

**Music at MIT Oral History Project**

**Dante Anzolini**

*Interviewed*

*by*

**Forrest Larson**

**March 28, 2005**

**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

**Dante Anzolini** (b. 1959) was Associate Professor of Music at MIT 1998-2006, and conductor of the MIT Symphony and Chamber Orchestras. Currently, he is Music Director of the Orchestra of the Teatro Argentino Opera Theater, in La Plata, Argentina, and Principal Guest Conductor of the Linz Theater in Linz, Austria. In April 2008, he conducted the Metropolitan Opera in Philip Glass's opera *Satyagraha*. Along with performing standard symphonic and operatic repertoire, he is an advocate for contemporary music, and has a special interest in the works of Charles Ives.

**Forrest Larson**, Library Assistant at the Lewis Music Library, has received 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 March 28, 2005, in the MIT Lewis Music Library. Duration of the audio recording is 1:34:17. First of four interviews. Other interviews: November 2, 2005; March 21, 2006, and November 19, 2007.

## 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 (00:25—CD1 00:25)

FORREST LARSON: It is my pleasure to welcome Dante Anzolini, Professor of Music and Conductor of the MIT Symphony Orchestra and the MIT Chamber Orchestra. We are in the Lewis Music Library and the date is March 28th, 2005. Thank you so much for coming. It's just a real pleasure to have you. You have been at MIT since September 1998 and will possibly be leaving this spring or during the next academic year. So, starting off with just some biographical things, can you tell me what year you were born?

DANTE ANZOLINI: Yeah, 1959.

FL: 1959.

DA: December 7th.

FL: Wow, so you're a year older—or, a year younger than I am. [laughs]

DA: [laughs]

FL: You were born in Berisso, Argentina. Did you grow up there as well?

DA: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

FL: Can you tell me what sort of place that is? It is a city or a town?

DA: It's a small town that is nicknamed "the capital of the immigrant." So, you got—you got, for instance, you go to different neighbor[hood]s. I was born in the neighbor[hood] called Roma.

FL: Uh-huh.

DA: Obviously, in the Italian one, but the funny thing is like two blocks from the place where I first lived there was a Czech Republic Club, an Arab Quarter—

FL: Wow.

DA: —and, for instance, I remember the Lithuanian part was kind of like three or four blocks away. It was such a big melting pot that you cannot explain—you got—you know, you walk—I mean even nowadays the street, then you see all these blonde features from the northern Europe combined with all the Mediterranean features of most of the Italians and Spanish people that more or—I mean, they are actually probably seventy, eighty percent of the population in that small town. Now, the town has to be fifty-five thousand people.

FL: Uh-huh.

DA: They were...they were not ghettos, in the sense of places in which, you know, there was no freedom. No, on the contrary. But there were places in which you would hear much more Italian or Arab, or some variation of Czech, or some variation of whatever—Lithuanian, any language, but the actual Spanish.

FL: Wow.

DA: So, that's where—it's a little town. Beautiful.

FL: So how far is it from Buenos Aires? I couldn't tell from the map that I looked at.

DA: It's fifty-seven kilometers to La Plata; it should be sixty-five to [unclear]—La Plata is the following... is the city nearby, which is the capital of the whole province. Berisso is a small city that, by the time that I was born, was a very important one but because of some—the meat industry there was important. It was a port.

FL: Okay, yes.

DA: So, that's where—that's why, you know, all people from Europe were coming to that port.

FL: Mm-hm. So, one of your parents was Italian and the other Chilean. Can you tell me about them and all that?

DA: Yeah. They—my father literally escaped from Italy after the Second World War.

FL: What was his name?

DA: Lorenzo Dante.

FL: Ah-hah.

DA: Lorenzo, first name, Dante, and that's why my first name came about.

FL: I see.

DA: Because of his second name.

FL: Yes.

DA: It was a big fight in my family anyway. They—yeah, yeah, yeah—my mom also—he's—I'm sorry—her mother, my grandmum, also escaped from Chile—the very south, the southernmost city. It's called Punta Renas; it's literally in English “Sand Point”.

FL: Uh-huh.

DA: That's near Antarctica. So my grandmother was a—she got pregnant when she was a teenager, and in that highly charged prejudice little town of the south of South America that was a mortal sin. So she lived there for a couple of years, but finally she escaped from that place and went north, without any profession. My—I think that she was nineteen when she left Chile, and my mom was already four. So they went to live in that tiny city because there was a lot of... a lot going on. I mean, that tiny city, near Buenos Aires; it wasn't a big city. It was plenty of immigrants and my father, some fifteen years after that, which is—actually, when my father was twenty-one, he left Italy because of the fact my father had nine brothers, and most of them had left for Australia. One of them wanted to come to the States and finally went down south to Argentina. So there were two guys living in Argentina, and he went there as a tourist. He never thought of staying there.

FL: Wow.

DA: He actually never wanted to stay there. And they met in a ballroom, and they always talked about the simple fact that my father was inviting her to dance, and my mom thought that this guy was Spanish.

FL: Uh-huh.

DA: Such good Spanish he had in the few years that he stayed. He had a good ear.

FL: Yeah.

DA: And that's why, by chance, I'm first generation Argentinean.

FL: Wow. So what was your parents' professions?

DA: My father studied in a professional school. He didn't do the high school, secondary school. He was a carpenter by profession, and my mom, housewife.

FL: Yeah.

DA: Their relation with music was very...is very strange, I can tell you that. Because none of them were musicians.

FL: Oh, interesting.

DA: But in spite of that, there was a lot of music going on in the house. My grandfather was actually the official organist of a couple of important churches in Friuli [Italy], in—near Venice [Italy]. And he forced all his children to study music, with one exception. The only one who didn't want to was my dad.

FL: Wow.

DA: So everyone in the family knew how to play one instrument. I mean, the nine kids, and my father always refused to receive any lessons because he was fearful of my grandfather's manners, because every time that someone miss a note—misses a note [laughs], he would—he was banging on them. [laughs]

FL: Oh. [laughs]

DA: Therefore, my father probably was the one that loved music the most, but he never actually played an instrument.

FL: Ah-hah. Did he sing and stuff like that?

DA: No. My father—my grandfather was organist and, obviously in those times choirmaster, in both the churches at the sides of the river...the main river in Friuli. It's called Tagliamento, which means cutting. You know, the cutter.

FL: Uh-huh. Right.

DA: Something like that. So it divides the two regions, the one Venezia and the other, Venezia-Friuli, Venezia Giulia, so the two regions near Venice. So...

FL: What was your grandfather's name?

DA: Luigi.

FL: Luigi.

DA: For many generations, they—that's another one—they were always named Luigi, the first ones in the...all these numerous families with a lot of children. The first sons were named in my family always Anzolini Luigi or Giacomo.

FL: Ah-hah.

DA: Giacomo is actually my second name but translated into Spanish, because I was the first one, so it's—my grandfather was Luigi, my grand-grandfather was Giacomo and so on for, I think, seven or eight generations.

FL: Wow. Wow. What about siblings that you had? How many siblings?

DA: One sister.

FL: Uh-huh.

DA: My sister, Olga. She's younger. She used to be a musician. She played viola, guitar, recorder, and piano.

FL: Uh-huh. Is she still in Argentina?

DA: Yes, she's in Argentina. She's an actress.

FL: An actress, wow.

DA: She—by profession she's an actress, and she's a very important figure in a leftist political party.

FL: Tell me more about some of her professional activities. Does she do, like, theater or television?

DA: No. She does theater. She does independent theater, kind of—they call it in New York “underground,” some sort of like that, although last year she won the first—the national prize for her directorship because she turned director now in the last four or five years. So she's directing plays rather than acting. Now. Now, lately, you know. She's—she must be forty now, forty. Yeah. She's forty.

FL: Has she written any plays?

DA: No. No, no. No. She only worked as an actress. She taught acting for a number of years in several places. Before that, when she was a teenager, she was a musician and she started—she played the viola.

FL: Yeah. Did you ever play with her and do professional work with her?

DA: No.

FL: No.

DA: No, I taught her. I—she was one of the first people that I taught ear training, my way of studying perfect pitch. But, besides that, I was—our age difference is five years, and by the time that I was a teenager, I was already a professional myself, so she—when she entered in music, I was already kind of like far from the level she...the level that she was achieving. By the time that she was achieving a nice level, she decided to go on with the acting.

FL: Mm-hm. You speak a number of languages, you know, besides your native Spanish and Italian from your family.

DA: Mm.

FL: And I take it you also speak Portuguese.



DA: Mm.

FL: Do most Argentines speak Portuguese because it's so close to Brazil? Is that so common?

DA: No. No. I don't—no. Almost no one. It's funny, but it's even in the contrary. Usually, Argentinean-born people go to Brazil and they cannot understand a single word of Portuguese. In spite of the similarity—the incredible similarity—they are like two dialects. The sounds that you have to produce with Portuguese, the different phonemes—

FL: Uh-huh.

DA: —the different—

FL: Right.

DA: —are so complicated that they cannot understand. But, the other way around, the Brazilian—the Brazilians do understand, usually, Spanish from Argentina. Much easier than Argentineans, otherwise.

FL: So when did you start learning English?

DA: English, we had in...high school, we had some, you know. Two hours per week. It didn't amount to too much, honestly. Then I studied some when I was in the university. There was [laughs]—I did an exam in mathematics. English was studied as a second language because we were supposed to study algebra and analysis, oh, some English texts, but I didn't know much, much, honestly. Then I studied with a private teacher before I came to the States, two years. And then I decided to come to take an examination to start studying here. But my English was very rudimentary when I first came here as a student. Very. Extremely. I basically learned how to speak English in a black church in New Haven [Conn.].

FL: Uh-huh.

DA: And also reading every single minute that I went out of class at Yale, knowing that my level was not enough. I read every single minute, everything that I knew in other languages, in English, so that I could compare grammars and things.

FL: Oh, uh-huh. Right.

DA: And, then, I—you know, I tried to perfect it as much as I possibly could with papers and all those things, but that was my English training, yeah.

FL: Are there some other languages that you read or speak?

DA: Yeah, yeah. German.

FL: Uh-huh.

DA: German. German, I studied somehow at Yale in my second master's, but I really learned when I went to work in Germany.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: For I was a...I was a *Solorepetitor und Dirigent*—conductor—in Bonn and then I went to also...to work in another—the Swiss. I know, *Deutscheschweiz*, they say—Switzerland—[is] kind of a version of *Deutsch*, but German. But I spoke usually *Hochdeutsch* that I learned

there. And I can read easily French, and I understand French, most of, but I don't...I don't speak it very fluently yet. I—it's one thing that I have to improve. And I have a good working knowledge of Lithuanian. I went to work at—to Lithuania, and I learned basic things and, surprising enough, I, you know, in the last months, I was able to understand a good fifty or sixty percent of their conversations, although it's completely different roots, you know. It doesn't have anything to do with Romance languages.

FL: Right.

DA: Nor with German, for the case.

FL: Did you first get exposed to that back in Berisso? You said there was a Lithuanian—?

DA: No. Honestly, no. I knew of it, but...but I didn't have any Lithuanian friends, and usually I was exposed to the Italian community. My father, with one of my uncles, founded the Italian Club in Berisso, so we had these big meetings in which the only spoken language was Italian, aside from my mom. My mom didn't know how to speak, and she was always discriminated—in some bad sense, too. I experienced racism when I was small.

FL: Mm.

DA: Not to me, but I was a mix. My mother suffered that. So, I—at first, I have to tell you the truth. I refused to speak Italian. I kind of like went by my mother's side, to some extent.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: And it was a contradictory, schizophrenic feeling, because I loved my father very much, and I had incredible admiration for the guy. So I switched back and forth. And maybe that's resilient, that, you know, that's part of my—[thought unfinished].

FL: Yeah.

DA: But anyway, see that's...those are the things that I learned. Funny enough, I know another language. The dialect of my father was Friulan [also spelled Friulian], from you know, the Furlan, the dance— [Editor's note: the dance is typically spelled Furlan.]

FL: Yes. Yes.

DA: —comes from that place.

FL: Oh!

DA: And Furlan, you know, that you see in the suites, you know, even medieval dance.

FL: Right, right.

DA: So, that's—. [Friulan,] which is a beautiful language, and I don't speak it fluently, but when I go there, you know, my family speaks it still, you know, much more than Italian. I really...I—there are many words. It's funny that I learned at such a small age that when I hear it, it's like it goes directly to the object that it's attached to. You know? I remember things—learning that even before Spanish, but there were...they were not Italian words. They were Friulan words.

FL: Yeah, wow.

DA: Which is a different root, uh? It goes—Friulan, both Friulan and Sardo, the language from Sardinia, both come directly from Latin. They are not dialects of any Dante language.

FL: Oh.

DA: But all of the rest of the dialects in Italy, they are all coming from the original Toscana—

FL: Mm-hm

DA: —which became Italian.

FL: Right.

DA: The Tuscany dialect became Italian, but these two regions—the languages for some reason, their roots are directly from Latin, so it is not an easy one.

FL: That’s very interesting. I’ve always been curious about all the different languages in Italy and...

DA: Mm-hm.

## **2. Early musical experiences and training (19:26–CD1 19:26)**

FL: You mentioned that your father really loved music. Can you tell me more about your father and music, and his—maybe his musical influence on you?

DA: Look, aside from the—again, it might sound contrary to you or to anyone. My father loved music as a listener. He had incredible memories about my grandfather playing the piano, all these [Giuseppe] Verdi [1813–1901] operas. And the craziness of my grandfather! My father used to tell me things—strange stories about my grandfather. My grandfather would take a bike and would do four hundred kilometers, about two hundred and twenty miles, just to go and see one opera in Milano [Italy]. He would travel for two days, you know, stopping anywhere, just to go. So my father inherited that, kind of like, special as a listener.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: But he was a low class worker at the same time, so his experiences with music were very limited and—one day I remember, I was very small, I started studying piano when I was small and I was able to play pretty well when I was sort of ten, eleven, which was kind of weird thing in that low-income neighbor—neighborhood.

FL: Was there a piano in the house?

DA: Oh, no, that’s another story. I did get a piano only when I was eleven or twelve. Eleven. Because we didn’t have money.

FL: Yeah.

DA: So I had to study in different places, one place half a block from my father and one place half a block from...two blocks from my grandmother, the Chilean one. So I never had a piano. I had to study things, kind of going to different places. My grandmother finally bought me one. When she bought that one, I was already playing like a good fifth-year student, so I was

able to play one of the [Frédéric] Chopin [1810–1849] etudes. And the beginning, the number three [sings] *re-me-fa-sol-sol-fa-sol, la da-da-da cee-la-sol*—is beautiful, and he came running to my room asking me how come that I knew this piece. And I said, “Well, it’s a Chopin étude.” “No, it’s not a Chopin étude. It’s *Tristesse*.” “What do you mean, *Tristesse*?” Sadness, you know? [Étude Op. 10, no. 3, also known as *Tristesse*.]

FL: Oh.

DA: He said, “Well this is the song that the Italians used to sing at the end of the World War II.” I said, “This is not a song. There is no text.” “Well, whatever, I can sing you the text and you will see that we have a text.” [laughs]

FL: Uh-huh.

DA: So, those experiences I remember. *Santa Lucia*. *Santa Lucia* was a kind of like song-dance from the north of Italy that he asked me specifically to play when I was small. He got me the music. My mother, on the other hand, wanted me to play tango, and I learned a couple of tangos when I was small because she wanted me to play them, but—either-or...I didn’t identify with either-or. It was kind of a weird thing, you know, these places that I had never visited yet—

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: —that my father came from. And my mom—who even being born in a completely different place that I didn’t know until I was eleven or twelve, I think, the first time we went to Chile—[s]he asked me to...she asked me to play this music that, actually, when I was small I didn’t like at all, you know?

FL: So, you didn’t hear much tango as a child, then?

DA: Yeah, I heard a lot, but I didn’t like it.

FL: Yeah.

DA: I mean, in any household you would hear a lot of tango, all tango from the twenties, thirties, because [Ástor] Piazzolla [1921–1992], for instance, by then was a horrible fever for the establishment. For someone who didn’t, you know, didn’t abide to the rules of tango—4/4 *basta* [stop]! You know? 4/4, always quarters and you—you dance to it. That’s it.

FL: Right.

DA: So, this guy—I can tell you stories about how people would hate him.

FL: I’ve heard some of those.

DA: So, Piazzolla, until eleven, twelve. Then finally, later on, I had my experience with his music and himself. But yeah, as I said, I grew up with that. But the two of the important things that I have always in my ear were music that I would hear in a small radio, because we didn’t have any money for any LP player until I was already professional.

FL: Did you go to concerts as a child or—?

DA: Some. I was in this conservatory [Gilaro Gilardi Conservatory of Music; originally, Conservatory of Music and Scenic Art, est. 1949], you know, since a very early age, since I

- was seven, so I would see [a] concert and concert pianists and concert whatever, in this little reduced world of my childhood, because in the morning I would go to the school, in the afternoon to the other—to the conservatory. So it was kind of like my home.
- FL: Mm-hm.
- DA: But the only real experience I would have is that I like getting new music constantly, you know? I would go to the library, I would take a piece and try to play it. But the real experience as a listener, I was a weird—. I wanted, over the weekends—the weekends when the concert happened—I wanted to play soccer. And I went to play soccer like the whole day, you know. Saturday and Sunday, I—you know, that was the only fitting. In the evenings, when I would come from playing soccer the whole day, I would turn the radio, and I was always looking for contemporary music. And then one of the phenomenal things was my father bought me this—one of the first radios with a cassette recorder.
- FL: Yes.
- DA: And I would start recording pieces that I would hear, you know. About eleven, twelve years old, I was, you know, already listening to [Arnold] Schoenberg [1874–1951], [Béla] Bartók [1881–1945] and [Pierre] Boulez [b. 1924], *Available Forms [I & II]* (1961/2) by Earle Brown].
- FL: Earle Brown [1926–2002].
- DA: Earle Brown.
- FL: Yeah.
- DA: And I remember these things because I would try to get them and listen to them many times. *Atmospheres*, [György] Ligeti [1923–2006].
- FL: Yeah.
- DA: I mean, those pieces that were, you know, completely—I mean, the music after Bartók—all this music that I was listening to.
- FL: So you discovered that all on your own with your own initiative, or was there somebody who kind of introduced it to you?
- DA: No, no. It was a little bit by chance. I started composing when I was very small and then I...then I—the truth is, also that by age eleven I was a very avid reader, so I started getting information on all these kind of things.
- FL: Mm-hm.
- DA: And I read names and all this, and I saw books in the library. Regrettably, our library was such a small thing that I finished reading all the books that they had by age seventeen or something, so I was taking every week something new.
- FL: So which radio station was playing this contemporary music?
- DA: The National Radio in Argentina, which was a classical music one. As I said, for whatever reason, I refused to...somehow, I refused to go with the known [Johann Sebastian] Bach [1685–1750], [Frédéric] Chopin [1810–1849]thing. I mean I played them.

FL: Yeah.

DA: And since I played all the traditional stuff, my ear was hungry for other sonorities, other sounds, other things, other ways. And then I started composing, so perhaps it's parallel, you know? And then I was looking in the radio for every single program that would give me some other stuff, not necessarily the Bach, you know, or not necessarily the [Ludwig van] Beethoven [1770–1827], because you see, I'm studying Beethoven. It's nice, great, especially the last pieces, but I want a—. And then...and then...then also, for whatever reason, they would provide with a lot of symphonic stuff, and then I started loving the sound.

FL: Right, right.

DA: And then already by twelve, thirteen, I thought I want to be a conductor.

FL: My. The conservatory you were studying with, was that in Berisso?

DA: No.

FL: No.

DA: In La Plata. Berisso was such a small town they didn't have any pianists. There was one pianist in that city or two. I knew that lady.

FL: So there wasn't much music going on there? I mean, was there like a theater that did anything?

DA: No. Music—pop, popular music, then. Kind of an Argentinean rock.

FL: Uh-huh.

DA: I used to hear...I used to hear a lot of American country music.

FL: Uh-huh.

DA: They, you know, they [were] kind of like an invasion—[a] cultural invasion that you can perceive—rock [music], you know. As for classical [music], no. None. Almost none.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: I mean, I knew classical music only through the books in the library, my peers playing, myself reading music. That's it.

FL: Yeah.

DA: And then the radio, because I didn't have—well the truth is, I didn't have money to go to concerts.

FL: Right.

DA: On the other hand, you know, if I—I remember—it's such a weird thing that I remember the first time I heard a live...an orchestra. I was fifteen.

FL: Wow.

DA: And I remember that piece yet.

FL: So even at the conservatory there, you didn't hear much even? Was there an orchestra?

DA: There was no orchestra there.

FL: Oh, my.

DA: The orchestra was rehearsing sometimes. I mean, there were so few violins, so few violas, that I remember vividly that I was in the first stand of the violas when I was seventeen, after practicing the instrument for three months. Okay, I mean, honestly, I played a lot of piano by then and I had a very interesting, perhaps, brain for a child, devoted to music. But it doesn't make any sense that you already are in, in three months. And I was able to play well, but see, that shows that we have, I think, three violas, total. Fifteen violins, total.

FL: Wow.

DA: Playing, you know, first position, third position, that's what the level was. And piano was different, but—so the orchestra didn't exist. Musical activities were too pricey for low-income family.

FL: Yeah.

DA: I had to go to the conservatory and the school every day by bus, and it was ten kilometers, so I would have to wake up at five to go to the school and other—other children will go, you know, like ten minutes before eight.

FL: Right.

DA: So, it wasn't easy.

FL: Were your first piano lessons at the conservatory there?

DA: No.

FL: No. Where—so who was your first piano teacher?

DA: [laughs] The first piano teacher was a teenager at the—now, he must be sixty—who had a piano at the corner—oh God, I'm remembering that now. My...the first piano I played was in the house of the corner where I would take the bus to go back to my mom's place in my grandmother's neighborhood, which was at the last part of Berisso, in the poorest part of Berisso. So this guy...this guy's father had a kiosk, you know—

FL: Uh-huh.

DA: —selling sweets and cigarettes and things and magazines, and I heard the piano going to this. Yes, yhat was the first one, but I heard about a piano as an instrument, and the organ and the violin, because my mother never studied any music, but she loved the violin.

FL: Uh-huh.

DA: And actually, I started in the conservatory as a pianist and violinist.

FL: I see.

DA: A fact that I...I don't put [this] in my resume anymore, but I started with piano and violin, because for some magical reason, when I went to the conservatory it kind of—my mom pushed me to do it, sort of. My grandmother, too. My father, too. And I went there and they

took [gave] us a test, and according to the test, they would assign us instruments—not what we chose.

FL: Oh, yes.

DA: And for some weird reason, there were three hundred kids then and I got the highest [score on the] test. We don't know any music. I don't know how they valued my [test]—I didn't have any knowledge. I didn't have anything! I don't know how was the test [created]. To me, today, it is incomprehensible. Therefore, when they say that I was the highest in all this group of kids, they assigned me to the most difficult instrument for them, which was the violin.

FL: Oh. Mm-hm, mm-hm.

DA: And my mom was very happy, but I wasn't. I didn't want to practice the violin. I wanted the piano, but she want[ed]...she said, "Well, you got the best." "Well, I don't care. I want to play the piano." So finally, I did the two instruments in the first year.

FL: So, what age did you start playing the violin then?

DA: Seven.

FL: So you'd been playing piano for a couple of years now [by then]?

DA: No, yeah, I—exactly. Before that, I was, yeah, playing in that place with that kid, but look, nothing important. I started from zero again.

FL: At the conservatory there are some—are there some memorable teachers that you had that—can you tell me about some of those people?

DA: Yeah. First, the piano school in that country is still a good one. I mean, you have to remember [Daniel] Barenboim [b. 1942] started there, [Martha] Argerich [b. 1941] started there.

FL: Uh-huh.

DA: They were born Argentineans, and Martha Argerich studied, actually, with one of the best teachers we know [Editor's note: possibly referring to Vincenzo (Vicente) Scaramuzza, 1885 – 1968]. And my—one of my main piano teachers was...is...she is...she's alive, [and] still one of the best friends for Martha. This lady, Cucucha Castro [María Rosa Oubiña de Castro, no dates found], she studied in Paris with Argerich when they were both teenagers.

FL: Okay. Wow.

DA: And they went to study with Nikita, oh, what was her name, is her name? [Nikita Magaloff, 1912–1995] I don't remember. Anyway, a couple of people there. So, they are—there was this lady, [Carmen] Scalcione [no dates found], Italian, phenomenal piano teacher, and this other lady that was the first—was a friend of Martha Argerich. Besides that, my composition teacher, who is still alive, he was a pianist for Piazzolla in the last years.

FL: What's his name?

DA: [Gerardo] Gandini [b. 1936].

FL: Uh-huh.



DA: Gandini is...nowadays, he's supposed to be the most known Argentinean composer. When he taught me he was thirty-six only, and I was fourteen. I studied—they gave me special permission to start...to start composition two years before I was supposed to, because I didn't have any—

FL: Why?

DA: Some subjects, that they are required.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: But they gave me this permission because of my interest and because the guy accepted me.

FL: Had you started composing before you took lessons, composition lessons?

DA: Oh, yeah. I was eleven. My first piece was written by when I was eleven.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: And I started writing with him when I was fourteen. Yeah. So those people...there was another Fragoni [name unverified]. Fragoni was a phenomenal clarinet player from Italy, who was the principal clarinet in the National Symphony. For some weird reason, in that small city we got this teacher in chamber music, and I had my first chamber music with this guy. I was fifteen, playing already [Johannes] Brahms [1833–1897] on the viola and piano, clarinet and piano.

FL: My.

DA: All these big pieces, you know, when I was small. Most of the [Wolfgang Amadeus] Mozart [1756–1791] and Beethoven sonatas for violin. I accompanied every violinist in town, all the Brahms, you know, [César] Franck [1822–1890], you name it. I did [Claude] Debussy [1862–1918], [Maurice] Ravel [1875–1937], whatever, you know. By age seventeen, I had most of the violin repertoire and viola—

FL: Wow.

DA: —in the piano.

FL: Did you do any of the piano quartet and quintet literature, as well?

DA: No, I did only the Brahms, *lo-fa-so-la-ti-ta-ta-tum*.

FL: Oh, the F minor [Piano Quintet in F Minor, op. 34]

DA: F minor.

FL: Yeah, yeah.

DA: But not much of the repertoire for quintet or quartet.

FL: Uh-huh.

DA: I did a lot of duo, some trios.

FL: Uh-huh.

DA: And the reason is—again, it’s funny but it’s the truth—the reason is that there were no quartets. Generally speaking, there were no viola players, very few cello players. So there...violinists were abundant. I mean, anyone—. And they preferred me for some reason because I, since very early age, I wanted to sight-read music. So I was known in the conservatory, in the whole town.

FL: [laughs]

DA: Every time that they needed someone who could read any new composition, or any piece that no one knows, or anything that has to be done tomorrow and we have no time to practice, they would call me since age thirteen.

[END OF CD 1 38:42]

### 3. Interest in contemporary music (38:42–CD2 00:00)

FL: Was there much emphasis in the conservatory on contemporary music?

DA: No, honestly not, but I had...there were two figures, two very important figures. One is this guy, Gandini, who was very young then. He was only thirty-five, a young—

FL: What’s his first name?

DA: Girardo.

FL: Uh-huh.

DA: And the other guy was actually one of my first teachers in composition, it was—his name is Girardi [Enrique Girardi, no dates found].

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: This guy was a strong admirer of Pierre Boulez, the Boulez from the fifties. We are talking about ’72, ’73, eh? 1973, ’72, ’74. He was the guy that taught me how to analyze a twelve-tone piece when I was eleven, for instance. A great deal of information. Perhaps it’s kind of like too schematic way of analyzing, okay? Perhaps sometimes a little bit naïve—naïve, not very well prepared, but hey, I mean in that south of the world, where nothing was done, where I have to confess to you that my—one of my first loves, Anton Webern’s Opus 5 [5 Movements for String Quartet], Opus 6 [6 Orchestral Pieces], Opus 10 [5 Orchestral Pieces], and Opus 1, the *Passacaglia*, I found in the library, the only pieces that they had from Webern. And I—I went straight to a copy machine and I made copies, and then I was such—in such love with this piece that I took the photocopies and I took them to a professional binder, so I created my book. [Anton Webern, 1883–1945]

FL: [laughs]

DA: It’s still there in my shelf in Berisso, and you see this thing and it looks like a beautiful book with a cover that, you know, leather.

FL: [laughs] Oh, that’s funny. Yes.

DA: You know, and says “WEBERN” with golden letters. But there was, you know, in this poor environment, that someone had the skills to teach and to give me that, I mean, I’m thankful, I mean—

FL: Absolutely.

DA: This guy, for instance, was talking about [Charles] Ives [1874–1954]. I mean, no one knew!

FL: Oh! So that’s your introduction to Ives. I was going to ask.

DA: You know, no, Ives, Bartók, [Carl] Ruggles [1876–1971]. I mean, I remember—as I told you the other day, I remember listening for the first time in the Ruggles *Men and Mountains* [1924] and I went bananas! Believe me, I could—I wasn’t able to think for hours. So the next thing is I wanted to get somehow some recording. I didn’t have any money. We didn’t have LP—nothing!

FL: Yeah.

DA: Then I started reading—I went and I saw Joseph Machlis [1906–1998].

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: I was fourteen and I saw this book. It was translated into Spanish. It was called, in the Spanish, *Introduction to Contemporary Music*. I ate that book in two days! For like four hundred pages, I didn’t sleep, you know. So I learned all these details and I started getting information. I remember the third or the fourth LP I bought was the Ives—the Ives Four [Symphony no. 4]. The first one I bought I remember—I still remember it was Schoenberg/Webern the second one, Bartók. The third one was Beethoven *Eroica* [Symphony no. 3 in E-flat Major, op. 55] and the fourth one was Ives.

FL: Who was the conductor on the Ives?

DA: A guy that I met in New York, the Uruguayan guy. The assistant to [Leopold] Stokowski [1882–1977]. I met him in New York three years ago when I was conducting. Serebrier! [José] Serebrier [b. 1938].

FL: Yeah.

DA: I met him. I finally met him by chance when I was—I conducted in Carnegie Hall [New York City, NY], I think. Yes. Yes. When I conducted in Carnegie Hall, he went to the party afterwards.

FL: Wow.

DA: And I met the guy. Very strange. Very nice. A situation, no?

FL: Mm-hm. Did you also study voice in the conservatory?

DA: No, no. I sang a lot. I sang for...for...I sang longer in the choir—conservatory choir—than my career there. I loved singing. By the time that I was seventeen, we had...the program was fantastic, I have to say. We had five harmonies, three traditional harmonies. The last two were...you start in the first one, analyzing twelve-tone rows. The first one.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: In terms of piano, you had eleven years of piano, six years of chamber music, and one year only devoted to singers' repertoire.

FL: Mm.

DA: So you would learn with someone [to be] a very well [good] accompanist—how to accompany the voice.

FL: Right.

DA: All these arias. So there were many things that we had to learn when we were very young, so when I came here to Yale, I was enormously prepared by [my education] for tests, as I saw my peers were not able [to be], because I did my career in that conservatory very young. I was the youngest ever in the history [of that conservatory] who started, you know? But the amount of things that they throw at you, you know. So—.

FL: What's the name of that conservatory? I forgot to ask.

DA: Gilardo Gilardi [Conservatory of Music; originally, Conservatory of Music and Scenic Art, est. 1949] and it was founded by Ginastera [Alberto Ginastera, 1916-1983].

FL: My.

DA: That was the first conservatory that Ginastera founded, in Argentina. By chance, also, by chance, because I never met the guy, the truth is. I did some of his music when I was smaller, so there was a real combination. There were some extremely dedicated and smart teachers. Some of them were just fantastic! Then the environment. Not many pianists who could sight-read; not many people interested in contemporary music, but some few guys as a source of information.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: And a lot of things that were completely—was like a desert. Still is, to some extent. So everything was there for you because no one did it.

FL: Right. Now there's the theater in La Plata. Was there much opera going on there? Is that—?

DA: Yeah. I sang and now—I sang in *Magic Flute* [opera by Mozart] when I was eleven in that little choir. That's my first experience of that theater before it burned.

FL: Oh, so the theater burned?

DA: Burned 1977, when I was already in my adolescent years. The funny thing is that I myself accompanied some of the violinists that entered in the orchestra then, and they are now my...part of my orchestra. They're my workers.

FL: Oh, my goodness. Wow.

DA: So some of them know me from—I mean, my first clarinet now was the guy I who accompanied with the Brahms Clarinet Sonata [op. 110, Nos. 1 and 2].

FL: Oh, my.

DA: The first bassoon is the guy that I first conducted as a soloist because he played Mozart.

FL: Yeah.

DA: And our conductor wanted to play violin—he was a very good violinist—and he said, “Dante, you should conduct because I think that I will be stronger,” because I was the concertmaster of the orchestra, so he wanted to give me the opportunity. So, that...the first bassoon of this theater orchestra now is the guy that actually played his first concerto with me.

FL: My.

DA: There were many, many situations that I can...that are coming back after twenty years.

FL: So was that your introduction to opera or—?

DA: Pretty much. No, pretty much. Then I was assistant to the choirmaster. I became the conductor of the choir when I was twenty-three in that theater. I did a lot—I played as a soloist with the orchestra. I accompanied singers. I did the lights.

FL: My.

DA: I helped with the costumes. I helped, you know, sending people to the stage. I did everything possible in that theater.

FL: I have here that you’re—I hope I can pronounce his name correctly—your first conductor—conducting teacher, Mariano Drago Sijanec [no dates found].

DA: Sijanec.

FL: Sijanec.

DA: Yeah.

FL: He was at the conservatory there, right?

DA: No.

FL: No? Where was...was that later then, or where was he?

DA: I just...no—look, I just studied with him privately because, to make the story short, when I was in the conservatory, I discovered this Scherchen book [*Handbook of Conducting*, by Hermann Scherchen, 1989] on conducting.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: And, maybe because of my age or something, [I] was very impressed by that, and I took that as a bible. So I decided to study conducting only after I played at least five or six instruments. Therefore, I started conducting in a very old age. I studied with this guy when I was already twenty...twenty-three or twenty-four. By then, I had played piano, harpsichord, violin, viola, oboe, and percussion. So that’s when I started, but I didn’t start in the orchestra in the conservatory.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: There was no conducting teacher, and I found this guy; this very guy was the conductor of the orchestra where I am now conducting—

FL: Right.

DA: —for forty years, and this guy was the only teacher that Carlos Kleiber [1930–2004] had in his life.

FL: My.

DA: Very strange story. This guy was a Jewish Czech émigré—

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: —who studied at the Prague Conservatory, who at age twenty-something, twenty-two, twenty-three, did his last examination as a conductor by—I remember that because I told me, playing and conducting the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto [in E minor, Op. 64] and in the second part, Beethoven Third [Symphony, *Eroica*].

FL: My.

DA: So this guy, after the war, you know, it was such a disaster, you know he started emigrating everywhere; he wanted to get a job anywhere, so he went to France. So he got this job as a—in a touring company, ballet company, so he went down to Argentina. So, he conducted the orchestra in that theater because he was part of the company. The company fought. I mean, they had many problems. They split. So this guy was all of a sudden without a job in that country.

FL: Wow.

DA: He would sleep under the trees outside of the—in the gardens outside of the theater.—

FL: My.

DA: —for a couple of days until one guy saw him and said, “You were conducting three nights ago. Yeah, you were fantastic.” He said, “Well thank you.” “Well, why don’t you?” “I have no house, no place; I cannot go back to Europe.” “I invite you to live in my place.” This guy’s name was Drago. That’s why my teacher took his name as a tribute, but Sijanec was his actual name. Sijanec.

FL: Oh, my. Mm-hm.

DA: Then, after a couple of days, he went back to the theater and said, “Look, you know me.” “Yeah, you were conducting.” “Okay, I need a job.” And since everyone thought that the guy was phenomenal, the director then gave him a job for a year. He stayed in the same orchestra for thirty-five years or forty. He never left Argentina and he never left that orchestra. So he built this conducting teaching in that city—

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: —but, by the time that I wanted to study conducting, he was already very old and he didn’t teach anymore in the university, because he was doing part of teach in the university and conduct in the theater. And I went to see him and he accepted me. He took me as a test or something, and he taught me for a couple of years.

FL: What are some of the things that you learned from him that stay with you today, some important things?

- DA: Oh, from the musical point of view—strictly kind of like, say, phrasing. He was someone who was completely com—he was much more convinced of...on the [Wilhelm] Furtwängler [1886–1954]—
- FL: Mm-hm.
- DA: —kind of idea. Not improvisation in the moment, but at least a flexibility to acknowledge a piece as a new one, even though it was written three hundred years ago.
- FL: Right.
- DA: Every time that you try it. And so, he wasn't like a schematic guy.
- FL: Uh-huh.
- DA: He had incredible elegance in the podium. I never learned that [laughs] actually, or maybe. I don't think I—[thought unfinished]. One thing that stuck with me for many years was, he was always looking for a kind of like...a weirdo...[a] weird relationship—[a] factual relationship—between gestures and sounds.
- FL: Mm-hm.
- DA: Whereas, after many years I recognize that, you know, I mean, you elaborate the technique and you—[thought unfinished] I'm...I'm very completely opinionated in many things that I—that we conductors do. So there are certain rebounds and places in the space that you have to use your gestures in order to produce, whatever, you know, togetherness, or dark sound, or light sound or something. I mean, it's a very complicated subject that I'm...I'm writing about, honestly, now for the last two or three years. I won't—[thought unfinished]. But it's a very complicated book, too. I mean, it's not something easy to read. I mean, there are many details, and I remember that [is] something that he installed in my brain. Now, I mean after many years, I'm starting to think that it's not that it's...I mean, it's not—you cannot define that a given gesture would produce a given sound, obviously not. I mean, anyone can see that. But, at the same time, the other side of the idea is to be able to create a gesture—[a] gestural message, so you can be predictable, [so] that you can help them and they can see a clarity—a very clearly defined picture so no one has a doubt about [the] ensemble or togetherness. So, it remained with me for many years, and I think that influenced my conducting in that aspect. Clear—clarity of purpose, clarity of conveying [a] straightforward, a clear message—
- FL: Mm-hm.
- DA: —to people. Then some ideas about—interesting ideas, because he always referred gestures to the Greek/Roman art sculptures.
- FL: Interesting.
- DA: It was nice. I mean, look, in a way you have to acknowledge that metaphorically, we are speakers to a crowd. So, if you analyze the biggest, the most important monuments of our culture, the genetic code comes from them, so the European culture is based on the Greek and Roman world.
- FL: Right.

DA: So the syllogism was, for instance. Look at any statue where you see an emperor or an important figure talking to the crowd. If you analyze the posture and the arms, you will never see a parallel.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: You will never see a parallel, two arms. You will never see the arms down, not conveying any meaning. You will never see [demonstrates]. What you will see is a gesture that someone who wants to convey an important message, generally speaking, that's across cultures, that we all copy that in the whole European continent and again, it went to America.

FL: Right.

DA: [It] is some sort of motion that implies that, even though it's never a mirror between the two hands, [it] is some way to approach in a clearly defined curve—and a very elegant one, he would say, you know—in such a way that you see that the message almost goes through them to the crowd. So if you understand that, you will see that there is no justification whatsoever to do a replica of a given gesture, to beat the time with the other hand, unless you want to overemphasize a given message of...of the difficulty of pursuing the togetherness.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: Somehow, there are codes that are understood with a—that, you know, if you are studying information theories, more or less a variation of what we do, or we do a variation of information theory.

FL: Right.

DA: Therefore, the little things sometimes, they—you know, how do we come from the beauty of Greek and Romans' certainty? Clarity of objectives, you know. But we didn't study much repertoire, to be completely honest.

FL: I was just going to ask. Uh-huh.

DA: Not much. I mean, we emphasized, you know...I remember Beethoven First [Symphony no. 1 in C Major, op. 21] for weeks, and I remember Brahms First [Symphony 1 in C Minor, op. 68] for weeks. I remember *Oberon* [by Carl Maria von Weber]—it was difficult because he was, along with his wife in this town, in a very rich part of Buenos Aires. I had to travel three and a half hours to get to his place.

FL: Wow. So how often did you—?

DA: Once a week on Mondays, the only free day in the theater.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: He never charged me a single dime.

FL: My.

DA: I never understood why, and he said to me, I remember, that I had such a big talent for him that he would never charge me. So I would sometimes bring some little present. The truth is, at that point I was still—even though I was professional already, I didn't have much money. [laughs]



FL: Mm-hm.

DA: So it took me a lot of sacrifice to get there, and I didn't have money for his course. I was telling my son yesterday that he has to remember that my father went with two baggages from Italy to Argentina, and I came to this country with two and two scores.

FL: Wow.

DA: You know, I have about five hundred scores now, but I had two when I first came here because I didn't have the money!

FL: Yeah.

DA: Beethoven and Bach. Brandenburg [Concertos], and it was a Dover [Publication]. When the Dover started it was my salvation because Dover for me was the only ways I could get scores.

FL: Right.

DA: Otherwise, I didn't have the money. It was a sacrifice every time that I had to buy piano pieces.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: With Ricordi Argentina, which was a bad publisher, you know. My Chopin etudes, for instance, you know, or Beethoven sonatas. Ricordi with terrible fingering, you know, bad slurs. But I didn't have any other thing—

FL: Right.

DA: —I mean, I couldn't—you have no idea. When I went to Brazil, the first time I left I was twenty-one. By then I already—the only thing that I was looking for was contemporary music. Anywhere! You know, under a table, anywhere—

FL: Right.

DA: —that where, you know—then I went to São Paulo by bus, two—one thousand miles, and when I heard that there was this big library, municipal library, I went there— running from the bus station. And I found [Paul] Hindemith's solo sonata, violin solo. I was already studying violin again—or [Alban] Berg [1885–1935], the Opus 4 [5 *Orchesterlieder nach Ansichtskartentexten von Peter Altenberg*, op.4], you know, and then I saw a couple of pieces by [Karlheinz] Stockhausen and I went bananas! For me it was something that, for you guys, would have been easy.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: But it's not the same thing in different continents. You know, sometimes there are things that are not as automatic as you might think. I mean, I remember making copies of Alban Berg Opus 1 [Piano Sonata, op. 1 (1907/8), by Alban Berg] when I was thirteen. There was one score I could find in the library. The only thing I could do was take it, go to the copy shop and make copies and—because one score was half part of my father's salary.

FL: Yeah.

DA: My father, I told you, was a carpenter, but he quit—he quit that when I was born. He was a truck driver because it didn't give money—

FL: Uh-huh.

DA: —being a carpenter. So my father would take me in his truck, and we would talk about everything. So, being a truck driver, getting you Alban Berg Opus 1, no! No. Forget it. I mean, no. Getting the Stockhausen Universal edition—I saw the first Universal edition when I went to the library and I saw the Alban Berg, but it was the first and last one. Then, after two years, I saw Weber. So, they were so pricey that no one could buy them. No one! Not even the library. So, that was actually the situation.

FL: Wow. Now, when you went to Sao Paolo, how long were you there? Did you—were you studying there, or what brought you there? You just went—?

DA: No. Vacation.

FL: Yeah.

DA: It was—I was—I don't remember; I was nineteen or twenty-one. Nineteen. Nineteen. No, it was vacation, but I—and I went with a group of friends. We didn't know where we were going. Finally, we ended up, I don't know, in Rio or something. And we ended up there by chance and, as I said to you, you know, they were crazy because they were just wanting to go to the beach [laughs] and I went to the library—

FL: That's great. [laughs]

DA: —to see the stupid scores! I mean, I couldn't believe when I saw some and so—ah!—the first time that I saw—I made copies of [Luciano] Berio's was a piece for piano. [Five] *Variations. Variazione* [*Cinque Variaziones*, (1952/3, 1966)].

FL: Uh-huh.

DA: I made copies there. I mean, imagine that! After so many years, I still remember the first time that I saw some pieces, and I still remember me going like crazy because I was able to make copies!

FL: Yeah.

DA: I mean, this is when I [unclear] for the copyright, but that's the truth.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: The truth is, [if] you didn't do it, you could starve.

FL: That's right.

DA: Musically speaking, because there was no other way!

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: Anyway.

FL: And you studied oboe and percussion. Was that at the conservatory?

DA: Yeah, yeah. Oboe was there. Percussion was in—I started in the States.

FL: Uh-huh.

DA: Oboe I did with the principal oboist of the orchestra that I'm conducting now, who retired; obviously, he retired. And he's the father of the second flute [flutist]. [laughs] But, anyway, it's funny.

FL: Right.

DA: But percussion, no. Percussion I did as a secondary instrument at Yale—

FL: Uh-huh.

DA: —with a couple of very nice peers. They taught me. Great, you know. Great percussion players.

#### **4. Undergraduate education (1:05:34–CD2 26:55)**

FL: So, when you were—and it sounds like when you were a teenager, you already had the idea that you might want to be a conductor—so you were learning some of these other instruments to give you some background with that, right?

DA: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

FL: Yeah.

DA: Absolutely.

FL: So, where did you do your undergraduate education?

DA: I finished high school when I was sixteen, one or two years earlier, because terribly young. By then, you would have to choose a career, because in Argentina we follow the model of France and Italy. They were the two models in Argentina.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: So the—so, actually, you choose to be an architect when you are eighteen. It has its very bad things; it has some nice things. Among other things, when you come with certain amount of education to this country, generally speaking, when you go and you confront yourself with the masters, you see that other people who devoted their four years in liberal arts, they have a very well grounded, beautiful general education—much more than you, maybe. Maybe. You never know. But in the concrete knowledge of a given career, by definition, they can't. I—I had to confront the first difficulty in my life, because I had a conflict when I was fifteen in the conservatory. I almost quit. Oh, you have to—

FL: No, nope.

DA: I almost quit music for some problem that I had when I was fifteen. So, I wasn't completely sure about keeping with music. My father did want me to keep playing, but he was very contradictory two years after when I had to choose career because no one would ever think that I could be a musician as a career. Truck driver, housewife—they would love music, but, hey, get real. That, combined with my demonstrated—at least that's what my teacher said—

talent for mathematics, made me think that the only way is to do math and maybe do parallel—finish the conservatory and keep, you know, start prep [for] a real profession.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: At that point there was a dirty, dirty war in Argentina [Dirty War, 1976–1983].

FL: Oh, yes.

DA: So it was a difficult time for many reasons. They re-installed the examination to enter into the university, which is fine. It's great, it's okay, and it was a difficult test, but I passed it. So I was accepted, and I started math in La Plata. My honest wish was to do a doctorate in pure math—pure mathematics.

FL: Was this a college or a university in La Plata?

DA: University.

FL: What's it called?

DA: [National] University of La Plata [est. 1897].

FL: Okay.

DA: So, as you might understand, I didn't—for instance, in the university, aside from English—there was nothing, nothing of history, geography or anything. It was all math.

FL: Oh!

DA: So, plus, I was one or two years younger than anyone, so my math skills were very, very developed in the following three years, until I was twenty, but I never left music. And the combination of factors, for some reason, is that the very first year that I started with math, I got my first professional job as a musician. Then, I got a second job. Then I did two of them. Then, I started my third instrument. So little by little—then I started doing a lot of chamber music with everyone. I was playing every day, every evening. What I was supposed to do in two—in one year, I did in two, and you know, I was postponing things. I used my talent for math, but the thing is, to put it bluntly, it was getting boring.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: Boring to the extent that I knew that I had the skills, but I didn't have the interest. At the same time, music was taking off, you know. My second job—all of a sudden, I...I'm...I was chosen. They gave me a contract for being the harpsichord and piano player of the best orchestra—chamber orchestra—in the country. So then I thought, gee, I mean—besides that, for all my father's arguments, I was earning more money when I was eighteen than him when he was my age now.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: Plus, I was invited to teach music in high school when I was seventeen. So the security wasn't fantastic, but I was doing the music as a second job—as a second thing, because in the morning I was in the university.

FL: Right, right.

DA: In the afternoon, too. Two days a week, I went to the orchestra but in the evening was playing piano. And, when I'm finished playing or viola or anything, I had to go study math. And, again, you know, it was a crazy life. And, I didn't quit composing. So all these combination of factors got me to kind of like completely stressful, twenty years old, and I went—you know, my health went bankrupt. I collapsed when I was twenty. November, I remember. Nineteen or—no, twenty. Because I couldn't handle it anymore. I was playing in that orchestra, composing, attending the university, studying viola, and writing texts, you know. So I collapsed, ended up being...quitting math and composition.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: So I took a path that I thought many years after—and I'm trying to solve these things now with therapy, among other things, and with composing—and in spite of neglecting, apparently, neglecting my father's mandatory, willful wish—his idea of getting something for real—I became a musician, but in the most rational way.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: I developed my piano skills. I developed my ears. I developed my viola [and] violin playing. I took the oboe, and I put as a goal: I will be a conductor.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: I will be what I wanted to be when I was thirteen, but I cut my legs and my arms and my fingers for creating anything. I...I refused to—I didn't acknowledge anymore my creative part of my personality. I never again tried to compose, and I—because I was going crazy. Because in the middle of that nightmarish times in which I had to do one zillion things at the same time, when I composed, I would spend hours and hours by myself, locked in my room. And I thought that I was going crazy. Plus Henry Miller [1891–1980].

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: Plus Bertrand Russell [1872–1970, philosopher].

FL: [Sighs] Yes.

DA: So, it's—plus the then unknown [Gabriel] García Márquez [b. 1927].

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: Plus Dante [Alighieri, 1265–1321]. You know, plus all the piles of cassettes of contemporary music. My complete—completely crazy I-don't-know-where-to-go technique, you know, because I got to kind of like a [Alban] Bergian or [Pierre] Boulez, sort of, but then I didn't know what—I didn't—I didn't know how to follow. [Arnold] Schoenberg killed me.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: It's not that Schoenberg was dead. Killed me. Or—and after my dodecaphonic viola piano sonata and the—I also did a triple concerto for—it's all dodecaphonic, for violin, cello and piano and orchestra—

FL: Right.

DA: —then I didn't know what to do. I was—I thought I was going crazy. I thought that I was literally losing the reasoning capacity.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: I couldn't handle anything in spite of being successful in the music world in that small town. I didn't know how would I make it as a musician, and I couldn't stand math anymore. I never lost a love for math, but not—I didn't want, and I will never in the next years of my life, feel trapped in that kind of, “You have to study math” [way].

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: I have many books of math and I still read a lot, but just as a kind of like little parcels, little you know.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: So, I think that that decision created everything that you saw until a year ago, two years ago. I mean, from the forty-second year of my life—

FL: Right.

DA: —and the last two, three, four—it's like I'm... kind of like I'm going back to same roads.

FL: So the—many composers have talked about the oppression of twelve-tone technique and serialism. Was that something that was more kind of self-imposed on you because you saw this stuff, or was there anybody who was kind of pushing that on you?

DA: I think that academia did it to all of us.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: To some extent, in many countries.

FL: Yes.

DA: I think in Europe, it was very clear. In South America, with the Italian thing also, but see, I think... I think it is a combination. It's a phenomenal propaganda that, you know. It's like going Darwinistic.

FL: Right.

DA: Going [Charles] Darwin—it's the evolution theory. It's something that is related—is evidently related to, you know—“This music is dead, this is alive, and this is the path.”

FL: Right.

DA: One, I think I didn't realize that then, but the only—the biggest trouble—the biggest force in the world to counteract that was here.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: And we didn't realize that. Because in our conservatory thing, at least in Argentina, being a very European country in South America, we followed the path of France, Italy—the avant-garde, you know?

FL: Right. There was an Argentine composer-theorist, Juan Carlos Paz [1901–1972], was he—?

DA: Oh, yeah. Paz.

FL: Was he influential that way?

DA: Oh, man! Juan Carlos Paz was exactly one of the most influential books I read in my teenager years. He did a wonderful, wonder—I have the book here—wonderful book. I don't know if it was translated here in English. It—quotations, comments on concerts and ideas, but the guy was such a very strong advocate for what he thought avant-garde was.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: He did acknowledge, for instance, this crazy [Charles] Ives as a major force. At the same time, everything that was not under the rules of [Arnold] Schoenberg, [Anton] Webern, [Pierre] Boulez, was completely out. He did a phenomenal book of—it's called *Introduction to Our Times' Music* [*Introducción a la música de nuestro tiempo*, by Juan Carlos Paz, 1971], in Spanish—was the other, with [Joseph] Machlis and with the [Igor] Stravinsky—I mean, I read many books, you know. My source was reading books and reading, so I learned names before I heard their music.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: I learned every single detail known in Spanish and Italian of [Charles] Ives before I heard two pieces.

FL: Wow.

DA: Then I heard the pieces.

FL: Had you read the *Essays Before a Sonata* [by Charles Ives, The Knickerbocker Press, 1920].

DA: Of course. I bought it when I was seventeen.

FL: Yeah. Wow.

DA: Yeah, yeah. Of course.

FL: Well, the next interview, we'll get into Ives more.

DA: Mm-hm.

FL: When did you start playing tango, and how did that come about?

DA: Oh, that was crazy. I was eighteen. I didn't like tango at all. I was getting famous in the little town I was born. There was a weird guy, three hundred pounds—three hundred-something, probably—who used to live near a church I used to go. And I always saw him in his porch. I learned after years that the guy knew seven languages, and he was teaching the math teachers of the university—my teachers. He never earned any degree anywhere. Anywhere. And he was hired to teach chemistry in one university, math in another one—I mean, it was like [he was] kind of a genius. They won't talk about him in town. He sent an emissary to me. He sent someone to talk to me because he knew that I was playing viola, but he knew that my main instrument was piano, and I was a composer, and then he learned that I was studying math, so all his loves. I went to this rehearsal, and by then I had played the viola for one year, but as I told you, I learned things so quickly that by my second year I was

able to play fourth, fifth position, you know, things that people normally do in many years. But I was already all of seventeen, eighteen, you know.

FL: So, what was this man's name?

DA: Iriarte. I-R-I-A-R-T-E. The fat Iriarte we said in—yeah, El Gordo. [Editor's note: No information available on Mr. Iriarte.]

FL: [laughs] So what were his instruments?

DA: Piano. Man, he played—he knew—you name it. By the seventies, he knew all the contemporary music written in Europe and the States. He would talk about these subjects when I was a teenager, and this guy playing piano and doing weird arrangements of [Ástor] Piazzolla, whom he considered the biggest genius in Argentina. And he was the only one, because Piazzolla was not loved. I mean, he was hated by most tango players. This [was the] only guy [who] said that he [Piazzolla]—he [Iriarte] did his arrangements of Piazzolla and other pieces in the manner of Piazzolla, and he [Iriarte] always said the only real musician of all this tango style—remember!—[that] is going to be remembered [is] Piazzolla. Just remember—thirty years from now. It happened.

He invited me to play in his orchestra as a viola player, and it was a weird ensemble because it was kind of modern tango, in which he would do arrangements starting with—I remember some of the tangos starting with weird church modes. Bananas.

FL: Yeah.

DA: Or Stravinskian rhythms that would cross with Boulez effects and, then, the tango would start. I mean, completely—I didn't do the traditional tango myself.

FL: I see.

DA: I started with that weirdo.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: And then the guy got sick. And he knew that I was a pianist, professional already, you know, in big orchestra, so he asked me from his bed that I should take over his position. [laughs] So I played some rehearsals and a concert, but I never—I finally left, because I wanted—as I said, I studied all those things altogether at seventeen, eighteen: math, you know, composition seriously, jobs as a harpsichord player, you know, all the Bach that you can name. All these concerti. All the whole ball together was a big thing that I—bigger than I could handle. Then, at age twenty, I cut everything. I did this, you know, with the—that you do with the branches in a tree.

FL: Yeah.

DA: I said, okay, I have to go like this. I cut. And tango. I mean, I didn't tell you. I was in a rock band.

FL: No!

DA: I was in a rock band when I was seventeen.

FL: And you played keyboards?



DA: I played keyboards, and my style—they liked my style of improvisation because then, I always improvised. I cut improvisation when I was twenty.

FL: Wow.

DA: I'm starting improvising now two years ago, again. For twenty-two years, I never improvised again.

FL: Wow.

DA: Only a couple of times when I went—I learned jazz, and I played as a jazz player for my living in New Haven [Conn.]. So I always had the capacity, but I was always kind of like inside. I never wanted to open that. And I decided two years ago that I will open it for the rest of my life. Period. No matter what. But then they heard me improvising, so they asked me to play in this rock band because I—[thought unfinished]. They talked about names that I never heard in my life—Chick Corea [b. 1941], Keith Jarrett [b. 1945]. I didn't know what they were, who they were, what they play, and what they played. I never heard anything. So then, I remember that we were recording with the rock band some things. I finished. They passed me—they played back the recording and said, "Okay, listen to this one. It was similar to what Keith Jarrett used to do."

FL: Uh-huh.

DA: So I said, "Who is this guy?" Man, I didn't know anything. I was completely ignorant. I don't care about this being published. I was an ignorant! In many aspects of musical life, I was a clear son of an immigrant truck driver.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: The counterpart is that there were many other things that people learn when they are very old that I learned when I was very small, but this completely unbalanced: rock, tango, classical music, contemporary music, baroque played every single week, all these [Arcangelo] Corelli [1653–1713] Concerti Grossi, every single piece of Bach. You know, the complete opposite constantly. They...they—it was like bouncing your head against all this knowledge, all together, that served me a lot, until now, but also was a kind of energy drain.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: You know?

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: But, that's the truth about my last adolescent years.

FL: So, did you go on to do a bachelor's degree in music in Argentina?

DA: No.

FL: No.

DA: What I did was I went to the university where my teacher used to teach. I quit math. I finished a second year of the university, kind of. You have time?

FL: Well, we've got—

DA: Oh. We're okay.

FL: Yeah. I was watching the—make sure the machine is still going.

DA: Yeah. I have like ten minutes.

FL: Okay.

DA: I went to the university to study orchestral conducting because there was a degree. When I quit math, I was nineteen or twenty, and I took the examination, the test, to go to this university because I wanted to do this degree. But when I went for the test, I found out that the teachers knew a lot less than me, and I was free—it was one of the first violent things that I really felt in my life. I couldn't believe that. I was—I mean, I had to study so much, it was so many styles by then, and I knew so many things about practical music-making, chamber music, you know, that I couldn't believe that these guys—I passed eight examinations that normally people do in two years in a month. But then when I finished and I said, I'm going to—am I going to stay here with these deaf ignorants—I'm sorry, I was always ignorant and I am, I said, but I'm leaving.

FL: Yeah.

DA: In that place, I met Osvaldo Golijov [b. 1960].

FL: And this was the University of La Plata, right?

DA: Yup.

FL: Yeah. Uh-huh.

DA: So I never had from this—that school a degree. What they did when I came to the States is my degree, as in the conservatory, was of such a high level—

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: —how can I explain? Besides the subjects that I told you, we studied pedagogy, we studied theory of education, we studied counterpoint for years, I mean like anything in the musical matter that you can think of. There was one thing that was called, the translation would be "Analysis." Four years of analysis, of pieces from medieval times to—the last one was this guy, the Polish composer.

FL: [Krzysztof] Penderecki [b. 1933]?

DA: Penderecki.

FL: Yeah.

DA: So, they made equivalent of the degree between my studies at the conservatory and my three years at math.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: And so that's why they usually define my undergraduate degree as math plus piano plus whatever, because there was no college then, there. So, when I came here to do the test for starting at Yale in the master's degree, before I came I sent all the paperwork for all the classes that I passed in the university, and all the classes that I passed in the conservatory.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: None of them was in the music school at the university. In spite of the fact that I passed eight classes in one month.

FL: Yeah.

DA: But it didn't make sense for us. It didn't. Because I mean, there were—I mean, you should have seen the...my exam in harmony. I mean, I could—by age nineteen, I could harmonize, I mean, in the late Strauss style. They were asking me for some background and I had that when I was eleven. And that was one class.

FL: Yeah.

DA: I mean, then I thought, this is not serious. Of course, I have the knowledge; Osvaldo told me, “Hey, man, you have been doing music since your first breath.”

FL: Right.

DA: I mean, I studied music when Osvaldo was not playing instruments. I had already been in fifth year playing Chopin etudes.

FL: Right.

DA: Osvaldo had a phenomenal talent for composition anyway. So he stayed there and then he went to Israel, but I quit and I didn't know where to go.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: So I did the second part of [Hermann] Scherchen [1891–1966]. I did all these instruments and now I have to become a choral conductor. Another life, yeah?

FL: Uh-huh.

DA: And I, by chance, was called because my sister was in a very important chorus and [the] conductor needed an assistant.

FL: So, which chorus was this?

DA: The university [National University of La Plata] chorus.

FL: Uh-huh.

DA: So, I became assistant to the university chorus when I was twenty-one. And then I was thinking, yes, everything is step-by-step, and not achieving everything. When I finish doing this, I will start conducting.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: So that's how the trend went.

FL: So, is this a place to stop or do you have some more time?

DA: Maybe better to stop—

FL: Okay.

DA: —because I have to leave. I have to arrange some things.

FL: Okay.

DA: But I hope it was interesting.

FL: This is very good.

DA: [laughs]

FL: So next time, we'll continue with your work at Yale, and then your time here at MIT, and then talking about contemporary music and Ives. I want to ask you about Evan Ziporyn [MIT Kenan Sahin Professor of Music] and John Harbison [MIT Institute Professor of Music].

DA: Mm.

FL: And then discussion about musical performance in higher education.

DA: Uh-huh. Yeah, yeah.

FL: Okay, and kind of what that means, and some of the challenges of that.

DA: Yeah, yeah.

FL: Okay?

DA: Great. It's good.

FL: So there'll be a lot to talk about next time, but we'll do our best.

DA: Okay.

FL: So thank you so much!

DA: No, thank you. Thank you. That's very nice.

[End of Interview]