

Music at MIT Oral History Project

Jeanne Bamberger

Interviewed

by

Forrest Larson

May 27, 2005

Interview no. 1

**Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Lewis Music Library**

Transcribed by: University of Connecticut, Center for
Oral History, Tapescribe, from the audio recording

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Note on timing notations:

Recording of this interview can be found either as one continuous file or as split up over two audio CDs. Timings are designated in chapter headings in both formats, with the timing on the full file preceding the timing on the CD version.

Contributors

Jeanne Bamberger (b. 1924) is Professor Emerita of Music and Urban Education at MIT. She taught music theory and music cognition at MIT 1971-2005. A student of pianist Artur Schnabel, she has performed extensively as soloist and in chamber music ensembles. She studied music theory with composers Ernst Křenek and Roger Sessions. Her research interests include musical development and learning in both children and adults. Among her many publications are the books *The Mind Behind the Musical Ear* (1995) and *Developing Musical Intuitions* (2000).

Forrest Larson, Library Assistant at the Lewis Music Library, has attended training workshops in oral history methodology and practice at Simmons College and by the Society of American Archivists, and is a member of the Oral History Association. He is also an active composer and violist.

Interview conducted by Forrest Larson on May 27, 2005, in the MIT Lewis Music Library. Duration of the audio recording is 1:55.55. First of two interviews. Second interview: June 7, 2005.

Music at MIT Oral History Project

The Lewis Music Library's *Music at MIT Oral History Project* was established in 1999 to document the history of music at MIT. For over 100 years, music has been a vibrant part of the culture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. This history covers a wide variety of genres, including orchestral, chamber, and choral musical groups, as well as jazz, musical theater, popular and world music. Establishment of a formal music program in 1947 met the growing needs for professional leadership in many of the performing groups. Shortly thereafter, an academic course curriculum within the Division of Humanities was created. Over the years, the music faculty and alumni have included many distinguished performers, composers and scholars.

Through in-depth recorded audio interviews with current and retired MIT music faculty, staff, former students, and visiting artists, the Music at MIT Oral History Project is preserving this valuable legacy for the historical record. These individuals provide a wealth of information about MIT. Furthermore, their professional lives and activities are often historically important to the world at large. Audio recordings of all interviews are available in the MIT Lewis Music Library.

1. Family and early musical experience. (00:00–CD1 00:00)

FORREST LARSON: I'm delighted to have Jeanne Bamberger for an interview. Today is May 27th, 2005. We're in the Lewis Music Library; I'm Forrest Larson. Jeanne Bamberger is Professor of Music and Urban Education at MIT. Just to start off, can you say when you were born, and where, and all that?

JEANNE BAMBERGER: All right, I'll reveal that. I was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and I was born on February 11th, 1924. [laughs] There you have it!

FL: So, interviewees in the past have not actually just given the date, just the year! [laughs] Good! Tell me about some of your family roots, your parents and grandparents, and all that.

JB: Okay. My maternal grandparents came from Romania, in probably the 1870s or 1880s, something like that. And my paternal grandparents came from I think Lithuania, but maybe Poland; I'm not sure.

FL: Was this on the East Coast or the West Coast?

JB: Well, interesting. My father's parents went to New York. Brooklyn. No—I guess my father was born on Delancey Street in lower Manhattan. But they came to Minneapolis quite early because my grandfather had asthma, and Minneapolis was supposed to be healthy. So they came to Minneapolis then, and my grandfather had a pawn shop in the rauchiest part of town.

FL: [laughs]

JB: [laughs] And so my father was born in this country. My mother's father came to Minneapolis directly, and he came because there was somebody in Minneapolis who was running a butter and egg business and needed young men to go in a horse and buggy, and travel them around the city selling the stuff. He came by himself, and then he brought his—I don't think they were married yet—but his then-to-be wife. And she proceeded to bring all of her relatives. And he, including—he brought his father, who was the Reverend Ossius Colbert [name unverified], I guess one of the first rabbis in Minneapolis—

FL: Oh my!

JB: —and a very distinguished gentleman, spoke many languages, as did my grandfather. And then my grandfather, my mother's father, began peddling all through that, into North Dakota, and ended up buying, creating, a general store in Hankinson, North Dakota. And that's where she grew up, my mother. And he had a very successful store, including being the medium, or something, between the farmers in North Dakota, and particularly General Mills [Company], the big city stuff, because Hankinson was a railroad stop. And I used to go and visit them in North Dakota, and the most exciting part was watching the trains, particularly the guy who weighed stuff, because he had a wooden leg!

FL: [laughs] Wow!

JB: [laughs] And this huge scale! And so we liked to play there. But then came the

Depression and everything went kablooey. He left, they left Hankinson and moved back to Minneapolis. But they lived in Minneapolis in a big house. My mother had seven brothers and sisters. So that was that family. The other family was, actually, that grandfather died when I was quite young. But his wife, my grandmother Shapiro, lived, despite all of her physical problems. And she was—she didn't read or write; she was illiterate. She came to this country when she was twelve and went into a tobacco-rolling, cigar-rolling plant. And she was just a tremendously powerful and smart woman, and all of the progeny look like her! [laughs]

FL: [laughs]

JB: All the cousins, everybody, including my grandchildren.

FL: Were there any musicians among those?

JB: On my mother's side of the family there were some fairly crazy people who were—one of them played the organ for the silent movies in the theater in Minneapolis. And another one—and I think she did some composing. That family, they were entertainers, and they were very funny.

FL: So what was the organist's name?

JB: Her name was Gert Goldstein! [laughs]

FL: Aha.

JB: And she was—that whole family, that whole Goldstein family was, they were very funny, and very entertaining, and probably somewhat suspect in their lives. I don't really know.

FL: Uh-huh.

JB: That was it; there was no other music anywhere, certainly not on my father's side of the family.

FL: Wow, wow! How many siblings do you have?

JB: One brother, who became a doctor like my father. My mother, by the way, got a degree in child welfare at the University of Minnesota, which was all quite amazing, that she insisted on going to the university and continued on—had a wonderful nursery school in our house. And my father was a pediatric cardiologist, who did that. My brother was a radiologist. And that's the family, that's the immediate family.

FL: Where did some of your musical interests come from? Your parents probably liked music?

JB: There wasn't that much music in the house. When I was four, just turning five, my parents, my father—my parents went, but my father went to Vienna to specialize in internal medicine, after having been a general practitioner. And I remember a lot of things about it, but one of the things I remember was that there was somebody who, some kid practicing the Minuet in G [by J. S. Bach] every morning, and I really wanted to play that piece!

FL: [laughs]

JB: But I had already started taking piano lessons when I was four, so when I came back I

- continued. And somebody decided that I was gifted, or whatever you call it. So from the very beginning I was getting out of school early and being treated like some kind of a specimen of some sort.
- FL: So what was the—do you know why you started playing piano?
- JB: My mother decided, and my mother was pushing it. I practiced fifteen minutes every morning before I went to school, and when I came back from school I had to practice again. And she—I think from my studies of prodigies, there was always a person, a father or a mother or a teacher who was on the back of the kid. And making their life miserable and pushing all of that. But it was never a question of: I love to do this. It was just that I had to do this.
- FL: Mm-hm. Did your family go to concerts very often?
- JB: Yes, I got [coughs] the Minneapolis Symphony [Orchestra], which was quite extraordinary. Mitropoulos was the conductor [Dimitri Mitropoulos, MSO Music Director, 1937–1949]. And every Friday night, there was a symphony concert, and I went to those concerts from the time I was very little with my parents. I don't remember going to any other concerts, but those, that was a regular thing, and I still know the kind of literature that was—I know the symphony literature from those days. No, I mean, I recognize things. And besides that, Mitropoulos played a lot of contemporary music, which of course the assembled multitudes hated. And then, when I was at the University of Minnesota, the orchestra, the Minneapolis Symphony, the hall where they played and rehearsed was on the campus. So I spent more time going to the rehearsals than in my classes, I think, during the first two years. Well, even after that.
- FL: Wow!
- JB: So that was where I got a really important education, was listening to those rehearsals.
- FL: Were there any piano recitals or anything that you heard as a youngster, or chamber music concerts?
- JB: I don't think I knew what chamber music was! [laughs] Later on, when Joanna Graudan came, and her husband Nikolai [Graudan] was the principal cellist—came to be the principal cellist [of the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra]. And then, I remember she got me playing with some singers. I thought singers were very silly.
- FL: Uh-huh. [laughs]
- JB: But I did that, but nothing else. Except, of course, I went to all their concerts, the cello-piano thing. That way I really learned the cello literature. But I don't remember, when I was little, I certainly didn't go to any concerts at all. [laughs]
- FL: [laughs] So your first piano teacher was a neighborhood piano teacher. What was her name?
- JB: Margaret Carlson. And she had studied with [Emil] Jacques-Dalcroze [1865-1950], which I think had—I think that was a big influence, because she had all of her piano students, she would invite them to her house on Saturday mornings and do Dalcroze

- stuff [Ed. Note: probably referencing eurythmics]. And I think that was a big important influence, that whole thing.
- FL: How long did you study with her?
- JB: Well, until she died of tuberculosis; probably until I was six or seven.
- FL: Is there any lasting thing, besides the Dalcroze influence, that you remember from her?
- JB: Well, I don't really remember her, except that she wrote an article, with the help of my mother, on how to get kids to practice, and the whole relationship around practicing and parents. It was in *Good Housekeeping* magazine. And at the head of the article is a picture of me looking very serious.
- FL: [laughs]
- JB: Which I have.
- FL: Tell me about some of the other teachers you had as a youngster.
- JB: Well, then there was Lavillian Jones, who took over from Margaret Carlson. She was, you know, the ordinary neighborhood piano teacher. But by that time I was being made a fuss over. And I remember, when I asked her, "What's this big fuss? Why is everybody, why are you doing this?" and she said, "You've got good hands." [laughs] Okay. But you know, at that point there were the usual yearly recitals of all the kids who were taking lessons with her, and I was always the big star. So, that was—and I don't remember anything about her teaching.
- FL: Do you remember what you were playing at the time?
- JB: Well, no, I don't. I don't even remember—I don't remember any exercise books. *The Maiden's Wish*. I don't know what that is, but that comes to mind! [laughs] [Ed. note: possibly referring to a transcription for piano (after Chopin, Op. 71/1, Chants polonais No. 1)]

2. Beginning serious piano study. (14:10–CD1 14:10)

- FL: [laughs] So there's two other teachers that you mentioned to me previously: Joanna Graudan—and you mentioned her just a minute ago—and then Gabriel Fenyves.
- JB: Fenyves.
- FL: Yeah. So tell me when you studied with them, and are there some other people we're missing, too?
- JB: Well, Fenyves was the great piano teacher in Minneapolis at that point. So when I graduated from Lavillian Jones, I was sent to him. He was Hungarian. And I don't think he was much of a teacher. But I think I was still studying with him when I played with the local school orchestra—not the public school, but there was a music school called the McPhail Music School. Which, by the way, David Deveau [MIT Senior Lecturer in Music, pianist] taught at! [laughs]
- FL: No kidding! [laughs]

- JB: And they had a little orchestra, a student orchestra, and I think I played a Mozart concerto or something with that orchestra when I was—well, I studied with him until Joanna Graudan showed up, fortunately. And then, I must have been thirteen or fourteen when she appeared.
- FL: Do you remember which Mozart concerto?
- JB: No. But I know that when I began studying with her, I—that was a whole other order of magnitude. She had been a student of Schnabel [Artur Schnabel, 1882-1951], in Germany, and her husband [Nikolai Graudan] was the assistant principal cellist in the Berlin Philharmonic [Orchestra]. And they left—they fled, really—on the day when Hitler came to hear the Berlin Philharmonic and everybody was supposed to—the orchestra was supposed to—stand up and say, “Heil, Hitler!” And he refused, and that was the end. They left the next day, or something.
- FL: Wow!
- JB: And they first went to London, and then they went to New York. And finally he got the job in Minneapolis, which was very fortunate for me because then I began to have a really—I began to understand something about musicians and the musical culture. And she really became my kind of substitute mother, they—or my substitute parents. I spent a lot of time in their house. I listened to them practicing. I went to all their concerts. And she was the one who connected me up with [Ernst] Křenek [1900-1991, composer] because she made—she asked. Křenek would come and talk about the music that we were studying. She also got her collected students to play all of the *WTC*, the *Well-Tempered Clavier* [by J. S. Bach], from beginning to end. I remember playing the B-minor one, particularly. So that was the studying of—those were my piano teachers, until Schnabel.
- FL: Joanna Graudan—did she also give recitals in the area, solo recitals? And did she have a performing career?
- JB: She had a big performing career with her husband. They were an established duo. She also played with the Minneapolis Symphony [Orchestra]. She played the [Felix] Mendelssohn *Rondo* something or other—*Brilliant?* [*Rondo Brilliant* in E-flat major for piano and orchestra, Op. 29] And I think some other...she also played some other concerto, but I remember that one in particular. She didn't play—I don't remember her playing solo recitals, but she played, she and her husband played, you know, all the big cello-piano literature.
- FL: What's her husband's first name?
- JB: Nikolai.
- FL: Nikolai, okay.
- JB: He was from Latvia, originally, and she was from Russia.
- FL: When you were growing up, did you play any other instruments or sing in a choir or anything like that?
- JB: It was really barren, as far as music was concerned. I had a ukulele! [laughs]
- FL: Oh, my.

- JB: A neighbor gave me a ukulele and showed me a few chords!
- FL: [laughs] Wow! Now you were saying earlier that you, the Minneapolis Symphony performed contemporary music. Do you remember, was it—to you, was there something unusual or special about that? Or was it something, just part of when you went to concerts?
- JB: Well, it didn't really begin to happen—the first conductor of the Minneapolis Symphony that I heard was Eugene Ormandy [MSO Music Director, 1931-1936]. And then, and he didn't, I don't remember any contemporary music there, but there may have been some. Frankly, I think when I was so little I probably slept through half the concerts! But it was when Mitropoulos came, and that was much later. I don't know exactly when he came, but I think it was when I was already—well, certainly when I began studying with Joanna Graudan, because it was Mitropoulos who invited him [Nikolai Graudan] to come. So—but I didn't really become aware of contemporary music until later—I think probably when I was in high school. And then, I was going to say it was when I began going to the rehearsals, but I wasn't going to the rehearsals when I was in high school. I think it was probably already when I was in college and going to the rehearsals that I got interested in contemporary music.
- FL: So you hadn't been studying a contemporary piano repertoire before then?
- JB: Nothing. I think, really, mostly I played, you know, not very interesting stuff.
- FL: Uh-huh.
- JB: Every once in a while I hear something and realize, oh yeah, I played that at some point or other. But it's all kind of a blank. The first thing, yeah, I was already studying with Hansi—she was called Hansi Graudan. I played the [Robert] Schumann, “A minor Piano Concerto” [Op. 54] with that little orchestra when I was probably in high school—when I was in eleventh grade, or something like that. And I also played, with another student of hers, the Mozart two-piano concerto—E-flat concerto [Piano Concerto in E-flat for two pianos, K316a].
- FL: Oh, my.
- JB: And then, I gave solo recitals when I was in high school. I don't remember much of what I played. I remember the Mendelssohn, Serious Variations [in D minor, Op. 54]. [laughs] And not much more. There was that whole *Well-Tempered Clavier* thing. But I studied a lot of music with her.
- FL: What are some of the, kind of musical values that you learned from her, that have stayed with you?
- JB: Well, I suppose the most important was this total reverence for the score. You had to try to do what the composer wanted. You were supposed to—that was supposed to be knowable. [laughs] But you were supposed to be absolutely true to the score. I remember much later talking about improvising, and she thought improvising was terrible!
- FL: [laughs]

JB: Because somewhere or other I began—and I still do—when I’m working on a piece and there’s some part that I’m having trouble with understanding or playing or something, I’ll start improvising around it, so that the thing the composer wrote is one possible, one possibility, among many. And I play around with all of them, then I come back to the real one and it makes—and then I can begin to understand what the problem was. But she was absolutely reverent when it came to the score. And then, she gave me, I remember, the Brahms exercise—Brahms wrote a book of piano exercises [*51 Exercises*, Wo06].

FL: I didn’t know that! Wow!

JB: Fifty-one exercises. And they’re very good, and I did a lot of those. She also gave me other technical stuff, ways of practicing scales and arpeggios, and nobody had ever done that before. And I played much more repertoire: Chopin and Beethoven and Bach and Schumann, and Brahms—the whole works. She really—the most important thing she did was to introduce me to the real piano literature.

FL: Did you do any Debussy?

JB: Yes, “Clair de Lune”! [laughs] I think that was—yes, I’m sure that that was, because I remember when I went to Europe on the Fulbright, there was an initial interview, and they asked me had I played any contemporary music? And I said Debussy, that was as far as—! [laughs]

FL: [laughs] So in high school you mentioned you played with some singers, accompanied some singers?

JB: Yes, it was probably already when I was in college. I remember playing Schubert *lieder* a little bit, but it wasn’t much of anything.

FL: So, no real ensemble experience, prior to college?

JB: Nothing, nothing. And I didn’t know any other people who did music until I got to college!

FL: Wow.

JB: I was totally alone in all of that.

FL: Were there any—there must have been some important musical experiences you had prior to college that really kind of caught your attention?

JB: I don’t think so. I mean, just the Graudans, and that whole circle. Then I really—I began practicing a lot, and sort of thoughtfully. And before that, I don’t know what I was doing.

FL: Mm-hm. Did you hear much music on the radio, classical music on the radio?

JB: My father listened to the Metropolitan Opera on Saturday afternoons, and we had, initially, an old wind-up Victrola!

FL: Yeah, yeah.

JB: And he listened to Chaliapin [Feodor Chaliapin, 1873-1938, bass singer]!

FL: Uh-huh. [laughs]

JB: But I don't remember hearing—it was vocal music that he liked. Other than that, nothing.

FL: When you were in high school, did you have any kind of future plans for music? Or were you just doing it because you just wanted to do it?

JB: Well, it was sort of ordained that that's what I was going to do. And I got out of school early; I was at home in the early afternoon. I didn't really know anybody. I would go home, and supposedly I was supposed to practice. But, well, I guess I did because I learned all this stuff. But it was—I don't remember, I just didn't have any kind of a musical education except for my piano lesson, period.

FL: So you didn't do any study of music theory prior to college?

JB: Certainly not! [laughs]

FL: Wow!

JB: Except there were these little sessions with [Ernst] Křenek. But I don't think I really knew what that was all about, and I obviously didn't because when I went to the University of Minnesota as a music major and took the first theory class, I hated it! [laughs] It didn't have anything to do with anything, as far as I was concerned. I had no problem with it, the ear training stuff. I also, as I remember, my mother was always trying to get a diagnosis or something—what later she called a prognosis. [laughs] I remember being taken, when I was quite young, to the guy who was the head of the University of Minnesota music department, Mr. Scott [Carlyle M. Scott, pianist & Music Department Chairman (dates of appointment unverified)], to be evaluated. And I remember he tested my ear, and at that point, well, I must have had absolute pitch because I remember being a parlor exhibit, too! [laughs]

FL: [laughs]

JB: But I remember him just playing a whole handful of notes that I was supposed to, you know, keys, and I was supposed to say what they were. But I don't have absolute pitch now.

3. Philosophy studies, music theory with Křenek. (28:33—CD1 28:33)

FL: Wow. So you have a degree in philosophy from the University of Minnesota from 1946. When did your interest in philosophy—how did that kind of come about?

JB: Are you sure that 1946 is right? I'm not sure.

FL: Well, that was what was on your resume. Maybe the date is wrong.

JB: Maybe it isn't, because I remember I didn't go to Berkeley until '48, but I think it may be a little later than that.

FL: Okay.

JB: Well, I started Minnesota in 1941, but I took—then I went to New York after two years. So the first two years, I was a music major, I guess. Maybe I switched already in the second year to philosophy because I really didn't like the—but mostly I was

doing a lot of practicing at that point, and playing. And going—by this point my mother was beginning to be worried that I was a social misfit because, since she had denied me my—since I had been, I hadn't been part of the kid community at all. So, of course, I had to go to the university, and I had to join a sorority, and I had to do all those things.

But it was at that point that I also—then I began studying with Křenek. I think that was probably when I was—it may have been when I was still in high school, but certainly when I was in college. And I studied sixteenth-century counterpoint with him! And then I began going to all the ISCM [International Society for Contemporary Music] concerts, which he organized and ran. And at that point, and then I met some of his students. He was teaching at Hamline [University, St. Paul, Minn.], and I met some of his students, and then I began to have a kind of sense of what this music world was all about. But that was, I think, already when I started college.

FL: But your interest in philosophy—how did that kind of come about?

JB: Well, I probably took a philosophy course, along with the other courses I was taking, and there was this guy, Herbert Feigl [1902-1988], who was a sort of friend of my parents, and lived near where we lived. And I probably took a course with him. And that was interesting. So I began taking more courses with him, and with more people in the philosophy department, and I liked it. That was much more interesting than the music courses, which I thought were useless.

FL: Was that kind of intellectual discourse part of your family?

JB: Well, my family, they were certainly intellectuals, and there was certainly big talk and discussions going on around the dinner table. And my brother was in medical school; the conversation at the dinner table was about his cadaver, and my father seeing this beautiful cancer of the cervix that day. [laughs] And my mother would stop it after a while!

FL: [laughs]

JB: But she was very active in the Minneapolis community in politics and in the Jewish community. She claimed that she was the one who got Hubert Humphrey [1911–1978; U.S. Vice President, 1965–1969] to run for Governor. He was a professor at the university at the time. Anyhow, she was a big supporter of his and a big campaigner for him. They were generally leftist, politically. I think my mother was probably considered a communist, which is ridiculous! [laughs] Because there wasn't any Communist Party around that I know of. Although my father had a relative who was a Trotskyite, who went to Mexico with [Leon] Trotsky [Russian revolutionary, 1879–1940]. [laughs] And he was not liked by the family! He was bad. But there certainly was—my mother read a lot; my father read a lot. There was a lot of intellectual stimulation—that, there was. No music, but lots of—on the other hand, I didn't like to read, at all. And I didn't read except when I had to read for school. So, I don't know why, but I just didn't like to read. I was much more interested in dogs! [laughs]

FL: Did you have like a pet dog or something?

JB: Well, I was always wanting to have a dog, and my mother would always tell me to play with the dog next door.

FL: [laughs]

JB: But we finally did get a dog, and that was a terrible catastrophe. We had—actually, there were several dogs. One died of distemper. And then we had another dog, and at that point, in fact, I was reading—maybe that’s why I didn’t like to read. I was reading a book, and I saw the dog go out of the fence, out of the gate. And I thought, “Well, I’ll go get him in a few minutes.” But it was too late; he got run over, and that was a big disaster! But when I was in junior high school, coming home, when all the other kids were still in school, and I’d stop at the neighbor’s yard and talk to the two dogs there about what had happened to me! [laughs] So yeah, animals were always important.

FL: So when you were in college, and you got interested in philosophy, that thing with reading, that must have been—?

JB: Well, by that time I was reading, I think, yeah. But certainly when I was in college I was reading all the time, and probably also in high school. But I didn’t read as an avocation, as a pleasure.

FL: So you mentioned that [Ernst] Křenek was a friend of Joanna Graudan, and you had taken counterpoint lessons with him. What other study did you do with him? Did you do, like, any score study or analysis?

JB: I think so, because she organized, Joanna organized these—well, certainly in connection with the performance of all of the Bach preludes and fugues [*Well-Tempered Clavier*]. He came and talked to us about them and did some analysis. And also, there was a lot of interaction with him. No formal analysis course or anything—the lessons were these, the sixteenth-century counterpoint thing. But in connection with the ISCM concerts, he—well, you know, I learned not only about sixteenth-century counterpoint, but he was also lots of talk about twelve-tone.

FL: I was just going to ask, yeah.

JB: Twelve-tone stuff and some analysis of it. And I think I must have spent quite a bit of time hanging around and talking about music in various ways with him.

FL: He’s an interesting figure because he’s seemed to be very opinionated, but yet there was a lot of change in his ideas over time.

JB: You know that I wrote my master’s thesis on his four piano sonatas? [“An Analysis of the Four Piano Sonatas of Ernst Křenek,” Master’s thesis, University of California, 1951.]

FL: No, I didn’t know that!

JB: [laughs] Four—there were then four piano sonatas. That was my thesis. And one of the big points in the thesis was that he changed—well, first it was *Jonny spielt auf* [opera by Křenek], which was jazz. And then came the twelve-tone stuff, which he was still pretty much into, I think, when I knew him. But on the other hand, he made fun of it. I remember— [laughs] Well, he sort of made fun of it. And he certainly distinguished among the ways in which it was used. He talked about [laughs] a woman who came to study with him, composition, and after a month or something she said she was so grateful to him, teaching her this twelve-tone thing, because

- before that it used to take her months and months to write a piece. And now she could write a piece in a week! [laughs] And it was probably just as bad as the other pieces. But that was certainly where I—that was where I got introduced to twentieth-century music.
- FL: Tell me a little bit more about what he was telling you about twelve-tone theory. You read some statements of his, and he was talking about it being the future of music and very kind of strident about that. But he obviously—
- JB: Well, on the other hand, there's this book—I've forgotten what it is—the music appreciation book that he wrote. It's something like *All About Music* [Ed. Note: Křenek, Ernst: *Exploring Music* (London: Calder & Boyars, 1966); original German title: *Zur Sprache gebracht: Essays über Musik* (Deutsche Buch-Gemeinschaft, 1958).] That's not right, but it's a very good book! I don't think I have it anymore; I don't know what happened to it. But he was a wonderful teacher and not at all like [Arnold] Schoenberg. He wasn't only teaching twelve-tone stuff, he was—for instance, he was an incredible musician. He could sit down and play on the piano a Beethoven symphony, or some atonal piece. He was a very good pianist. And he, among many others, completed one of the Schubert piano sonatas that's unfinished. He just had an incredible ear; he could play anything! And he'd play it and sing what he couldn't play. And, well he was certainly a kind of person that I had never ever met or knew existed. He was a really profound, very thorough and diversified, musician. Unlike Hansi Graudan, who was a piano player. [laughs]
- FL: Right.
- JB: So the fact that she made that connection, I think, was probably very important. And it was studying with Feigl, and also this guy Sellers [Wilfrid Sellers, 1912-1989, philosopher], who was the other—well, as a matter of fact, the University of Minnesota was pretty amazing, at that point. Alfred Kazin [1915-1998, writer] came to teach in the English department, and I took courses with him and got to know him. And Saul Bellow [1915-2005, writer] was there for quite a while, and I got to know him quite well, and his whole family. And then there was Feigl, and Sellers, oh, and also, what's his name? The red-headed poet from the South. I can't think of it at the moment, but there were a lot of extraordinary people around that university at that point. Plus, oh yeah, there was Louis Krasner [1903-1995, violinist], who was the concertmaster [of the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra].
- FL: Oh, yeah, my!
- JB: And I spent a lot of time with his family. In fact, after the Graudan's left, the Krasners sort of took over as my musical family. And he, Louis, organized a whole series of concerts at Macalester [College]—not just contemporary music. In fact, they played *The Musical Offering* [by J. S. Bach], I remember. And again, I got a whole education through those concerts that he organized. So, you know, at some point, in the upper years of high school, everything changed, really because of Hansi Graudan. And Mitropoulos and Krasner and Křenek and this, it was a sort of—we called it the Athens of the West! [laughs]
- FL: So in your studies with Křenek, are there things that have kind of stayed with you, musical values and stuff like that?

JB: Well, that you can take a piece of music and think about it. That you can go deeply into a piece of music. There was not much connection—there was studying music and doing counterpoint and so forth, but it didn't connect much with performance, as is the case generally, I think.

FL: Yeah, right.

JB: Although he was a wonderful performer, as far as I remember we never talked about performance with him. And I never talked about the pieces I was playing with him. And Hansi Graudan, her way of teaching was: play this louder, and wiggle that finger more, and nothing about the music. [laughs] Except to be faithful to it, whatever that meant.

FL: Did Křenek talk much about some of the other composers that he knew? I mean, that was a real kind of hotbed of activity.

JB: Well, he certainly, you know, there was Alban Berg [1885–1935].

FL: All the Darmstadt [Germany] people. [Ed. note: The uncompromising serialist composers, associated with the Darmstadt International Summer Courses for New Music (1946–early 1960s)]

JB: Well, not so much that, more the Viennese thing.

FL: Yeah, uh-huh.

JB: I don't remember him—I don't remember him talking about the sort of politics of contemporary music at that point.

FL: Did he talk about the musical revolution that was happening? Or did he see it that way?

JB: I don't know. Since I was such a hick [laughs] from the farm—I don't mean that literally, but I just had no sense of any of that, that was going on. So I know that he was, he felt—I mean, here he was at this little podunk university college, university in Hamline. I mean, there were all these people around who were European—who were refugees, and not very happy that they were stuck in Minneapolis and Saint Paul. So there was, I think, quite a bit of—well, one thing that was very fortunate was that because they were stuck in Minneapolis and Saint Paul, they were very accessible to somebody like me, much more so than in New York, for example. So there was this very tight community of refugees, music people and refugees. And Feigl wasn't part of that, but still, he was sort of part of that. There was this whole group of people who were out of place, and found each other, and were very happy to adopt a kid who was interested in music. So, and that was the good part about being in Minneapolis.

[45:20–CD1 45:20— End of CD1]

4. Piano studies with Artur Schnabel, other philosophy studies. (45:20–CD2 00:00)

FL: I want to ask you about your studies with Artur Schnabel [1882-1951, pianist and composer]. And Schnabel knew Křenek, is that correct? Is that the connection?

- JB: I think so. He certainly knew [Roger] Sessions [1896-1985, American composer]. No, the connection was Joanna Graudan. She sent me to Schnabel, as sending me to her teacher. And that's how I got to him. I don't remember playing for him before I went. I remember she had me play for [Rudolf] Serkin [1903-1991, pianist and Director of Curtis Institute of Music Philadelphia, 1968-1976]. And in fact, when I was twelve, I went to audition at Curtis, but I didn't get in. And I don't remember playing for Schnabel, but she insisted that I did. So I guess I did because he came periodically to play with the orchestra, and I guess I played for him. I definitely remember playing for Serkin. But anyhow, he accepted me, and I always had the feeling he accepted me simply because she said so, but maybe I actually played for him.
- FL: So where did you start studying with him? Eventually, he was in New York—but did you study—?
- JB: In New York. He was already a refugee, living at the Peter Stuyvesant Hotel on Eighty-Sixth and Central Park West. And I was, I guess, eighteen when I went to New York.
- FL: And that was, what, 1943?
- JB: Yes.
- FL: Okay. And then you went to Columbia University, right?
- JB: Yeah, because my parents at this point said I had to go to the university. But Columbia had a special program for professional children. It was called the University Undergraduates. And that was how women—because Columbia was still all boys. [laughs] Or men, I suppose you're supposed to say. It was just a fluke. I went to register, and the person that interviewed me—I was going to take, you know, extension courses or something. The person who interviewed me said, "Well, you should be in University Undergraduates," which allowed me to take any course in any part of the university that I wanted to, and not just—I mean, that program was supposed to be for children who were like working during the day or something. But it didn't—I could take any courses I wanted to.

And that was when the philosophy thing got really going. I took a course from Irwin Edman [1896-1954] on aesthetics, [Ernst] Cassirer [1874-1945], all kinds of—my advisor was Ernest Nagel [1901-1985]. So, and that was, I lived right practically around the corner from Columbia. And that was very important because it was my—I mean, I wasn't at Juilliard [School of Music] or someplace else where there were other students. Again, I was off, isolated somewhere. But, and when I was going to Columbia, I still didn't really meet anybody much. It was during the war, and so the population was kind of funny. I seem to remember people who were older in those classes, but they were very good classes.

And that was—the first two years I was going, '43, '44, '45, I was studying, taking—well, there were three of us: Leon Fleisher [b. 1928, pianist], Claude Frank [b. 1925, pianist], and myself, and then for a while, a woman named Hilda Banks [Shapiro; b. 1927, pianist], and for a while, Dika Newlin [1923-2006, pianist, composer]. And everybody went to everybody else's lessons, which was a big, important thing because we not only heard what he had to say about the piece we

were studying, but everybody else's pieces as well. And you only played a piece for him once. You came with your piece. He had his upright piano over there and the grand piano over here, and you played the piece, and then he went at it. Very often spending a lot of time on the very beginning of the piece, sort of like Beethoven's sketches, which have the implications for everything that happens in the rest of the piece.

But the very first lesson, he asked me a question like, "Why did you do it that way?" or something, and not aggressively, but really asking. Nobody had ever asked me a question like that before! Nobody had ever asked me why I did something, or suggested that there was more than one way of doing it, or that you could think about that, that this was a decision process. And I had no idea how to even engage such a question! So, and that had a huge effect, because I had no idea how to think about those things. So I sort of got paralyzed. I mean, I really, I couldn't play for quite a while. I mean, I could play, but it was all kind of self-conscious and stiff.

And of course in those days I was practicing a huge amount. I was practicing, like, three hours in the morning and three hours in the afternoon, but all now trying to understand, trying to think about why am I doing it this way or that way? And he also sent all of his students to study with Erich Itor Kahn [1905-1956, composer], who was a sort of second-rate—well, not very nice—but he was certainly not a well-known composer. But we had to study theory with him.

And one of the things was that I was a terrible sight-reader. I mean, really, really awful! Because I'd get whoever was the teacher to play it for me, and then I could use the score because I knew what it was supposed to sound like. And so at the first lesson he wanted to talk about a Bach chorale, and he asked me to play it, and I couldn't play it. I mean, I couldn't read it, and he thought I was fooling him or something. But I really couldn't sight-read, and I think that's one thing that has made me become so interested in the whole business of notation, and what it captures and what it doesn't capture, and why people have trouble learning it and learning to read standard notation. And what it has to do with playing, and learning from the score and then getting beyond the score, getting off the score. So, that was at the very beginning of the lessons. But I studied a lot of stuff with him.

FL: Well, Schnabel seems somewhat unusual, as far as insisting that students really understand the score. And there he was making a connection between music theory and performance.

JB: Absolutely, he was. And he was always talking about the music. He never talked about technique for one minute. His general approach was, if you know how you want it to sound, you'll find a way to make it that way. And you know, if you complained about the piano, that was no excuse. He used to say, "You should be able to play it on a noodle board!" [laughs]

FL: [laughs]

JB: And then on the other hand, he would—I mean, he didn't just—he played a lot. But he wouldn't just play; there was always a reason. And he talked particularly—and this goes back to the Dalcroze thing again—he talked particularly about phrasing, and he was very much interested in—I mean, if you look at the Beethoven editions of the

- sonatas, you find these roman numerals sitting there, which have nothing to do with harmony. They have to do with the phrase structure, how many bars. So he was very interested in asymmetrical—in moments when the phrasing was asymmetrical, and he was very interested—the whole thing was to project the structure. That was what he talked about.
- FL: Right. And what's interesting about his use of music theory—it's not to explain the piece of music, but to give you creative tools as a performer.
- JB: Absolutely.
- FL: Because he seemed almost hostile to an academic analysis of the music because he said that doesn't explain the music.
- JB: It doesn't—it's arid. [laughs] And he was interested in making the music come alive and projecting that. I remember studying the Mozart B-flat Sonata [K.333], [sings]. And he must have spent half an hour on [sings phrase]—just that much. First of all, it shouldn't be [sings same phrase, different emphasis], but it should be [sings phrase]. And he generally, if you listen, you'll hear he goes to the ends of phrases, even if it's a weak beat ending. But then he would put words to these things! [laughs]
- FL: [laughs]
- JB: So, [sings] “Listen to the birdies sing.” [laughs] And by putting words to them, you would get the articulation that he had in mind. And that may come—you know that his career started as an accompanist to his wife [Therese Behr, 1876-1959, contralto], before she was his wife.
- FL: I didn't know that was how it started.
- JB: Therese. That was really his first career, was as her accompanist. And she was—she continued forever to be the final opinion. [laughs] I mean, she was a wonderful musician, and he took what she said as the gospel. So that sometimes—the lessons were in his apartment there in the Peter Stuyvesant Hotel, and she was around, of course. So the way it worked: lessons lasted about three hours. And you can imagine they would if he spent half an hour on that. The point was on that thing that the left hand, the grouping, the phrasing, goes against, overlaps, the phrasing in the right hand. And that was what he was working on, that you should be able to hear both of them, both of these groupings. And I was having a really hard time doing that, at which point he, at some point he said, “Miss Shapiro, perhaps you should take up the clarinet.” [laughs] Since I could only play one line like that!
- FL: [laughs]
- JB: But—so the lesson was three hours, and after three hours there would be tea. And we would all have tea, and he would hold forth on whatever he was reading, including admitting that he would read the beginning and the end of a book, and then he would fill in the details! [laughs]
- FL: [laughs]
- JB: And he thought it was very funny that I was studying philosophy, and he would make jokes about it. He'd tease me about it. And in those, when we had tea, Therese, his

wife, I remember one time she said that she—well, we didn't hear it, but when we came back and it was time for the next lesson, he made Hilda, who had taken the previous lesson, come back because Therese said the tempo was too fast. And so they had to take care of that.

FL: Wow!

JB: So, but certainly the focus was on—he would pick some aspect of the music itself and work at trying to get you to project it. Sometimes a detail like that, sometimes big structure.

FL: Was it one lesson a week, or did you have more?

JB: Every other week.

FL: Every other week.

JB: But every week, I was there with the other people.

FL: Yeah, mm-hm. There's so many aspects of Schnabel that it's hard to choose. But some ideas that are really interesting: he talks about the futility of recreating the composer's intention. And that's still the big thing out there even today.

JB: Right. Well, that's why I was making jokes about Hansi Graudan, who was, you were supposed to be, yeah, right. And all that was so new to me! And I was so scared, anyhow. Every time I'd go for a lesson, I was sure I was insulting him by my playing. And I was so totally uneducated as far as music was concerned.

No, it was not to recreate the composer's intentions, but to recreate the music. And that was your job, was to try to find, to understand the piece and not to start out by thinking, "What did Beethoven want me to do?"

FL: Right. And he talked about the performer becoming equal with the composer.

JB: Right. And he also, another big thing was—that I quote often—"Practicing should be experiment, not drill." And he would experiment. I'd stand outside the apartment door and listen to him practice, and he was always practicing phrasing, and experimenting, both with the, you know, where the phrase boundaries were, but also how to project it. And that, I think, I associate that, again, with the Dalcroze stuff, which is also all about movement and phrasing. And so I think that's why, when I watch what people who have no music background, no music training—kids—when I see that what they're representing in their invented notations, that's what they're representing, this figural grouping. And I don't think I would have noticed it. I don't think I would have been so sensitive to it. I wouldn't have understood it, if it hadn't been for this collected background of emphasis on that kind of a live structure. And also, the whole issue of anything—from a motif to a note—changing its function depending on the context. That was something else that I think he was—you know, you can't play this the same as you did before because it's somewhere else. And that was a big point.

FL: So it's interesting in a way. Maybe it's kind of paradoxical, but I'm sure he didn't see it that way: he was insisting on accurate editions of the score, which seems very scholarly, and it's scholars who do those. But yet, there's this tension with musical scholarship.

- JB: Yeah, well, but you have to have the score in order to find out what the material is that you're working with.
- FL: Right. You know, for him it wasn't then an authentic recreation of the composer's intention, but you had to start with something that didn't have somebody else's interpretive ideas in it.
- JB: For sure, and that was very important. You shouldn't use somebody else's edited edition. And it's, you know, in his edition of the Beethoven sonatas it's very clear what's him and what's Beethoven. And well, that may be sort of what led me to the business of the Beethoven fingerings.
- FL: Yeah, your article on that, yeah. [Bamberger, Jeanne: "The Musical Significance of Beethoven's Fingerings in the Piano Sonatas" (*Music Forum* v. IV [1976]: 237–80)]
- JB: Yeah, right, because the fingerings that Beethoven wrote in are groupings! [laughs] They're not technical. In fact, they're often terribly awkward, technically. But they tell you what the score, an ordinary score, can't tell you.
- FL: Mm-hm.
- JB: So for example, I think at the end of opus 111, there's a C major scale, which he fingers 1-2-3, 1-2-3, 1-2-3, 1-2-3 because that's the grouping. And there are many more. I mean, I found, I really—that was the first paper I ever wrote, but I was interested in it because it, again, was a performance issue. The fingerings were—well, it was a wedding of the performance issues with structure. So he was putting in fingerings in order to, as a means of helping you to project the structure, and very often the grouping structure. In the beginning of the opus 81A Sonata, at the very beginning, there's a crescendo and he fingers it 5-5-5. Well, but it's legato! [laughs]
- FL: Oh!
- JB: Well, and it works. Because if you try to, you know, hang on and play it legato, you can't hear your crescendo. And you really get this feeling of movement towards the goal by going, by—so, you don't have to use his fingering, but you have to try it, because it's telling you something. And you get a feel for what's going on in the music by trying his fingering. So, and all of that's related to this whole notion of grouping, and figures, in contrast to meter.
- FL: Wow! There's a quote here. He says, "I do not believe that great composers are ever inspired by the specific qualities of instruments." Yet, in the same paragraph, he says, "The conception of musical ideas in the composer's mind is followed by a gradual indication as to which of the available instruments might be suited to convey those ideas." And then he says, "The greatest part of Beethoven's piano music can be communicated only by means of the piano." [Ed. note: quotes taken from Schnabel's *Music and the Line of Most Resistance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1942).]
- JB: Yeah, well but I think if you take the chronology there, he's saying that the composer isn't initially inspired—
- FL: Right, that's right.

JB: —by the instruments, but once he’s got something that he wants to project, then he’s going to look for the instruments that are right. And in the case of the Beethoven piano sonatas, that’s the piano. [laughs]

FL: Right, right. When I was reading that, it got me thinking about some of his comments about historical instruments, and stuff like that. And he was, had some problems with that.

JB: [laughs] Right.

FL: Because people talk about Beethoven hearing his piano in his head when he was writing it.

JB: Yeah.

FL: Did he talk to you much about historical performance issues?

JB: He pooh-poohed it.

FL: Yeah, yeah.

JB: And he certainly didn’t—I don’t know whether he said this, or where, but the general feeling was, if Bach had had a piano, he would have loved it. [laughs] And if Beethoven had had a big Steinway, he would have been very happy.

FL: What did he think of the harpsichord as an instrument?

JB: I never heard him say anything about it, but I’m sure he thought it was kind of piddling.

FL: Uh-huh.

JB: Maybe I’m just projecting.

FL: Yeah. With this idea of the composer, at some point, getting a clear conception of the instruments for the music, what did he think of arrangements of pre-existent works?

JB: Well, by the way, maybe you can answer this question. Somebody used a piece—was working with kids, and it was a piece, a Mozart piece, for violin, piano, and cello, and flute. I don’t think there is any such piece.

FL: No, I don’t—

JB: There’s an example. And we were thinking, maybe the flute was playing—maybe it was a string quartet, for all I know. I don’t know what it was, but anyhow. I never heard him talk about arrangements, but I don’t think he would be particularly interested. I don’t know.

FL: Another interesting idea of his, among so many: this idea of the autonomy of art, and in music that the particular piece is a unique entity that must be looked at solely on its own terms. And that’s certainly not a current idea out there today.

JB: Well, it was. It was, during the critical, in literature. [Ed. note: Reference to the “New Criticism” theory in literature, mid-20th century.]

FL: Right.

JB: And I think—well, I don’t know that he was part of that, but it was certainly the same

- point of view. It has nothing to do with what Beethoven had for breakfast, or you know, what he was reading. This is the piece, and everything you need to know is there.
- FL: Yeah. What's your feelings about that, as a musician?
- JB: Well certainly I tend to lean in that direction, I would say. You know, at the University of Chicago I taught a course in art, music, and literature, and we all—it was a big course—and we all taught all three. But we never crossed over. We'd have three weeks in one area, and three weeks in another area. And if kids made connections, fine. But I've never, except with Křenek, in my thesis. It was clear that his life, and the changes in his life, changed the style in which he was writing. And I tried to make that connection in the thesis. But in general, I don't think it's very interesting.
- FL: Schnabel talks about the danger of stylistic generalizations, even—even within a composer's output.
- JB: Right. It's funny, because a lot of the this stuff I feel is part of me, and maybe that's where I got it, originally. But it's also Schoenberg: *Style and Idea* [1975], you know. The idea is what's important, not the style. [laughs]
- FL: Mm-hm. Schnabel was obviously known as a distinguished performer of Mozart, Schubert, and Beethoven. Did he publicly perform any contemporary music?
- JB: I don't think he even performed his own music. You know, he composed a lot.
- FL: Yeah, I was going to ask you about that.
- JB: No, not when I knew him. He may have when he was younger; I don't know. But he was very—he felt closest, much closer to somebody like Roger Sessions than I think he did to other pianists. He really—he said, "I don't teach the piano. Does the carpenter teach the hammer?" [laughs]
- FL: [laughs]
- JB: And, you know, it was music that was—he really wasn't teaching the piano. And he was interested in—his interests were in other people who were interested and close to music, not to piano playing.
- FL: Did you study any contemporary repertoire with him?
- JB: No.
- FL: Would he have been—it wouldn't have been a problem, though, if you had brought it to him?
- JB: I don't know. Nobody else did, either. I don't think there was anything beyond Brahms. Certainly no French music. I don't know if he talks about French music, but I have a big bias against French music! [laughs] I don't know where I got it. But, well, it was also with Sessions. I mean, there was this [Igor] Stravinsky-Schoenberg thing.
- FL: Yes, right!
- JB: And Stravinsky was on the French side. I still don't like French music.

FL: Did you ever play any of Schnabel's piano music?

JB: No. No, surprisingly, [Dimitri] Mitropoulos played a symphony of Schnabel's with the Minneapolis Symphony. And he came, and of course the audience hated it. Have you ever heard any of his music?

FL: Yes, you loaned me a CD.

JB: Oh, yeah.

FL: There's also a CD we have with some choral music.

JB: Choral music? I didn't know that.

FL: Yeah, yeah. It's so interesting that here's this very august, classical pianist, yet his music doesn't seem to overtly reflect that. It's non-tonal, and—

JB: Well, but only in sort of, it's highly structured.

FL: Yeah.

JB: What was I going to say? Something about his—I don't remember, about his composition. But he was really quite—that was where he saw his real—oh, I know. I was going to say, have you ever heard any of his cadenzas for the Mozart concerto [no. 24 c minor, K.491]?

FL: No! No.

JB: [laughs] Well, they're pretty far out! There must be some—I'm sure there's some recorded.

FL: I'll have to look. That would be very curious! It's not on the order of when [Alfred] Schnittke [1934-1998, composer] did cadenzas for stuff?

JB: No, because those are funny. But these are very serious, and they're sort of on the verge of being atonal, but not quite. [laughs]

FL: Wow! [laughs] Wow!

JB: Very chromatic.

FL: Did Schnabel talk to you much about his music? And just, that different world that he inhabited as a composer, as opposed to—?

JB: No. All I know is that he really enjoyed being with Roger Sessions. He sent me to Roger Sessions; Schnabel sent me to Sessions. But I don't know, I don't ever remember him talking about his own composing, except that he had the usual twentieth-century paranoid attitude, because nobody plays his music, nobody likes this kind of music, and that kind of stuff. I don't think—paranoid is probably not the right word to say, but resentment.

FL: Yeah. But that was hard on other people, Schoenberg, and—

JB: Oh, yeah, all of them, right.

FL: Yeah, yeah.

JB: Well I think Schoenberg was really paranoid. [laughs]

FL: Oh! [laughs] Read his letters!
JB: He was! Yeah, right. Yeah, right.
FL: I was quite shocked when I read some of them. Letters to the Editor, he'd write back, and whoa!
JB: [laughs] Right. Well, when we get there, I'll tell you about my visit to Schoenberg.

5. Concerto movement by Johan Rösler, formerly attributed to Beethoven. (01:16:45—CD2 00:31:30)

FL: I do have a question there. Moving on, so we don't—okay. In 1946 you played a concerto movement in D major; at the time it was believed to be by Beethoven. It was a performance with a City of Saint Paul Pops Concert.
JB: Right.
FL: And that's the Minneapolis Pops Orchestra?
JB: Right.
FL: Yeah. So tell me about finding this piece and performing it, and what brought that about?
JB: Well, I found it in the Newark Public Library. Why I went there, went looking for it? I think I was probably looking for unedited, you know, looking for editions of stuff I was playing.
FL: The *Beethoven Collected Works*?
JB: Exactly.
FL: Yeah, that was the 1888 edition, with Guido Adler [1855-1941, musicologist].
JB: That's right. I think that's—and I just stumbled on it and took it home and played it. And thought, "I've made a discovery."
FL: Yeah, there was no indication in that edition that there was any question of authenticity?
JB: Not that I know of.
FL: Yeah.
JB: Except that in my—that's not true, because in my—I don't know whether Xerox, or what—but I made a copy of it that I used to learn it. And there's an asterisk and a footnote. And I, at this very moment, I can't remember what the footnote said, but I think there was somebody else's—? Maybe it simply said that Guido Adler found it, or something. But it's now attributed to somebody else, isn't it?
FL: Yeah, this guy Johann Joseph Rösler.
JB: Yeah, right!
FL: 1771 to 1813.

JB: That's what I think the asterisk—has his name connected to it because I remember this name. [laughs]

FL: According to the research that I've done, when Adler put it in there he didn't know that there was any question of authenticity.

JB: Aha, well then probably somebody else might have just written that in, into the score.

FL: Yeah. It wasn't until 1925 that it was correctly identified.

JB: Right, well, and it was certainly after that that I—yeah.

FL: But it still didn't seem to be publicly known because there had been numerous recordings of it claiming to be by Beethoven, including some current CDs available now!

JB: Really! [laughs] Well, I remember telling Schnabel about it, and he said, "Well, what does it sound like?" And I said, "Well, it sort of sounds like Mozart." And he was furious! "One doesn't sound like Mozart!" Mozart is—that was again, style, but not Mozart, not the piece of music. And that was the end of the discussion.

FL: Wow. So how did it come about that you got a chance to play this with the orchestra?

JB: Well, it's interesting that I couldn't have answered that question except that going through all of these mounds of letters that have surfaced I found letters, I guess, to my mother. Anyhow, letters saying something about talking to the guy who was the conductor of that orchestra and arranging it. And I think [Louis] Krasner was somehow involved. But it was manipulated, [laughs] in the sense that people got to the conductor, and the conductor agreed to perform it.

FL: Mm-hm, and you wrote the cadenza for that, right?

JB: I did. I also played it with the University of California—

FL: Berkeley.

JB: Berkeley, yeah.

FL: Right, in 1950.

JB: Yeah. And Sessions said afterwards, "The best part was the cadenza!" [laughs] And he also said, by the way, when I was doing that—going out to lunch with him, and he said, "Well Jeanne, I hope you're not thinking of being a composer because women who compose are very unhappy." [laughs]

FL: [laughs]

JB: And then he started mentioning several of them, who had been students of his, and all of whom were very unhappy. [laughs]

FL: [laughs] Wow! Did your performance of that piece draw attention to it by other pianists, do you know?

JB: I don't think so. I think it was, you know, sort of a one-shot thing and that was it. After all, you know, it was a college orchestra.

FL: Yeah, but as far as with, in Minneapolis?

- JB: Oh, not that I'm aware of. Pops Orchestra, I guess, is it—you know, it was in a huge hall, but people were eating. You know, it was that kind of pops! [laughs]
- FL: Yeah, right, right.
- JB: Schnabel used to say he didn't like to record. You'd never know he didn't like to record, since he recorded all that stuff. But he said he didn't like to record because he always imagined people listening to the record and eating. [laughs]

6. Study with Roger Sessions. (1:22:37–CD2 00:37:17)

- FL: Yeah. [laughs] Moving on to Roger Sessions, whom you studied with, according to your resume, in 1948 through 1951. Is that correct?
- JB: Correct.
- FL: And your connection with Sessions was through Schnabel, right?
- JB: He literally sent me to him. But when I got my degree in philosophy, I mean, there I had a B.A., and there was a big—I didn't know what to do. Because suddenly I realized you can't get a job with a B.A. What are you going to do?
- FL: Yeah.
- JB: And I went, I had to make a decision between: I was going to go to the University of Chicago, in the Committee on Social Thought, because Schnabel had come and given a series of lectures there, and he was a friend of the guy who ran it. So I was torn between going in that direction some more, and going and studying music for the first time, really. I mean, studying. And by that time I was really interested in trying to understand more about how a piece of music works, and so that's why I went to study with Sessions instead of going to the University of Chicago and doing more philosophy kind of stuff.
- FL: Right, so this was at the University of California at Berkeley, when he was there?
- JB: Right, right.
- FL: What kind of courses did you take with him? Did it also include any private study?
- JB: Well, yes, definitely! First of all, I didn't have a degree in music, so I had to take the undergraduate music courses. So I took courses from David Boyden [1910-1986, Professor of Music, musicologist], and [Manfred] Bukofzer [1910-1955, musicologist].
- FL: Oh, my!
- JB: [laughs] He and I did not get along very well!
- FL: [laughs]
- JB: And as well as Sessions. And then I kept taking Special Topics. In fact, I really got my degree in Special Topics, which were sessions with Sessions. And a lot of—in the beginning, Roger was writing his harmony book [Sessions, Roger: *Harmonic Practice* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1951)], and I was the guinea pig. In fact, if you look at the introduction, if you look at the acknowledgments, you'll see. I was simply

going through all the exercises with him. And [Robert] Bob Helps [1928–2001, pianist, composer]?

FL: Mm-hm, the pianist.

JB: He and I were the guinea pigs for that book. And that was a fantastic education because I was not only doing the exercises, but he was talking with me about them. And at that point, theory got to be interesting because, you know, it wasn't following rules, and not being sure not to have any parallel fifths or something, but it was all about function, and structural functions, and harmonic functions. Something that had to do with music!

And then I took his analysis class, [laughs] and he spent the first—he spent more than half of the semester on the first movement of the *Eroica* Symphony [Beethoven's Symphony no. 3 in E-flat Major, op. 55]. And that was a revelation! I had no idea that there were things like that in music. And at the end of—the exam, at the end, he gave us a piece of the music to analyze, and I said I couldn't do it, and I was going to walk out of the exam. And he said, "Well, just do it. I won't read it. Just do it for yourself." So I did it for myself, and of course he took it, and read it and it was fine.

But, hanging around with all of these big, important people, it was very easy to feel pretty little. [laughs] So, and then I was taking a composition course from somebody named Charles Cushing [1905-1982, composer], and going to all of Sessions' composition seminars, where the composition students would bring their pieces, and he would laboriously play them on the piano and talk about them. And that was another whole education! And just being around, really, for the first time, with other music students was a whole new experience. There was, I mean, Leon Kirchner [1919-2009, composer] was teaching there as an instructor. Earl Kim [1920-1998, composer] was away that first year; he had the Paris Prize [*Prix de Paris*], and he was in Paris. Andy Imbrie [Andrew Imbrie, 1921-2007, composer] was there. And I began playing all their music. I gave, you know, the first performance—that's there, on one of these CDs—Imbrie's Piano Sonata, and Leon's—I don't think there is a recording of Leon's—?

FL: Yeah, what we've got here is—

JB: Imbrie and Sessions. I played Sessions' Second Sonata [for solo piano]. [Ed. note: Referring to recordings of her performances (also works by Beethoven and Schubert), given to MIT Music Library; she had not given a recording of Leon Kirchner's music.]

FL: Yeah.

JB: But I played—wasn't there a tape or something of his Violin-Piano Duo, Leon's?

FL: I don't know.

JB: I guess not. But I played everybody's music, and that was another whole new life! And then the second year, I was Sessions's T.A. [Teaching Assistant] in the analysis class, and that was also a wonderful experience because I really—he spent quite a bit of time reminiscing: "When I was in Florence—" and telling bad stories about love

affairs, and whatever. But, so the students would come to me for help.

FL: Oh, yes!

JB: [laughs] And one of the things we had to do and they had to do: we'd take a huge piece of wrapping paper or something, a roll of wrapping paper, and analyze a piece from beginning to end on these long rolls of paper, doing and saying absolutely everything that you could about the piece. So I was, I had to help them because he didn't interact with the students much individually. And a lot of them didn't even understand what he was talking about a lot of the time. We spent a lot of time on the first two chords in the *Eroica* Symphony. Why didn't he just start the piece? What are those two chords doing there? Well, there was a lot of speculation about that. And also, I don't remember—yeah, I guess it was in the analysis; it must have been a different analysis course. We studied the Schoenberg Fourth Quartet [op. 47], and the Stravinsky—no, one of the Bartok quartets. And that was a whole different way of—I mean, the study of the Fourth Quartet wasn't—I don't remember him talking about twelve-tone anything at all. He talked about it just like he talked about the Beethoven *Eroica* Symphony.

FL: Well, he seemed to have a faith in, if music was, if it was a good piece of music, and it was what he called, had intelligibility, it didn't matter if somebody didn't understand it right away. He just seemed to have a faith in that, and didn't seem to be caught up in this—?

JB: Accessibility.

FL: Yeah.

JB: Right. Well, in fact, in the paper I just wrote [“An Analysis of the Four Piano Sonatas of Ernst Křenek” Master's thesis, U. of Calif., 1951], I quoted him where he said he was much more interested in the piece that he didn't understand at first, and had to come to understand, a piece that he had to listen to many times. He also didn't like recordings. And the reason he didn't like recordings was because they were always the same. [laughs] And he would get bored with the particular inflections that this performer was providing. I also remember Mitropoulos coming—Mitropoulos was going to play a piece of his, and Mitropoulos came, and Sessions handed him the score and then was busy with something else. And the story was he came back after half an hour or an hour or something, and Mitropoulos said now he knew the first movement by heart.

FL: [laughs]

JB: He always played—he always conducted without a score, and I think he was one of the first people who did. Other people now, I guess, do. But he conducted whatever it was without a score.

FL: Kind of gave him the freedom to not be tied to it.

JB: Right. But on the other hand, he could sit and memorize it!

FL: Yeah. It's interesting, Sessions and Schnabel both had a similar idea about faithfulness to the score, but not over-interpreting.

- JB: Yeah. Well, Schnabel used to say, sometimes, if you played in a way that inspired that, he'd say, "You don't have to heat the music. It's hot enough already." [laughs]
- FL: [laughs] There's a quote here from Sessions's book *Questions on Music* [Sessions, Roger: *Questions About Music* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970)] that I'll read for some comments here. He says, "What one is sometimes tempted to regard as quasi-pathological is that musical analysis, as sometimes practiced today, like many other things in our present day world, often tended to become over-specialized, something to be pursued for its own sake, often with the implied object of discovering and establishing the ultra ultimate criteria of music on a quasi-scientific, supposedly rational basis.
- JB: [laughs]
- FL: [continues reading] Concessions, however, are made somewhat grudgingly to what is called intuition, as a quasi-explanation of what cannot be fully explained in strictly analytical terms." And then he speaks of the antithesis between the creative and the analytical attitude towards composition. This is coming from a very powerful intellect, you know.
- JB: Well, that's what it takes, in order to—I mean, a less powerful intellect is willing to do all the things that he's talking about there.
- FL: Yeah.
- JB: But he was never—he was always, well, experimenting. He was always playing around, considering different kinds of possibilities. Like those first two chords. Well, you know, what's the problem? You've got E-flat major chords! He's establishing the key! Well, that's not good enough. I mean, he establishes the key when he goes [sings]. That establishes the key, too. But to puzzle over why something is the way it is. The recapitulation in that first movement, where the horn is playing sort of like he was still before.
- FL: Right.
- JB: Well, you know, you can—what's that doing? But, there's so many puzzlements in any—I mean, that's the nature of complexity, is that. And it is like Schnabel, in that it's not a question of—and I'm sure that all of that had a huge effect on my not, sort of, joining the club of the music theorists, because they're just what he says there. And it doesn't get to what everybody—on the one hand, what everybody knows how to do in this culture, that is to say, to make sense of the music that's all around them. It doesn't touch on how they're doing that, or what the nature of that knowledge is. And knowledge and intuition, really. But, on the other hand, it doesn't touch on what performers are finding in a piece of music, or the nature of complexity. And I think that's a really important and interesting subject, and without their saying it, that's sort of what they're into, is that. In fact, at the end of that paper, whichever paper—I don't remember what paper it was—but at the end of the paper, I quoted Sessions and Schnabel, both of them saying what they're interested in is the pieces that they have to listen to many times.
- FL: Sessions also has an interesting thing about intuition, and it makes me think of you. He says, "What is called intuition is simply a result of intensive, pertinent functioning

of the aural imagination. This has nothing to do with rationality in an analytical sense.”

JB: Well, but I think that intuition is learned. I mean, I think that you develop your intuition. I think you have to start with trying to understand what you understand. And then, but then you can develop that. So, I don't think intuition is magic. [laughs] On the other hand, I think you can—I would disagree with that in that I think you can examine, probe, for the nature of a person's musical intuition.

FL: Yeah, I had a question about it; you already brought it up.

JB: Yeah, and I think sometimes intuition—I said this once, and somebody got very upset. I think the word and the notion is sometimes used as a garbage can. [laughs] I mean, you attribute something to intuition, and then you don't have to say any more.

FL: Right.

JB: But I think, as far as education and learning and all of that is concerned, it's critical to try to understand what it is that people know how to do without anybody teaching it to them.

FL: Mm-hm. So, Sessions wrote music that could be described as challenging to listen to, and he saw it as coming from a creative vision, not to be difficult or avant-garde for its own sake. Did he talk about the issues of music such as his, and even among musicians, being able to, even musicians found that very challenging. Did he talk about those kinds of issues, and that whole process, and what was happening with those kinds of composers?

JB: Not per se, because he was—just as he was in the *Eroica* Symphony, he was in the piece. And the fact that it was difficult, well, the *Eroica* Symphony's difficult, too. And I think that was more the approach. It's just that when we listen to Beethoven we don't hear why it's difficult, or it doesn't seem to be difficult, because we're not really hearing what's going on, all that's going on in the piece. In fact, you know, when people ask me what I do, one of the things I say quick is, “I'm interested in helping people to hear the complexity in a complex piece of music.” [laughs] So, the fact that people have trouble with it is simply because they're listening to style, if you want! [laughs] I mean, they're waiting for the resolution; they're waiting for the chromaticism to resolve, and they're missing the whole point.

FL: Did he talk about serialism and [Anton] Webern [1883-1945], but also later on, Luigi Nono [1924-1990] and [Karlheinz] Stockhausen [1928-2007] and [Pierre] Boulez [b. 1925]? Did he talk about that?

JB: Well, he claimed that he wasn't a twelve-tone composer, and he was—he insisted on that. But I think his attitude towards it was, the twelve-tone part of it, and doing serial analysis, and so forth—that wasn't what was interesting. It was what the piece shares with complex pieces in any style that was the point. Of course, [laughs] when we did the Fourth Quartet and then the Bartok Quartet, it was almost as if this was to show the greatness of Schoenberg and the less greatness of Bartok. But Bartok was already much better than Stravinsky.

FL: He also had a thing about national style.

- JB: Wait, I just remembered, we did the Symphony in Three Movements of Stravinsky. Those were the three pieces.
- FL: Is it possible that some of the problem he had with Bartok was the kind of Hungarianness of it?
- JB: I don't think so because we used to talk about the difference between people who wrote ethnic music, borrowing, in contrast to somewhere the notion of renting a house instead of living in it. [laughs] But I don't think, no, I don't think it was the fact that he was using folk songs, or something, but it was just—because what's important is what people do with their material.
- FL: Right. So he had kind of a preference to Schoenberg—?
- JB: To Bartok and certainly to Stravinsky. [laughs]

7. Performing contemporary music, visit with Arnold Schoenberg. (01:42:37–CD2 00:57:17)

- FL: Wow. We can't get through this next topic now, but let's see what we can do. Your master's degree—and we talked about some of the stuff you've already done at Berkeley. You mentioned your master's degree was on Křenek's Piano Sonatas, right?
- JB: Four Sonatas, yeah.
- FL: Okay. Did you also study piano when you were at the university there?
- JB: No, not at all. I just played a lot! [laughs]
- FL: Was that your first experience playing contemporary music?
- JB: Yeah.
- FL: Yeah, yeah.
- JB: And that was, really Sessions pushed me into that.
- FL: How was that for you? Was it something you really wanted to do?
- JB: Yeah, oh, I was very excited about learning that music and playing it. And I think the fact that they were all right there!
- FL: Yeah.
- JB: So it was really like being—that was where I got the idea that what I wanted to be was a community musician! [laughs] Because that's really what I was there. And it was really—it was the only time when there was a whole group of people, and we were all involved with this stuff, and I was playing it. Not the only one, of course, but along with others.
- FL: So you played the piano part in Schoenberg's "Ode to Napoleon" [Bonaparte for Voice, Piano and String Quartet, op. 41, (1942)] with the Barati Chamber Orchestra in San Francisco? How did that come about?
- JB: Well, we were just talking about that last night. Somebody in the orchestra must have

suggested it. I don't remember how it came about. I was asked if I wanted to do it.

FL: Did you know George Barati?

JB: Well, I think he was around because he was a composer, and he was kind of part of the crew that, although he was older. And he was playing a lot of the music that people were composing, so he was—I don't know, I'm pretty sure I had met him before. But, you know, the fact that I was playing all of this stuff—

FL: And so you were kind of known out there as a pianist that could do it?

JB: Absolutely, right.

FL: Yeah. George Barati, his dates are 1913 to 1996, he taught cello at Princeton University and studied with Sessions there.

JB: Right, and so that probably—right, I knew he was a cellist. But that was all a very funny thing because I was taking a course from David Boyden on the Mozart string quartets. And the exam was scheduled at the same time as a rehearsal of the “Ode to Napoleon.” So I asked Boyden if I could take the exam before or after, some other time. And he said, “You're going to have to make up your mind whether you're a student at the university or you're a pianist.” [laughs]

FL: [laughs] Wow! Wow! Wow.

JB: Also, I had never played in an orchestra, as an instrumentalist in an orchestra, and that was a whole new experience.

FL: Wow. Who were some of your other students, colleagues, at the university there? And did you talk about contemporary music much?

JB: Oh, yeah, we were deep into it all the time!

FL: Yeah.

JB: Leland Smith was probably my best friend. You know, he was at Stanford [Professor of Music, 1968-1992]? He retired.

FL: Yeah.

JB: But he's the guy who did score. He and his wife were probably my closest friends. And then, I don't know, there was—what's his name? Rosen—not Charles. Not Charles—that's another story. I can't think of his first name—goodness. [Jerome Rosen, b. 1921] He's at U.C. Davis. And then there was—ah, I can't remember his name, either, but I'll think of it. The guy who wrote the music for—he became a movie composer, and he wrote the music for the James Dean movies, and became famous for that. [Leonard Rosenman, 1924-2008] I'll think of his name. So there was a whole group of people. I was mostly—it was the composers that I was hanging around with. But it was the first time that I had been around people who were talking about music, and playing music, and doing all of that. Also Vincent Duckles [1913-1985, musicologist, music librarian] was a close friend! [laughs]

FL: No kidding! Wow! Wow.

JB: In fact, they kind of adopted me. I gave piano lessons to their kids. And Madeline, who is now over ninety, his wife, is still very active and very much around. And was

involved with the new—there's a new music building, a new building, a whole music library building that's just been opened.

FL: Oh, I heard about that, that's right.

JB: And it's dedicated, it's named after Vincent.

FL: Well, rightfully so.

JB: Yeah.

FL: I know that at various universities among composition students in the past there were lots of debates about twelve-tone music, and the way that it became kind of institutionalized. Was that an issue there?

JB: Well, it wasn't an issue because it was not institutionalized. It was not looked upon as some kind of panacea. It was—and I don't think that there, I don't remember—certainly none of the pieces that I played were twelve-tone. And students of Sessions were not writing twelve-tone music.

FL: Yeah.

JB: And that meant that they had to really work hard to find how to be not tonal. They had to find their own—

FL: Their own voice, yeah.

JB: —voice, or whatever you call it. Yeah, there were a bunch of others, too, whose names I will come up with eventually.

FL: At your performance of Ode to Napoleon, was Schoenberg there, possibly?

JB: No. No, he was already pretty old. But I did go to see him.

FL: Uh-huh, well tell me about that.

JB: Well, that was also because of David Boyden in a way. I wanted to write my thesis on the sonata form in atonal music.

FL: Ah-ha.

JB: And David Boyden said that was by definition impossible! [laughs] Well, but there are all those pieces that are in sonata form! Like, the *Lyric Suite* [by Alban Berg] comes to mind.

FL: Yeah.

JB: Okay. So I said, "I'm going to go and ask Schoenberg about it." So Roger arranged for me to go and talk to him. And it happened that—I mean, this must have been in 1950, or something like that, '49 or '50. And there was a big all-Schoenberg concert in Los Angeles celebrating his, what, seventy-fifth birthday?

FL: Something like that, yeah.

JB: Right, right, okay. So, I went to the concert, and at the intermission, Nuria, his daughter, came out on the stage, thanked everybody for coming, and for the concert, and apologized that her father wasn't feeling well enough to come. Okay. The next morning, I went to visit Schnabel—uh, Schoenberg. (They're all S's, aren't they?) I

went to visit Schoenberg, and while we were talking, the vacuum cleaner is going all the time. And finally he apologized, and he said that Ronny, his son, had put Nuria up to making that speech, that she wasn't asked to do that, she wasn't told to do that, and she shouldn't have done that! And so she was being punished by having to vacuum the whole house. [laughs]

FL: [laughs]

JB: Anyhow, he was totally livid at the idea that there couldn't be sonata form in atonal music. And then he went off on how horribly his pieces are performed, and that's why nobody likes them because the performances are so bad! And he was quite cuckoo. I mean, he looked wild. And also in the midst of it, Dick Hoffman, who was some way related to him. Richard Hoffman [b. 1925]?

FL: Uh-huh, oh, the composer?

JB: The composer.

FL: Yeah.

JB: He came every morning and went through the mail and organized things. The mail arrival was the big event.

FL: Oh yeah, he was kind of an assistant to him?

JB: He was.

FL: And cleaned up his archives after he died and stuff. Yeah, right.

JB: Right, he was there, doing that. So that was the visitation with Schoenberg. After that I became quite friendly with his daughter, Nuria. We used to play tennis.

FL: So what more did he say about sonata form in atonal music?

JB: Well, he sort of began just railing about everything. But what he said was, it wasn't a matter of the tonic and the dominant, but a matter of contrast. And there were lots of ways to make contrast. And that it was stupid of anybody to think that that was the essence of sonata form, was the tonal areas—that it was the structural contrast that was important. So, but then I—

FL: So what did David Boyden say of that, after you came back and reported to him?

JB: Well, I think by that time I was hardly talking to him.

FL: [laughs]

JB: I was through with that. But there was a problem also with Bukofzer, because I didn't have enough footnotes, and I said things, and I didn't say where they came from. This was after the whole thesis was typed and ready to go, and I'd been working on it, of course, with Sessions. And Sessions and Bukofzer shared an office. And I always used to say that if Bukofzer didn't smoke his cigar, and Roger didn't smoke his pipe, so that there was a lot of smoke between them, they would have, I don't know, fought! They would have beat each other up, or something!

So, Bukofzer made me put things in like, "Private conversation with the composer." Because I had, the whole interest—and that goes back to a question you

asked before—but one of the interests that I had in doing it was this change in style. And the Four Piano Sonatas cover the whole change.

And so I was trying to account for this change in style by what was going on politically and where he was moving, and what was going on musically, politically. And Bukhofzer didn't want to have any of that because I couldn't document it! [laughs] So I had to put in these footnotes, and I had to rewrite the thesis. And finally, and in the meantime, I had gotten the Fulbright and was leaving, and I was finished. So I had to find somebody to type this new version, quickly. So I ran into Bukhofzer as she was working on it, and he said, "Well, how's it going?" And I said, "Oh, she's great. She's really fast." And he said, "Speed does not ensure accuracy." [laughs]

FL: [laughs] Wow. So, I think we can end there, and we'll start with your Fulbright Scholarship, and studying with Messiaen next time. Then your career at MIT, and lots of things.

JB: Okay.

FL: Thank you so much for coming today!

JB: Okay, well, it's all very interesting.

[End of Interview]