

Music at MIT Oral History Project

Dante Anzolini

Interviewed

by

Forrest Larson

March 21, 2006

Interview no. 3

**Massachusetts Institute of Technology
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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, and again in November 2011, 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 21, 2006, in the MIT Lewis Music Library. Duration of the audio recording is 00:55:25. Third of four interviews. Other interviews: March 28, 2005; November 2, 2005, 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. Education at Yale University (00:20)

FORREST LARSON: It's my honor and privilege to have Dante Anzolini back for another interview. He's Associate Professor of Music at MIT, Conductor of the MIT Symphony and Chamber Orchestras. It's March 21st, 2006. Thank you, Dante, for coming.

DANTE ANZOLINI: You're welcome.

FL: In the last interview, we were talking about Jacob Druckman [1928–1996] and your work with him when you were a graduate student at Yale. And I just want to resume where we left off there. Tell me something about some of the repertoire that you did with the Yale Contemporary Music Ensemble when you were his assistant conductor.

DA: Yeah, yeah. Generally speaking, I remember I started with him my first year there, in 1987, preparing pieces by student composers, because he would...he would divide programs into student pieces and some of the most known 20th century small pieces. There were usually small ensembles but it was variable. It would be from a piano piece to a quartet to a big ensemble, like, you know, thirty people. I even conducted one opera by—what was his name—Martin Bresnick [b. 1946].

FL: Oh, really?

DA: Yeah, yeah.

FL: Wow.

DA: It was a—kind of like a cartoon “dash” singing-with-acting “dash” pit orchestra, ensemble “dash”... I mean, one zillion things in Yiddish-English and—Yiddish-English—It was something about the train that took... A piece about the concentration camps.

FL: Oh. Wow.

DA: You know, that was among the things that I used to do. I mean, in the New Music New Haven series is how I got to know John Harbison [b. 1938; MIT Institute Professor of Music].

FL: Oh. It was that far back. Wow.

DA: Yeah. I mean, that's probably the first link, historically, that I had with MIT.

FL: Uh-huh.

DA: And it was a very funny situation. And Jacob Druckman, as I said to you in an e-mail, one of his pieces was probably the thing that triggered my whole career in Europe.

FL: So, do you want to tell me about that?

DA: Oh, yeah, it would be...it would probably interesting. Well, anyway, following with a...answering your...trying to answer your question—

FL: Yes, right.

DA: —I did pieces, I remember, pieces by Ezra Laderman [b. 1924; Dean at the Yale School of Music, 1989–1995]—

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: —who is now in the faculty and, generally speaking, piece—you know, like known [Igor] Stravinskys [1882–1971], you know, known... a couple of—I remember now, yes! We had *Ionisation* [by Edgard Varèse; 1883–1965]]. We have—we had some other piece by Varèse. We had—not [Charles] Ives [1874–1954]. And Gunther Schuller [b. 1925], —

FL: Oh.

DA: —to give an example. I prepared for Gunther Schuller his piece for brass and piano, a symphony for brass and percussion, all pieces that I would prepare, and then when the guests would come to New Haven, I would give them the baton. I mean, that was a beautiful—that was really great. They learned about me and my interest because I mentioned to a—I mean, I use—generally speaking, I'm a good friend of composer wherever I go, usually. Composers, I—there are some people I have some empathy, I mean, librarians, composers. [laughs]

FL: Mm-hm. [laughs]

DA: I mean, this is the truth. It always happens everywhere.

FL: Yeah.

DA: You know, it's very funny. So I mentioned that I was a composer myself but I quit—I had quit, and then—and then a couple of composers showed me their pieces, and they saw my interest on just simply helping them, because I like doing new music. I always loved—you know. So, I remember that there was one or two sessions a year for the whole orchestra in which either Jacob [Druckman] or Martin [Bresnick] would conduct. But then, all of a sudden I was starting conducting and I ended up doing probably most of the sessions. It was like a panel of the composition faculty, and I would rehearse with a certain amount of time and then, you know, doing a couple of run-throughs of the pieces. That way, it started Marco Beltrami [b. 1966]. Marco Beltrami, who is a known Hollywood composer now—he did a lot of music. I saw a movie where he did the music, I mean lately. I mean, it was one of the latest movies. He usually does the horror movies [laughs] or something.

FL: [laughs]

DA: Marco—Marco always wanted to become a Hollywood composer and I remember I conducted one of—*La Città Decadente*, *The Decadent City*.

FL: Uh-huh.

DA: And that was his first orchestra piece, and you can see some of the style in his movies. Oh, he now is a rich guy living in Hollywood and—and things like Carlos Sanchez Gutiérrez [b. 1964]. Carlos—

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: I met him at Yale and I—the fir—one of the first things I did was reading one of his pieces and then when he prepared this piece called *Sequencia* (Sequence), for thirteen instruments; that was the first piece I conducted with him. And it was in New Music New Haven, the series where Jacob and Martin were running the show.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: Jacob was—I mean, I’m saying “Jacob” now, but I, you know, I have this kind of like South American-European way of, you know. It was hard for me to say Ja—I mean, I never see any situation—I don’t remember, you know, yeah, I would always say, “Mr. Druckman.”

FL: Right.

DA: Jacob is now after he passed away. But he was a great guy. He was a very polite, cautious, nice, warm guy to all students. He had a phenomenal knowledge of orchestra colors, and really something that you can say—that he had this palette. I mean, he knew how to do things and he had this phenomenal skill. I mean—and then a nice, a very nice ear for harmonies, although never advanced as, you know, not cutting edge or anything, but really someone who you would easily hear that he was a good thinker in harmony. I mean, someone who knew how to do and can create tension—

FL: Yeah.

DA: —and really fine, precise ear for like changing little things and all this and then bursting into something new.

FL: In a way that’s not—it’s not academic. I mean, it’s very—

DA: No.

FL: I mean, yeah.

DA: Very original, to some extent—

FL: Yeah, yeah.

DA: —and very daring, and at the same time rooted in the—somehow in some—[Charles] Ives—Ives-Ravel [Maurice Ravel, 1875-1937] strata.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: I mean, if I can mention something that comes to my brain. Well, the funny thing is in my like fourth year at Yale, Jacob called me one—he will always call me—sometimes we will have a rehearsal on Monday—I told you this story. You know, sometimes he told me, he said, “I cannot conduct tomorrow.” I said, “I don’t have the score.” “Well, you can get it tomorrow morning and you can—” He had a lot of confidence in my skills, but I sometimes I would go crazy, you know, overnight preparing things.

But that was a good preparation in terms of my...you know, what was coming after that. I mean, to make the story short, one day he calls me and said, “There’s this guy coming; a great composer is coming in town. He’s... You can prepare as usual the ensemble piece.” It was some—it was one of his—his name is John Harbison. I didn’t even know the guy. I mean, as many number—names that, you know, sometimes I read in the books but I never met them. I said, “Well, yeah, Jacob, I heard about him but I don’t—” “Well, this is the music of such and such and such.” I think that it was his famous alto cycle songs [Editor’s note: likely *Autumnal* for alto and piano].

FL: Oh, which one is that?

DA: Well, I don't remember now, but it was a small ensemble. I prepared it. But the day after, he called me again and he said, "Look, there is something going on. I mean, John Harbison wants to get these pieces played by a pianist. No one wants to play them." I said, "What are the pieces? Well, you know, I mean, maybe... What is the deadline?" "Well, he's coming in three days. You know that." "What?" I said, "Okay. Given me the pieces. If I like them I can practice them." "Well, we have no other option," he said, "otherwise, I have to cancel him." And I was known because I would play piano in the orchestra, besides doing all, you know, conducting, piano—

FL: Yeah.

DA: —and conducting [unclear—contemporaries?], I would do all those things. It was a nice—I mean, I was basically the only conductor who would do all those things and I wanted to take care of the opportunity. I never thought I had the opportunity of being in such a big place.

FL: Yeah.

DA: You know, and getting to know these people, playing with them, playing for them. So, you know, I wouldn't sleep, but—

FL: [laughs]

DA: So, I took the piece—there were "Four Occasional Pieces" [(1978) by J. Harbison] it was called. Four or five. They were hard, but I didn't sleep that night. I mean, I went to the practice room and, you know, I think I went to sleep about three or four. I had like forty-eight hours. Studied like crazy. The second day he comes; I met him before noon. They gave me the keys for the big hall, at the piano there, started playing. He liked them. I mean, he like my way of playing it. "Okay, thanks," he said. I tried to do them, look, it's only forty-eight hours. He was pretty happy. I didn't know him at all.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: That evening I played the pieces and I think I played well. I think I—I mean, very seldom I'm happy with my playing, but that evening I played well. And he was so happy, he gave me a hug! I mean, he opened like, you know, this kind of like big embrace, like—

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: I was nervous. Well, I couldn't believe that the guy liked the pieces—I mean my playing.

FL: Yeah.

DA: The pieces were nice. The last one was a tango.

FL: [laughs]

DA: It was such an incredible coincidence, and I liked the tango. Was it—was it obviously a non-academic tango, but it was his way of—

FL: Yeah.

DA: —and it was, now that I know his music very well, you know, it was something that he didn't try. I didn't—no, it was very original and very nice—still the rhythm was there, but it wasn't a tango, but it was a tango. It was a beautiful piece.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: I like also the second piece, I remember. The second piece was very nice. Anyway. After the concert, Jacob comes and Jacob says, "Look, as you know, the composer goes to this bar. You want to come? You want to join us?" I would never go to those places.

FL: Yeah.

DA: Generally speaking, I would be with my friends having a beer in the bar by—Naples, it was called, in Yale. But at a certain point, one of my best friends, probably my best friend, girl, I ever had in my life—she was like my sister. She passed away some years ago. She said, "You should go there." I mean, she was always advising me because I was such a dumb-head when it comes to getting to know people, and you know, and exploring these relationships with them in a way that, you know. I said, "Okay. I will go." So, like at twelve o'clock, I was—already it was already late, but I went there and the comp—all the composers—all student composers knew me, and Jacob loved me in his own way.

FL: Mm-hm.

2. Studies at Tanglewood Summer Festival (14:11)

DA: And I sat, and John [Harbison] was in front of me and he said to me, "I hear you are a conductor." "Well, yeah. In fact, I prepared your piece. I didn't give you the baton. I wasn't there at the first rehearsal, but I prepared your piece." "Oh! You did. Great! So, you know that I am in Tanglewood [Lenox and Stockbridge, Mass.] this year." I said, "Yes." "And I heard that you are accepted." I said, "Yes, I am accepted but I am not accepted to the fellowship there." "No, no, no, but you are going." "Yeah." I said, "I'm not sure, but I think I'm—" "When you come in, when you come to Tanglewood, you look for me."

Some months after, I went to Tanglewood and the first lessons—I think I told you. I don't know if we talked about it in these interviews?

FL: No.

DA: I didn't like it at all. I didn't like neither my teachers, nor the situation, nor even—you know, being in that second level without—because I was accepted at Tanglewood, but they never gave me the opportunity to take the exam, the test here—

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: —so they could send me to either way. So they defined, by themselves, that I was second level. After six years in a row of applying, they never accepted me to take the test in Boston.

FL: Hm.

DA: And the first time they accepted me, it was without test, but I [unclear] to the second level. So, my guess was I wouldn't—not come back at all. I didn't have any money. In the second level, they wouldn't give you much of a scholarship. The first—the first classes wasn't—you know, the first lessons were bad. I didn't like it at all.

FL: Was this like formal classroom classes? Yeah?

DA: Yeah, yeah, conducting, you know, with the piano, with some quartets, with all this.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: There were two Fellows, and the rest of us were all second-level auditors or something.

FL: Mm-hm. Who were some of the teachers?

DA: Gustav Meier [no dates found]. Seiji Ozawa [b. 1935]. And then the guest conductors, I recall, [John] Nelson [b. 1941]—the American conductor in Europe. But this is a funny thing, how it became my career. I—ah, yeah, the pianist—he was also teaching conducting—Leon Fleischer [b. 1928].

FL: Oh. Uh-huh.

DA: So, I didn't like it there at all. I loved the place. I loved the energy. The orchestra was quite okay, but that was one of—no one, somewhere there, so I—I was ready to leave. I didn't have money. I didn't have a—I mean, I was eating whatever, you know, in the morning, in the afternoon and sometimes, you know, they have some—couple of dollars to eat a sandwich or something, inventing something because the place was expensive. I didn't—they did give me a dorm, but the dorm paradoxically—I was the only guy in a dorm five miles or seven miles from the *known* Tanglewood.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: They had two places but the—and the one place was for the poor people and the other place was for everyone else. So there was a singer for the first two days. Then he left. But then I was the only one, sleeping by myself in this weird dorm. So taking my old car—I had a Subaru, very old, a disaster—but I had all my... I took some scores from the dorm in Yale, some clothes, a couple of pictures of my family, and that was all I had. And I started to just not eating well, you know, studying like crazy, every day. Then I—after the first week, I called one of my best friends then, who had big chances at Tanglewood, and that very summer he was going to have the best—the biggest chance of his life. And this guy said to me, "You have to stay." And I said, "No! You were a Fellow. I'm not a Fellow. I have nothing to do here. I mean, I'm not conducting. I'm not doing anything and I'm not learning anything. I don't respect these people. I don't like them; I don't think that they're doing a good job and I just hate the situation. I don't care." He said, "If you are leaving, you are an idiot." He said to me, "You cannot—you should not leave. You will see that you will meet people there. I mean, something will happen, and I'm telling you, at least you have to survive. Go and talk to Richard Ortner [President of the Boston Conservatory]. Tell him that you cannot eat. Maybe they will give you some money so you can eat at least in the mornings." But, I said, "You know that I'm in this weird dorm where no one is." "Yeah, I know, I know. You will survive." This friend was Osvaldo Golijov [b. 1960].

FL: Uh-huh.

DA: The same guy that was pushing me to come to this country.

FL: Right.

DA: And the same guy that again helped me. Next day, I went to talk to Richard [Ortner] and they gave me breakfast, free breakfast for the whole—. I said, "Richard, I'm leaving. I have no

clue how to survive—I mean, I don't have money. That's the truth, and I'm not—I'm in the second level. I'm very thankful to you and to the festival to allow me to be here but—" I didn't want to say anything about the—how I didn't like the teaching or anything. That afternoon, I went to see John Harbison, and he remembered me and said, "Okay, you take this score. You study it. You come back tomorrow and I take you a test." So I went home, studied like crazy, came back next day. He was waiting for me in one of those—how do you say that? Stables, dorms—no, one of those houses that they have—wooden houses with a piano. I don't remember the word.

FL: I don't know what—yeah.

DA: It was one of those houses with a piano, so he said, "You conduct. I play," he said. And he started to say, "No, no, no, no. That's a B flat, the first chord." He looked at me, "No, no. You are reading a—" I think that he was reading clarinet in B [flat] and it was in C or—the other way around. Then he looked at me, he played again a couple of things. Three or four measures, I conducted 5/8, 5/8, 7/8, or whatever. "You pass," he said to me. It was the shortest—

FL: So, what was the piece?

DA: The piece was by a composer—student composer—it was a fellow composer then, and now they told me that he lives in Boston. His surname is Horne. David Horne [b. 1970].

FL: Hm. I'm not familiar with him. Yeah.

DA: He was working at Harvard.

FL: Uh-huh.

DA: But he was an English [Editor's note: Scottish] guy. Then he was very young. He was like twenty-three. I was already twenty-nine or something. So John said, "You are conducting this piece." "Conducting?" "Yeah. You have to prepare this piece. You have to conduct the ensemble." "I'm conducting this?" "Yes! You are. It's my power to give you this because I am the chief for the contemporary music week. You will conduct it. If you conduct well, we can give you something else." So I started preparing the piece, and I found some mistakes in the writing. And I told the composer and the composer was looking at me like crazy. "Yeah. I analyzed your piece and I think that you—" There were some rows, you know? It mean, it wasn't dodecaphonic.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: It was much freer than that part that was [unclear], and he was looking at me, and he went to tell John. And John came back and said, "Well, they are very happy about you and the players, too." So, they were all Fellows; I was a second level. I mean, even the players were having, you know, free tuition, free everything and—but by then I was meeting people because they saw this new guy who was living in—who *lived* in the other dorm but who was coming in the break—you know, for breakfast.

FL: Yeah.

DA: So I was eating like a human being. It was good. I conducted a piece and it went so well he said, “Okay, now,” John said, “You did a very good job. You have to conduct this [Luigi] Dallapiccola [1904–1975].”

FL: Wow.

DA: Great piece by Dallapiccola, with a singer. “You have to prepare it.” And I started rehearsing. He came to one rehearsal and said, “Would you like to be assistant conductor to this guy who comes—conduct entire new-music week? I don’t know him, you know. His name is Dennis Russell Davies [b. 1944].” I said, “I heard the name but I don’t know.” “Well, I’ll introduce you to him.” The first rehearsal, I shook hands with this guy, who became one of my best friends in music. And I sat through his rehearsal, and I discovered—I studied the pieces, obviously, you know? And I discovered that he was making a couple of mistakes in the beating. So in the—I mean, the guy is phenomenal. He’s great. That I discovered something is because simply I studied like crazy and, you know, everyone is a human being. But I went to see him. I mean, I didn’t know what to do. I thought about it but I said, no, I’m the assistant. I have to help him. So, I went there and I said, “Maestro,” the second day, “I think *da-ta-ta-ta-ta*”—explained, you know, something of the meters. He looked at me kind of funny; looked at the score—

FL: [laughs]

DA: —and he wasn’t sure. I mean, it wasn’t a nice, friendly face.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: That evening, I called Osvaldo Golijov, and I said to him that I had done that. And he said, “You are an idiot!”

FL: [laughs]

DA: He said, “You cannot say to a conductor that he’s wrong! I mean, any conductor, if someone—but you’re—come on! I mean, you have been assistant to this guy! I don’t know, Dante. You will never learn.” I said, “Probably so, but you know, if I made a mistake it’s already gone. What can you do?” I mean, in all honesty, the guy was making a mistake, I mean.

FL: Yeah.

DA: There were some measures that sounded like double time, and it wasn’t intended to be double time. It was the same. Anyway. The next day—I mean, I felt bad. I mean, I didn’t go to sleep well, you know. I thought—. The next day, Dennis comes back and says to me, “I was analyzing what you said. You’re right. Thank you. But thank you very much.” Look at me like, you know with this—

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: —eyes and I was, oh my God! The third day he doesn’t come to the rehearsal. John was walking around. There’s no conductor. “You have to conduct,” he says, John says. I said, “What?” What was the piece? Jacob Druckman’s *Lamia*.

FL: Oh.

DA: [laughs] And I—I mean, not that I knew the piece from memory, but I had heard it at Yale. I had studied like crazy, every single piece, because I had to assist, but I never thought that I would have the chance to conduct—never in life—much more so at Tanglewood! But people started talking about me because they saw me conducting one, they saw me conducting Dallapiccola. They saw me assisting Dennis. Now, they saw me having breakfast with them. The students knew me. I said, “Okay. I will conduct.” Dennis had a flat tire. That was what happened. He had a flat tire.

FL: [laughs]

DA: So I started conducting the piece—of all pieces, Jacob Druckman’s! And I conducted the piece, and all of a sudden I see the guy coming. Dennis.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: And I make something with the baton; it’s like saying, you know, “You have to conduct.” And he says, “No,” and says, “You” with his finger: “You conduct.” And he was watching me. Watching, watching, watching. So, okay. And I stop. I rehearse. I stop. I say, “Okay, this will be a run-through.” And Dennis was like that. When I finished the first reading of the piece, the read-through, the whole orchestra was clapping. Then I thought, Jesus, I think I did it okay. And Dennis comes and says, “That was very good. Thank you.” He started conducting. Some days later, all composers wanted me to conduct. There was a reading session. Everyone, all of a sudden, knew about me.

FL: [laughs]

DA: And there was a conflict because some of the teachers there didn’t like me, and they wouldn’t give me everything because I was not a Fellow. So they did give some pieces to the two Fellows, and I ended up conducting the rest of the pieces. [laughs]

FL: [laughs]

DA: Among them was a piano concerto by this guy, Horne—David Horne. He finished writing the piece the night before, and it was all a scribbled disaster. And one page would be like “flutes, oboes, piano, percussion, double basses, bassoons,” and the next page would be “violins, piano, flute, oboe.” And the next page would be different, and it was crazy to study the cues.

FL: Yeah.

DA: Let alone the pitches. I mean, I was—I wasn’t it; it was the piano concerto. But I conducted very well and people were like clapping like crazy. That summer ended up being the summer in which I received a prize, the only prize given to a conductor but not being a Fellow, which was the most bizarre reality [C. D. Jackson Conducting Award].

FL: Mm.

3. European career (29:37)

DA: The chief conducting teacher evidently didn’t like me, but I got that prize [C. D. Jackson Conducting Award] because everyone was talking about me. The last day, Dennis [Russell Davies] was there, talking on the phone with Osvaldo. Osvaldo said to me, “The guy saw

you. This is your opportunity. You need a job. You are finished at Yale. You told me that. Why don't you ask him? The guy knows how you work. I mean, he's fair. You don't have to feel like you're doing any bizarre, stupid, corrupt politics."

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: Osvaldo knew me very well, you know. I wouldn't—I never dared play—talking to people then, you know? Not even now. I mean, it's hard for me. I mean, I talked to [Daniel] Barenboim [b. 1942] the other day, and it was hard for me. And you, know people, you know, see the pieces, the score that I—they are impressed, but I...that was one of the biggest failures that I always had. I'm—but, you know, I'm learning now; it's not late, but—

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: We sat on the grass there. I remember the situation if I close my eyes. I see this guy, Dennis, and that—I explained that I didn't have a job; I finished, I, you know, that—. And then he said to me, "You know, I'm becoming the new Music Director of the City of Bonn in Germany. Do you have a European past?" I said, "Yes, of course. Italian." "Well, that will help. Let me see what I can do." That was August. September, October, I came back to Yale. Didn't have any money. I had finished my three degrees there. I stayed in the area, just rented a place with two friends. Didn't have much money to eat. Yale didn't want to give me a position, but Jacob pushed it, so I would be again his assistant, but never—I never got paid. So Jacob was very upset, but the school didn't care about me. And I stayed in the area, you know, playing piano, accompanying people, playing the mall, playing organ in one church, looking for a job. Because, after all, you know, I didn't want to go back to South America. I was going to go back to Italy, but I didn't know where to, and I started taking auditions as a choirmaster, as, you know, I was doing that anyway, you know—

FL: Right.

DA: —so, you know, in more important places. The same day, I don't remember anymore if it was February 8th or February 10th, the same day I got a call in the morning from one of the churches giving—offering me a bad salary then, but for me it was a fortune, you know.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: Like \$25,000 a year for conducting and playing organ in one church in New England. The same day, five minutes later, Dennis calls me. "We have a job for you here. Would you like to come?" I said, "When should I go?" "Tomorrow. You have to prepare [*Die glückliche Hand* [Op.18], and *Erwartung* [Op. 17; both by Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951)].

FL: Oh, my goodness.

DA: I said, "What? In twenty-four hours?" "Yes. Hey, it's a job! I know you play piano. You have to be *chorrepetitor* [coach]." That's how my career started in Europe, I mean, generally speaking, in this hemisphere. And it was all a chain of...a chain of coincidences. Obviously, I had to practice piano like crazy for John Harbison's piece. I studied like crazy for Jacob [Druckman]. I studied like crazy for Dennis [Russell Davies]. Yes, but the truth is, there was a flat tire. There was no one—there was no one playing the piano piece by John [Harbison].

FL: Yeah.

DA: I mean, and also the bad ones, you know? No one would take me a test to go to—to be a Fellow at Tanglewood. No one liked me, really, of the top teachers. I didn't like them, either.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: All of a sudden, after all those things, I was chosen to have a master class with Seiji [Ozawa], and Seiji was teaching three guys and one of them was me, without being a Fellow. And it's in the video or something that they show for the fund-raising, 1991. I didn't have much to do with Seiji Ozawa. I mean, honestly, he gave me this public lesson in front of people, but...the rest of the people, I mean, they wouldn't even take a look at what—whatever I was doing. I was always treated like, you know—. So, I imagine that it was not simple for the management to give me the only prize—conducting prize—that year. And I was never called back.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: But somehow the link, you know, is very funny. When you think about, you know, all these things in life that—now it's coming again, sort of, you know, as I told you, I conducted the Brucknerorchester [of Linz] because Dennis is sick.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: But Dennis is sick, but the orchestra knew me and Dennis went to the orchestra and mentioned my name, and the orchestra knew me. It was, "Anzolini, of course." We did a big tour three years ago; he has to come every year. And, all of a sudden, you know, these kind of things. And also, Philip Glass [b. 1937] was interested in me conducting, because it was Bruckner plus Philip Glass. But I—Philip Glass, I met him through Dennis.

FL: Uh-huh.

DA: I was never interested in his music when I was twenty. Never! I never thought I would meet him. I never thought I would do his music. I never thought, you know—there were many things. I never thought I would go back to do [Arnold] Schoenberg. It was one of my heroes when I was an adolescent. But, then, you know—and now this Schoenberg arrangement for piano—

FL: Right, the Opus 31? [*Variationen für Orchester*] Yeah.

DA: —the only one in the world—

FL: Yeah.

DA: —that got the attention of [Daniel] Barenboim and Simon Rattle [b. 1955]. So, you know, those coincidences. Of course, I wrote every single note for months of that piece. It took a lot of energy, a lot of my concentration. Yes, I did it. I mean, it's me, but I don't want to neglect the fact that, in life, many times are chancy. You are in a place, and all of a sudden you become a good friend of someone that you really love, but you don't even know—you didn't even know that you would be there two years before you met that person.

FL: Right.

DA: You don't plan those things.

FL: Right.

DA: You—there are things that you cannot call as your responsibility or your power or your work or your job or your, you know, skills. No! There are things that are just—something that is—could be magical, astrological, coincidences, weird chaotic physics. I don't know.

FL: Yeah.

4. Coming to MIT and connections with musicians (37:15)

DA: It's just to be there and—but, sorry for being so long, but I thought that the chain of coincidences, I mean, the whole thing started so many years and ended up here. Because after that, when I was working in Germany, another chain of coincidence—I ended up in Bern and my son was born in Bern. Then I ended up in Milano, and then I received once a fax from a guy called John Harbison, many years after Tanglewood. There was an open position here. “I remember you. There are many applicants; would you like to apply maybe?” And then I thought, I will come back.

FL: So, John recruited you?

DA: He sent me a fax saying, because I had sent him a—no, no it's much more complex. I didn't have...I was doing a lot of freelance work, because I quit in Bonn. I went to Bern, and I quit on corrupt politics. I couldn't stand the place. I mean, the orchestra wanted me—wanted me to be there. I couldn't stand it, so I quit those jobs and I started doing a lot of freelancing. So [unclear] didn't have much money and John...I sent a letter to John, and John sent me his Oboe Concerto. He needed someone to write it—to copy it—and I was known for having good—

FL: Good script, yeah.

DA: And I did it. Then he...since he knew that I was in need of a job or something, because I was conducting in Brazil, in Switzerland, in Lithuania, but I needed something more. Then he sent me the fax, said, “Look, remembering that you did this, the Oboe Concerto, here there is an opening.” He didn't even think that I was going to come. I didn't think that I was going to come.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: And when I came here, I didn't think I was going to get a job. After all, there were like two hundred people.

FL: Yeah.

DA: You know, how could I? I never thought I was going to come to Boston, but I came.

FL: Yeah.

DA: But the—again, it's a coincidence because I remember my colleagues never, you know—I respect all of them, you know—they don't talk about the other candidates, but I knew that there were eight guys from all over the world. There were a lot of people, you know, it's just a coincidence that you win, that you get a job.

FL: Right.

DA: It's not that you are the best. It's maybe that day some people liked you better than others. That's it!

FL: Right.

DA: But it's a part of the incredible chain of things. And I see in the middle part of my life—now that I—I'm consider myself, I'm not in the beginnings; I'm not at the end, I don't—I hope the way I see myself physically, and the way I, you know, that I can afford strenuous work. And I have some skills that I didn't have when I was twenty, nor when I was thirty, and I have some capacity—developed capacities. Now, how I see it is a phenomenal, weird curve, and you never know where you're going to end up and things—you can do a lot of real work yourself, but how can you predict? How can you—? The other day, I couldn't believe the face that Barenboim put at [on] my piece, the Schoenberg. He said, "This is not possible. Never—no one has ever done it." I said, "I've done it, and I know that you can play this." And he was unbelievably interested. He said, "No, I'm going to give you a call. You know, I have to study this. This is important."

FL: So, he's going to play it?

DA: Seems to me that maybe. I mean, he's conducting the piece.

FL: Yeah.

DA: Tomorrow—I mean of all pieces, tomorrow [Lorin] Maazel [b. 1930] is conducting the piece with the New York Philharmonic, for four days in a row. For some reason, many people are conducting that piece. Daniel Barenboim is conducting the piece again the same day of my last performance in Düsseldorf with the Brucknerorchester [of Linz] in Germany, so I won't be able to go to Vienna. But he's performing the piece.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: And then he told me that he was going to talk to [James] Levine [b. 1943] and he did, because John Harbison knew that he did talk to Levine about the piece, because Levine was conducting the piece. And, although I don't know what's going to happen about me, but I know that at least I did something that some people that are in the top of the business in my profession consider somehow important.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: Somehow. I mean, it's simply an arrangement.

FL: Yeah.

DA: It's only an arrangement, but if they understand that I'm serious about conducting, you know, when I study things, you know, maybe...!

FL: Mm-hm. So, by way of the arrangement, there's—they are understanding you as a musician.

DA: Exactly!

FL: Yeah, right.

DA: Only that. I mean, no more than that; no less than that. But I—as I say, with my personality, I never thought that I had the balls to go and meet some important people. I never did.

FL: Yeah.

DA: I never had—I never felt secure.

FL: Yeah.

DA: I—you know, you know what I mean? I never—

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: I'm very secure what I can do. I'm very—extremely... I mean, I know that I can...I am able to battle. You know? I am able to—I know that I can fight and I always fought. That I know, and it's my only certainty. Not my brains, not my talent, but just that I'm able to fight.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: But I never thought I would be able, or worth it, to talk to the generals.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: Because, you know, they know how to fight, and they deal with the battle in the top, but I never thought I would belong to that class. And, little by little, in different parts of the world where I started as a simple, single warrior, like in—you see it in Argentina. Now I'm the general.

FL: Yeah.

DA: It would take me probably twenty more years to see what the results are. I am patient, I think.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: But, you know, all those—it's funny, you know, the way you—. Sometimes when I recall things and I'm telling my son, I mean I...it looks like a fable. It looks like a...it is weird. It sounds like a literature thing, but the truth is, it happened to me.

FL: Yeah.

DA: And the truth is, I didn't plan it. [laughs]

FL: Yeah.

DA: And the truth is, that's how I come to this reason enough, you know, I can fight; I can work. I work like crazy, yes, yes, and many results are due to my commitment to music, yes.

FL: Right.

DA: But the truth is also, believe me, that if you don't have good luck, good fortune, nothing happens.

FL: Yeah.

DA: Nothing. I don't—because I'm sure that there are many people that work as hard as I do that are—that have twenty times my talent and thirty, fifty, sixty, my brains. Maybe they didn't happen to go through that road when exactly that tire was going to be flat.

FL: Yeah. Right.

DA: You know?

FL: Right. Wow.

DA: Well.

5. Charles Ives (45:26)

- FL: So, we've got about ten more minutes. Why don't we at least begin the discussion of Charles Ives and resume next time?
- DA: Oh, yeah.
- FL: As we've discussed before, the music of Charles Ives is important in your life, and you first heard his music as a teenager. Remind me, which piece again was that?
- DA: The Fourth Symphony
- FL: The Fourth Symphony. Okay.
- DA: I [unclear] [José] Serebrier [b. 1938] in a [unclear—dumb?] play.
- FL: That's right, that's right. Ives was a Connecticut Protestant Yankee who evokes a powerful sense of New England, like in his piece *Three Places New England*. It was deeply influenced by the philosophical ideas of the so-called New England Transcendentalists: Henry David Thoreau [1817–1862], Ralph Waldo Emerson [1803–1882] and Nathaniel Hawthorne [1804–1864]. And I think of you, you're a native Argentine, brought up in the Catholic Church, and this music is so—moves you so deeply. Can you talk about that?
- DA: Sure. That I could talk about for hours.
- FL: [laughs]
- DA: I mean, I have five more minutes, but I wish I could—
- FL: Well, we will resume this.
- DA: We will resume, yeah, I hope.
- FL: But I wanted to throw that out.
- DA: It is—paradoxically, it is a very different picture when I was an adolescent. I mean, I honestly think that my admiration for the guy grew and grew. I mean, it was big then! But now for me, it is much more [laughs] than this. [pause] There is one aspect, you know, but you can—you can maybe rationalize—when I first heard the piece I couldn't—I mean, it moved me so deeply. I couldn't—I mean, it has such a strange, incredible force, something that was beyond the limits. Something that I couldn't understand, but again, the rational thought, I—. For instance, I was a very devoted Catholic then. When I was fifteen my adolescence was marred by the Catholic Church.
- FL: Mm-hm.
- DA: The new guys had related to that, but it's different. I don't—I mean it's a new, and it's different. It's something—the concept of sin, the concept of good life, the concept of paradise, the concept of hell—*inferno*—and you cannot also—you can't also define things as being part of the South American culture, I mean, in my particular case, because my roots are European, so—and Italian, and the Pope [claps]—Christmas Day my father looking, you know, watching TV and looking at this guy talking in Latin, and translating to me, and calling, you know, sending—making me send all these letters in Italian to my family and, you

know, going—crowing about the war, Germans, Latin culture, Italian roots, Dante Alighieri [1265–1321]. How—you know, all those things, I felt when I was an adolescent like trapped into. I mean, there was a time in which I needed to really look for freedom. Ives was one way. Paradoxically, I never thought that I was going to come to the States, but the English literature also was important to me. Of course, there's no relationship—there are many things that I didn't understand. I went...I looked like crazy for the *Essays Before a Sonata* [by Charles Ives (1920)] and I found a Spanish translation—

FL: [laughs]

DA: —in a really obscure bookshop, and I started reading this thing like it was, you know—for me it was nuclear physics.

FL: Yeah.

DA: I learned about the guy when I bought this book, the Machlis—Joseph Machlis [1906–1998; *Introduction to Contemporary Music*].

FL: Yeah, right.

DA: And it was the first thing that I bought in—I mean, I devoured the book in two days. It was like three hundred pages, every single composer in history, the people that I didn't know. I—I never heard the people like, you know, this—I mean, I heard about Philip Glass, for instance, but I never heard about a guy called Kirchner.

FL: Yeah. Leon Kirchner [1919–2009; composer].

DA: Leon Kirchner. I never—I mean, there are so many names that now I think that they're normal for you guys [Americans] but for me?

FL: Yeah.

DA: Then I couldn't find his music anywhere. I just—this set of years, I heard it—the LP all over and over and over and I couldn't explain the harmonies. I couldn't explain what was going on, let alone the...the...the disaster of the second movement. And compared to that, fugue!

FL: Yeah.

DA: I thought, what is this? I couldn't explain it, and I was tempted to dismiss it as something too out of range of my...for my precise, square, entangled with the Viennese [Editor's note: refers to the refers to the Second Viennese School, a group of 20th century composers, led by Arnold Schoenberg, 1903–1925] and my interest in Schoenberg.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: You know what I mean? I mean, it's something completely—and, then, you know, of course [Pierre] Boulez [b. 1924; composer]. I mean, I was going through that pattern because one of my teachers in composition—not [Gerardo] Gandini [b. 1936], the other guy [Enrique Girardi]—was—gave me a lot of interesting things, but he was also too much of a rational guy. He was an engineer, too, interest in mathematics. That was my—also my way of, you know, I went to the university and studied mathematics.

FL: Right.

DA: I couldn't explain that guy. I couldn't explain Ives, but still there were something. That something, I mean, for instance, years later I studied some of the hymns—some of the popular songs of New England.

FL: Right.

DA: For me, there was something that looked tonal but in a very weird, abstract, thorned...because it was never, you know, the clarity of something. No. It was daring, and that was...what took me, you know, as a—and then this unit, because it was practically listened to the universe talking to me, the second movement.

FL: Mm-hm.

DA: I mean, it was something that I, again, I didn't know how the guy wrote it, and I read in this Machlis book that they—phenomenal. I would never—look, I mean, I was fifteen. Twelve years later, I would be in the same university and I would meet Jim [James Sinclair], who was working on the [Ives] Fourth Symphony [preparing a critical edition]. I never thought it was happening—it was going to happen to me, say.

FL: [laughs]

DA: Well, the guy Machlis was saying in the some of his writing, Ives' writing was illegible [in manuscript score], you know. No one knew how to explain it and they are still working, say, Jesus Christ, how can a guy imagine this music?

FL: I should just clarify for the record that you are talking about James Sinclair [no dates found; conductor], aren't you?

DA: James Sinclair. Yeah, yeah.

FL: Yeah.

DA: Whom I met in the same library [Yale University Library] because I was known in every place as a library rat, myself, and the guy was also that kind of—that type of guy.

FL: Right.

DA: And as I mentioned, many times we crossed paths, but we didn't know each other. Sort of, I mean, we...maybe we shook hands some time, you know, after me being four years there, but—. And that was about the only piece that I—then [claps] I read about the *Concord Sonata* [Piano Sonata No. 2, by Charles Ives]. I went [claps] to Buenos Aires and I bought it when I was twenty. It was one salary. I just—

FL: Yeah.

DA: —I still have the same piece. The same edition.

FL: Wow.

DA: You know, and I—and I opened the thing, and I was reading like crazy, trying to play this, and “This is impossible. I cannot play this piece.” There was no recording whatsoever. So there were many things that for you were normal in the '80s, '70s.

FL: Yeah.

DA: Not for me. Not even close. I mean, I don't even remember where the hell I got that long play [LP recording].

FL: Uh-huh. Was it the John Kirkpatrick [1905–1991; pianist] recording?

DA: No, no, no. The LP of the Fourth Symphony—

FL: Oh, of the Fourth Symphony. Oh.

DA: —was—is [José] Serebrier.

FL: Yeah.

DA: I never thought I was, in my entire life, I was going to meet Serebrier. I met him two years ago in New York—

FL: Right.

DA: —in a concert that Dennis [Russell Davies] was conducting.

FL: Yeah, you told me. Yeah.

DA: And I didn't even think this guy—I mean for me, from this low social class in a small Italian neighborhood, people that were in the LPs were, for me, monuments. And people like Ives, Schoenberg, Boulez, you know, they were people unthinkable for me to think, you know, that I would be in the places where they were raised, the places where they would perform.

FL: Yeah.

DA: The places where they were conducting. I never thought of meeting Boulez in my life. So, I—
ooh.

FL: We'll have to go.

DA: I have to go, but we can keep talking about it.

FL: We'll resume this, yeah. Okay.

DA: Thanks.

FL: Thank you very much for coming this afternoon.

[End of Interview]