

**Music at MIT Oral History Project**

**Cherry Emerson**

*Interviewed*

*by*

**Forrest Larson**

**November 28, 2000**

**Interview no. 1**

**Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
Lewis Music Library**

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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

**Cherry Emerson** (1916-2007) received bachelor's and master's degrees in organic chemistry from Emory University, 1938 and 1939, and a master's degree in chemical engineering from MIT in 1941. An accomplished amateur pianist, he studied for a number of years with Alfredo Barili. With William R. Cuming, he founded Emerson & Cuming, a manufacturer of specialty chemicals. Founded in 1947, the firm became a worldwide company developing products crucial to such industries as aerospace and oil drilling. Mr. Emerson's philanthropic activities have benefitted educational and cultural institutions, including MIT, Emory University, and the Rockport Chamber Music Festival. He was the primary donor supporting renovation of the MIT Music Library, which is named in honor of his mother-in-law, Rosalind Denny Lewis. Cherry Emerson died in 2007.

**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 November 28, 2000, in the MIT Lewis Music Library. Duration of the audio recording is 1:50:45. First of two interviews. Second interview: November 30, 2000.

## 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 Background (00:15—CD1 00:15)

FORREST LARSON: It is my distinct pleasure to welcome Cherry Emerson to this interview. It's November 28th, 2000, in the Lewis Music Library. Cherry has a master's degree in chemical engineering from MIT, class of 1941. He had a very distinguished career in engineering and business. He's a pianist. He was the primary donor who made the renovation of the MIT music library possible, and this library is named in honor of Mr. Emerson's mother-in-law, Rosalind Denny Lewis. Thank you very much for coming; it's really wonderful to have you here.

CHERRY EMERSON: Well, it's very nice to be here again. I always enjoy visits to MIT. And by the way, I think you should say a comma after your last sentence there: the wife of Warren K. Lewis, MIT Professor of Chemical Engineering, under whom I studied, and whereby I met his daughter Mary, who may be known to you—and the fact that we married not long after I got out of MIT.

FL: We will certainly get into that more later on.

CE: Okay.

FL: So, you were born in Atlanta in 1916. Can you tell me about your father and some of his influences on your professional development, your choice of a career, or just what you'd like to say about him?

CE: Well, that's a very interesting story to me and I hope, therefore, to you.

FL: Yeah, his name is Cherry, Senior?

CE: That's correct. I'm a Junior, but after his death, some ten years, I dropped that Junior and since then have been known as Cherry L. Emerson, Cherry Logan Emerson. But he put me through the public schools in Atlanta. I put myself through, I guess is the right phrase. And then came the question of college: where would I go? And since he had been a Georgia Tech [Georgia Institute of Technology] graduate of the class of 1908 and 1909, and wherein he was the first master's degree from Georgia Tech, he wanted me to go there, and study engineering at MIT.

But I wanted to study chemistry, because I had become very well acquainted with it in senior high school class under a Professor Hightshoe [spelling uncertain], who was well-known in the chemical field. And I just wanted to progress in that field, rather than even study engineering. And the reason I went to Emory University instead of Georgia Tech was that the chemistry department at Emory was known to be one of the best in the South at the time, and under the direction of Professor J. Sam Guy [James Samuel Guy]. And many people recommended that chemistry department to me; I searched around for good information. And so I decided to go study under the Department of Chemistry at Emory University.

And you might be interested to know—you won't find this out from anybody else in the world—Ira Remsen, who was the President of Johns Hopkins University, and as well the founder of the chemical department—the modern chemistry department—at Johns Hopkins, and who in truth came up with the university system

for the colleges of the USA and had a big influence intellectually on how the college life in America developed, had his own chemistry lab.

And my grandfather, who opened the doors at Georgia Tech, had studied under Ira Remsen. He came to Georgia Tech and lived and died there, teaching chemistry. A second man studied under Ira Remsen and came to Georgia, Charles Herty, H-E-R-T-Y, who became the first President of the American Chemical Society, and a third man, J. Sam Guy, who came to Emory University in Georgia. And I knew some of this history, and so I—mainly about J. Sam Guy—so I went there. And that little anecdote about Ira Remsen is something that is in print, in a book called *The Life of Ira Remsen*, written by a chemist named Getmann, G-E-T-M-A-N-N [correct spelling: Getman]. And MIT should have that in its library because Ira Remsen's name in the history of the development of the university system in America is profound. Well, does that answer your question?

FL: Sure, sure!

CE: All right.

FL: Tell me about your mother, Sina White?

CE: Sina. [Editor's note: CE corrects pronunciation—long “i”]

FL: Sina. She was obviously a musician. Was she both a singer and a pianist?

CE: Yes, she had a good voice and loved to sing. And we had the piano in the house, but I'm going to tell you how my piano got there, later on.

FL: Right.

CE: And she knew Alfredo Bareli, my later-on teacher of music—mentor of music. And I mean music, not just piano! And she wrote a song, which Ellen Harris [Associate Provost for the Arts and Professor of Music at MIT] has right now.

FL: Right, “When We Were Sweethearts”? [*The Music of Alfredo Barili*, Victor Floyd, tenor, William Ransom, piano (Atlanta, Ga.: aca Digital Recording, p1999).]

CE: Yes.

FL: Yes.

CE: And Ellen has sung part of that to me. Thank you, Ellen. And she wrote the words and music for that, and it was in the style of, oh, [pause] the famous songwriter—I'll have to come back to that.

FL: Dudley Buck?

CE: No, no, not Buck. A well-known—well, I'll think of it before this interview is over.

FL: Okay.

CE: And she put a lot of effort and work into that because it was her only chance, really, to do what she wanted to do. And she did it well. And the song never sold any quantity, but it sold to a few people in Atlanta who knew her. And it's a nice piece of music, I think.

FL: It certainly is!

- CE: And so we'll leave it at that. But she—the first bar of that song was written by Alfredo Barili. She did it all and then asked him for an introduction, and he obliged by writing the first bars, I think the first six bars.
- FL: Tell me about your mother's influence on you, musically, the support that she gave to you to play the piano. And also, did she come from a musical family?
- CE: Well, that's a very good question, and the answer to that is yes, but it was primarily my grandmother.
- FL: What was her name?
- CE: Her name was Sina Harris, H-A-R-R-I-S, just like Ellen Harris. And she was really a wonderful lover of music. She could play the piano well. And all of her life she indulged in music. She and her husband, Woods White [spelling uncertain], went many times to the Bayreuth Festival [music festival] in Germany. And in those days to travel to Europe was quite an expedition! And I know that she went a number of times, and she gathered paintings and brought them back home and hung them in her home. And she had, I would say, twenty or thirty beautiful German paintings of the countryside and the Main that she brought back from those festival occasions. So my grandmother was a leader to my mother, who I guess passed some talent anyway to me.

And there was one other: the last—no, the next to the last child of the Woods White's was my uncle named Huston White [spelling uncertain]. And Huston White had really most of the talent for music that that family had. It came down to him, and he was really a wonderful pianist. He studied all of his piano with Alfredo Barili and was the man who recommended Alfredo Barili to me, as I will come back to, because I have to. But Huston White was so good that Barili told his father that he should go on the stage and make a career of playing the piano. And Huston didn't want to do that! [laughs] He had seen too many people try, unsuccessfully.

- FL: So what was his eventual career?
- CE: And he wanted to go into law, and he eventually became an outstanding lawyer. He was certainly the best-trained lawyer in the South, at the time. He had gone to Davidson College, a Rhodes Scholarship to [pause] I think it was Oxford in those days, rather than Cambridge. Then came back, went to Harvard and got a law degree from Harvard. That was not enough. He went to Princeton and got a law degree in international law from Princeton under a fellow named Edward Corwin, and for whom he named his second son. He named his first son Huston White, Jr., and his second son Edward Corwin White, who also has a lot of musical talent. He is now a professor at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa teaching opera and voice. And he's a fine singer.

So there was a talent in the family, I think originating with my grandmother White, Sina White. And she passed it along to those two children of hers. Sina Harris was her name, I said. Well, it was Sina Harris White, was her full name.

- FL: So singers and pianists. Were there any other instruments played?

CE: Yes, Huston was a multi-faceted musician. He played the clarinet very well and was the principal clarinet in the early Atlanta Symphony Orchestra. And he played for an opera group which went around the South.

FL: What was the name of that group?

CE: I don't know.

FL: There were a lot of small, kind of short-term opera groups that were touring around at that time.

CE: That's correct. You have it sized up exactly right.

FL: Yeah.

CE: And my first opera was when he collared me and took me over to Athens, Georgia, at the University of Georgia, where this opera group—whatever their name was—was putting on *Faust* [by Charles Gounod]. And I heard—that was the first opera I ever heard. And Huston played the principal clarinet in that opera, *Faust*.

FL: How old were you at the time?

CE: Twelve.

FL: Uh-huh.

CE: Twelve years old.

FL: Wow.

CE: And that was my first adventure, you might say, in music. And he made—Huston had a big influence on me because he saw I had a minimum of talent anyway, and he wanted to develop it. And he was the man who said to me—well, I'll come back to that. Because when I was thirteen years old, I did start music work, piano work, under a Mrs. Caldwell, C-O-L-D-W-E-L-L [correct spelling: Caldwell], whose son [Harmon W. Caldwell] at that time was the President of the University of Georgia.

FL: [laughs]

CE: And just a—just, I can't help telling this anecdote! But his schedule to visit his mother was my schedule to visit her for a piano lesson. And he frequently interrupted my piano lesson. And here I was, this thirteen-year-old kid there, trying to study piano, and he would burst in the door and embrace his mother. And he would say, "Mom, I'm flat broke! I need some cash!" And she would [laughs] go out and bring him a fifty-dollar bill! The President of the University of Georgia! So if this gets on the record, and gets down to Georgia, they'll first get a good laugh out of it, and then they may come to see me!

FL: [laughs]

CE: But I saw that several times! And I studied with Mrs. Caldwell for a good part of a year.

FL: What was her first name?

CE: I cannot remember [probably Lillie D. Reynolds Caldwell]. She was always Mrs. Caldwell to me, and to me she didn't even have one. But then I exhibited my talent to



Huston White. And he listened carefully to several pieces that I played and then he said, “We can do better than that. You go to see Alfredo Barili, and I’ll call him up.”

FL: And we’ll get more to Barili.

CE: Right. And so that’s how my musical career started. I could do a tarantella for Mrs. Caldwell pretty good, pretty well, and lots of short pieces like that. But it was not real musical training. And she didn’t know anything about the “Mozart Technique” at the piano and that sort of thing. So you just sort of worked out your own fingering. [laughs] And I had to!

FL: Yeah, that was so common with some of that music education in areas of the country like that.

CE: That’s right.

FL: There’s a gentleman who is about your age who is a violinist, who studied violin with a piano teacher. She didn’t even know how to play the violin!

CE: [laughs]

FL: And he had to figure out how to play!

CE: Sure. Well I had to figure out how to play the piano.

FL: Wow!

CE: But Barili took care of all of that!

FL: [laughs]

CE: Oh, he was a disciplinarian!

FL: Wow. So tell me about your siblings, brothers and sisters. And were any of them musical?

CE: I had one sibling, my sister, Dorothy Elizabeth Emerson. And she also went to Alfredo Barili. I think—she was a year and a half older than me—and so she went to him, and he in essence, in a very polite, Italian way, said, “Don’t come back.” [laughs] He thought that it was no point in trying to teach her to play the piano. And she could play around on it, and she could play church music and things like that, and did. And for all of her life, I think, she kept a piano in her home, but she was not a musician, believe me. And she was not much of a pianist either! She was a dear sister, but that was all. She did not contribute to the musical talent of the family.

FL: Now your mother, Sina, did she study a lot with Barili?

CE: No, just a little. But he was a good voice teacher—very good voice teacher. He had—he taught—he came to Atlanta—some of this will be out of order, so to speak—but he came to Atlanta in 1880, when he was twenty-seven years old. And the first thing he did was to form a Barili School of Music, and a chorus and a choir and things of that order. And he taught singing in a very professional way. And his daughter, Louise Barili, was a fine singer. I’ve heard her sing many times.

FL: Did you study voice with him at all?

CE: No.

FL: No.

CE: No, I never did. It didn't work out with my schedule. I came—after Mrs. Caldwell, I was just fourteen, just barely, when I met him for the first time, and he was seventy-seven. He was really—he became a very good friend. He was really a third grandfather to me. That's the way I have said it many times. And he taught me things that the other grandfathers couldn't teach me! And so it was really a very, very good association.

FL: I'll give you more chance to talk about that as we go along. Tell me some of the memorable childhood musical experiences, concerts that you went to.

## 2. Early musical experiences (18:23—CD1 18:23)

CE: Yes. Well, I told you about my first opera. And Atlanta had a fledgling Atlanta Symphony, and I would go to hear them. And then a feature of my life, really, which my mother loved so much—she really loved those operettas that toured the world at that time: *The Chocolate Soldier* [by Oscar Straus] and *The Student Prince* [by Sigmund Romberg], and things of that nature and many more, would come to Atlanta time after time because they could fill the houses there. And she took me along to hear those operettas, and I really and truly enjoyed them a lot.

FL: Were there any particular favorites that you had?

CE: Well, those two that I first named.

FL: Yeah, yeah.

CE: Because they come right to mind, and there were others. And [laughs] she was also a film addict, and she would take me to the movies with her.

FL: Silent films? And did they have—?

CE: Silent films.

FL: —did they have live music with the films?

CE: Yes, oh, yeah! Yeah, the pianist in front of the film, playing.

FL: My grandmother played for silent films.

CE: Did she?

FL: Yeah.

CE: Well yes, that went on all the time. Rudolph Valentino—I'm one of the few people alive who ever saw him! And he was a favorite of hers.

FL: So what were some of the films that you remember going to?

CE: Well, *Moby Dick*, believe it or not, was a film [directed by Lloyd Bacon, 1930]. And I was really frightened at all of the water that was in that thing, the ocean, you know, and so on, and the tussle with Moby Dick. And then I saw Norma Shearer [Edith Norma Shearer] in several films, because my mother liked her in particular, but I

can't remember the names of them; they were romances of one kind or another. And Rudolph Valentino, he would produce a movie every other week, it seemed, and you could see him. I remember him riding around on that white horse of his, all over the desert, and I don't know what desert it was—probably one in Hollywood. But he was just someone who, for a short time in my life, made an impression on me.

FL: Mm-hm. Now the music for the silent films—was there times when it was a theater orchestra or was it just piano that you remember?

CE: There was no orchestra, it was just a pianist.

FL: Yeah, because sometimes they had orchestras.

CE: Yeah, but that was probably in New York. We're talking about Atlanta. They could afford a piano player, but I don't think they could afford an orchestra. But along with the films in those days went vaudeville. Are you acquainted with that fact?

FL: I didn't know that, that they had films and vaudeville acts.

CE: You could go to see Norma Shearer, say, in a movie, and when the movie was over the stage would light up and out would come one act after another of vaudeville. And sometimes they had orchestras for that, and sometimes instrumental soloists, and that sort of thing. But that was pretty rudimentary. And then they would start the film all over, and if you could pay twenty-five cents, you could stay there all day and see the film two or three times and the vaudeville two or three times. It was a bargain, to say the least. But very little serious music went with it.

FL: Did you hear piano recitals or chamber music concerts as a child?

CE: Oh, oh, man! You have struck a point! Yes is the answer. I have seen [Sergei] Rachmaninoff play several times in Atlanta. And I have seen [Ignacy Jan] Paderewski play in Atlanta.

FL: Were these solo recitals or—?

CE: Solo recitals.

FL: Uh-huh.

CE: Yeah, in the old barn, we called it, the Civic Barn—cold, windy, and terrible acoustically. Yet there they were, playing to very large audiences. You could get seven or eight thousand people in there, and they would fill those seats. So I remember those, and then of course the German pianist who was so famous in those days. He used to play a lot of Bach. Well, we'll have to come back to his name, too! I'll try to remember it tonight and tell you [name unconfirmed]. But he played to much smaller audiences. He would come and play at the Women's Club in Atlanta, a famous club sitting on Peachtree Street and Fourteenth there. And my grandmother was—Grandmother White—was one of the founders of that club. And this gentleman I'm trying to remember—it started with an S, I'm sure. Anyway, the pianist from Germany, he would play—every year he would come and play there. And I would go religiously because I knew I was listening to real talent. And I'll try to come up with his name for you.

FL: Now, their programs—what was a typical program? I've seen some of these concert programs where there's a lot of operatic transcriptions and things like that, mixed with more, a more serious classical repertoire.

CE: Like Liszt might play?

FL: Yeah, but like some of these piano recitals, like when Rachmaninoff played, what would be a—did he play some of those lighter pieces as well?

CE: No.

FL: No.

CE: No, he stuck with his own music, and music like it that he approved of—mainly Russian music. And there's a lot of good Russian music, as you know.

FL: Did they ever play with—play like piano trios, or anything like that? Do you remember any chamber music with that?

CE: I don't remember any piano trios. I remember a few duets.

FL: Piano duets?

CE: Yeah, two-piano pieces.

FL: Right.

CE: But I can't remember the names of the people who did it. But Atlanta was full of music. There was a New York person who would act as an agent for traveling musicians, and he had a routine of sending them from New York to Atlanta. And so it was a series over the year, particularly the winter part of the year, and they would come down there. And I would buy tickets to that series, and I heard some great music like that: Rosa Ponselle, people of that nature. [laughs]

Rosa Ponselle sang *Aida* in the only opera that I ever acted in [*Aida*, by Giuseppe Verdi]. And you know what part I had right off—I was one of a group of spear-bearers. But that was what—and Giovanni Martinelli was Radamès. I forget who the others were. But Rosa Ponselle and Giovanni Martinelli sang *Aida*—for the last time for Rosa Ponselle. She retired that year. That was while I was at Emory University. And she retired after that and just left the scene. But she sang a beautiful *Aida*, and I stood on the stage at the Fox Theater in Atlanta—this is where it all happened. And Giovanni Martinelli sang in the second act, where we came in. He had such a tremendous voice! I stood only a few feet right behind him, and you could feel the floor panels just moving up and down, with—it was amazing to me! I almost didn't get off the stage! [laughs] But I did.

And I had many musical experiences of that nature that kept me very interested. But at that time that I just spoke of, I was studying under Barili, and seriously.

FL: When did you first hear chamber music, string quartets, and things like that? Because you are known to love chamber music, and I wonder when you first were exposed to that.

- CE: Yes. When I first heard it, I would say, possibly at Agnes Scott College, which is a girl's—it was at that time all girls, and I think still is—out in Decatur, just a little bit east of Atlanta, two or three miles maybe. And that's the first one I can remember. But I got interested in chamber music right away, and I've heard so much of it since that I don't know just when and where I really first began to enjoy it so much. But I'm sure that at this Women's Club there was chamber music, that I spoke of, that my grandmother helped to found, and where—oh, I get frustrated over these names!
- FL: You're doing wonderful! [laughs]
- CE: [laughs] I'll try to come up with it. Two names, I owe you now. Oh, Victor—the musician who wrote in the style my mother wrote in. Victor Herbert!
- FL: Victor Herbert, yes!
- CE: Victor Herbert, that was it. We said it simultaneously. She loved Victor Herbert's music. And her song—Ellen [Harris] will tell you this—was in his style.
- FL: It certainly is, yes!
- CE: All right, you agree.
- FL: Yeah.
- CE: And I'm sure he had a profound influence on her, just listening. She didn't know him at all. But I owe you only one name now, and I'm sure I can come up with it!

### 3. Piano study with Alfredo Barili (29:33—CD1 29:33)

- FL: [laughs] So getting back to Alfredo Barili, 1854 to 1935. For those hearing this interview who are not familiar with him, could you briefly describe him from a biographic, historical point of view? There's a full-length biography of him [N. Lee Orr, *Alfredo Barili and the Rise of Classical Music in Atlanta* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1995)], so we don't need to go at great length, but for those others who are hearing this interview, who may not know Barili. From your personal standpoint, how do you, kind of, look at him historically?
- CE: From my personal standpoint? Well, he was a wonderful man and human being. He loved people; he loved musicians in particular. And he was the founder of classical music in Atlanta. He came there in 1880—there was nothing. And when he died in '35 it was a well-developed musical scene. And he played the primary role in that. At his school he taught hundreds and hundreds, running into the thousands, of students over the years. And there's no doubt of that. And he had a number of outstanding ones who went on to musical careers, primarily as teachers.

But he taught not only singing, both male and female, but also many different kinds of instruments, he would teach students how to play effectively. And the piano was his big love, so he had been playing the piano since the time he could reach the keyboard, I'm sure. And as you say, there's a lot in the history books about that. At the age of ten he made a concert recital in some hall in New York; I don't know which one it was. So he was well-known, and many musicians considered him a

wonderful talent. And he was. But—and I'm going to come back on that, so don't think I've lost the thread here. But he had health problems.

FL: Asthma, wasn't it?

CE: Yes. I don't know exactly what it was, I was going to say, but he told me it was asthma. And he carried around oxygen on wheels that he could pull with him and inhale the oxygen to help him when the asthma was bad. And we used to take walks together, and he would sometimes—not all the time, but sometimes—he would take that device with him if he hadn't been feeling well that day, or something like it.

So I think he was an undeveloped talent in that respect, that he didn't have enormous physical strength, which is a great asset to a pianist! You just ask David Deveau [concert pianist, Lecturer in Music at MIT] and you'll get the whole story. And he was—when I knew him, I would have to call him a rather frail individual. He probably would have been ready to dispute that right away, but I really believe I'm right. And it meant that he never had enough drive and strength to, for example, go on a career of piano recitals round the world. But he could play a piano wonderfully well, and for short times when he sat down there you knew you were listening to genius. That's one of my talents [laughs], is to find talent in other people. And even in my mentor there—and he was a mentor—I could recognize how good he really was. So my impression was: I'm in the presence of genius, but it's a frail genius. That's about the best I can say.

FL: He was also known in the musical world as the nephew of Adelina Patti [Adela Juana Maria Patti], 1843 to 1919, a very famous American opera singer.

CE: Yeah, right.

FL: And that whole family.

CE: You want a few comments on that?

FL: Sure.

CE: Well, Adelina Patti was born in Spain, in '43 —1843. And she—her family moved to Italy, where she became first famous as a singer. And wait a minute—strike that. Her family brought her over to New York as an infant, so to speak, and they were living just north of New York City in a beautiful little setting. And that was where she had her first training and was recognized. There were many musical stars in the physical location of New York, and many of them heard her sing. And she was a child, now, I'm talking about—eight, nine, ten years old, and they recognized how good her voice was and tried to encourage her to continue. And she did.

And when she was, I think, thirteen years old, she was singing in the Metropolitan Opera. Now, that's to be checked from the history books, but at a very early age she was. And she was eleven years older than Alfredo Barili. And his family had come from Italy to New York, and they co-mingled, of course, and they visited one another. And the Pattis were making out financially better than the Barilis, so they moved toward that beautiful home that the Pattis had in New York. And he visited her many times there, and she would sing to him. He told me that. As a mere child, a few years old, Adelina Patti was singing to Alfredo Barili. And I'm

sure that had a big influence on his interest in vocal music, which was paramount in his life, next to, say, piano.

And there's much more to be said about their relationship. Adelina Patti went on to make many millions of dollars in the 1860s, '70s, '80s, '90s. She retired in I think 1913 and died in 1919, I believe.

FL: That's right.

CE: Is that right?

FL: That's right.

CE: Yeah, good. Maybe I can come up with that other name, the pianist. But you'll know it, as soon as I do. Anyway, they were very close. And she went through three husbands, and the third husband and she built a castle in Wales, Craig-y-Nos.

FL: Oh, yes.

CE: C-R-A-I-G-Y-N-O-S, Craig-y-Nos. And she made that her final home. And the Barilis, first Alfredo and his wife, would go over there yearly from Atlanta to visit with Adelina Patti. And that was where he played this music you have recorded [*Adelina Patti*, Adelina Patti, soprano; Landon Ronald, piano; Alfredo Barili, piano (Dacapo, 197-?)] was in her castle.

FL: Aha!

CE: That was where it was played.

FL: That's right, it said on the record jacket, yes.

CE: Yeah, okay.

FL: I didn't know where that was.

CE: Yeah, that was Adelina Patti's home in Wales, Craig-y-Nos. And they put the piano, Alfredo Barili told me, up on boxes to elevate it for some reason. So they had to lift the stool, of course, for him to sit on! [laughs] And he was in a very precarious position when he made that recording for her. But they loved one another as cousins. Oh, wait a minute—he was a nephew. Closer than a cousin even, I guess. And all of his life he knew what she was doing, and she knew what he was doing. They corresponded. I don't know where all of those letters went, but many of them are in the Atlanta Public Library, the correspondence between Adelina Patti and Alfredo Barili. And particularly Louise Barili, she—the daughter of Alfredo—and Emily was his mother's name—took a liking to Adelina Patti, and she in turn took a fancy to Louise, and Louise used to accompany Alfredo Barili.

When Mrs. Barili stopped going to England, it was Louise and Alfredo who went over. And I'm sure that she financed the trips because while he was well enough off to have a meal every day, he didn't make a lot of money, for sure. And that was quite a trip in those days, to go from Atlanta to England. So I guess that's enough. I can tell a little more, but that was the substance of their relationship.

FL: So, moving back to Barili, can you talk about some of the important musical and pianistic ideas you learned from him?

CE: The “Mozart Technique.” Mozart taught Hummel [Johann Nepomuk Hummel, 1778-1837]; Hummel taught Hiller, Frederick Hiller [Ferdinand (von) Hiller, 1811-1885] of Switzerland and Germany; and Hiller, in the conservatory in France there—it’s in the book [Barili’s biography]— I forget the name of the city, but it was near the German border with France [Cologne Conservatory, Germany] —and Barili went to that conservatory, and Hiller was the piano teacher he had there at the conservatory. Do you think there’s something wrong with that?

FL: No, I was seeing if I had written down the name of that conservatory. I thought I had written it down as a reference.

CE: There’s a big story about that. But there, you see, the “Mozart Technique” passed from Hummel to Hiller to Barili, right there in that conservatory. Do you know what I mean?

FL: Yes.

CE: The roll of the wrists and the fingering that’s so rigid. Mozart is the hardest thing to play! Do you play the piano?

FL: Some. I’m a violist mostly.

CE: A violist?

FL: But I studied piano in college, so yes.

CE: Well, if you’ve ever tried to play Mozart’s piano music, you will agree with me. David Deveau does, anyway. And when David and I agree on something, it’s the truth! Mozart was such a genius, it’s just absolutely amazing! But that technique he passed directly to Barili. And so I learned it from Barili, and it came right from Mozart. And I don’t know how we got started on this, but you asked a question and it left my mind.

FL: Yeah, asking about the musical and pianistic ideas you learned from Barili.

CE: Oh, yes, well, I learned fingering from Barili. And he was a disciplinarian. I went many times, hundreds of times, to his home there. On that piano—you’ve probably got a picture of it; it’s in the book. I played that. That was a concert grand from Steinway that they gave to him. He concertized in his early youth, and they gave it to him to keep! And he did. And there’s a story connected with that, as there is with everything. I’ll come back to that.

But he sat me down there, and he made me play all of the scales until he was thinking I was ready to start doing something else. And the arpeggios—I had to play those at some length before he could see that I was making a little progress each time, you know, and if he liked it. And so that was the disciplinary function that I found from him about playing a piano, that you had to know how to do those things, and do them very well, before you were ready to play anything. And then he started me on things that—“Jeunesse” [laughs]. I don’t remember who even wrote it; it was a French woman, I think. [Editor’s note: full title and composer not known] Youth, isn’t that what that means?

FL: I think so.



CE: Or young people, something like that. And I had to play that and many other pieces of that nature, including the “Scotch Poem” [op. 31, no. 2] of Edward MacDowell [1860-1908]. Have you heard my story on that?

FL: No.

CE: Well, Edward MacDowell was a good friend of Barili. He knew the family and he came to Atlanta many times, and the Barili home was his hotel. He just moved in there and stayed for whatever time he stayed in Atlanta for one of those musical festivals that Barili inaugurated, or whatever.

And Edward MacDowell wrote the “Scotch Poem.” It’s a beautiful piece of music, and I have reintroduced it to Atlanta. It’s being played around there now. If you need a copy of it, I’ll get you a copy. And somebody—David Deveau [Senior Lecturer in Music at MIT] would just love this piece of music, and I should get it up here for him to play. But it’s being played now in Atlanta by several people. And it’s very dramatic; it sort of has the “Fingal’s Cave” feeling to it [Felix Mendelssohn: *The Hebrides Overture*, op. 26]

FL: Yeah, yeah.

CE: And it’s water. You can just see the water moving around. And he gave that to me to study. He just said, “Here, take this.” I had to go buy my own copy, eventually. He didn’t supply many!

FL: How old were you when you started studying with him?

CE: Fourteen.

FL: Okay.

CE: And by this time I guess I was sixteen, the tale I’m telling. And he got ill again and was out for two or three weeks. He didn’t want me to come. He said, “I’ll call you when I’m ready,” and finally he did. And I had studied this piece, and I had just made my mind up that I wasn’t going to blow this one, and I was going to do a real good job on it.

And so we met, maybe three weeks after the incidence of that. And he said, “What do you want to play?” And I said, “This.” I didn’t say anymore than this. And I sat down at the piano, and I set the music aside, and I played the “Scotch Poem” for him. And when I finished that, he said, “Cherry, Paderewski couldn’t have done that any better!” [laughs]

And I think that was probably my high point in musical experience, particularly with him, anyway. And he wouldn’t have said that if he didn’t believe it. And so I played things fairly well for him, like Beethoven’s op.13—*Appassion*—no, not the *Appassionata* —the *Pathétique*. *Pathétique*. [Piano Sonata in C Minor, op. 13]

FL: Yeah, that’s right.

CE: I could do that without missing any notes, and that made him fairly happy. But he could point out so many things in the courses of that, where he thought the phrasing wasn’t right, and the accent wasn’t right, and the rhythm wasn’t right and all, that I

knew I could never please him completely on that one. And there were many in that category.

#### 4. Continuing piano study (47:47—CD1 47:47)

FL: What were some of the other pieces that you studied with him?

CE: Well, I played a few Mozart pieces for him.

FL: Do you remember which ones? [laughs]

CE: Oh, you're asking for a seventy-year recollection, and I'm sorry Forrest, but I can't—

FL: That's okay. Some of the piano sonatas?

CE: Yes, yeah. And I played a wide variety of different pieces that he wanted to have me play, to show me how technique would be different on this piece and that, and so on.

FL: Did you play any J. S. Bach?

CE: No jazz Bach.

FL: J. S. Bach? Johann Sebastian Bach.

CE: Oh, yes, oh, yeah, yeah.

FL: Do you remember which? Stuff from the *Well-Tempered Clavier* probably?

CE: Probably. I can't remember now.

FL: Yeah.

CE: I've still got a lot of my music at home, right there in Atlanta. I could go and look and maybe come up with the answer. But I played Bach for him, I played Mozart for him, I played MacDowell for him, I played a lot of Beethoven for him. Beethoven was the thing he really loved, I think, most of all. Because he understood about Mozart, that it was really difficult, and the elegance that is just so apparent in all of Mozart's writing, that you just have to deliver on in a Mozart piece. And I guess I wasn't too elegant!

But he kept me at it and disciplined me in many ways. So he—I may have played some Handel for him, too, because he was very interested in Handel, Haydn, Mozart—that era, you know. And Handel preceded them all. But he taught me music; he didn't teach me just the piano.

FL: Tell me more about that, what you mean by that.

CE: That, for instance, I in the book say that we became good friends, which is certainly true. And I had an automobile, and he didn't, and so I used to take him on drives up into the north country in Georgia, into the mountains. Georgia has four-thousand-foot mountains within seventy-five miles of Atlanta. And we used to go up there—drive up and sit on the side of a lake there that I remember. And we would just talk about music, and he would tell me his recollections, like you're interrogating me now. He would tell me about Bach and Mozart, and Beethoven in particular, and Chopin.

- Oh, I used to play a lot of Chopin for him. The Polonaises he loved, and he could let me go my way a little on those things, you know. They're bombastic quite a bit, that way. And I was—I would say as a group those Polonaises were the best I did for him, technically. I don't know about musically, but I could hit all the notes, and make it sound pretty good. And you could let yourself go on one of those Polonaises so easily!
- FL: What about some of the other American composers? I know that he was friends with Amy Beach [1867-1944]. [Editor's note: After her marriage, she used as her professional name Mrs. H. H. A. Beach.]
- CE: He knew Amy Beach very well. She was another hotel guest, and she and Louise were very good friends. And so Amy Beach came a number of times to their home in Atlanta and particularly patronized Louise. But I never met Amy.
- FL: Did you play any of her music?
- CE: No, I never played a note of Amy Beach's music. But I love her music. Those piano concertos of hers—I don't know how many she wrote—two or three, I think—they are first-class music!
- FL: Yeah.
- CE: And people have finally begun to realize that.
- FL: Certainly, it's been a real good change that way.
- CE: That's right. No, I didn't know Amy Beach, but she was a friend of the family and knew all of them. There was an Alfredo Barili, Jr., who became an architect in Atlanta.
- FL: Oh, that's right, yes.
- CE: And he was their oldest child, and Louise was their younger one. And there were just the pair of them, the only children that the Barilis had. And after Mr. Barili died in that accident—automobile-bus accident—that he had, they were forced to move to smaller quarters, and they moved over into the Highlands group in Atlanta, just really only a few miles away, in an apartment. And that's where they lived together: Louise, never married, and the mother, Mrs. Barili. And I used to visit them there rather frequently just because I knew them so well. And that's where they lived until Mrs. Barili died, and then later on Louise. They were sort of isolated in those days. It was sad to see, but nothing much I as a youngster could do much about.
- FL: What would you say Barili's lasting influence on you is?
- CE: Music!
- FL: Yeah.
- CE: Without him, I don't think I would ever have gotten as interested in music as I did. I really mean that. I think my mother was, compared to him, a slight influence. And he just opened up the world of music to me.
- FL: And how long did you study with him?
- CE: Four years. Four and a half years.

FL: And after you stopped studying with him, you kept playing though, right?  
CE: Oh, yes! I played for many years afterwards.  
FL: And are you still playing some?  
CE: Not for anybody else.  
FL: No, but you still play?  
CE: I can play the piano a little, yes. But we should go back to the story of the piano.  
FL: That's right.  
CE: Because it is a good story, and he had a hand in it. When I—friends formed my studies from Mrs. Caldwell to Mr. Barili, I had just an old rattle-y upright, which was my mother's piano. And Huston White said, "Go find yourself a better one." And so I did.

And the way [laughs] I did this thing was as—I was looking ahead. Now I started this when I was thirteen years old. And wait a minute, even earlier than that—I started this when I was twelve years old, twelve, thirteen, and fourteen. And for three summers there in Atlanta I peddled Coca-Cola because the area we lived in, called Morningside, was in a stage of rapid development for homes, and there were carpenters and other workmen working all around Morningside. And I opened my eyes, and I could see that there was a business. And so I borrowed three dollars from my mother. [laughs] I bought a case of twenty-four Coca-Colas from Coca-Cola, and— at two cents a bottle by the way. What's that, four dollars and eighty cents, something like that? And I had the rest, and so I paid for that first batch.

And then they came back every day in the summer, except Sundays, and they would deliver me twenty-four Coca-Colas, and I would pay them cash, and I would cool some of them in a bucket and put them into the wagon, drag it around there. And all of those workmen just waited for me! Their eyes lit up when I showed up. And I could sell all the Coca-Colas I could bring into that action. And at the end of those three summers, I had six hundred and eighty-five dollars in the bank! That was an enormous sum to me. And I don't know as I've done as well, proportionately, since! [laughs]

But anyway, I had this money, and I went to see Mr. Barili. And I said, "I now have enough money, so I think I can get a piano. Will you please come with me and test the one that I think you might like?" And he went with me to the Carter Piano Company in Atlanta. And he went to this Steinway Parlor Grand, five-foot-eleven, or whatever it is. Its serial number is 265625; I'll never forget that number! And he sat down and played it a while, and he said, "Cherry, that's the piano for you!" And Mr. Carter had been standing right there by the piano all this time, listening, and then his eyes lit up because he thought he was going to sell it. And so, and eventually he did.

But I said, "What do you want for that piano, Mr. Carter?" Right away, and Mr. Barili was still there, he said, "Eleven hundred dollars and it's yours." And I said, "Well, I don't have eleven hundred dollars. So I'll look around elsewhere." And I did. And some weeks later—oh, this is another story—I was in the Baldwin

Piano Shop there in Atlanta. And they did have a good piano there, and I could have bought it because it was seven hundred and fifty, and I knew I could get that one for my money. And I was sitting there in some chair thinking the whole thing over, and in walked this gentleman. I'll never forget this. He just took over. He was an obvious somebody. And he walked over to the Baldwin piano that I'd been playing on, and he sat down, and for an hour all he did was play scales and arpeggios. And I just sat there fascinated because I knew what was going on, and I knew that here was a genius. And do you know who that guy was? José Iturbi [1895-1980].

FL: No.

CE: Do you know that name?

FL: No, no.

CE: Oh, my goodness! Well, look him up then, on the internet; he'll be there. José Iturbi, J-O-S-E I-T-U-R-B-I, José Iturbi. He was a famous pianist in the era of the '20s, '30s, and '40s and well-known all over the world. He was a Cuban.

FL: Oh.

CE: And he played many times in Atlanta. I heard him perform in concert. And he just walked in, and I had the opportunity to hear. And he played the same things I played for Barili! [laughs] So I thought, "Well, this is something." But anyway, to get this story finished, I went back to Mr. Carter then. This is now three weeks later. And I said, "Look, Mr. Carter, I found a piano up in Baldwin and it's just about as good as this one, and I can buy it. And so I would prefer to have this Steinway, and what will you sell it to me as your rock-bottom price?" And he said, "One thousand dollars." And so I said, "Well, good-bye." And so I walked out.

And on the way home, a great idea occurred to me. And I went to my bank—they kept the bank books there for you in those days. And I got my bank book out, and there it had the sum total of six hundred and eighty-five dollars in it. And I walked right back to Mr. Carter's place, and I said, "Look, you see this bank book? That's mine. You see my name there? And it's got six hundred and eighty-five dollars and two cents in it." And I said, "I'll give you everything that's in that bank book if you will sell me that piano." And he called around to his fellows. He had four or five fellows in the sales department there. He said, "Come over here, fellows!" And he said, "This kid wants us to sell him this piano for six hundred and eighty-five dollars. It's all the money he's got in the world. Should we do it?" And they all raised their arms up in the air and said, "Yes!" [laughs] So help me, that's exactly what happened! And so I went back to the bank, and brought him back a check for six hundred and eighty-five dollars. And the next day he delivered the piano to my home.

FL: That's fantastic.

CE: That's how I got it! And I kept the two cents. So that was the story of the Steinway, and it still sits right in my parlor. And it is a beautiful instrument. I've had many musicians play it, aside from myself. They all—it's got a particularly beautiful bass, and it's the real McCoy; there's no doubt about it.

FL: My! Wow. I have just a few other questions about Barili, and then we need to move on. Did he ever talk to you about why he stopped composing? Because it seemed like well before 1900 he had stopped composing. Did he ever say why?

CE: No, because—I can only surmise, Forrest, that this is the reason: he produced that “Cradle Song” [op.18] of his—you’ve undoubtedly heard it.

FL: Yes, yes.

CE: I’ve passed the music around here, and I know people like it. And that became a famous piece. He sold over a quarter of a million copies of that, and I think he got—I don’t know what he got, but I’d guess twenty cents a copy, maybe, for himself. Probably sold for fifty cents, something like that. And that’s not a lot of money, but in those days it was substantial. And I think that he figured he never was going to do any better because those mazurkas of his, the dances—oh, they were very good music, but people didn’t need that kind of music. I mean, for a home, playing the piano at home, they didn’t mean anything to people. You can’t go out and form a dance party there and dance to the mazurka. But you could sing the “Cradle Song.” And it was just an outstanding effort on his part, and I think he said, “It’s a tough business, and I’m not going to do any better.” And I think he sort of discouraged himself from going any further. Maybe his health deteriorated, I don’t know. It’s very hard to answer that question, but that’s best guess I can make.

FL: Yeah. Did he ever play chamber music, like piano trios, piano quartets, and things like that?

CE: No, not that I know of.

FL: Yeah.

CE: But I have a good friend, Edwin Hanley [b. 1916] , who is known—

FL: A [Alessandro] Scarlatti scholar, yeah, right.

CE: Yes, and he was a friend of Klaus Liepmann [1907-1990; first Professor of Music at MIT] , by the way, who came here from UCLA. That’s where Ned Hanley worked all his life. And he played the violin, and he and I played chamber pieces—  
[Editor’s note: Liepmann’s academic position prior to MIT was at Yale University.]

FL: I was going to ask about that.

CE: —for Barili. The Beethoven “Romance” [Editor’s note: arrangement for violin and piano of either op. 40 or op. 50] and a Schubert piece that I can’t remember—those were the key elements that we did. And that was Beethoven and Schubert.

FL: Mm-hm.

CE: We played a fair amount of that material for him, just because Ned wanted to be in on it, so to speak, with him and me playing together.

FL: So Ned Hanley was a childhood friend of yours?

CE: A lifelong friend. He’s still living out there.

FL: Yeah, yeah.

CE: He's a lot more than childhood, although we met one another in the Boy Scouts at the age of twelve. We have never parted company. He's the same age I am or a little older—less than a year. And we are in contact right along. And he's a fine musicologist.

FL: That's right. Does he still play the violin?

CE: I don't know. I don't know! As a matter of fact, though, I think I have a recollection now of asking him that very question out in his home in LA a few years ago. And he said no at that time, but I don't know whether he was dead serious or not. You can't ever stop a musician from fiddling around. And I think he probably played the fiddle a little today, but I don't know. It would be the same way I would play the piano.

FL: Mm-hm. Did you hear Barili ever play concertos with orchestras, or anything like that?

CE: No, no, but I heard him play a lot, quite a bit.

FL: Yeah. What were some of the memorable performances that you remember him playing?

CE: Well, he loved the *Moonlight Sonata* [ Beethoven, Piano Sonata in C-sharp Minor, op. 27, no. 2], and he used to play that for me. And I don't know whether he played the *Appassionata* or not. I can't remember. What is that—do you remember?  
[Editor's note: Beethoven, Piano Sonata in F Minor, op. 57]

FL: I forgot the opus number on that, yeah.

CE: The opus. But he would play the Beethoven sonatas, primarily. He and I had a thing going on that, so to speak. I would play one; he would play one.

FL: Didn't he say he considered the Beethoven sonatas the bible for pianists?

CE: Right, absolutely!

FL: Yeah.

CE: You've got it right; you hit the nail on the head there. He did, in reality.

FL: Mm-hm. Did your love of music come into play as you were deciding on a professional career? How did that—?

CE: Oh, I'm introspective. Some people have no introspection, and so they don't even understand what it means. But I'm introspective and I knew that I was not good enough to go on the stage, concertize on the piano, and make a living. And so I put it out of my mind. I never considered it seriously, in other words. Although I could play Beethoven sonatas so people could enjoy them, I don't think I could play them so they'd plunk down ten dollars a head to hear it! And I'm not going to—I'm realistic, too. I'm not going to try to do the impossible. I'm willing to do something that's hard to do, if I know that it's possible to succeed, but that was just never in my ethos at all, to make a professional musical career. I know that probably disappoints you, but it's the truth.

FL: Yeah, yeah. I mean, playing music, you don't have to be a professional in order to—

CE: To really love it!

FL: —to really love it, and to even play it well.

CE: Yeah, that's true. And that's where it fit in my life.

FL: Mm-hm, and that spirit has stayed with you for all your life, too.

CE: Yes, that's true.

FL: Are there particular composers and pieces that have been favorites of yours over your lifetime, and can you tell me about some of that?

CE: Oh, I had quite a repertoire when I finished with Barili. And by the way, I haven't mentioned even to anybody interested in me, let's say, the fact that I was good enough so that I didn't want to stop studying the piano when Mr. Barili was killed [struck by a bus]. And so while I was at Emory University I enrolled in the Atlanta Conservatory of Music [Editor's note: defunct c. 1937, not to be confused with the New Atlanta Conservatory of Music]. And I studied under a man there named Charles Beaton, B-E-A-T-O-N. And he's in some history book somewhere, I'm sure, because he was a fine pianist. He toured all around the South. And he and I got along together. He wanted to know how good I was, so when I walked in there I sat down and played the opus 13 of Beethoven [Piano Sonata in C Minor, *Pathétique*] for him, and he said, "Okay, you'll do," something like that! [laughs] And so he took me on as a student. And he introduced me to the Mendelssohn concertos.

FL: Oh!

CE: And I played both of those.

FL: Did you ever get to play those with an orchestra?

CE: Well, here's what I was coming to. I made him happy with, what is it, F Minor Concerto, I think—the first that Mendelssohn wrote [Piano Concerto no. 1 in G Minor, op. 25]. And I could play it pretty well. And he said, "I want you to play that with an orchestra. I'll get the orchestra together, and we'll practice, and you'll do that." And I said, "No, you won't." Because at that time in my life, I was an assistant scoutmaster in a troop where the scoutmaster had walked off the grounds and left me in charge of it. I was at Emory University studying hard to get along, and playing the piano with an orchestra—I knew how much work it would take, you know, to get that thing in good shape. And I just said, "I'm not going to try it, that's all." And so I never did. But you can play those concertos without an orchestra and enjoy them.

FL: That's right.

CE: And I did. And I worked for a little over a year with Charles Beaton, and then the Atlanta Conservatory of Music was in a piano store there in Atlanta that—what was the name of it? There's another name. But I have a picture of the fire that burned it up. And it was destroyed completely, and Charles Beaton was in that fire. And he came down the fire escape and had to drop to the ground. They ended up a few feet off the ground in those days; they didn't even go down to the ground. And he hurt himself, his foot, badly, and he never got over that. And although the Atlanta Conservatory a year later tried to come back, it was dead Depression days. They weren't able to get enough students back. I went back, though. I was going to study under Charles Beaton, but the man was a wreck, mentally. And newspaper rattling



out in the hall, for example, outside his door, and he would rush out to see if there was a fire going—this sort of thing. He was really nothing like the Charles Beaton before the fire. And so I just said, “I can’t do it” to myself, and I didn’t go back. I told him that I wasn’t going to come back. I don’t think he would have been able to teach me anything that was worthwhile after this. But the Atlanta Conservatory went out of business in—I think it was 1937 or 8, right in there they had the big fire.

And so that was an episode in my life where I continued studies in music. But Charles Beaton was a piano teacher; Barili was a music teacher. And that was the big difference in the two.

FL: Did you ever play any of the Barili piano pieces, besides the—?

CE: Just the “Cradle Song.”

FL: Just the “Cradle Song,” yeah. What about some of the popular ragtime, or other popular pieces of the time? Did you play—?

CE: I played to myself those, yeah. I didn’t even tell him. But I used to play—what’s the famous guy?

FL: [Scott Joplin] *The Entertainer* or the *Maple Leaf Rag*, things like that?

CE: Yeah, but the one I—yes, I played those—George Gershwin I used to play. I played the *Rhapsody in Blue* my own way.

FL: Yeah!

CE: And I just had fun with the piano. That’s what I was trying to do, and so I did a lot of that on my own, you know. How could it be otherwise? I didn’t want to be restricted, you know, to any rigid group of pieces that I had to play. I played a lot of Rachmaninoff. Some of that, the Preludes, I did for Barili, by the way; I just didn’t mention that. I had forgotten and overlooked it. But I played quite a bit of Rachmaninoff, and I liked it.

FL: Well, that’s considerable technique involved for some of that! [laughs]

CE: It sure is, yeah.

FL: What about some of the [Franz] Liszt Rhapsodies and things like that?

CE: No, I never played any Liszt.

## **5. Undergraduate study at Emory University (1:16:39—CD2 13:37)**

FL: Yeah. So moving on: your studies at Emory University. You got a bachelor’s degree in organic chemistry in 1938, and a master’s degree in organic chemistry in 1939.

CE: That’s right.

FL: You mentioned earlier why you chose Emory University. Can you tell me a little bit more about what it was about the field of chemistry that really appealed to you? I

know you had a teacher in high school that was influential. But was there something about—?

CE: I mentioned his name, Dr. Hightshoe, yeah.

FL: Yeah, right.

CE: He was the only really professional man I had as a teacher in high school. He was a professional chemist; he—I mean he stood out. I mean he was good! I told you, my major talent is recognizing talent in other people, and you could just see that he was good. And he inspired me in chemistry, and that's about all I can say. You go to college and you know that you've got to major in some field. And so I decided, actually before I registered there, that I was going to major in chemistry, and I never changed that feeling. And I don't regret it. I think chemistry is one of the world's fascinating subjects.

FL: It certainly is. Can you tell me about the curriculum at Emory University at the time? Were there much in the way of liberal arts? What was your feeling about the curriculum?

CE: Well, yes, there was considerable liberal arts, and that was actually the emphasis that Emory gave to the whole college. And science was the weakest element in Emory's curriculum.

FL: But the chemistry department was strong, you were saying?

CE: It was strong, yeah, very strong. It was the outstanding one—still is, to this day. But science has been a neglected subject. When I got back to Atlanta in 1985, I sized that situation up without any difficulty, and I really started using all the influence I had to strengthen science at Emory. And I know you asked me about what it was like when I was there, and I know I'm off the subject, but I'll get back to that.

FL: Sure.

CE: And so finally, I got them to agree to a program which we named Science 2000, just to have a good name for it. And this is 2000. And we have just now finished a building in my name there, which is going to be the most modern chemical laboratory in the world, just because it's, right now it's being occupied, maybe even while we're talking. [The Cherry L. Emerson Center for Scientific Computation] And there have been two or three excellent changes in the faculty there, increases in the faculty. And in particular, a man named David Lynn from Chicago, who is a powerhouse in chemistry. And we've got several in that department anyway, of our own, before he showed up.

We have probably the best theoretical chemistry department in the world, at Emory University! Keiji Morokuma is the man who's running it. He studied in Japan—he's a Japanese—under a Nobel laureate. And in my opinion he must have by now been nominated as a Nobel person, but he's never been elected, and he probably is going to be. That's my guess. And we have another, and he has developed that theoretical chemistry to a degree that people are coming from all over the world now to study in that department, under him.

And we have one in particular in the United States, a fellow named Bill Miller, William Hughes Miller, a professor of chemistry at Berkeley, California—University of California. And he is—it’s conceivable that he could, after retiring from there, come and work at Emory. Because chemists don’t die at retirement age. They hang around and do things.

And so we have now strengthened science at Emory considerably, but it’s all been so far in chemistry. And it’s one of the real fine chemistry departments. Just go ask the chemist you know in your troop here, and he’ll tell you the same thing. And you know Lightman—David, is it?

FL: Yeah.

CE: David Lightman? [name unconfirmed]

FL: Yeah.

CE: He knows that. Talk to him about it. And so, what I got into over the years has slowly developed into a top-flight organization there, with a little influence from me, but other people did all the work. And my influence primarily there has been the same one that I’ve had all my life, that I recognize talent in other people. And I think it’s paid off to a degree there at Emory.

But when I was there, the liberal arts were what you had to study. For example, my first year I had Latin. And I loved Latin! I did a lot of work on Cicero and what’s the other famous Latin poet? Oh, gosh, now I owe you another name. But anyway, I studied Latin for a year and got fairly adept at it. And by the way, Emory University, at the end of my first year, which would have been ’35, put on for the southeast group of colleges there—cultural departments, whatever—classical languages—they all came to Atlanta and got together in a big church there named Glenn Memorial Church, and we put on a Latin play!

FL: My!

CE: [laughs] That was something!

FL: Which play was it?

CE: I don’t remember.

FL: Yeah.

CE: But I spoke to Joanne Chase—she’s the wife of the President of Emory, Bill Chase [William M. Chase]. And I—for some reason this came up, and I told her my story. And she said, “What was it, a tragedy or a comedy?” And I said right off, “Well, I think we made a tragedy out of a comedy!” [laughs] “Or a comedy out of a tragedy.” That’s the way I said it. And it was, but we got through it all, and they applauded when it was all done, so it was worth it. But that was the sort of atmosphere that predominated the campus. English was like that. English was a strong subject, always has been with Emory. Latin was a weak subject; it only had one professor and that was it. And history was a good subject at Emory and always has been.

And so, between history and English and psychology—that was a good one, too—semi-science, I call it—it was an open atmosphere. And you had to shape up

and get the right grades in those things in order to get along well under the professors. Mathematics was a pretty good department at Emory. I loved math, and I took every math course Emory had to offer. And I could have gotten my degree in math if I had wanted to, but I wanted to be a chemist. Still do! [laughs] I'm still trying!

FL: Were you involved in music there, as far as any performing groups, or anything?

CE: There was little music there. The only music was under Malcolm Dewey, who was also a professor of classical and romance languages and, part time, developed the Emory Glee Club. [Editor's note: Malcolm Howard Dewey organized the Department of Fine Arts at Emory University.] And the glee club was the only form of music there at Emory when I was there.

FL: Did you play piano for them or anything?

CE: No.

FL: No?

CE: No, I didn't. And he developed that glee club to the point where they enjoyed European trips, maybe every other year, something like that. And he was really the founder of music as such at Emory University. But now it's a gigantic enterprise compared to what he had going.

## **6. Graduate school years at MIT (1:27:07—CD2 24:04)**

FL: Wow. So moving on, you came to MIT to study chemical engineering, and you got your degree in 1941. What made you come to MIT, and why chemical engineering, as opposed to staying with pure chemistry?

CE: Yeah, that's a wonderful story. That's a wonderful question! Are we doing all right on time?

FL: Yeah.

CE: Well, I told you my father went to Georgia Tech and got two degrees from there in engineering, civil and electrical—mechanical and electrical—what's the matter with me? That was my son who got the civil degree at Worcester Polytech [Worcester Polytechnic Institute]. And he had practiced engineering all his life. And after he retired from his practice, he came back to George Tech as a teacher and later also became a dean. And so he was well-known on the campus. His father, of course, had been there ahead of him. He died in 1924 when I was eight years old, almost nine. And so he wanted me to study engineering.

But at the end of my career at Emory, in science and chemistry, I had worked under an eminent organic chemist from Johns Hopkins [University] who came there as a consultant named E. Emmet Reid, R-E-I-D. And you ask any chemist about E. Emmet Reid, and he'll tell you what I did: he was an eminent organic chemist. And he was in charge of the six of us who were working for master's degrees, and he apportioned the ideas out that we were to work on and supervised the work. And Dr. Osborne R. Quayle, the head then of the department, had invited him there because he

had known him professionally. And that was one of the best things Emory ever did, was to get E. Emmet Reid there. And he was a good influence for chemistry in direction, to strengthen it further.

And I ended up with a fellowship to Johns Hopkins, for a thousand dollars for one year. They were going to test me out. And I don't blame them a bit. That was the way they did it. But I had this fellowship in my pocket for a thousand dollars, and when my father started to put the heat on me about this—it's time to decide this now—what engineering are you going to study at Georgia Tech? And I said, "Well, I'm not ready to go all out for engineering."

But after a few months of that, I said, "Well, I will agree to study chemical engineering somewhere, if you will agree to support my first year, wherever that is. Because I have this fellowship to Johns Hopkins all lined up, and all I have to do is go up there and register." And so he finally agreed he would, and as he agreed, I said, "Well now, where is the best place in this country to study chemical engineering?" And I could just see what was going on in his mind because if I had gone to Georgia Tech, it would have been no cost the first year! [laughs] It wouldn't have cost him anything! And so he had to admit—he was an honest man—that MIT was the best place. And so I said, "Well, I'm going to MIT then."

And so I started correspondence with chem engineering here, and with Warren K. Lewis [MIT Professor of Chemical Engineering]. There's a correspondence—it's got to be in the records somewhere—between him and me, while I was lining up getting here. And so my father gave me a twelve-hundred-dollar check when I got on the railroad train in Atlanta to come up here. And I put it in the First National Bank there, at the corner of Mass. Avenue and Commonwealth. And that was all the money I had when I got here, and I never got another nickel!

FL: Was that the fall of 1939?

CE: No, that was the fall of—oh, yes, yes. I'm sorry—absolutely. That was the fall of '39, and it was beautiful weather, by the way. I keep wandering, but these are good stories. And the climate was so good that even through December and into January, that I said, "Gosh, this is about like Atlanta," and I was worried about living up here in all the snow.

And then—and you can look this one up on the record, too, right here at MIT. On February 14, 1940, Saint Valentine's Day, we had in Boston the biggest snowstorm of history. In two hours it plunked twenty-five inches of snow on Boston. And you just go back to a newspaper, and you'll find that's exactly what it says. And the next morning—you know, I was a student here, I was paying my money, and I was coming to class—and so I walked across that Harvard Bridge, as it was called. I lived on Commonwealth Avenue in a boarding house with about six other MIT guys. I couldn't get in the dorm; I was too late to get in the dorm. It was much smaller than it is today, anyway, for graduate students. And so I walked across in the snow, and I walked up the steps at 77 Mass. Avenue, and I opened the door, and by golly, it wouldn't come open! And it was locked! And they had locked the doors and gone away. And that, I am told, was the only day in the history of MIT when they had a lock-out!

FL: Wow!

CE: And eminent people have told me that! So I don't have any reason to believe—I know I couldn't get in; I know it was locked. And so I went back and studied in my room. And the next day, things were normal enough, so we got back together. But I guess the staff just couldn't get here, the professors and all. So many of them called up, they had to shut the place down. And they tell me that was the only time. Well, I forget your question now, but did I answer it, or not?

FL: Yeah, yeah. We can go on here, too.

CE: Okay.

FL: When you were here at MIT, you were obviously here as a graduate student, and you were pretty focused on a particular subject. But did you have opportunity to take courses outside of your—outside of chemistry, chemical engineering, in any humanities subjects?

CE: Well, no humanities subjects. I had had little physics at Emory, and so they told me to take my choice of some physics courses that they wanted me to take. And I took optics, and I studied optics here at MIT as a physics course. And of course I had to get that on the record. And then they really pulled sort of a fast one, I thought. They said, "We want you to take some of our chemistry courses because we aren't so sure of what you learned down there at Emory." And I said, "Well, I didn't come here to study chemistry. I came here to study chem engineering. And I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll go around and see the head of each chemical course in the Department of Chemistry, and I'll let him ask me any question he wants, and if I can't answer it, I'll take that course." This is the bald truth now, I'm telling you. So I did that, and I went around, and they all signed off: he doesn't have to take our course.

And so I didn't have to take any chemistry courses, but I deliberately took physical chemistry here because I knew you had a famous professor here in physical chemistry, and I felt that I could learn a lot from his ideas on that. And I did.

FL: Who was that professor?

CE: Oh, he's the fellow [name unknown] who invented Pyrex glass. Now, I've got that on the record, and you can go ask any chemist over there who did it. These names, I'm sorry.

FL: It's okay.

CE: I'm doing badly.

FL: You're doing so well!

CE: Well, I did take those two courses, optics and physical chemistry. But aside from that—no humanities. And that was it.

FL: Did you have time for any extracurricular activities?

CE: Not here, no. Not in graduate school, no. I did at Emory, and I took fencing, for example, and golf. I was on the golf team, and things of that nature, down there. But I didn't take any extracurricular studies here.

FL: Did you get a chance to attend any of the concerts at MIT, either by student groups or professional concerts they held on campus?

CE: Well, look, to my knowledge—and I'll admit the limitations of my knowledge right off the bat—I didn't know of any music at MIT when I was here. Do you know that there was?

FL: There certainly was.

CE: A lot?

FL: There was a gentleman, Henry Warren Jackson [correct name: Henry Jackson Warren] was conductor of MIT Glee Club.

CE: I've heard that name, yes.

FL: They were quite highly regarded.

CE: Okay.

FL: And the MIT Orchestra, though it was a struggling organization, it was still student-led, was around. There was the Banjo Club, which was quite popular. And then every spring they had a thing called the Tech Show that everybody talks about as being very popular.

CE: Yeah. Well, you've told me a lot that I didn't know because I didn't know of any of those. What I did when I got to Boston was I made a beeline to the BSO [Boston Symphony Orchestra]. And I heard some wonderful performances there that I could just never have heard in Atlanta: the Haydn and Handel Society [correct name: Handel and Haydn Society], the *Messiah*, and all that. And I heard Lotte Lehman's [operatic soprano, 1888-1976] farewell concert down there at Symphony Hall.

FL: Wow!

CE: And a great pianist. Again, I'm—he was a Czech, I think, and he had one of those Slavic names, and I can't remember if he was Cherkassky, or something like that. [Editor's note: It may have been Shura Cherkassky.] I heard him play more than once there; he was really outstanding.

And of course, I heard Koussevitzky [Serge Koussevitzky, conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra], and that was my introduction to true orchestral music. He was just something special. And that brings up so many stories that I just can't even envision our getting them into this. But I recognized the talent of that man. That was my chief talent in myself, and I could see that he was, oh, he was a leader in the field. And when I first heard him play—the orchestra play Beethoven's Seventh Symphony under him, his direction, that made my hair stand up. And I knew that I had heard the best rendition of that that you could hear. And I've heard fellows like [Arturo] Toscanini conduct it, and what was the famous German conductor? [Otto Klemperer]

FL: There's so many.

CE: Yeah, there's so many. But I've heard him conduct it.

FL: Karajan? [Herbert von Karajan]

CE: No, no.

FL: Furtwangler? [Wilhelm Furtwangler] There's so many, yeah.

CE: No, it wasn't. I've heard Furtwangler do it. But Koussevitzky had him beat all hollow. Really, I mean, until you've studied the work that he put into Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, you don't know what it means. I am not talking to you personally, I'm talking rhetorically.

FL: Yes, yes.

CE: But he just had everything figured out about that. His conducting in general was way above the level—the normal level in America at that time. I know about [Frederick] Stock at Chicago [Chicago Symphony Orchestra conductor] and a few others, but they didn't measure up to Koussevitzky. But that's where I went to hear my music here in Boston, and I'm so glad I did. And I don't think I heard any music outside of Symphony Hall, but I heard quite a bit down there. I spent more money on it than I should have, I think.

FL: [laughs] When you were here as a graduate student, there was a gentleman who was an undergraduate in civil engineering named John Bovicchi [MIT student 1940-1942, composer, conductor]. Is that name familiar to you? He's now a well-known composer, but I just wondered if you happened to have run into him because that would have been an interesting—

CE: What sort of music does he compose?

FL: Oh, all kinds: orchestral music, choral music. He does a lot of choral conducting these days. But I've played under him—

CE: Did you?

FL: —a couple times, doing some Bach cantatas. But the MIT Concert Band premiered a number of his pieces. He's quite well known in the Boston area and in New England particularly. I was just wondering if maybe you had known him.

CE: Well, the fact that I didn't know any music, I realize that from your remarks now that I should have found out more, but I really don't think I would have had much time to get involved in MIT music then.

FL: This annual tradition at the Boston Pops called Tech Night at the Pops got started about that time. Did you go to any of those?

CE: No.

FL: Uh-huh. You know about Tech Night at the Pops?

CE: I know about it now.

FL: Yeah, yeah.

CE: But the history has rolled so far since then, that—

FL: But the MIT Glee Club at that time started—

CE: Started it?

FL: —started singing at Tech Night at the Pops. I just wondered if you had heard that.



CE: Well, the Pops was so different then from what you have today! I used to go to the Pops, all right, but that was after I got out of college, went to work, and was married and had children, and all that.

FL: Mm-hm.

CE: But that's later on in life.

FL: When you were here at MIT, can you talk about the cultural climate? I'm talking in, I guess, the broad sense of the word cultural, as far as the way people were thinking. Were the students in general narrowly focused or were they—because some people I've talked to who were students at the time thought of it as very much a technical school. And was that your experience, or did you see it as—?

CE: Well, I had a little bit different experience, yes, that brought some things to light. I ended up in the course—it's called the Practice School in Chem Engineering. Are you aware of that?

FL: I'm not familiar with that term.

CE: There's a book published by MIT, and you should get a copy of it and put it in your library. It's not music; it's about—*The Flagship*, it's called. [John Mattill, *The Flagship: The M.I.T. School of Chemical Engineering Practice, 1916-1991* (Cambridge, Mass.: David H. Koch School of Chemical Engineering Practice, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1991).] And it's a book, the story, the full story, of the Practice School at MIT in Chem Engineering. It ought to be at this library; it ought to be in every library at MIT.

And I was in the Practice School. And that meant that number one, you had to have a 3.6 average in order to get in to it. And when I was here, the way courses were graded were H, C, P, LP, F, and that was it. The H was for Honor, C was for Credit, P was for Pass, and L was for Low Pass, and F was for you know what. So, H was rated four, and C was rated three, so you had to be in between those two to get into the Practice School. And I got in, let's just leave it at that.

And so we had stations out in the field where we studied chemical engineering on a research basis for the companies where these stations were located: one in Bangor, Maine; one in Parlin, New Jersey; and one in Buffalo New York, at Lackawanna Steel, Bethlehem Steel at that time. And we did, we worked on research projects for those people.

And the MIT students were groups of twelve people and in each station for about—I forget now—what would it be? Eight, ten weeks, something like that. And they were all good students, and there were a professor from MIT and an assistant professor—associate professor—from MIT running each station. And so it was a scholastic endeavor. They assigned and supervised the research projects that were given to them by the management of the plant where we worked. Up in Bangor it was making pulp for paper, and down in Parlin it was making cellulose nitrate for gunpowder, and out at Lackawanna Steel it was making steel for whatever you need for steel.

And we got to know one another as student groups very well. And I found out, for example, that Joe Knaus [MIT class of 1942], who was in my group, and is still alive, I think, and living down on Cape Cod somewhere. I saw something that he had provided to the MIT news division. And he mentioned me in there, because of marrying Dr. Lewis's daughter. Well, Joe Knaus was also interested in music, and he was a good jazz musician.

FL: What was his instrument?

CE: I don't know. But I know he sang, and that's a good instrument.

FL: Absolutely!

CE: And so, he and I went on a few little musical episodes of our own. And he was a highly intelligent person and I think better culturally trained, maybe, than I was. And he and I—that was an influence from MIT's student body on me. But he was the only one I can remember now who had a sincere interest in music that I ran into here. Most of it was rigidly scientific or engineering. And I think somebody should write a history of a particular group in the Chem Engineering Practice School and see what they have done since then and feed it back to MIT. I think it would be a very interesting exercise! Maybe our group would be as good a place to start as any.

FL: Wow! Well, looking at the time, there's about ten more minutes on the tape. But I'm thinking, if we can do another interview later in the week—?

CE: We can.

FL: Then I can start—

CE: Thursday afternoon.

FL: —and we can talk about Dr. Lewis.

CE: Yeah.

FL: And maybe that would be a good place to start. So why don't we—

CE: Why not? He's just as important an influence in my life as Alfredo Barili.

FL: So that would be a great place to start the next interview.

CE: Right, that's fine.

FL: Okay?

CE: Yeah.

FL: So I want to thank you very, very much for this.

CE: I hope you're pleased. That is always a problem. But you had wonderful questions. I'll say that was the best organized question set that I've ever run into!

FL: Well, thank you.

[End of Interview]