

Music at MIT Oral History Project

C. Robert Sprich

Interviewed

by

Forrest Larson

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**Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Lewis Music Library**

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Table of Contents

1.	MIT education and activities (00:14).....	1
	<i>St. Louis Country Day School—beginning as an engineering physic major—Rush Week at MIT—early film and radio experience—MIT Lecture Series Committee—MIT radio station programming—humanities in the Sputnik era—double major in Humanities and Science</i>	
2.	Humanities at MIT (10:50)	3
	<i>MIT Professors: Carvel Collins, Huston Smith, Norman Holland, Bruce Mazlish, Roy Lamson—American literature studies with Carvel Collins—MIT Lecture Series Committee and interest in film—pioneering film studies as an academic discipline</i>	
3.	MIT Music Library (18:44)	5
	<i>Working as student assistant—equipment maintenance—Anna Faith Jones, Music Librarian—MIT Acoustics Lab—outfitting the Music Library with speakers—MIT Music Library statistics—live and recorded music in the library—Ernst Lévy—listening lounge vs. music library—playing music in the library—building the collection: books, scores, recordings</i>	
4.	Performing arts at MIT (35:01)	11
	<i>Tech Show—MIT Shakespeare Society, Gilbert and Sullivan Society—MIT Symphony Orchestra—Lecture Series Committee: movie nights, celebrity guest lecturers—Humanities Series Concerts—E. Power Biggs—André Marchal—Klaus Liepmann—Gregory Tucker—Longy School—Ernst Lévy—John Corley—MIT Concert Band—Tectonians—Technique—Roy Lamson and The Intermission Trio—MIT student chamber music—MIT Acoustics Lab</i>	
5.	Humanities and the arts at MIT (58:55).....	20
	<i>Humanities at Bentley College compared with MIT—Boston’s rich musical offerings—Warren K. Lewis, Committee on Educational Survey—film, literature, and psychology</i>	
6.	Professional interests (70:59).....	23
	<i>Tufts University—dissertation on Havelock Ellis—Simon Lesser—collaboration s—work at Bentley College—film and film music</i>	

Contributors

C. Robert Sprich (MIT class of 1960) graduated from MIT in 1961. He received his Ph.D. from Tufts University in 1971. While at MIT, he worked in the Music Library (1956–1961), was involved in the Lecture Series Committee, and had an active interest in music at MIT. He is Professor of English and Media Studies at Bentley College (now Bentley University), where he has taught full time since 1966.

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 16, 2002, in the MIT Lewis Music Library. Duration of the audio recording is 1:32:32.

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. Pre-MIT education and MIT activities

FORREST LARSON: It's my distinct honor and privilege to have Dr. Robert Sprich, class of 1960, for an interview this afternoon. We're in the Lewis Music Library. It's May 16, 2002. Earlier on the tape I had mentioned 1961 for his class year, but it's actually 1960. So I that's a correction, for the record.

So Bob, it's a real treat to have you here. Thank you very, very much for coming.

ROBERT SPRICH: You're most welcome. I loved the Music Library from the time I set eyes on it. And the recent renovation has augmented the facility. And I'm pleased and proud to be here and to be a part of this project.

LARSON: So I have some background questions. Some of them can seem kind of mundane, but they're always interesting anyway. Can you tell me about where you grew up?

SPRICH: Yes. I grew up in St. Louis, Missouri. The city and state are pronounced that way, in spite of the way they are corrupted by people outside the area. I lived in what's called North St. Louis. St. Louis is on a sort of a harsh U-bend in the Mississippi River. And I was at the extreme—grew up at the extreme northern city limit. Went to public school for—through fifth grade and then was very lucky to be able to transfer to a private school named St. Louis Country Day, at that time. And to do so on full scholarship, as my family could not have afforded the tuition.

It was a school that had a classical education base. And so I learned three years of Latin and four years of German and, um, got to take classical music appreciation for six, a total of six years. I've just given a modest amount of money to the, uh, Music Library in honor and memory of my music teacher. His name was Robert Reeves, and really turned me on to interest in the classical music genre.

LARSON: Did you play any instruments?

SPRICH: Let's see. Let's see. Violin for one month, and piano for two. [laughter] But I was very good at the four-speed turntable.

LARSON: Yes.

SPRICH: I still have a turntable that plays 16 RPM, if anybody cares.

LARSON: That's great.

SPRICH: And 78s. I have—I have a couple of [Enrico] Caruso and an Amalita Galli-Curci on the old RCA Victor, one-sided records.

LARSON: Wow.

SPRICH: So, uh. I don't know why people are so busy throwing away their old stuff as soon as the new technology comes out. Uh, I've got records, even, even 78 records, but a lot of—you know, a couple hundred LPs, I guess, and some, some CDs, and a lot of cassette tapes. So I just keep all of the capabilities in my system. Why not?

LARSON: Yeah.

SPRICH: I graduated high school from St. Louis Country Day, now merged with a girls' school called Mary Institute St. Lou—Mary Institute Country Day school, MICDS. And I cannot say enough about the education I got from there. Uh, I, I learned how to write complete sentences and write clearly. And that has, had put me—has put me in good stead all the way through college, graduate school, and henceforward.

I, uh, probably profited a little bit from the "good old boy" network of private school admissions counselors. Because out of my graduating class of forty-two, I think a dozen went to Ivies, and two of us came to MIT, which is a rather high percentage. You would agree?

I also started out, wanting to major in engineering physics. And I later realized that I'd been conned, because that was the Sputnik era. And both our US government and the large corporations were really terrified that the Russians were going to get a space station or a station on the moon from which they could take potshots at targets on Earth, and, like shooting fish in a barrel. So they were—all sorts of resources were being put into science.

And one of my humanities professors, a little bit envious of the science people, said, "None of them rides the subway unless the National Science Foundation is buying them the token."

LARSON: Who was that professor?

SPRICH: Oh, that was Professor Carvel Collins, a Faulkner scholar and one of, one of my principal mentors here. So I came up, having—first of all, I did no college visits. I wanted to go to MIT, so I applied to MIT. Somebody said I should have an insurance school, so I applied to Cornell [University] and was, was lucky enough to get into MIT.

Stepped off the train at South Station here in Boston, having never been east of Illinois before. And at that time, I don't think anybody did campus visits. And so the first week was fraternity rush week, for some crazy reason. Oh, no. For a secret reason within the Institute—because they didn't have enough housing for freshman. And they had to—

LARSON: That's still the case.

SPRICH: —funnel twenty percent off into fraternities. Anyway, I decided I didn't want to—I couldn't make the decision of who I wanted to live with for four years in that time, and didn't get too many offers, anyway. So I remained an independent which is easier to do at MIT than at some schools where they are clubby and cliquy and where not being a member of an eating club or something is, uh...makes you a social pariah.

I walked in the door. I got involved in—I had supported myself, got spending money, by repairing radios and TVs and by projecting 16-millimeter movies for my church. I got paid for that, but also for my high school, where I did it as just one of my duties. It's always pleased me that after I left, they had to form a Projection Club with seven or eight members. It's nice that you have to—that it takes that many people to replace you!

So anyway, when I got here I followed the—. Oh, I'd also done a little remote broadcasting of church services from my church. So I got involved with the radio station here, for my freshman year anyway, and the Lecture Series Committee, which probably still exists.

LARSON: Yup.

SPRICH: Wonderful organization. And there, from them, I became acquainted with British and other European films, Japanese cinema, uh, Rashomon and so on. And that really broadened my interest in movies.

LARSON: So the MIT radio station, what kind of broadcasting/programming did they have?

SPRICH: Well, let's see. They did some interviewing. They did some, some classical music programming, actually, and popular. I pretty quickly found out that I was spreading myself a little thin. And so that was the easiest activity to withdraw from, and I soon did.

The studio was in the basement of...let's see. The east campus has the parallels and the senior houses. So it was in the basement of one of the senior houses.

LARSON: Wow.

SPRICH: And, you know, cramped little studio and so forth, but functional.

LARSON: So prior to coming to MIT, did you know that MIT had a School of Humanities?

SPRICH: Actually, I—it never occurred to me. Because the corollary of this Sputnik thing was that the counselors were saying, "Oh, the humanities are passé. Nobody of real intellectual rigor is going to go into that area. It's science. That's the thing."

So I kind of realized that I was sold a bill of goods about getting an engineering or a scientific education. But when I got to MIT, I found out the spectrum of activities available. And by the middle or end of my sophomore year, I had changed my major to the double major program, Humanities and Science. And mathematics was my science specialty.

And Statistics—a course that so bored me out of my wits that I kept dropping it—they finally dropped as a requirement by the time I was a senior and allowed me to grandfather that as my, one of my—not having to be one of my requirements. So I was saved in a lot of ways.

2. Humanities at MIT

I didn't know anything about the humanities beforehand, but I was lucky enough to come into contact with four first-rate scholar teachers. And they really pointed the direction.

LARSON: You want to just say who those, those, um, mentors were?

SPRICH: Absolutely. Um, Carvel Collins, I mentioned. Faulkner scholar, had taught at Harvard. This is—this is a man who could teach a three-hour class and, without using

notes, anecdotes about American literature, which was the subject at the time. And you would look at your watch and say, "Has three hours gone by?" And it would—he would seem to be just kind of shooting the breeze. And yet, when I look back on it, I see he was giving us the whole background and, and fabric and context of American literature, which I've been able to make use of in my own career, which is as a college teacher of literature and film.

Secondly, there was Huston Smith, who came up from Washington University in St. Louis. And one of my high school teachers tipped me off about this guy. Said, "You take a course with him or I'll stop being your friend."

And I, I did. I came up and took a course with Huston the first semester he was here, and his reputation among students hadn't been established yet. So there were thirty-five people in the class. And the second semester, his reputation did get established. The number went up to a hundred. And his course remained the most popular humanities course, I think, for many years.

He also took the unprecedented step of asking me to be his grader and to, you know, sort of become his teaching assistant, if you will, even as a second semester junior, I guess I was, then. And he's—we've kept in touch over the years. He's now about eighty-five and just published another book. He was the author of a book called the, uh, *The Religions of Man* [New York: Harper, 1958], which has sold, I don't know, eight or ten million copies.

LARSON: I've got a copy of that.

SPRICH: Standard...standard text, and wonderfully written from sort of Everyman's point of view. Just as you're formulating a question in your mind, he answers it. A sweet man and a great scholar.

Third was Norman Holland, who was a somewhat younger man and just an assistant professor when I was here. He was also my freshman adviser. And he went from—stayed at MIT for a number of years, then moved to the State University of New York at Buffalo in an endowed chair, and has gone to University of Florida. He's... I guess he's seventy now, but having—still having fun. And I keep in touch with him once every two months by phone or email.

Finally, there was Bruce Mazlish in history and psycho-history. And until recently, at least—I don't know whether Bruce has retired, but he's had a chair in rhetoric and is still associated with the Institute. Those are the four.

LARSON: He seemed to be a colorful figure, at least in little references that I've seen. There's some crazy picture of him with a wild costume and—

SPRICH: Well, he was kind of—he was a Columbia graduate and kind of buttoned down and restrained. But you know, everybody deserves to kick up their heels. [laughter]

LARSON: Yeah. So tell me just a little bit more about your humanities component of your major here. And what did you work on for that? What was your specialty?

SPRICH: Well, I—as soon as I became associated or aware of Carvel Collins, who taught just two courses and they were limited to twenty-five, and it was considered—often, more than a hundred people would apply to get in. I was delighted to be selected. So I

took Nineteenth Century American Literature, Twentieth Century American Literature, and The Modern Novel. And The Modern Novel included Kerouac's *On the Road*, which was modern like just published, just out in paperback. So I—and he had done things like interviewing Erskine Caldwell and others for the *Atlantic Monthly*. He was really *au courant*, as far as literature was, was concerned.

And I worked with him as a Research Assistant for a time and actually kept doing things for him beyond my undergraduate career. Because I've—I stayed in Boston. [Henry David] Thoreau said, "I have traveled much in Concord." I can say, "I have traveled much in Boston," because I went to MIT undergraduate and then Brandeis [University] master's degree in English and American literature, and then Tufts [University] for the, the doctorate in, in English literature.

And Lecture Series Committee, as I've mentioned, helped broaden my interest in film. I've always been interested in film, and, uh, I've been able to integrate that into my teaching career. And I just never realized that at the beginning of my career—I started full-time teaching in 1966—film was regarded as very suspect as an academic discipline. And so when I taught *The Graduate* for credit, I had to practically sign my life away to get permission to do this, because it was just...just on the edge of respectability.

But now—so it's nice to find out after the fact that you were a pioneer. It's like one of Moliere's characters was delighted to find that he's been speaking prose all these years, [laughter] didn't know what it was. But, uh, yeah—I made a not-very-smooth transition.

I guess I talked about Collins's stuff. And I took the directed study with him. And [Norman] Holland taught Shakespeare, Comic Sensibility, and the Introduction to Literature course, which I took with him. And Roy Lamson—I don't mention as a major mentor just because I took only one course with him. But he was an administrator who was quite important to, to me. I think I had an easy—easier—time than I otherwise might have in doing some of the weird things that I wanted to do, like petition not to graduate on time, because his secretary thought that I looked like her son. And Roy, who was a sweet guy, would pretty much sign anything that she would put in front of him. So I think, I think I got away with a few things.

This is to be stricken from the record. [laughter] No. Every—everybody involved has retired or died off, so there's no possibility of libel suits at this point.

3. MIT Music Library

LARSON: So moving on, you had worked here at the Music Library as a student assistant. What years were those?

SPRICH: Well, I—when I walked in the door, I of course came to the Music Library because of my love of classical music. And I made inquiries and found that the person who did repairs on the equipment had just graduated or left. In any case, the job was

vacant. And the small amount of tools that were available were kept down in the Microreproduction Laboratory on the basement level.

And the recent Wellesley [College] graduate, Anna Faith Jones, who had newly taken the job as Music Librarian. And the atmosphere was so congenial that I accepted the job right away, kept it probably for four and a half years, because I stayed on working part-time. I was...I spent a summer...well, hey—the summer of, it must have been 1960, I was the acting music librarian. I'd never taken up acting before. [laughter]

But at that time we were all—all the equipment was monaural. Nothing was stereo. The, the huge monster main system for the big list—for the main area was an invention of somebody over in the Acoustics Lab. And though he explained the esoteric principles of it to me a couple of times, could never make heads or tails of it. But it was certainly not conventional bass boost, treble boost, volume. It had many knobs.

And I used to fool around with them because you could never tell when you—like a Moog synthesizer or something. I never knew what to plug in with what. But it sounded pretty good.

One of the, one of the things that I was very pleased about was KLH [audio company]—uh, Henry Kloss's gang—was over here on Cross Street near the Necco candy factory. And I went over, hat in hand, to see if they would give us a discount on some speakers. They were then making KLH model 6, which was compact and very good sound.

And I explained what I wanted, and Malcolm Low, who was the L of KLH, said, "Gee, we, we've got a fair trade policy, so we can't sell anything at a discount. However, uh, we have acoustically perfect speakers that have scratched cabinets, which we'd be glad to donate to you." [laughter] I said, "I don't know, I'll have to think about that for a tenth of a second." So we got enough KLH model 6s for all six listening rooms, I guess.

LARSON: Wow.

SPRICH: And I experimented with various other things like, uh, viscous damped tone arms, so you couldn't drop them on a record and scratch them. They were more trouble than they were worth, actually. But, uh, pretty much we just maintained the equipment that we had. And it was—the amplifier was still vacuum tube at that time. For the—through the period of time that I was here there were not major changes.

LARSON: Wow. Wow. Do you know what the hourly rate-wage for students was?

LARSON: Oh, that's a good question. Let's see. Uh, it must have been something between \$1.50 and \$2.00, because I had come up through the ranks of \$0.75 an hour at, at home. And I think my first summer job in the aerospace industry was, uh, working for about a buck and a quarter an hour.

LARSON: Mm-hm.

SPRICH: But the thing that I find astounding is that, jobs like mine are now called work study and are considered part of the financial aid package.

LARSON: Yeah.

SPRICH: It hadn't dawned on anybody. And, and even though I had a good scholarship, it hadn't dawned on anybody to restrict the amount of time I could work. And if I was having a big date and needed a little more money, I could, you know, work up ahead and work a few extra hours, up to twenty a week. And so that was a very nice situation.

LARSON: How many other student assistants worked in the library?

SPRICH: Well, now we're talking about a hierarchy here. Those who only knew how to place records in, on the counter, and back in the rack? There must have been half a dozen.

But those who were sophisticated in the mechanical— [laughs] I was the one. I had a little back-up from the people in the electrical engineering department if I got really stumped. But pretty much, I handled it on my own.

LARSON: What were the hours of the library? Do you remember, roughly?

SPRICH: Well, let's see, uh, I know they closed at 6:00 on Saturday, so let's say—

LARSON: They still do.

SPRICH: —9:00 to 6:00. And, uh, one of the perks—

LARSON: It's quarter to six now on Saturday.

SPRICH: Oh, oh. Oh, OK. One of, one of the perks was that I had a library submaster key, so I could get into this place and lots of other interesting places in the Hayden Building.

LARSON: Uh-huh.

SPRICH: And I used to entertain myself, uh—I think we had a tuner, so we could tune in Boston Symphony on a Saturday night. And I could come in, lock the door again, point myself away from the door so people wouldn't bang on it and bother me and have a private concert.

LARSON: Oh!

SPRICH: And the weekdays, uh, probably not much changed.

LARSON: So when you came in this afternoon, we were looking at, obviously, the new space here. Is there anything more you want to say about the layout of the old space? I was here before the renovation. But even since, you know, after you left, things had changed to some degree. But—

SPRICH: OK, now back in the corner, away from the desk and nearest Walker Memorial, there was a recital room. It had a baby grand, enough space for a chamber music group of two or three, and, and then maybe fifteen seats.

LARSON: Hmm.

SPRICH: And it was double insulated so that the sound wouldn't bother people who were in the main area.

LARSON: Wow.

SPRICH: And Ernst Levy used to play here.

LARSON: Was that mostly for students and faculty? Or were there outside artists that sometimes would play there?

SPRICH: It was an underutilized facility. I can't recall there being any advertised concerts for people outside. It was also not a practice facility in the sense that people signed up for it and came in.

LARSON: Right.

SPRICH: So, I think it was kind of thing that, we really didn't know that much what to do with it.

LARSON: Mm-hm. Were there ever concerts in the larger space—the reading room and stuff like that? Because later on, that's where there were concerts. But during your time here, were there?

SPRICH: Very few. I can remember a cello and violin, viola, something and maybe they even moved a harpsichord in. But that was rare.

LARSON: The architect's original intent for this space—contrary to the wishes of the Music Section here—the architect had in mind a listening lounge. And there was always, it seemed like for a long time, some tension between the two ideals there. When you were here, how was that playing out? Because there was still music played, you know, over the house sound system. But what was your take on it when you were here?

SPRICH: Well, I think it was a place you could come to kind of unwind. And I don't know that there was any pressure on the person in charge to play a certain kind of music. I think it was—at least the summer that I was acting librarian—it was kind of my whim.

But it was much like you get in a classical record section of a record store, you know. Put up the album cover and, "Here's what we're playing now. And if you don't like it, uh, goodbye."

LARSON: Mm-hm.

SPRICH: So, nothing was ever raucous. I don't think we played any John Cage. Didn't drive anybody to heart attacks or catatonic states. But there was music most of the time. And it was selected by the librarian in charge.

LARSON: Was there any kind of programming elements? Would it be a theme one day? Or say, a composer's birthday would come up, or something like that? Were there any attempts like that?

SPRICH: There was a little bit of that. But it was not, as I recall, systematic or—. For example, we did not do a WGBH thing and put out a program guide for, "Here's what we're going to do for the next month."

LARSON: Right. Was it throughout the time that the library was open during the day or just some specified hours?

SPRICH: Well, it was a full day job for me. I think in the summer they did close at 5:00 or thereabouts. But in the—

LARSON: But as far as playing the music, was that all day?

SPRICH: Ah, I see what—yes. Now, if nobody was there and you wanted to rest your eardrums a little bit, why, that was a possibility. And people could come in and suggest something or other, and you could say, "No." But we tried to accommodate, as I'm sure you do now.

LARSON: Did people come just to listen? Were there kind of regular people who would come, like during their lunch hour or something to listen? Or did you get a clientele like that? Or was it just if you happen to come to the library for something else, you got to hear music?

SPRICH: I think there was a dedicated core clientele of two kinds—the folks who liked to listen to music and those who liked to check out the scores and study music in a more serious way. I don't read music, so I never got into that. But I admire people who do. I got the—the C-major scale was too much for me on the violin. [laughter]

LARSON: So the music that was played, was it more than classical music? Was there any jazz or popular music played?

SPRICH: No. As far as I know, the collection went just into light classics. A friend of mine—I don't know on what statistical basis—thought that Scheherazade [by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov] was the most requested piece of—or the most requested record here. And we'd wear out our copy about once every two years.

LARSON: [laughs] So I want to ask you about the collection itself—the books, the scores, and the recordings. When you were here, was there a systematic program to build the collection? Or was it strictly—were purchases made, just on the demands of faculty and students making requests? What's your memory on that?

SPRICH: Well, I didn't have anything to do with the purchasing. My feeling was that there were neither the resources nor the administrative green light to do a whole lot of building of the collection. I think Anna Jones paid attention to what was coming out, read the journals, and so forth and ordered new things as she thought they would be applicable. But, no it was a fairly slow build.

LARSON: So the budget was, was pretty modest then?

SPRICH: I think so.

LARSON: Tell me about the books that—we'll talk about the scores, um, in a minute—but were there many books on music? You know, dictionaries—I mean reference books—but also just, you know, standard scholarly literature, as well?

SPRICH: Well, it tended to be reference books and lives of the particular composers kind of thing. Bios.

LARSON: Mm-hm.

SPRICH: I didn't get the sense—and I cannot remember specifically standing in front of the shelf and browsing the collection—I didn't get the sense that there was too much on music theory here, though the Music Library has always had the support of the Music Department.

LARSON: Right.

SPRICH: And, certainly if there was anything that Klaus Liepmann [first Professor of Music at MIT] or one of the other faculty—Greg[ory] Tucker [MIT Professor of Music 1947-1971]—felt was essential, that would be a priority to get.

LARSON: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. What's your memory of scores? Were there both study scores as well as performing parts for chamber music?

SPRICH: Yes. There were both. And I—when I saw a recently a CD that was augmented with...so you could see the score as you were listening to the music, I thought, “My goodness, what a step forward that is for somebody who is learning and likes to play along on whatever instrument!” But there were scores to perform from and also to study the intricacies of Bach's fugues.

4. Performing arts at MIT

LARSON: So were you involved in any way with helping out with concerts or productions? I'm thinking, for example, like the famous Tech Show. Were you involved in any way with that and did you go to those? What can you tell me about those?

SPRICH: I did not go to a lot of the Tech Shows. I don't like roasts. And I don't like kind of snide—although you know, one of my specialties is comedy—I don't like snide comedy. And so I was not drawn to those shows in a big way. Again, more I was amazed at the spectrum of performance art on the MIT campus. And it included a Shakespeare society, a Shakespeare performing group, a Gilbert and Sullivan performing group, which probably still—

LARSON: Still goes.

SPRICH: —goes on. And, you know, the [MIT] Symphony Orchestra, which was garden variety students, who happen to be virtuoso musicians as well as whatever their scientific specialty was. And I did go to those concerts, as well as the chapel music—concerts in the chapel Thursday noons, which I still go to, because I get the mailing list about that. That's a wonderful space. And I like to hear the tracker organ played.

LARSON: It's a great organ. Did you ever like sell tickets for a concert or help to organize things in any way? Were you involved in anything like that?

SPRICH: Uh, no. I—my involvement was through the Lecture Series Committee—movies on the...a musical film, for example. I might—I helped out with both projection and ticket taking and things there. And that, that kept me busy because there were three film series here: Friday night, Saturday night, Sunday night.

And the Saturday night, the admission by then, at that time, was 35 cents. So if you want a cheap date, you could get yourself and your date in on one MIT ID. And we used to fill Kresge Auditorium for two shows. Uh, nine hundred people or a thousand people or whatever that was. And that's a lot of 35 centses!

So the result was that the Lecture Series Committee people could sit down and say, "Well, who do we want to have as a lecturer?" And if the fee was astronomical—

top, uh, you know, the maximum fee that one would draw at that time, Bennett—
Bennett Cerf [publisher, TV personality], \$5,000, OK.

LARSON: Mm-hm.

SPRICH: Because we had, we had \$30,000 in the bank at any one time from our, from our
little movie operation.

LARSON: My. So there was this concert series called the Humanities Series Concerts. And
they had very distinguished groups—the Juilliard String Quartet and even the Boston
Symphony, I read, had come on that. And they seemed to be, from what I gather
reading, quite popular and well attended. Are there any memorable concerts from that
series that you particularly recall?

SPRICH: Well, I'd be interested in knowing when that got started, because I can't remember
it as an organized entity.

LARSON: It seemed to be going in the, by the late '60s. At least in the annual reports for the
school of humanities, they mention that.

SPRICH: OK. Well, you see, I'm late '50s.

LARSON: I'm sorry. I meant the late '50s.

SPRICH: Late '50s.

LARSON: Yeah, right.

SPRICH: I think they were, they were just getting started. And I remember particularly organ
concerts by E. Power Biggs—

LARSON: Right.

SPRICH: André Marchal [French organist].

LARSON: Mm-hm.

SPRICH: And, those were quite exciting.

LARSON: So they even had an Institute organist. I forgot his name, but there was somebody
on the staff who was the MIT organist, and, uh—

SPRICH: Yeah, I recall that vaguely, but not in any detail.

LARSON: Yeah.

SPRICH: I loved the two Holtkamp organs.

LARSON: Did you get a chance to hear Klaus Liepmann in, in a recital as a violinist?

SPRICH: I think once in, in Kresge. Mostly, I saw him conduct.

LARSON: Yeah. Right.

SPRICH: And, and he looked like, a, some sort of magnificent bird with his long arms, and
he was wearing tails.

LARSON: Can you recall much about his violin playing?

SPRICH: Uh, no. Gregory Tucker was the violin virtuoso at the time. Or at least—

LARSON: Oh, I thought Gregory Tucker was a pianist.

SPRICH: Gregory was a pianist?

LARSON: I thought he was.

SPRICH: Oh. I could be wrong. Memory plays tricks.

Uh, I know that from the Music Department, I realized a different set—they have a different set of priorities. I would worry about, you know, is the bass boost proper. And it would drive them nuts if there was a flutter or a wow or it was playing at the wrong speed.

As you know, some folks have absolute pitch. I have whatever is the opposite of that.

[laughter]

LARSON: Do you remember, um, anything about—Well, I want to ask you first about courses you took with Klaus Liepmann and Gregory Tucker. Do you remember Gregory Tucker's recitals or performances of his own music?

SPRICH: He was also associated with the conservatory in, uh, in Cambridge, just off the common.

LARSON: Oh, the Longy School?

SPRICH: Longy.

LARSON: Yeah. Right.

SPRICH: He taught over of there.

LARSON: That's right.

SPRICH: And I think he did more performing there, probably, than here.

So I knew Gregory Tucker just as a very fine individual and someone who would always take time to speak to students if they had—or work with students if they had any problems. And I was much, much saddened when he died of heart attack very suddenly.

LARSON: Yeah. [pause] What music courses did you take when you were here?

SPRICH: Well, let's not be so hasty using the plural. I took the Introduction to Music, uh, with Ernst Lévy. And I thought it was going to be—I thought it was going to be duck soup because they'd already had all this music appreciation stuff. But he locked the door and said, "I've decided to teach ear training this time." And since I had great difficulty distinguishing between a fifth and an octave, I knew I was in deep trouble.

[laughter]

But I guess stayed on in the course. I think it was, uh—I had a habit at the Institute. The standard load was five courses, but you could take more, and nobody said anything to you, and nobody sent you an extra tuition bill.

I had a friend who once took seven and, uh, got all A's. But he was—That was Don Hatfield, and he's up there with Noam Chomsky [Institute Professor in Department of Linguistics and Philosophy] as far as that, as brilliance.

LARSON: So you didn't take any courses with Klaus Liepmann?

SPRICH: Didn't take any with Klaus. I just knew him anecdotally. And I was at his house once, helping him with some problem with his music system. He lived on Lake Street, in Cambridge. That's near Mount Auburn Hospital.

LARSON: Uh-huh.

SPRICH: Lovely, lovely old home.

LARSON: Do you have any kind of personal recollections of Klaus? There are so few people who I've had a chance to talk to who really had interactions with him. And I'm just trying to get more of a picture of what he was like. I met him for about thirty seconds once, but that wasn't enough to get an impression of him.

SPRICH: Yeah. Well, I have no idea how good he was as an administrator. As a college teacher myself, I've learned that the skills to be a department head are completely different from those needed to be a good classroom teacher. And so I can't comment on that at all.

But I know he had a fine sense of humor and was very well liked by the members of the MIT Symphony Orchestra, who felt that he not only, uh, uh, provided them an opportunity to do what they loved to do but also kind of brought them along to a higher level.

And he was very striking man, tall and, uh, under other circumstances he could have played a Dracula part in a way.

LARSON: Yeah, as I recall he was even taller than me—noticeably so.

SPRICH: Right.

LARSON: Did you go to many MIT Symphony Concerts?

SPRICH: It wasn't a part of my regular schedule. But I think there was a major one fall and spring for the four years that I was here. And I probably went to five out of the eight of those. Some of the peripheral events, like chamber music programs and so forth, got by me. I was not heavily into chamber music at that time. That, and early music, has been a development later—Handel and Haydn Society, and so forth.

LARSON: Any memorable concerts either by the orchestra or just concerts in general that you heard at MIT? Things that really stand out for you?

SPRICH: Well, the organ concerts I've spoken of.

LARSON: Mm-hm.

SPRICH: And I certainly began to be interested in the harpsichord as an instrument. I don't think we had one in the small space here in the Music Library on a regular basis. But I think they brought one in once and I heard a recital that really—I mean, it's one of those experiences where, you know, the hairs on your neck stand up and said, “This is

an instrument that I—” I think I would have gone out the next day and bought a kit and tried to build one!

LARSON: Oh!

SPRICH: Which would have been a big mistake.

LARSON: Who was the harpsichordist for that concert? Do you know?

SPRICH: I don't remember. A male person of short stature. It was probably not John Gibbons yet. I don't think he had burst on scene at that point.

LARSON: Uh-huh. Could it have been—oh, he's dead now. He taught over at Longy for a number of years. I'm forgetting his name.

SPRICH: I probably wouldn't remember it either. But anyway, it was delightful.

LARSON: Yeah. There was a physics student and cellist from MIT, class of 1958. His name was Karl Kornacker. Did you know him? I know him from when I grew up in Ohio. He was a mentor of mine. Did you know Karl?

SPRICH: I didn't know Karl. There was a cellist in my class named Peter somebody who was quite good. But I did not know your man you're speaking of.

LARSON: Yeah. Karl went on and did play professionally for a while. What about the MIT Concert Band with John Corley? Did you go to any of the concerts?

SPRICH: A few. Band and brassy music is just on the edge of my interest. John Corley actually came out to play for a Bentley College commencement, maybe on more than one occasion, with the Concert Band. And, the sound was superb. But I was not a big follower of that here. I'm really not a jazz person.

LARSON: Mm-hm.

SPRICH: I just, you know... I see the enthusiasm that jazz generates for somebody like Woody Allen, or a real passion, and I admire that. But I don't share it.

LARSON: Did you ever hear John Corley play the trumpet? He was at one time a fine trumpeter.

SPRICH: I think I remember he was doing a solo in the Kresge Auditorium. And maybe even, uh, playing, uh, along with the, uh, the organ in the, uh, chapel.

LARSON: There's a recording that I have that's undated, and it's John Corley with an organist and no date or location.

SPRICH: Well, there are these Music at MIT discs—records.

LARSON: Yeah, this is a, a recording that he actually loaned me.

SPRICH: Ah.

LARSON: But there was no date on it, and he couldn't remember when that was, and it would be nice if I could—

SPRICH: Well, I, I—

LARSON: It's the only recording of him playing.

SPRICH: That's a shame to lose a virtuoso's work in that way.

LARSON: Yeah. Yeah.

SPRICH: I remember now that the recording I have of the MIT chapel organ, Roger Voisin as the trumpet soloist.

LARSON: What about MIT Choral Society? Did you go to many of their concerts?

SPRICH: Only very occasionally. And I knew nothing directly about them, except that, by reputation again, they were extremely accomplished for a college group.

And again, I constantly compare the image of the nerd with, at that time, the slide rule dangling from his belt, as the outsider's image of an MIT student and realize that that's a carefully cultivated myth.

LARSON: Right. Because it doesn't exist.

SPRICH: It doesn't exist.

[laughter]

LARSON: Yeah. My oldest brother still doesn't believe me. I've been here for so many years, and he's convinced.

SPRICH: Well, yeah. It's Mass Avenue "nerd crossing."

[laughter]

LARSON: Yeah. Yeah.

SPRICH: No, I don't think I ever—. Well, take that back. A few come to mind.

LARSON: Yeah.

SPRICH: But that's there in the great, the minority for sure.

LARSON: Right. I know you said you weren't much into jazz. I have a few "jazz at MIT" questions. There was a group called The Tectonians. Did you have any contact with them at all? And did you know about what they did? They, at one time, played for dances on campus and played around town in some of the clubs. Do you have any recollections at all of their activities?

SPRICH: One of my extracurricular activities that I happened not to have mentioned was that I got involved in the production of the yearbook, the *Technique*.

And actually I came up through the ranks to be editor-in-chief in my senior year. And all I remember about The Tectonians was, as with many other groups, the struggle to get them together for a group picture and to get somebody to write copy about it. And, you know, nobody gives a hoot about this when they're in the midst of it. And ten years later, they regret all over the place that they don't have the record of what, who, who was with them in the group and, and what they did it. But I remember having to pull teeth to get a group picture and a little paragraph. But I don't think I ever heard them perform.

LARSON: Did you know anything about the kind of their reputation with the students? And were they kind of an active presence on campus? Or did you have to kind of seek them out?

SPRICH: Well, I think as with the Shakespeare players and the Gilbert and Sullivan group, there were a subset of people who was interested. And they were really interested. But it was not a phenomenon that swept the campus.

LARSON: Yeah, OK. So you mentioned earlier, Roy Lamson, a Professor of Literature and influential in the development of Course XXI [Humanities]. But he was also a jazz clarinetist and he had a group called The Intermission Trio, which we saw pictures of a little bit ago.

SPRICH: Yes, yes.

LARSON: Did you ever, ever hear them play?

SPRICH: I never heard them play. I heard him play brief solo pieces and could hear his talent at the instrument. But really nothing very sustained.

LARSON: Do you know much about where they played? It seemed like they played faculty functions and certain MIT community gatherings. Was that basically their role, as far as you can, can recall?

SPRICH: I, I think so. They were a, a group that came together for fun.

LARSON: Right.

SPRICH: For each other's pleasure. And if somebody else could get pleasure out of it too, why, that was great. I know they played the Faculty Club, on top of the Sloan Building sometimes. I don't know if that's still the Faculty Club.

LARSON: Yeah.

SPRICH: I can remember them in that space. And Roy may have played for a Course XXI humanities reunion, which we had after twenty-five years, I think.

And I made an effort to visit him within a year of his death. But he...his wife said that he was so ravaged by—I guess it was cancer—that he really didn't want to have visitors. And I respect that. But, he was not really a mentor. He was a facilitator for me. Because my relationship to him was as an administrator in the program.

LARSON: This next question you may not be able to answer much. But at MIT there's a long tradition of students playing chamber music for fun, not for performance. Were you aware of that? Anything you can say about that?

SPRICH: Yes, I was aware of it, through this classmate of mine who was a serious cellist. And I was not in a major way passionate about chamber music at that time. But I was delighted to see space in the main buildings for practice rooms and the spaces that could be used for that kind of small group performance. I thought that was a real commitment on the part of the Institute, which hadn't been obvious. I think when the chapel wasn't being used as a chapel, that was a space that could be used by a small chamber group, or the [Kresge] Little Theater. But not much on the main campus.

LARSON: This next question is a real shot in the dark, but my boss, Peter [Munstedt, MIT Music Librarian], kind of brought this to my attention. You had mentioned the MIT Acoustics Lab designed the equipment for here in the library.

Did they do any kind of research in the area of what was later thought of as electronic music? You know, building synthesizers and actual composition? Was there any activity like that? Because later on, when Barry Vercoe [computer scientist and composer] came, MIT was a real center for that.

SPRICH: Yeah, the only contact I had with them was through this one researcher, whose name I can't recall, who built the listening, or the, the amplifier for the main space here at the Music Library. The electronic music and all these things, I learned only much later through the documentary, *Theramin, An Electronic Odyssey*.

LARSON: That's a great film. Yeah. So you weren't aware of anything like that, probably not until later after you left.

SPRICH: Yeah. The, the Acoustics Lab was in the old Building 20 somewhere. And I'm not sure I ever set foot in it. But Dr. X would come over every once in a while to give us a pep talk and "fine tune the instrument," whatever that meant.

5. Humanities and the arts at MIT

LARSON: So this, this last area, humanities and the arts at MIT, it's a richly fascinating subject for me. There're lots of questions to ask about that. There's a special place that those activities seem to have here that's different from a traditional liberal arts institution. Do you have any thoughts on that in general?

Because most people come here to study science and engineering. But when they pursue the arts and music, it's with a real professionalism. But they do for, for different reasons, I think, in some ways than at a liberal arts institution. Do you have any thoughts about that and how it might be different, or your experience as a student with that?

SPRICH: OK. Well as a background, I now teach at Bentley College, which is my first full-time job, and likely to be my last. They came up from a, just a certificate school to—we're going to change the name to University any year now. But they have people who came to college thinking they wanted business degrees of one sort or another—accountancy, computer information systems, something like that. There's some, a little overlap with MIT.

But the type of student was...thought he or she knew what they wanted to get. And I think that at Bentley, we do have the capability of offering bachelor of arts degrees in English literature or what have you. But I think that if a student opts to do that they become an outsider from the primary culture of the place.

When I made the decision to switch from science into humanities, the atmosphere of the Humanities Department and the culture of the Humanities Department was such that I never felt I was an outsider. I always felt that there was so much going on here and that the arts were not treated as icing on the cake or sophistication for Beacon Hill snobs or something, but as really part of the main pulse of life. That, uh... You know, I couldn't have predicted that ahead of time. But I had an educational experience that I would put up alongside of any liberal arts experience.

And, hey, some of the liberal arts include mathematics and include scientific stuff. And I believe that's been lost sight of. So—

A lot of my students have this weird idea that ability in the humanities and quantitative ability is somehow on a seesaw, and that if you have one you can't have the other. I mean, somebody who's good at accountancy says, "Oh, gee, I've never been any good at writing sentences." And, uh, I say, "Why not? You know. Let's go to work on that one."

But the educational experience at MIT was enriched by music here at the library, live performances, BSO [Boston Symphony Orchestra]. I mean, the BSO, after all, is walking distance across the—not with as much arthritis as I now have. But, uh, I used, I used to live on Beacon Street and walk back and forth across the, the [Massachusetts Avenue] bridge. Who could say that they've lived on the water side of Beacon Street with a window looking over the Charles and the main court of MIT for \$7 a week with kitchen privileges?

LARSON: My.

SPRICH: It was a different time. And the Boston area, I mean, this sometimes it gets hyped as the Athens of America and all that stuff. But it really is rich in culture. You can attend free or inexpensive concert events every day.

LARSON: Yeah.

SPRICH: You can flunk right out. [laughter] Some people do.

LARSON: Yeah. Do you think there's—I mean, when I think of MIT, I think of it as a creative and vibrant place. I mean, creative in the best and the largest sense of the word. And when that gets channeled into the arts, there's a particular kind of intensity and focus on that that seems to me different than other educational environments. And do you have any thoughts about that?

SPRICH: Well, I think I would agree with you on that. Sometimes in a liberal arts college the atmosphere gets a little precious as far as the territoriality of humanities. And here at MIT, I found that there was a smooth interaction and dialogue between quantitative stuff and humanistic values and ethics and so forth. So, uh, yes, I thought it was quite, quite a, a rich and, uh, exciting educational experience for, for me.

I, I have, have, uh, been just beginning to contemplate my retirement and, uh, about, about to go to the vice president with various demands for a severance package. [laughs] And, uh, you know, I've really felt that, you know, staying in the Boston area, staying in touch with MIT, and having got this training has, uh, uh, been just tremendously beneficial to me. It's a good life.

LARSON: Mm-hm. When, um, when you graduated in, in 1961, the, the School of Humanities had, um, had, was officially inaugurated in 1951, if I'm, if I'm not, um, mistaken. [Editor's note: The School of Humanities and Social Studies was established in December 1950.]

SPRICH: Sounds right.

LARSON: It was through some real dedication of some, um, some very visionary people. And it looked like in the ten years, um, since its founding, by the time you got here, that it had really, that the school had already reached the professional stature of the other, other schools here. Because that was their, their, their intent when they started it, that it had to have the same, um, status and, um—

SPRICH: Well I, I think there was, uh, a dedication here. But I think there was also a push from outside. I think at some point the Carnegie Commission, Carnegie Foundation kind of gave MIT bad marks for not emphasizing humanities enough.

LARSON: Mm-hm.

SPRICH: And, and that's what led to the curriculum change of one out of five required courses being in the humanities.

LARSON: Right. That came out of the Warren K. Lewis report in 1948, uh, Commission on Curri—I, I've forgotten the exact name of the committee. [Editor's note: Committee on Educational Survey, also known as the Lewis Committee.] But there was this campus-wide committee, and there was, there's a big report, which I've read, and, um, they go into detail about that. And, Dr. Lewis was a chemical engineer. And he led that fight for the creation of the School of Humanities.

SPRICH: Boy. Boy, am I glad they did. Otherwise I might have been stuck in double E. [laughs]

LARSON: Yeah. Um, and from what I can gather is that, um, the original, um, intent of the school was to include the other liberal arts. But because of, of, um, neglect and also funding concerns, those things they kind of strayed from the vision. And then they, they, they picked it up again in the, in the, in the late '40s there.

SPRICH: Right. Yes. I don't know a lot about the pre-history. Uh, but I, what you say, what you're saying certainly makes good sense to me. People like Roy Lamson, they had to make very attractive offers to get them to leave tenured positions elsewhere.

LARSON: Mm-hm.

SPRICH: And Carvel Collins was, was regarded as a superstar as well. So was Huston Smith. Norm Holland was a different matter. He had gone to MIT, studying electrical engineering and, uh, was the, I think the editor of the humor magazine [probably *VooDoo*] when he was here. Good sense of humor.

Then he went to Harvard Law School with the intention of becoming a patent attorney. But he found out that that was not, uh, something he could, uh, do as a life's work. So he went back and got a doctorate in English and was just—had just been here since '55, I think, the year before I came. And he was taking courses at the Boston Psychoanalytic Institute to become, as he has, an internationally-renowned scholar in literature and psychology.

And I kind of— He challenged me. "Well, if you want to, if you want to study literature and psychology, you got to get some psychoanalysis," which I did. And it's, it's been a happy blend of movies and literature and, uh—

I have—I'm teaching a course in the fall called "The Psychology of Characters in Film." And it really, uh, tries to look at how, how can we become emotionally involved with, in fictional creations that are on a two-dimensional screen? And in some cases, may be more involved than some of the people in our actual physical lives.

LARSON: Mm-hm.

SPRICH: Good and bad—villains, heroes, whatever. That's, that's one of the things that, that really fascinates me.

6. Professional interests

LARSON: I didn't get a change earlier, this is a nice, nice lead into the, the subject and a nice way of, of rounding out this, this interview asking you about your own professional, um, interests. What was your, um, your dissertation topic on, your PhD dissertation?

SPRICH: I took a course at Tufts [University], a seminar in the literature of the 1890s in England. And the teacher in that course, Michael Fixler, was interested in a man called Havelock Ellis, who was an exact contemporary of Freud's and got into some of the same areas that Freud did.

He is best known for a seven-volume work called *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*. And strangely enough, his message is that sexuality is okay and not something to beat people over the head with in, uh, the repressive religious traditions. He also was a literary critic who resurrected and brought out new editions of Jacobean, some of the Jacobean dramatists, post-Shakespeare like [John] Webster. I guess [Christopher] Marlowe was still doing okay. But people who'd gone out of print.

And he was, he was a guy writing in the, the end of the nineteenth century who sounded like a twentieth century critic. And he was already prepared to, uh, espouse the kind of literary style of [James] Joyce's *Ulysses* and [Marcel] Proust's work *Remembrance of Things Past*. And this came out most clearly— He wrote for a periodical called *The Savoy* that only had about six or eight issues in the, in the 1890s. But [W. B.] Yeats published in that and Aubrey Beardsley did— And was Oscar Wilde in it? Maybe, maybe a bit.

Anyway, he did a thing on [Thomas] Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, which was a novel that scandalized people at the time when it came out. Because it seemed to speak approvingly of, of two people living together without being married and having children. And the thing that caught people off guard was if this had been a young upstart, why, they would have just panned the, the novel and savaged the guy and that was the end of the road. But this was a guy who had been looked up to as a novelist for twenty years.

And, uh, you know, I've read reviews that say, uh, you know, "People don't know which way to run, run and hide from this new Hardy novel." [laughs] I also have a theory that I won't expound. But that was his last novel, *Jude the Obscure*. And he, he said at the second edition, "the public has driven me from writing the novels."

I think he ran out of things to say in the novel and wanted to go out with a bang, because he continued to write poetry and other stuff af—after that. I, uh, I need to do some more work to substantiate that one. Anyway, uh, Havelock Ellis was in this bridge between literature and, and psychology. Uh, and, and, uh, ironically he didn't, uh, one might have expected he would talk up sex. Uh uh. He talked it down.

He said, "Hey, what's all this, uh, fuss about Hardy's *Jude the*—the sexuality in Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*? Let's look beyond that to its, uh, merits as a work of literature." And that was something that, uh, almost none of the critics could do. So that interested me. And I wrote a, uh, dissertation on that. And I went over to England to, uh, present a paper to the Havelock Ellis Society.

And I was kind of, uh, uh, asked if I would, uh, make an effort to do a definitive biography of, of Havelock Ellis. And I came close to doing that. Boy, am I glad I didn't. Uh, there's been one done. And, and my dissertation and a couple of other things are, are credited in that book. But it took seven years, and I think it led the scholar through a divorce. [laughs]

And I'm happy to say that I didn't have to have that experience. I have a lovely wife of forty years, uh, that I'm still with. It would have been—It would have been a big mistake.

Because as long as I'm a literary critic or a film critic, I can say, "This is my opinion." And somebody can disagree violently, and that's his opinion. But as soon as you get into biography, you got to go checking, you know, did, did, uh, Havelock Ellis really say this? Did he really appear in such and such a place? And that's a whole different ballgame and not one that interests me.

I like to stay in the realm of the imagination. And, uh, I can retreat back there when everybody—when, whenever anyone gives me a hard time. [laughter]

LARSON: But the field of criticism, as a scholarly, uh interest, is, um—I—You know, I—I can—I, I appreciate what, what that is. And it seems like you, you've kind of continued in that vein with your, your work with, with film.

SPRICH: Yes. I, uh, had—There was a very well known scholar in a, or, or a groundbreaking scholar in literature and psychology named Simon Lesser, who, who did a 1958 book called *Fiction and the Unconscious*. And, uh, he taught at UMass-Amherst.

And I got to, it was one of these things where—I've done this a few times—you write a fan letter to somebody, and it's not just a, a gushy fan letter. It says, "I liked your work, and here is chapter and verse. This is what I liked about it." Well, I got to know him. And, uh, had a real, uh, affection for him. So, uh, eventually he got some form of dementia that would—they didn't want to call Alzheimer's at the time, but they might as well have called it that—and, uh really lost it.

He had, he had in mind to collect his short essays in a volume. And he even titled it, called *The Whispered Meanings*. So, uh, I picked up, I picked up the ball on that one and, uh, published it, along with—and this was, uh, kind of an amazing experience:

The U—UMass Press where he taught wanted to do the book. But they said, uh, we—we'd like you to have an in-house consulting editor that was another man who was interested in the field and, and a member of the English department. His name was Richard Noland.

And, uh, so I, I read something that he'd written on, on Simon Lesser. And I said, "This man's approach is similar to mine. Why—How about bringing him on as a co-editor?" And, and they went into a state of shock. Nobody has ever said that to the, the Press.

But it was a labor of love, uh, and it turned out, *deja vu*, I had met Richard Noland in, in, uh, New York City in the, in the, uh, apartment of a mutual friend. He'd done his graduate work at Columbia [University], Noland, and, and so did John Covington, who was a year ahead of me here at MIT. And uh, so I, he kept looking familiar to me. And so we, we finally traced it back.

We worked, we worked together. Uh, it was great fun. And I discovered that it's much more fun as a scholar to, uh, collaborate and dialogue than to, to sit in a bloody carrel in, uh, Widener Library [Harvard University] and try to crank out your stuff.

LARSON: Mm-hm.

SPRICH: And if you can work with somebody who regards themselves as a peer and, and doesn't try to pull rank on you all the time, uh, it, it can be a beautiful experience. I, I did a, what's regarded as a definitive article on the original *Star Wars*. I did it in, uh, collaboration with a child psychiatrist, uh, named Mark Miller. And he, he, you know, get his, uh, child patients would talk about *Star Wars* all the time as a way of talking about their own—dynamics of their family.

And, uh, he lived in the Waban section of Newton, which I do, about six blocks away. So whenever he'd have a cancellation of a fifty-minute hour and, and I would be working at home I'd go over there. We'd have coffee, and we'd work on our project. And we, we crank, cranked it out.

Uh, so I, I discovered that you don't lose any brownie points as a scholar for having, uh, a second author, especially if that author is somebody from another discipline or another, uh, academic institution.

LARSON: Mm-hm.

SPRICH: And, uh, so—It's, uh, it's been golden. I, I went to work for, uh, Bentley as assistant professor in 1966, uh, was promoted to full professor in 1977. So I've been, uh, I've, I've enjoyed my academic freedom.

Uh, I usually get asked what courses I would like to teach. Occasionally I will—the department head will ask me to do something that they need. But mostly I put together, you know, films I would like to see again and, uh, teach a course in those. So, uh, loo—looking back, uh, I, uh, I feel quite, uh, lucky.

There was a, not a commencement speaker, but a, uh, a student baccalaureate service speaker one year at, uh, at Bentley. And his advice to students was a lovely

parody of the kind of crap you usually get. His advice to them was, "Be tall. And if you can't be tall, be lucky." [laughter] Now that was something to take away

LARSON: That's great.

SPRICH: Yes. Yes.

LARSON: Something that I, um, a question that came to mind. I don't know why it didn't occur to me earlier with your, um, your in working film. There's a professor here whose expertise is film music, Professor Martin Marks. Uh, are you familiar with any of his work? He's written some books on silent film, uh, music, um, and, um, he plays a lot for silent films. But, um, when you're teaching, um, courses on films do you address any of the, the, the use of the music or anything in the films?

SPRICH: Well, I, I would certainly, uh, subscribe to the, uh, the notion that, uh, the right soundtrack can make or break a film. One of my all time favorite films is *The Third Man*. And the zither music in that film, uh, sets the mood, does foreshadowing, uh, ab—absolutely prepares the audience for, for what is going to come and what they didn't think was going to come. Uh, and this is, the case can be made for—I guess I heard a lecture that, that said a film, film score is, uh, tremendously important.

And I know I followed the *Star Wars*. Uh, John Williams's music for the first one was pretty good, and, uh, it's gotten increasingly repetitious later. But I, I, uh, I've seen, uh, Marks's name in film texts—

LARSON: Mm-hm.

SPRICH: —and references to his book. But except an a, uh, well, something like George Lucas's *American Graffiti*, uh, the soundtrack on that one is practically an anthology of all the favorite songs of—popular songs of the time. And, and they're so integral to, to, uh, what's going on in the primary action that it's a stroke of genius.

LARSON: So yeah, I recommend your taking a look at some of, uh, Martin Marks's works. It's, it's, it's quite, um, quite striking. And, um, it's certainly changed my view about, about film music and, um—

SPRICH: I, I will take your advice. I'll be happy to do that.

LARSON: I think he'd be interested and to kind of know, you know, about your work too, and—

SPRICH: You know, I, I tend not to spout theory much.

LARSON: Mm-hm.

SPRICH: Uh, and, and for a while, people were, were talking about the, uh, uh, important difference of whether the music on the soundtrack is music that can be heard by the characters in the film or whether it's music that's for the, for the audience only, added to whatever dramatic, uh, thing is going on. And somebody invented the terms diegetic and non-diegetic. [laughter]

And I, I just, uh, you know, con—conducted a, uh, a campaign against that terminology. I mean, hey, it's, can the characters hear the music? Or can they not hear the music?

LARSON: I've heard those terms too. [laughter]

SPRICH: Yeah, it's I, I've never—They've never found their way, as far as I can tell, into a, a widely circulated—

LARSON: Yeah.

SPRICH: —uh, uh, glossary of film terms.

LARSON: Mm-hm.

SPRICH: But I, I have, a—No, I'm not going to talk about my colleague that likes to use that term. Because, because someone might think that I was re—regarded him as, as a pompous ass. But if he's a pompous ass, he's only an associate professor. And he's my age. And I will not mention names—

LARSON: Yeah.

SPRICH: —or initials.

LARSON: Well, I want to thank you for your, your generosity this afternoon. If there's any, um, you know closing remarks about the, about the library, about, um, MIT or the humanities, um, um, there's certainly time to do that and, uh—

SPRICH: Well, I, I would, uh, I, I, uh, am, am going to retire within the next two years. And I, I don't think that I, uh, am going to have any trouble, uh, as some, some few people do, apparently, uh, not having to do so they, they, follow the wife around the house as she does her, does housework and laundry. Uh, there's actually, a, a, a film that called *Rich in Love* that has Albert Finney and, uh, Gil, Gil, uh, Jill Clayburgh in it.
[laughter]

And, and the, the guy, retires, the husband retires, and he doesn't know what to do with himself, so he just follows his wife around. Drives her crazy. She leaves. That's not gonna happen to me. Uh, gee, that was a great riff, but I forgot what the point of it was. Oh, well. Uh, like, uh, like Mark Twain I can tell a shaggy dog story again. [laughter]

You know, college students don't remember what—don't know what a shaggy dog story is.

LARSON: Yeah.

SPRICH: I have to educate them. They, they don't know what a foil is in a, in drama.

LARSON: Wow.

SPRICH: And those, those are two, two of the things that I contribute. Oh, well, what I was, uh, thinking about is that I have been looking back on, on my career. And I've, I've mostly written about specific movies. I wrote about *Star Wars*. I, I've written about the, the futile attempt to make a movie from, uh, Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*.

Uh, and, uh, Collins was a Faulkner scholar, so, uh, I promised him that I would, uh, put his essays together in a collection the way I did for Simon Lesser. And, uh, I am making, uh, use of the latest technologies, uh, putting things on disk and using publication on demand and a lot of other things. And, uh, I'm going to do

that for him. Uh, he died in 1990 suddenly. And, uh, certainly, uh, as, uh, as my mentor—

He really I, I, I mentioned the three-hour lecture just goes by, tells anecdotes, uh, I have never taken lecture notes. I just have about three points that I want to make and I write them on a three-by-five card and wing it from, from there. Uh, and I, I have no illusions—There, there was a time when there were thirty candidates for every opening in the teaching of literature and film at the college level. And I, I'm just very lucky to be able to stay in the Boston area to be able to, uh, get a tenured position where I'm, essentially, allowed to do whatever I like and at a school where teaching is, uh, numero uno, uh, good teaching and scholarship, well, that's nice too.

So, you know, I've published some stuff. And actually the *Star Wars* thing has gotten the, the widest audience, I think. It's, uh, in, in most, uh, bibliographies of, of science fiction film. And right now I am working on a, uh, an essay on the movie *Mumford* and also on, uh, *Pleasantville*. So, uh, I'm, I still, uh, I mean, uh, the question, are we having fun yet? [laughter]

LARSON: Yeah.

SPRICH: Uh, I still am. I, I love what I do, and, uh, I've, uh, had, uh, like, liked being able to stay in the Boston area. I, uh, married a Radcliffe girl. We, we went to different schools together. I even dated a girl on her floor but never met her while we were both undergraduates. But she went to social work school at Simmons [College], and, uh, mutual friends fixed us up at that time.

I have two kids, uh, a son who has a, an MBA from Bentley and, uh, works in Silicon Valley, uh, just outside San Jose [California]. And I have a, uh, daughter, Susan, who is a licensed clinical psychologist and PhD and, uh, a clinical instructor of psychology at, uh, Harvard Medical School. So I am, I am proud of that gang. And, uh, not to mention the two granddaughters, ages four and seven, uh, whom I get to babysit for twice a week.

LARSON: Wow.

SPRICH: I would pay money to do this, most of the time. Most of the time.

LARSON: That's great.

SPRICH: I, I've, uh, I've enjoyed talking with you.

LARSON: So thank you so much.