

Music at MIT Oral History Project

Claude Brenner

Interviewed

by

Forrest Larson

November 21, 2008

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 of the full file preceding the timing of the CD version.

Contributors

Claude Brenner (b.1928) received two degrees in aeronautical engineering from MIT, a B.S. in 1947 and a M.S. in 1948. During his student years, he sang in the MIT Glee Club under three different music directors, and joined the MIT Logarithms shortly after it had started. Among his other student activities, he was editor of the student newspaper *The Tech*. He was President of the board of directors for the New Orchestra of Boston. Mr. Brenner has been chair of visiting committees for the MIT Department of Humanities and the Music Section. Since 1995 he has been a member of the Council for the Arts at MIT. Professionally he has worked in the aeronautics and defense industries and was President of Commonwealth Energy Group Ltd.

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

Interview conducted by Forrest Larson on November 21, 2008 in the MIT Lewis Music Library. Duration of the audio recording is 1:56:29. First of two interviews. Second interview: May 1, 2009.

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. Early years in South Africa, coming to America and MIT (00:20—CD1 00:18)

FORREST LARSON: It's my honor and privilege to have Claude Brenner for an interview this morning. He is MIT Class of 1947 and 1948. He has both a bachelor's degree and a master's degree from MIT in aeronautical engineering. It's November 1st, 2008 [correct date Nov. 21], and we are in the MIT Lewis Music Library. Pardon?

CLAUDE BRENNER: Twenty-first.

FL: Twe—did I s—?

CB: You said first.

FL: Oh, okay, November 21st. Wow, I'm glad you caught that! [laughs] Alright. Can you tell me where you were born, and your date of birth?

CB: I was born in Pretoria, South Africa, on 7 July, 1928.

FL: Can you tell me a little bit about what you remember from your childhood as far as what Pretoria was like, and just any kind of general stuff?

CB: Well, Pretoria was a small city of about, as I recall, three hundred thousand people, at the time, roughly. It was the administrative capital of South Africa, so there was a lot of government buildings, and the famous Union Buildings are there. Also famous for its jacaranda trees that line the avenues, and there's a great jacaranda festival. I didn't realize until I was an adult in this country that the jacaranda was an import from Mexico.

FL: [laughs]

CB: I, of course, always thought it was native to South Africa, but it's not. And life was as suburban life is in this country, in those days. But what's more important was essentially how isolated South Africa was, because the communication networks that we have today didn't exist. Communication was essentially by radio telephone, and that was a big deal at that time, if you wanted to speak to London, of course, which was the center of the universe for us [laughs] in the British Empire! And the principal mode of transportation was by sea, a two-week trip from Capetown to Southampton. So South Africa, of course, was isolated. It was, it participated in World War One, of course, and had fought some battles in Africa, to take the—help take the German colonies that were then existent. But it was a placid life.

FL: Uh-huh.

CB: And we went to school, and we lived at home. At the beginning, however—I was born in Pretoria, but that was only where Mother came to give me birth. The family was living in a little country village in western, the province of Natal, now KwaZulu-Natal. The name of the place is Elandslaage, which means place of the eland, the largest deer in the world. And Father had a general store, and a transient hotel. It was a railway junction, and often people needed a place to sleep between catching trains from one place to another; there was—would be an overnight stop.

FL: What was your father's first name?

CB: His name was David.

FL: Uh-huh.

CB: And, actually Sidney David, but he was named—his first name was Sidney David, but he was known as David to everybody. And so as an infant, as in a young child, we lived there. He died when I was eight months old, but my mother continued to live there, and managed the hotel with her, at that time unmarried, youngest brother. This little hotel at the railroad junction. My first ambition was in fact, because we lived at the railway junction, on the side of the railway tracks, was to become as we called an engine driver. [laughs] As we say in this country, as engineer, but not the kind of engineer that I ultimately became! [laughs]

FL: [laughs]

CB: And then the hotel burned down, and so we moved to Pretoria to live, and then from there to Johannesburg. And I was living in Johannesburg, and happily in school there, finishing elementary school, in fact, when I came to this country at age eleven.

FL: So your mother's first name?

CB: Was Frances, or Fannie, she was named. But she preferred—she sort of formalized it. It was, Fannie was, of course, had the implication of something else in those days! [laughs] One sat on one's fanny, so she formalized it to Frances.

FL: Mm-hm. So after the hotel burned down, what kind of professions was she—what kind of—what did she do for a living?

CB: Mother was—she became a legal secretary. She was secretary to a law firm. But she was most interested in chiropractic. And that was because her older brother was a very learned—came to this country to learn natural healing, healthful means of healing. When I say healthful, what today would be called holistic medicine—it wasn't called that at that time—osteopathy and chiropractic being part of that naturopathy. And he became very prominent in Britain. And the family sort of adopted that measure of living, that lifestyle, of healthful living. And mother chose to learn chiropractic as well, and practiced it herself.

So we came to this country for her to study, initially in the very early thirties, when I was three or four, at the National College of Chiropractic in Chicago, and returned after a couple of years. It wasn't quite that long, probably eighteen months, for a complex of reasons. And she always wanted to finish the course, and planned to do that, and so we left South Africa in 1939 to come here so she could finish the course in Chicago.

We—her original plan was to leave us there in boarding school, my sister and me—my older sister and me. She's, died two years ago. [clears throat] Excuse me. And also thought of dropping us off in England, because there were family there, and putting us in boarding school in England, so that she could come and study. Because to get a degree while raising two preadolescent children was sort of an issue. But in the end, decided to bring us along with her, which was a good thing, because we landed on the 21st of August, 1939, which was ten days before the Nazis invaded Poland.

And so, World War II broke out in Europe on the first of September. We had just arrived. And having visited my paternal grandparents in Baltimore—we were scattered all over the world as a matter of fact. Excuse me. [coughs] We visited them in Baltimore, and then made our way to Chicago. And shortly after we arrived—we arrived just before the first of September.

And the interesting aspect of that was that we lost twenty percent of our money at that time, because the pound was pegged at four dollars and eighty-three cents, and when we landed, it fell to four dollars and three cents. And we hadn't changed—as I recall, Mother hadn't changed all the money that she brought with her, so we lost twenty percent of it before we got going.

So we settled in Chicago, and—on the north side, and I went to the local grammar school, my sister and me. My sister and I went to the local grammar school and the local high school while Mother finished her degree. And then, as a result of, as everybody now seems to know, my being on the “Quiz Kids”, I was offered a scholarship to a local preparatory school, Lake Forest Academy, thirty miles north of Chicago. [Editor's note: “Quiz Kids” was a radio-TV series of the 1940s and 1950s.]

An interesting circumstance, that, because when Mother was making her plans and deciding what to do with my sister and me, as she was bent on completing her training in chiropractic, she applied at boarding schools. She asked the American Consulate in Johannesburg for the names of boarding schools near Chicago or in Chicago, and she was given Lake Forest Academy, and Ferry Hall [School], the sister school for girls, in Lake Forest [Illinois]. And when she saw the fees—she submitted the applications, but when she saw the fees, she realized that there was no way at all; three thousand dollars a year was an impossible sum of money back then! Today, by the way, it's twenty-three thousand dollars a year, but, or twenty-five, something like that. And so, forgot about it.

But when I was on the “Quiz Kids”, and appearing regularly, and it was our practice to introduce—well, it was not our practice, it was the format of the program that we were asked to introduce ourselves, the five competitors each week. It was a competitive program, and the three winners returned the following week with two newcomers to join them, each week. And we were required to introduce ourselves with our name, age, and school and year. And here I was saying that, you know, I was Claude Brenner, I'm twelve years old, and a freshman at Senn High School in Chicago.

And at the same time, the headmaster of Lake Forest Academy retired, and they were bringing in a new headmaster, and they were cleaning out the files. And they came across Mother's application for me. And they said to themselves, as I was told the story then, “Is this the same Claude Brenner as on the ‘Quiz Kids’?” It turned out that one of the alumni of the Academy, a man by the name of Fred Asher, who had graduated in the Class of 1935, I believe, or '34—'35, had joined the Quiz Kid production staff. And they said, “Well, let's ask our alumnus, Fred Asher.” And Fred confirmed that I was the same, one and the same Claude Brenner.

So they offered me a scholarship for my junior and senior years. And what that resulted in was two things. One, I had to start my junior year all over again,

because I'd completed half of it in the public schools, so I did high school in five and a half years. But the second thing that happened was I got an exceedingly fine education, for which I am forever grateful. It prepared me remarkably well for MIT!

And I'm very grateful to them, and remain very closely attached. I'm now a life trustee of the Academy, and remain very close to them for that reason. So that's what happened, and the "Quiz Kids" certainly did open the door. Somebody asked me recently if being a Quiz Kid helped me get into MIT, and I don't know. It helped me, certainly, with the education that I got through "Quiz Kids", at the Academy.

FL: Right.

CB: But whether being, of itself, whether it got me in, I have no way of knowing, although it was—the way the admissions process worked then was that there was a group of guys, you know, these old guys. They must have been fifty, [laughs] okay, or more? I was interviewed—my education counselor was a man by the name of Louis H. G. Buskarin, of the Class of 1904, who was then a lawyer in Chicago. And I did have that interview, submitted the application. There were no examinations to take. And there was an interview board that came, and I met them.

And somebody asked me recently what was the first question I was asked on "Quiz Kids", and I didn't remember. I remembered the first question I was asked in the interview in which the decision process was to whether I would ever be on "Quiz Kids". This was the second step. The first step of that was a questionnaire that you had to fill out, as to who you were and what you were, and why you wanted to be a Quiz Kid. And I wrote that I didn't—a three hundred word essay. And I wrote and said, with all sincerity, that I wasn't sure I did want to be a Quiz Kid, because as I listened to that program, those kids were very bright, and they were going to be tough competition, and I didn't know whether I wanted to deal with that!

FL: [laughs]

CB: But then the second step was a two hour interview, which simply consisted of two hours of questions and answers. And the first question that the interviewer, who was the legal staff member of the production staff, a man by the name of Joe Bailey, asked me, in the summer of 1940: what and where is the maelstrom? And I had no idea. And I thought, "Well, it's all over. I lost." [laughs] And of course, few people know what and where the maelstrom is; it's a large—as I learned then, and have never forgotten—it's a large whirlpool off the coast of Norway. And that sort of question and answer went on for two hours.

But at the same time, my first interview by one of these old guys from MIT, at this panel who came to Chicago to—there must have half a dozen or more men. And this man said, "This won't count against you, but do you know the meaning of the word mnemonic?" And I said, "No." [laughs] Of course, I've never forgotten that one, either!

FL: [laughs]

CB: So that process, I was finally admitted [to MIT]. And then I'd also applied for a scholarship, and I had to meet separately with the scholarship board. And they told me that I was—having known that I was admitted, I was told, "By the way, you'll

have a dormitory room.” And I didn’t know that I wasn’t going to get a dormitory room! But it turned out that the East Campus parallels [MIT dormitory] were, until that time or some period before, occupied by a contingent of Army recruits who were in what was known as the Army Special Training—ASPC. ASTP: Army Special Training Program.

FL: Right.

CB: And brighter young inductees who were drafted into World War Two. My best friend from prep school went to ASTP. But there was a contingent of ASTP Army students in the East Campus.

FL: Right.

CB: And so those weren’t available. And of course, what was the graduate house was occupied by the Navy V-12 cadets. [Editor’s note: V-12 was a special Navy officer training program at US colleges during World War II.]

FL: Right.

CB: So, but the Army had pulled out, and the rooms were now available to undergraduates. Those rooms were not enough to accommodate all the incoming class; we were six hundred. So many of them lived across, right across the bridge in boarding houses along Marlborough Street, and Beacon Street [both in Boston], and so forth. And so I did get a partial scholarship, and came to MIT. And that’s, you know, it never left me: “What’s the matter, Quizzie?”

FL: [laughs]

CB: “I want to tell my father that I beat the Quiz Kid,” you know? So that’s a long answer to your question! [laughs]

FL: It’s a good answer, so thank you!

2. Introduction to music, piano lessons, high school choir, inspiration to become an aeronautical engineer (16:57—CD1 16:55)

FL: I want to backtrack a little bit about music in your family. Were your parents musical at all?

CB: No.

FL: Did they sing around the house?

CB: No, no, no.

FL: Any relatives?

CB: No.

FL: So what kind of music did you hear growing up?

CB: Oh, we heard gramophone records. I remember getting a gramophone, and buying the records for *The Firefly* [1937 film], which was a movie set in Spain, I think. And

I used to play those songs on the gramophone—I think we had three records, two sides, six songs from *The Firefly*—over and over again! You know, kids do that today, that’s what kids do.

FL: Yeah.

CB: That was about the extent of it. There was no piano in the place. We lived, essentially, in a boarding house. We were not well to do by any means. My mother, sister, and I occupied a room in a relative’s boarding house, a boarding house nonetheless. But it was a comfortable place, and I was happy there. And I played with my clockwork trains, because we couldn’t afford electric trains. And I was happy with my clockwork, as we called them, wind-up trains. And I think because—no, there was no influence in music.

There was the influence of people asking me—well, they don’t, I remember. I don’t think I’d really been asked why I wanted to be an aeronautical engineer. And I think that goes back to the day that Mother took my sister and me to Germiston Airport, which was the principal airport in the town of Germiston [South Africa], a western suburb of Johannesburg, to see the airplanes. And they were German Junkers, tri-motors, operated by South African Airways. And she pointed to them sitting on the ground, on the tarmac. And she said, “You know that airplane is going to be in Durban [South Africa] in four hours?”

Well, that was astonishing to me! Because we went to Durban for our holidays. It’s on the Indian Ocean, and almost—well, slightly southwest of Africa, which is on a high—excuse me, of Johannesburg, which is on a six thousand foot plateau. And you know, the train trip to Durban was an overnight train trip. Four hours! That was astonishing! Those things were fascinating to me, and I think that’s where the seeds were set. And I started building model airplanes, and sort of never stopped. So when I came here, you know, I wanted to be an aeronautical engineer.

FL: Wow!

CB: But music, no! [laughs]

FL: Were there any concerts that you went to as a child, that you remember?

CB: No, no.

FL: So, when did you first hear live music, then, go to a concert? Was that when you came?

CB: I think probably when we were living in Chicago. And I remember being taken to see the opera *Hansel and Gretel* [*Hänsel und Gretel* by Engelbert Humperdinck]. And I was bored stiff with it, I must confess, because I had no preparation for opera, no understanding of what it was all about. And it was obviously sung in German anyway, so it didn’t matter that I had no understanding [laughs]; it just compounded the lack of understanding.

But I do remember, now that you raise the question, my very best friend, who lived across the street from me, from this family boarding house, but they had their own home. His name was Arthur Seltzer, and he was five years older than I, and he was my protector, as it were—but the gang of us, you know, the kids in the

neighborhood. But they had a piano in their house, and I used to sort of plunk at it, as I remember. But that was the only real introduction to personal music, that and my gramophone.

FL: You said you had some piano lessons for a short period of time as a child?

CB: Yeah, another Quiz Kid issue. Shortly after I joined the “Quiz Kids”, there was a piano teacher in Chicago, a man by the name of Buguslawski—I’ve forgotten his first name. But he and his wife taught piano, and they were well-known piano teachers in Chicago, prominent, a prominent family of musicians. And he offered Mother six months of free piano lessons, so that he could, you know—it was a deal—so he could then say that he taught the Quiz Kid, you see, and he’d get more students that way. And I remember that I had to play for the end of his six months of training, and there was a sort of recital, of course, of the students. And I’ve forgotten—Carl Philip Emmanuel Bach’s “Solfeggietto” [in C minor, H. 220] is what I played.

FL: Uh-huh.

CB: And I’d never really played that without missing at least one note! [laughs]

FL: [laughs]

CB: But of course, when I got up to play, there was the buzz and bustle in the audience of parents and family, listening there for, “Oh the Quiz Kid, the Quiz Kid!” And then, of course, he suggested that if mother wanted to continue the lessons thereafter, he couldn’t give them to me free. And Mother certainly couldn’t afford them. I mean, she was in school, and she wasn’t earning income. And so that was the extent of my piano. But I liked the piano, and I was able—liked to read music, and I was able to pick it out and play to myself, as it were. And I learned to play somewhat more sophisticated songs and chords, and things!

FL: Mm-hm.

CB: But that was the extent of my early training in music.

FL: So did you continue playing up through your time at MIT?

CB: Well, I did, you know, to entertain myself. There was a piano on the ground floor of the Goodale entry of the eastern parallel of the East Campus parallels, which I used to go and occasionally bang on for fun. And I disturbed the whole dormitory, because [laughs] there was no—it wasn’t a soundproof room, by any means.

FL: Yeah.

CB: And I did that. But as far as playing an instrument, no, no. I have a sort of a small recorder-like instrument, a plastic thing, sort of, I think, keyed like an ocarina, really, but it’s sort of in the vertical scale, which I can pick out a few tunes on to amuse myself with occasionally. [Editor’s note: the instrument likely was the flutophone.]

FL: Uh-huh.

CB: But I don’t have the finger dexterity to play music well, quite frankly.

FL: Uh-huh. Did you sing at all as a child?

CB: Not as a child. I don't remember singing as a child, except, you know, group songs in grammar school, I suppose, elementary school, if we did that. But, and I don't know how—it was when I went to Lake Forest Academy that I found that there were all of these wonderful activities open to me, which in a high school of two or three thousand seemed to be reserved for those people [laughs], the older kids. And I was very young in that group of people; always was, of course, having entered at eleven. But I could do anything there, at the prep school, so I joined the Glee Club. And I loved to sing!

FL: Oh!

CB: And I also joined the Chapel Choir, and we performed in Chapel twice a week, at Wednesday morning Chapel, and then Sunday evening Chapel. And so I sang with a small—I don't know, eight or ten or twelve of us in the choir, and the Glee Club was something larger—and enjoyed it very much, and liked to sing! Still do! [laughs]

FL: So with the Chapel Choir, it was obviously religious music. Do you remember any of the pieces that you did with them? Or the kind—how would you describe the music?

CB: Oh, they were—yes, they were sort of hymn-like songs. I remember once, because the phrase always interested me, was a hymn called “Bless the Lord, Oh My Soul.” And you know, that can be read both ways, and that fascinated me! [laughs] And it was—chapel music was interesting in its own sake. I liked the harmonies. And when I joined the Glee Club at MIT, which was a natural follow-on, I just came to MIT and continued to do the things that I did at the [Lake Forest] Academy. I joined the Glee Club, I joined Drama Shop, I joined *The Tech* [MIT student newspaper], because that's what I'd been doing at the Academy, you see.

FL: Uh-huh.

CB: I also went out for crew, but that's another story! [laughs] And so when I joined the Glee Club here, and we sang, you know, the early church music, I really loved the harmonies.

FL: Fantastic. So going back to the Chapel Choir, do you remember the director's name?

CB: Yes, I do, but I don't. It'll come to me, perhaps, later on in the discussion.

FL: Okay.

CB: One of the problems with being an octogenarian [laughs]—awful word to say, but amusing word to think about—is that people's names leave you, and they come back later, I'll think of it, perhaps.

FL: So with the high school Glee Club, was it standard, kind of popular music?

CB: Yes, and if we were good, we got to sing Fred Waring arrangements. Now, Fred Waring, of course, was the great glee club, radio glee club, performer, and his arrangements were really wonderful. And we all loved, particularly, “Stardust” [by Hoagy Carmichael] was the song which was a wonderful arrangement. And we were promised if we did well, he'd allow us to sing “Stardust”, or prepare us to sing “Stardust”! It was the same man who conducted both the choir and the Glee Club of

course. And I sang second tenor in those days, and of course, I'm best a baritone now. [laughs]

FL: Uh-huh! [laughs] So when you were in high school, were you listening to music on the radio at all?

CB: We did! As a matter of fact, perhaps our first real introduction to music was we discovered a morning show on the Chicago radio, which we awoke to, which played as the theme song one of the theme's from [P. I.] Tchaikovsky's *Fourth* [Symphony no. 4 in F minor, Op. 36], *Fifth* [Symphony no. 5 in E minor, Op. 64], or *Sixth* [Symphony no. 6 in B minor (*Pathétique*) Op. 74]. I don't remember which theme it was! And would play classical music. And there was a lot of talk with it as well, news, and so forth, but it seemed to have a classical motif to it, so that was our introduction. [sings] That theme was the theme of the radio program. And so that was perhaps the real introduction to aural, serious aural music. But I really had no appreciation for it until I came here [to MIT].

There's an anecdote that I like to tell. I learned to love the Boston Pops, of course, as semi-classical music. I had no understanding of classical music when I arrived here. And I had a record—somebody had given this to me—a twelve inch record of the Pops with the “Ritual Dance of Fire” [“Ritual Fire Dance” or “Danza Ritual del Fuego” by Manuel de Falla, from the ballet *El Amor Brujo*] on one side, and—oh dear, the other song, which was—it'll come to me. And I loved that record! And I went down to play it on the community, in effect, gramophone, record player, in the lounge of Munroe, in the western parallel, one afternoon. And somebody was playing a symphony. And I waited patiently until his record was over, and then I asked if I could play mine. But he was in, you know, in the middle of a four-record, eight side symphony! [laughs]

FL: Oh. [laughs]

CB: And he wasn't about to let me play “Ritual Dance of Fire” and “Jalousie” [complete title “Tango Tzigane Jalousie,” by Jacob Gade]—that was on the other side of it, by Arthur Fiedler. “Jalousie” and the “Ritual Dance of Fire.” And he said, “Hey, get this kid! He wants me to interrupt my Beethoven so he can play Jalousie!” And I was so embarrassed, but I didn't understand what he was angry about, you see! [laughs]

FL: Uh huh! [laughs]

CB: But later I understood, you see. Of course, “Hey, get this kid!”

FL: Yeah, yeah.

3. Aeronautical Engineering Studies at MIT (30:09—CD1 30:07)

FL: So, why did you choose to come to MIT?

CB: Well, [sighs] that's an interesting question. I knew nothing about where to go to college. All I knew was I wanted to be an aeronautical engineer. And that

knowledge, with that knowledge, for example, my—the drafting instructor allowed me to draft airplanes, or encouraged me to do so, to pursue my interest. But where to go to do this was simply people’s suggestions and advice!

Quite frankly, my original plan was—the original plan was to go to Cal Tech [California Institute of Technology]. The reason for that is that when we had been in California, on this grand “Quiz Kids” trip that we took, to be on the Jack Benny program in early 1941, we took the city of Los Angeles, three days, and Mother—my sister had to come along, because she couldn’t be left alone and we fell in love with southern California, because it reminded us so much of South Africa, in climate and appearance, and so forth.

And we ultimately decided that we wanted to go to college there. My sister would go to UCLA [University of California at Los Angeles]. Mother would practice her chiropractic, when she had finished her course, because we still couldn’t go home, because of the war. And I would go to Cal Tech to study aeronautical engineering. So that was choice number one. And the rest of it sort of filtered in by: “You know, Carnegie Tech [Carnegie Institute of Technology, now part of Carnegie Mellon University] is an interesting place. Have you thought of them?” And, “Illinois Tech [Illinois Institute of Technology] is a good place to go,” and somebody suggested MIT; I don’t know who.

There was no college counseling to speak of, even in our elite preparatory school. People kind of knew that they were going from there to Harvard or Yale or Princeton, you see, or to all the best Midwestern state schools or private schools. That’s what they were being prepared for largely—largely for the Midwestern schools. But to be admitted to Ivy League was the big deal. And so nobody sort of—I don’t remember getting any advice, but MIT emerged, somehow. And somehow—I don’t remember how MIT emerged in my consciousness as a place to go. So I applied at both MIT and at Cal Tech.

I’m glad that Cal Tech—an interesting thing was that Cal Tech required four three-hour examinations as part of the application process. One—and I sat in a classroom at school every Saturday morning for four weeks in a row writing these exams, one in physics, one in chemistry, one in mathematics, and one in—to write a great theme, essay, that you had to write in three hours, on a subject of your choice. And it turned out that, fortunately, that Cal Tech rejected me, didn’t accept me, and I’m told that the reason was that on one of the exams, questions on the math exam, I got the right answer but I used the wrong method.

FL: [laughs]

CB: That was what I was told they were told. But it turned out that was a good thing, because to this day what I hadn’t known, and nobody knew to tell me—nobody knew this to tell me—that Cal Tech did not give bachelor’s degrees in aeronautical engineering, and still doesn’t! You take the degree in mechanical engineering—still doesn’t, so as I understand. But you take the degree in mechanical engineering, and then a master’s degree to do the aeronautical component. And I had no intention of getting a master’s degree at that time. I mean, a bachelor’s was about all we could afford. So coming to MIT was, you know, an obvious choice. And I flourished here.

I loved it here! I had a wonderful experience here. It was—the motto then was “Tech is Hell.” It was hell, but I loved the hell! [laughs]

FL: [laughs]

CB: And it was, I threw myself into the academics. I suppose if I hadn’t thrown myself so well into the extracurricular activities, I might have done somewhat better in the academics than I did. But I did very well, nonetheless. A wonderful education, a wonderful experience, and I still think— look back on it with much pleasure and happiness. It was—I had some miserable times; there’s no question about it.

But in the end, it was a great place to be, and—certainly unlike the MIT of today! I mean, there were no house masters; we were simply there alone! And there was nobody, really, to advise us. There was somebody called the Chairman of the Dormitory Council in the faculty, but we never really had anything to do with those people. Sort of, we met the faculty in our classrooms, and that was it! And, but nonetheless, I, for the most—yeah, I loved my classmates. I loved doing what we were doing.

The competition was tough. That was—the competition here was tough. It’s totally different from the atmosphere here today, where people help each other, and cooperate, and so forth. There you were, on your own, and you were competing with your classmates far more than you were competing with the professor. That was what made it tough. “What did you get on the exam?” you know.

FL: Wow! So when you came, in the Department of Aeronautical Engineering, there was Professor Jerome C. Hunsaker, who was probably most widely known for designing this—what he called the flying boat, the NC-4.

CB: The NC-4, yes.

FL: Which was the first aircraft to fly across the Atlantic Ocean in 1919. Did you study with him at all?

CB: No. He was the chairman of the department, and he held, as a matter of fact, the aeronautical engineering department had been an option in the mechanical engineering department on its formation. And it didn’t become its own department until 1936, I believe. And he chaired both departments at that time. He was Chair of Mechanical Engineering, and Chair of Aeronautical Engineering concurrently. So we saw little of him; he was simply an august figure, a legend, as it were, for his great accomplishments. If I ever met him personally, it may have been at some function or other, to shake his hand. But he was that great, mysterious figure up above.

FL: Yeah. Tell me about your thesis advisor, Joseph Bicknell [MIT Professor of Aeronautical Engineering]?

CB: Joe Bicknell was—he taught Stability and Control, and he was a good teacher. Not a dramatic teacher. I remember for some reason—why I remember this?—he lived in the South Shore somewhere, I think Hingham [Massachusetts]. And I think I took one year of Stability and Control under him, in my junior year as I recall, and then the thesis was—my thesis partner, Dick [Richard] Scheuing [MIT class of 1947, SM 1948], was a Grumman Scholar. And that meant that he got a summer job—we

didn't have summer jobs then, because we were going to school the whole time. During that period, the academic, the calendar period, was two years and eight months for the eight terms of academic performance. So, we had no summer vacation until the war ended.

And, but he was a Grumman Scholar, and the war had ended, and in the summer of 1947, between, after we graduated, he went back to work at Grumman [Aircraft Engineering Corp.]. And they brought back—he brought back with him the interest that they had in what became our thesis topic. It was the interest in raising the horizontal stabilizer high up on the vertical stabilizer. So we—it was a wind tunnel study of the effect on stability and control of an aircraft of the vertical position of the horizontal stabilizer. You know it was fixed to the fuselage! Now you see them most often on the top of the vertical tail. So that was what our thesis was all about.

FL: Yeah, you were trying all different configurations?

CB: Yes.

FL: It was pretty interesting.

CB: It was, yeah.

FL: In your thesis, you mentioned that some people—the decisions sometimes were aesthetic choices, you mentioned. But also you mentioned there was an earlier problem with some of the aircraft, that their engines would cut out, and they needed to have it in a particular place to kind of help deal, stabilize the aircraft when the engine cut out. Can you tell me about that? I thought that was kind of interesting.

CB: Well, yeah. It's a long time ago, and I don't quite remember [laughs] what I wrote in the thesis. But I think we were talking about, of course, propeller engines then, because we had just—in fact, by the time we wrote our thesis, we had just flown—well, the British had introduced, and the Germans, too, of course, the jet engine in World War Two in '45. We hadn't yet flown supersonically. So, but the jet engine, commercially, was not introduced for some years after we were graduated. So we're talking about propeller-driven airplanes. And I guess it was more the issue on the vertical, of lateral control, once the engine cut out on one side.

FL: Oh!

CB: Then you had to have lateral control.

FL: Oh, I see.

CB: And you couldn't—and that was important, and so where you put the horizontal stabilizer could not interfere with the control, the vertical stabilizer—the rudder, in effect, you see. So you had to be sure that you gave ample room for the rudder to perform adequately when the engines were cut out, as well as to perform its maneuvers in turning, which were just in normal flight.

FL: It must have been an interesting time to be in aeronautics, when some of these seemingly basic issues were still being sorted out?

CB: It was, a very interesting time. And the department, as always, you know, had to be at the forefront of what we were doing in the nation. And the result of that was that they brought into the department a man by the name of Hsue-shen Tsien [also spelled Qian Xuesen, MIT Professor of Aerodynamics], who came to us from Cal Tech, and he was put in charge of the aerodynamics section of the department. Tsien was a protégé of Theodore von Kármán [at one point MIT Lecturer in Aeronautical Engineering], who in the thirties, forties, fifties, was the world's most famous aeronautical engineer, an Hungarian. And he was at Cal Tech, and Tsien was his protégé.

In those days, when aeronautical theory was developing rapidly, all the new theories bore von Kármán's name, both in structures and in aerodynamics. There was the von Kármán theory, the von Kármán-Tsien theory, and so on and so on and so on—various theories that were applicable to the—for the rapid development of aviation technology. And so Tsien came with a huge reputation, and he was a brilliant man.

And he taught, and my dear friends and I were the first group of students to study under him the very first course in the aerodynamics of a compressible fluid, which is what you needed to understand for supersonic flight. Because once you start flying supersonically, you're compressing the air ahead of you, and the consequences of that, the shock wave effect that people are familiar with, and so forth, affect the behavior and performance of the airplane significantly. And different mathematical and fluid dynamic rules apply than do to sub-sonic flight, so you had to learn this new technology. And he was a remarkable man.

His courses were horrible, because he would brook no questions! And we learned that very early. We sat in the classroom, not in a lecture hall, and he stood up, and he started writing on the blackboard. And somebody, five minutes into the lecture, interrupted him and said, "Excuse me, sir. I didn't understand that equation." And he turned around and he said, "Did you take course such and such and such?" The preparatory courses. "Yes." "Well, then you don't need the explanation." And he continued his lecture, and we sat in stunned silence. At the next lecture, somebody again asked a question, and he turned around and said, "Were you paying attention?" "Yes." "Well, then you don't need the answer." We never asked a question again, in the full year that we studied under him! We simply copied his equations, and listened to him talk.

And at the end of it, he gave us an exam, the questions of which bore no relationship to aeronautics whatsoever! They were mathematical exams of hypothetical situations which were, for the most part, impossible in nature. But it was a study of how well we understood the mathematics of what he was teaching us, and the concepts of what he was teaching us. And I remember when my graduate advisor, Shatswell Ober [MIT Professor of Aeronautical Engineering], at the time, told me what grade I got on the final exam. And there were no other—the grade was based on the final exam. There was no homework, and no mid-term exams. I shouldn't say there was no homework. There certainly was homework; forgive me. But there was no midterm exams of any kind, no quizzes, snap or otherwise. And I got what was then a—would have been a C today; we called it a P in those days, the passing grade.

And he said, “Well, that probably means you wrote your name right.” [laughs] And he was a very tough teacher.

However, my classmates in the Graduate House, somebody—and we were a large group. My class in ’47, I believe, graduated the largest number of aeronautical engineers in the Institute’s history. And the undergraduate class of ’48 was one fewer. It may be the other way around, but I think we were the largest. And so there were a whole gang of us who were taking our master’s degree together, and a couple of Ph.D. candidates. And somebody got the bright idea—and it was a bright idea—that we should entertain our professors to dinner, and just meet them, and get some ideas from them as to where we might go to work, you see! And so we did that monthly, and we invited Tsien, with some trepidation. But whoever invited said he accepted happily, and he was socially a very charming man!

Well, I should finish the story about Tsien. He went back to Cal Tech after a short time here, I think the following year. He was Chinese, and he was associating with known communists, apparently, and so they—they, the Feds—descended on him, and demanded to know whether he was a communist or not, and he refused to answer. In the end, there’s a wonderful biography of him written by Iris Chang, an American Chinese who, regrettably—this was her first book—regrettably, committed suicide some recent years ago—in which this—you know, she wrote letters to all of us, and what I’ve told you is summarized in that book, from my mouth and the mouths of many of my colleagues. But in the end, we deported him to China, because he was considered to be a communist, which he—I don’t know whether he was or wasn’t! But he went to China, and he rose to become head of their guided missile program.

FL: Oh, wow!

CB: [laughs] And I think—I think—he still lives. He’s well into his nineties, but I think he’s still alive in China. [Editor’s note: Tsien passed away on October 31, 2009.] He was a major-general in the Army, and married an opera singer. Iris, her biography of him is called *Thread of the Silkworm*, an interesting double-entendre, because the Silkworm is the name of their intercontinental ballistic missile. And this is the history of how it came into being, because we sent him over, because he was a commie—or we suspected him of being a communist. [Chang, Iris: *Thread of the Silkworm* (New York: Basic Books, 1995)]

FL: Oh, my! There was a lot of that going on.

CB: There was, yeah.

FL: Yeah.

4. Editor of the MIT Student Newspaper *The Tech* (48:42—CD1 48:40)

FL: So, moving on, one of the things you did at MIT, you worked for *The MIT Tech* [correct name: *The Tech*], the student newspaper. You were Assistant Night Editor in

1945, and the Editor in 1946. Tell me about your experiences working for that paper, just briefly.

CB: Well, that's how I learned to hunt and peck on the typewriter. Our office was in the basement of Walker Memorial. It was on the left just as you entered the outside stairs into the basement, on the west side of the building. I think we had two rooms, one where the editor sat, and one where the typewriters were, and we wrote our stories. And I learned to hunt and peck, and write my stories as a reporter.

And then when I was Editor, finally, I had the brilliant idea that it was wrong that the bridge leading to Cambridge from Boston was named after our rival upstream. And I didn't understand why the bridge wasn't named for MIT! So I started a campaign to rename the bridge. That was my editorial; that was my newspaper's whole thrust, was to rename the bridge! And I put up petitions all around the campus, and I was going to petition the City Councils of Boston and Cambridge, since of course, as we know, the dividing line is down the center of the Charles. And people signed them. I think I collected twelve hundred signatures. Some people wrote nasty remarks, you know. Somebody else wrote some stupid thing about since the cupola of the Bunker Hill Monument can be seen from the roof of Building Six, why don't we name it the MIT Monument? Which was stupid!

FL: [laughs]

CB: I mean, what's the relevance of that? [laughs] And learned very quickly that—well, first of all, Mayor [James M.] Curley was the Mayor of Boston at the time, and he was richly quoted as saying, “Curley quotes Shakespeare: a rose by any other name”—he didn't care what the bridge was named!

FL: [laughs]

CB: And the Boston City Council voted in favor, and the Cambridge City Council voted against, and because the, of course, the Cambridge City Council were in the grasp of the older university. And then there were, in fact, one of them said that MIT is still a child. Remember, this is 1944, and MIT was just in Cambridge since 1916, so that was only twenty-eight years. And Harvard had been there several hundred years more than that! [laughs] “When MIT learns to walk, then MIT can talk,” et cetera, et cetera, et cetera! And I learned then that it was going to be—that it was controlled by the Metropolitan District Commission, which no longer exists, of course—

FL: Right.

CB: —but that it was a state function, and that the name change had to be effected by an act of the Great and General Court [current official name is The General Court of Massachusetts]. So I was going to—by that time, it was getting near end of term, and exams were coming up! [laughs] And I was beginning to run out of time and things to do. And I decided that to petition the Great and General Court with my twelve hundred signatures was going to be something more than I thought I could manage. And so I was planning to have our own naming ceremony, *The Tech* would have a huge naming ceremony, “Welcome to Technology Bridge.” And in fact, having started the campaign, whenever I referred to the bridge in the newspaper, particularly

with respect to the crew races, and so forth, I would always, in bold face type, refer to it as Technology Bridge! [laughs]

FL: [laughs]

CB: And just about the time that I was about to implement that, I was called to the Dean's Office. Dean—the Associate Dean—he had been Dean of Freshman. I think by then he was Associate Dean, if not Dean of Students himself. Yeah, maybe. Thomas Palm Pitré. Because somebody had stolen the dedicatory plaques, the big brass plaques at either end of the river, had taken them off the fencing, the bridge fencing. And they'd been stolen, and he demanded that I return them! [laughs] "Have them back in and no questions asked." And I said, "But I didn't take them!" And of course, he looked at me skeptically, and I—there's nothing I could do. I didn't know what to do.

I certainly cancelled my plans, and besides, as I say, exams were coming up, and the end of term. And three weeks later the plaques were put back in place, and it all blew away, and the whole thing lost impetus. But we made a splash in Boston. *The [Boston] Globe* had a front page story about it, and better than that, [Francis W.] Dahl, the famous, D-A-H-L, the famous *Boston Globe* or *[Boston] Herald*, I guess it was, *Herald* cartoonist, did a piece: "Why would anybody want their name—why would MIT want their name on that rickety old bridge?" [laughs]

FL: [laughs] Wow!

5. MIT Glee Club (54:13—CD2 00:00)

FL: So one of the things, being, particularly, the Editor, gave you a bird's eye view of, kind of, what was going on. And some of the musical questions that I have for you about what was going on—you probably were in tune with a lot of those things. In the 1940's, the MIT Glee Club had two conductors. There was Henry Jackson Warren and George Dunham.

CB: Mm-hm.

FL: And I'll ask you more about them as we go on. So, when you were there, there were actually two separate glee clubs, from what I can understand, a Men and a Women's Glee Club. The Women's Glee Club started in 1945. Is that what you recall?

CB: No idea. No, I don't remember it at all, a Women's Glee Club. There may have been, but there were so few women here—

FL: Yeah.

CB: —that really, I think in our class there were about a dozen, at most. And I think that was representative of the four classes. I think if there were fifty women here at that time, that was a lot.

FL: Uh-huh.

CB: And to have formed—they may have formed a glee club, but I just don't know about it.

FL: Okay.

CB: I have no memory of it.

FL: Yeah. It might be that—well, I don't know. So, the Glee Club, being a glee club, obviously, sang a mix of classical and popular music.

CB: Mm-hm.

FL: How would you describe, when you think back, the kind of music that you did? How do you think of it?

CB: Well, it was more classical than popular. We sang a lot of cantatas of one sort or another, and hymnal music, and a lot of Negro—as they were called—spirituals, then. And occasionally, popular songs from the more popular musicals sort of thing. We did do joint concerts with women's junior colleges, which actually served a very useful purpose for us, because there was always a mixer after at the end of the concert, and that's where we met girls, you see, since we paid no attention to the few who were on campus at all. Although there were marriages on campus, from on-campus relationships, during our period, but not many. And we would generally rehearse, usually some piece of church music, together with the women. It was the custom to—then, that we sang the *Messiah* [G.F. Handel] annually, with Colby Junior College in New London, Maine. [Editor's note: Colby Junior College is now known as Colby-Sawyer College.] Oh, excuse me, New London—

FL: Connecticut?

CB: No, New Hampshire.

FL: Oh, uh-huh.

CB: New London, New Hampshire. You say Connecticut, because—I missed the concert my first year because they said, “We're going to New London, and get whatever train.” So I went to South Station [laughs] to get the One-Fifteen, and there was no 1:15 train to New London [laughs] from South Station! They said, “Oh, you must mean North Station.” I missed the train!

So we would sing that. We would go up there, and they would come down here, on alternate years. And I have this—the second time we went up, I did catch the right train, and it was bitterly cold! But we sang *Messiah* with them. And I think we did, actually, and that I think was in my senior year. And they came down when I was in graduate school; I continued to sing in the Glee Club. And so we sang with Lasell [College in Newton, Massachusetts], and Mount Ida [College, Newton, Massachusetts], and Endicott [College in Beverly, Massachusetts] and places like that.

FL: Right.

CB: And sometimes go there, and sometimes they'd—and we sang in Walker Memorial, and that was the universal concert hall. It was where we gave our concerts, and there would be the mixers in there to recorded music immediately afterwards.

FL: So how was the music chosen? Was it always chosen by the director?

CB: Yeah.

FL: Any student input into that?

CB: No, no.

FL: So, with the popular music, did you sing from arrangements, or did the group do any kind of arrangements themselves?

CB: No, we sang from published music all together.

FL: Uh-huh. One more thing about the—a couple more questions about the popular music. When you were doing that, did you just stand like you were singing the classical, or did you do any movements?

CB: No movement.

FL: No movement.

CB: In fact, [laughs] as you know, I was in the first group of the Logarhythms.

FL: Right.

CB: And I remember after one concert that we gave at a girls' school—and usually it was after a Glee Club concert we might perform—one or two of the young women came up and said, “You all stand up there so stiffly! Why don't you move around?” [laughs]

FL: [laughs] Ah ha. So during the performances of the popular songs, did a conductor conduct them like classical?

CB: Yes, yes, just like the—yes, exactly that, yes. We were well controlled, and well behaved, mm-hm. One interesting thing, by the way: when I was on *The Tech*, I would write the reviews of the Glee Club concerts!

FL: [laughs]

CB: And at the time, when I was also in Drama Shop, and I was doing a good deal of acting in Drama Shop, I played the lead in *The Drunkard* [by William H. Smith] one year, and I had never had a drink in my life! [laughs]

FL: [laughs]

CB: I had to feign drunkenness. That was quite an undertaking! Five acts and twenty-nine scenes, something like that. And we performed it twice in the New England Mutual Hall, on Boylston Street—that's the Tech on Boylston Street, where it used to be.

FL: Right.

CB: The—it was directed by Professor Dean Mattison Fuller [MIT Professor of English and Director of Dramatics], who was the drama coach, as he was called, formally, in the faculty. He wanted me to write a review of that, and I said, “Well, I can't write a review,”—or one of the other plays; I've forgotten. “I can't write a review of the play I was in!” And he said, “Well, you write reviews of the Glee Club! Why don't you?” [laughs]

FL: [laughs]

CB: And I said, “Well, it’s not quite the same thing, is it?”

FL: Wow! Do you remember any of the piano accompanists for the Glee Club?

CB: Yes, the piano accompanist for the Glee Club was my classmate Arnold Judson.

FL: Yeah, Class of ’47.

CB: Class of ’47, yeah.

FL: Were there any others? There’s some others that seem to be around. Somebody named Ephraim Miller, Class of ’50, and James Angell, Class of ’46? Are any of those names familiar?

CB: Yeah, I remember them, but my memory remains that it was Judson principally. I’m sure the others were there, I just have no memory of it. I sang throughout—through graduate school with them, as I said. And by that time, Liepmann was—Klaus Liepmann [MIT Professor of Music]—was here.

FL: Right, and we’ll get to him in a minute. Did any of the accompanists ever play any solos between numbers of the Glee Club?

CB: No, no.

FL: No.

CB: And we always ended our concerts with “Take Me Back to Tech,” always.

FL: Wow, interesting!

CB: And Judson played a beautiful accompaniment to that.

FL: Wow! Speaking just to that point, do you remember the pianists kind of coming up with their own arrangements of the piano part?

CB: No, they didn’t. They played the music as written.

FL: Uh-huh.

CB: Well, that’s my memory, that they played the music as written.

FL: Yeah, because there’s a recording of “Take me Back to Tech” on an LP, and it’s certainly—I’m not aware of any published arrangement of what they did, and those pianists seemed to have kind of worked up their own version of that.

CB: Well, if it was on an LP, it was either recorded onto the LP from an earlier recording, or if it was a fresh recording into that LP, as it were, it’s long after our time, because they didn’t exist.

FL: Because there was a radio broadcast from some time in the early fifties.

CB: Oh, yes, that’s right!

FL: Right, and on that, the radio announcer actually—I’m forgetting the two pianists’ names; I should have written it down—but there, that version, was obviously something they had kind of worked up. There were actually two pianists playing on that.

CB: Yeah. As we discussed earlier, I was on that LP, and it was from the fifties.

FL: Right, right.

CB: But I don't remember it, I really don't. I have a small memory of that.

FL: That's okay. Well, while we're on that subject, do you remember the radio station that—?

CB: You know, I don't that, either. I'm pretty sure it was an FM station, because it was a weekly evening program, it was broadcast in the evening, and it was a series of songs from local colleges.

FL: Right.

CB: But I just don't remember it.

FL: That's okay. So I want to ask you about some of the directors of the Glee Club. There was this gentleman, Henry Jackson Warren. And it looks like he came to MIT some time in the 1939, and then he temporarily left in 1943 to serve in World War Two, as far as what I'm finding. Anyways, I want to ask you about him. Do you know anything about his musical background, kind of what he did besides—?

CB: I don't.

FL: Uh-huh.

CB: I don't. I just took them as they were. I sang under both him and [George] Dunham. And I think I—I mean, they were both very, very nice men, and they were effective and accomplished in what they did. But beyond that, I knew little of them.

FL: Mm-hm. So, with Henry Jackson Warren, obviously he was a nice man. How was he in rehearsal? Was he patient, demanding? How did he get along with the students?

CB: He was very patient, and I think very direct in what he wanted. But he was very calm about it; both of them were. I mean, they [pause] I remember singing—remember that it was pleasant singing under them, and that the direction was effective. And I liked singing under both of them.

FL: Mm-hm. Again, getting back to Henry Jackson Warren, did you get a sense about his particular musical interests, things that really got him excited?

CB: No, sorry.

FL: Uh-huh. Do you know if he played piano or other instruments?

CB: I didn't.

FL: Did he ever sing for you? Did you get a sense of his voice?

CB: No.

FL: Uh-huh. Was he comfortable doing some of the popular music?

CB: Yes, yes, he was.

FL: Uh-huh. And, then there's George Dunham, who took over for the years that Henry Jackson Warren was away, serving in the Army. He came in 1943. And you don't remember anything about his background either, right?

CB: No.

FL: He is described as a prominent Boston musician, but other than that I haven't been able to find out what else he had done.

CB: When did Warren return?

FL: In, let's see, he came back the '47 – '48 year. Oh, no, the '46 – '47 year.

CB: Yeah, so it was Dunham, and then Warren, yeah.

FL: Right.

CB: I don't know why I remember Warren as being a somewhat more forceful person than Dunham. But they were both, as I say, in a sense, perhaps to use a word that doesn't quite apply, they were journeymen choral conductors. That was, they did what they did with a lot of local schools, and they came to MIT twice a week to do our stuff, and then lead our concerts when—I suppose they were the ones who scheduled them, and made those arrangements.

FL: Mm-hm. So we mentioned earlier this Women's Glee Club. I was looking in the MIT yearbook, and it said that it started in 1945, but you don't have any recollection of that?

CB: No, I don't.

FL: That's interesting.

6. Klaus Liepmann, first Professor of Music at MIT (1:07:54—CD2 13:42)

FL: So, in the fall of 1947, Klaus Liepmann came, and he was hired as the first Professor of Music at MIT. But in the spring of '47 he had actually conducted a concert of the MIT Orchestra. Do you recall the circumstances that brought him to MIT? Do you remember anything?

CB: No, no. All of those things were behind a curtain. You had no understanding of how the academy itself worked. We just learned that this great musician was now coming to take over, and was going to make his mark, which he did. In '47 he took over conducting the Glee Club, and the Orchestra. Now, the orchestra, of course, existed in its way before he arrived.

FL: That's right.

CB: And shall I go on about that?

FL: I actually have some questions about that.

CB: Okay, and so why don't we wait, then?

FL: Yeah. According to Klaus Liepmann's autobiography, there was some student initiative to get a full-time Director of Music, as Klaus was given the title of. Do you remember any kind of student, kind of, initiative, going to the administration for such

a position? [Editor's note: see Liepmann, Klaus: *Fifty Years in America* (MIT 1983) and Liepmann, Klaus: *Music at MIT: a short history of music at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology* (MIT 1980).]

CB: I don't, and I'm not sure I know where it came from. And I'm wondering—I'm thinking, I wondered if I ever wrote an editorial about that, because I did write an editorial about the need for a—an auditorium, which we didn't have. But surely I would remember that, and I don't, so I have no connection with any student initiative.

FL: Uh-huh. So, particularly the fall of 1947, when Klaus Liepmann was officially hired, Henry Jackson Warren was still the Director of the Glee Club. In fact, he conducted a performance of the *Messiah* that December. What was the relationship with, between Klaus Liepmann and Henry Jackson Warren, as far as conducting the glee club? Were they both—do you know how that sorted out?

CB: No, I don't know. My memory is a little bit dim. I do remember singing under Liepmann. I don't remember the transition at all. In fact, I had [laughs] an interesting—I sat in the front row, and we rehearsed in 1-390, in those days. And I was sitting next to [John A.] "Johnny" Gautraud, from the Class of 1946, and we were both singing second tenor. Except Johnny couldn't sing. I mean, it wasn't really that he sang flat; he couldn't even carry a melody flat, as it were, but he was there singing!

And I was fairly near the podium, and Liepmann was conducting. And he looked in my direction, and said, "You're singing flat!" And I wasn't singing flat [laughs], it was Johnny Gautraud who was singing flat! And so, I didn't say anything, and I went on singing, and I was singing perfectly well, as I knew I was. And he stopped again, and he came over, and he grabbed me by the wrist, and he shook me! And said, "You're singing flat!" I didn't tell him, "It's not me, it's him!" And so, I did the best I could. Nothing happened after that, and I don't know, maybe Johnny somehow was able to pick it up! [laughs]

FL: Do you remember if you sang in one of the *Messiah* performances that fall of '47?

CB: Yes, yes.

FL: Because there were two performances. One was conducted by Henry Jackson Warren, and one by Klaus Liepmann. Do you remember which one you—?

CB: Which one I sang in?

FL: The one with Henry Jackson Warren was at Jordan Hall [New England Conservatory of Music], and I'm not sure where the other—

CB: And the Liepmann was—?

FL: I'm not sure where that one was.

CB: No, sorry, can't remember which.

FL: Okay. Let's see here. So, when Klaus Liepmann took over, do you recall his opinion about the kind of glee club repertoire? Did he change the kind of music you were doing at all?

CB: I don't remember, honestly.

FL: Uh-huh. Do you remember his attitude towards the more popular music? Was he comfortable with that?

CB: I can't say. I really don't remember what we were singing then.

FL: Yeah, mm-hm. We'll talk about the Logarithms, which you sang with. Were there other student-run vocal groups that maybe weren't kind of officially sponsored by the department?

CB: Yes, there was the custom, which was a very pleasant custom in those days, something called the All-Tech Sing, in which living groups would assemble, and would present a combo, as it were, at a Walker Memorial [building] concert. And each fraternity, and each dormitory—or there might be multiple groups from the dormitories, although we only had Senior House and the East Campus—would sing some brief song. And then there was a winner! [laughs] And that was a student initiative. And then the revival of the Tech Show, which was in '47, I guess.

FL: Forty-seven, that's right. And we'll get to that later.

CB: Yeah, was a student initiative.

FL: Right.

CB: But there were no—yeah, well actually, the student initiative—there was the student initiative to put together the symphony orchestra—

FL: That's right.

CB: —which was Tony de Almeida, from the class of—what was he? Forty-nine, I believe. [Editor's note: Antonio de Almeida (1928 – 1997), MIT Class of 1948.]

FL: Yeah.

CB: Yeah. And he decided—he was a musician himself, of some accomplishment, and he put together a symphony orchestra, which included some staff people. And he even managed to mount a concert in Walker Memorial of some, perhaps, thirty to forty players. And, which was—I went to listen. It was okay. And I don't remember what he played, but I really admired his initiative for doing that.

FL: Yeah, he went on to a very distinguished career as a conductor.

CB: Yes, he did. He left here. In fact, he's no longer on our alumni rolls, which is a shame! Because he left here at the end of his sophomore year to study music at Yale.

FL: Right.

CB: And then became an internationally renowned conductor. He changed his name slightly.

FL: Oh!

CB: Because when he was with us, when he was at MIT, he spelled it “small-d-apostrophe” Almeida. But when he became, at some point in his professional career, it became “d-e” Almeida.

FL: Oh! I've wondered about that. Did you know him very well?

CB: Yeah.

FL: Tell me about him.

CB: He was a nice guy. He was sort of, in some respects—he was studying mathematics, as I recall. And in some respects, with his deep interest in music, it wasn't quite clear that he really was happy here, but that's just perhaps an interpretation, an after-the-fact interpretation. I didn't know him all that well. I remember that [laughs]—that he was an incredibly handsome young man, and when he was in white tie and tails he was breathtakingly handsome! And we were competing for the same girls, and I always lost! [laughs]

FL: [laughs]

CB: But that's about the extent of it.

FL: Did he—did you talk about music with him much? Did he kind of get you into—?

CB: No, not really. No, one is so—no, I didn't talk to him about music. You know, I think when we were together, and we weren't—he wasn't a close friend, but we saw each other on many occasions, I'm sure; I don't know what we talked about. But we didn't—if we talked about music, it wasn't in any depth at all.

FL: Mm-hm. There was a gentleman named Ralph Hushke, H-U-S-H-K-E, Class of '46, who presumably also helped Tony bring up the orchestra. Do you remember Ralph at all?

CB: No.

FL: Yeah. I'm wondering more about him, and what his role might have been in helping bring, revive, the orchestra.

7. A cappella singing with the MIT Logarithms (1:17:41—CD2 23:28)

FL: Getting back to the Logarithms, the a cappella group, from what I'm able to gather from the research, it was started in 1949 by somebody named Ted Metzger, Class of '50. Do you remember Ted at all?

CB: I don't, no.

FL: Uh-huh. It sounds like he sang with them for just a year, because the next year, when I've seen lists of members, he wasn't listed. And it looks like that's when you joined, in what, 1951?

CB: No, I think I joined earlier than that. I think I joined in '49, or early '50. That's my memory. Because it had just been founded. But maybe it was a year old when I joined it. My memory may be dim on this, of course, but I think—I would think it was earlier rather than later, for the simple reason that when I came back to the Institute to work here, at the end of 1949, I was still, you know, just barely twenty-one years old, and therefore still age-wise a contemporary of the seniors and so forth here, it was comfortable for me to insert myself. And they welcomed me, even though I was on the staff. So I can't be certain that it was 1950 that I joined. Maybe

it was '51, but I would think earlier rather than later, simply because that was—I know I joined the Staff Players at the same time, to do drama here. So, anyway.

FL: Yeah, so the repertoire that they were doing, being a cappella, they were interested in barbershop and kind of close harmony stuff. Had you done any of that before?

CB: No.

FL: Uh-huh. Was that kind of thing—was there something particularly compelling about that, that interested you?

CB: I loved the harmonies, yes. And since I sang lead, it was great! [laughs]

FL: So, it seems a little murky as far as the size of the group, and it obviously changed, but from what I was reading, it had first started out as an octet, and then I see a list of members from 1951, and there's twelve. It just seemed like it was variable in terms of its size?

CB: Well yes, because we sang as a double quartet, is the way we sang. We sang barbershop with two voices each, at each level. [clears throat] Excuse me. And, tenor, lead, baritone, and bass. And people came, drifted in and out.

FL: Mm-hm.

CB: And so we never sang as a group of twelve during that period. And I was with them until—through 1952.

FL: Uh-huh.

CB: Yeah, I'm pretty sure I sang with them three years, yeah.

FL: Mm-hm. How familiar were you with other collegiate a cappella groups? Did you socialize with them, like the Harvard Krokodiloes?

CB: No. We knew about them. I always loved—I loved the name of the main group, the Medibensters.

FL: Wow!

CB: And I wondered where that came from, but that's about the extent of it. We knew about them. I don't remember that we—we didn't have the sort of barbershop programs of multiple colleges. We sang, usually, either in small concert performance, or at the end of Glee Club concerts.

FL: Mm-hm. From the beginning, was the—at least in its early years, it seems like the Logarhythms was a Music Departmental sponsored group. Is that true?

CB: I don't remember that.

FL: You don't remember?

CB: I don't remember that we had anything to do with the academy.

FL: Was Klaus Liepmann involved at all?

CB: No.

FL: No. That's interesting. There was a list that I saw of, kind of listing MIT groups. It was a publication put out by the MIT Music Department, and it listed the

Logarhythms. And I thought maybe—because today, when they list groups, they don't list the student-run groups, and I thought maybe that the Logarhythms was involved with that. Can you tell me about how the group rehearsed? Did you use the piano to learn the parts? How did you, and was there—who kind of ran the rehearsals, and how did that work?

CB: I don't know. There was, I think, I remember Frank Wilson. I think he sang bass. Is that—?

FL: Yes, right, Class of '52.

CB: I think, yeah, and Jere Sanborn [MIT class of 1952]. We would rehearse in a classroom. We would rehearse wherever we could find a place to do it. We found the best place to rehearse before a concert at Walker was in the men's room, [laughs] in the basement, because it had such wonderful resonance! But again, you know, any one of us would come up with ideas about how to put riffs in, and so forth, if we did that sort of thing, which we didn't do much. Somebody would come forward with a portfolio of songs, and we'd choose them collectively, and decide what we wanted to sing together. And we just—there must have been a piano somewhere that we would pick out tunes on.

There's a wonderful story, by the way, about we were to sing at Pops one year, and we had been invited to attend the Boston chapter of SPEBSQSA, the Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Barbershop Quartet Singing in America, which is pronounced "spebskwa." I think a friend of mine, or somebody, was a member, and we were invited to their concert. And they sang a song called "Cruisin'". And it was about: "Cruisin' along in my old Model T, nobody to worry us, just you and me." And we loved that song! And they sang—we heard them sing it. It was such beautiful music, such a lovely song for barbershoppers to sing! So we decided that we would sing that when we were asked to sing at Pops that year, for Tech Night at the Pops [annual Boston Pops event].

And somehow, in the mysteries of the way this world operates, the word got out that the song we were going to sing was suggestive! And may even have dirty lyrics! And the only thing that we could think about was somewhere in there was a phrase that said, "two little spigots to check the oil," and some other phrase about, just cruisin'—I've forgotten, about cuddling—I've forgotten what the lyrics were now, but it was suggestive!

And the powers that be, whoever they sure, wasn't sure that we should be singing this song at Pops. So we were required to perform it before a small faculty committee of three. And we went into a classroom one afternoon, in the first floor in the Infinite Corridor—it wasn't called that back then, but in the first floor of Building Four, overlooking the back. And there were these three stone-faced—there was one woman and two men—stone-faced faculty people whom we didn't know. And we sang this song, and they decided it was okay! [laughs]

FL: [laughs]

CB: And we sang that, that's what we sang at Pops that week.

FL: My goodness! So, singing a cappella, it's a particular challenge to have really good intonation. Do you remember kind of how you worked on intonation?

CB: No, we didn't. We just decided whether we liked the sound of it, and that was it. I don't know that we really worked on intonation at all. I think we were really amateurish. As I said, we liked rehearsing in the men's room of Walker, because the resonance was so good.

FL: Because there are a couple cuts of the Logarhythms on that LP from that radio show. The intonation is very good, and really good ensemble work! You must have worked pretty hard to get there.

CB: I guess. You know, if you sing the same song over and over, and you enjoy doing it, and you really like the song, and you like the sounds you're making, that's what happens.

FL: Right. Was—the membership of the group was probably by audition, right? So you had to probably be a pretty decent singer to get in?

CB: Yeah.

FL: Uh-huh. In May, 1952, the group won an octet singing competition against twelve other New England and New York area schools. Were you in that group for that competition?

CB: I don't remember that I was, no. Where was it held?

FL: *The Tech* article didn't—oh, I should have written it down. It was some—I don't remember where it was held. I should have put that in my notes here.

CB: Well, in any event, I don't remember it, so I don't know where, yeah.

FL: So you were saying that often the Logarhythms would sing after a Glee Club performance. Was it often that you did a full concert yourselves?

CB: No.

FL: No?

CB: Yes, well not often, but we did occasionally sing in different venues. I remember that we used to sing our—the opening Glee Club concert of the year, for example, used to be at Longwood Towers [Brookline, Massachusetts].

FL: Uh-huh.

CB: In the lounge, for the residents of Longwood Towers. And they were sort of, all of these old people, as they seemed to us youngsters [laughs], sitting in the lounge, and we would sing. And I think we did a concert there once, and once we did a concert specially at one of the girls' schools. And we had concerts, yes, around and about, but not many, that might come our way. And I don't remember where we went.

FL: How often did the group rehearse?

CB: Oh, certainly once or twice a week.

FL: Yeah, yeah.

8. Humanities at MIT (1:28:41—CD2 34:28)

FL: So, to change the subject slightly, looking at the kind of broader subject of humanities, and of course music included with that, at MIT, when you were a student in the forties, there was a Division of Humanities, and Robert [G.] Caldwell was Dean of Humanities, and there was a Department of English and History, and a Department of Social Sciences. When Klaus Liepmann, the first Professor of Music, was hired, he was in the Department of English and History.

CB: Mm-hm.

FL: Which is kind of interesting. Of course, all of this predates the formation of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences in 1950. Here's an interesting quote from MIT President Karl [Taylor] Compton [MIT President 1930 – 1948] in 1947. He speaks of the importance of the broad program in humanities that was envisioned. He said—well, one of the things he certainly did was help move MIT away from a more narrowly focused engineering school, and brought in more pure science research, which was a real change.

But, there's a quote of his—oh, darn it, I don't have it here! It was an interesting quote of his about the importance of humanities at MIT. I thought—I must—sorry about that. And then, in 1949, there was this committee called the Report on Educational Survey, otherwise known as the Lewis Report, which also affirmed the value of humanities at MIT, which led to the formation of the School of Humanities and Social Studies [correction: Sciences] in 1950.

When you were a student, do you remember institutional kind of administrative attitudes toward music and the arts? Do you get any sense of that? With your role at *The Tech* you must have been in tune with, kind of, you know, what—?

CB: I don't. I think the only impressions I got were from the Humanities people that I dealt with, who I regret to say even to this day, to some degree, share the feeling that they were very much sort of lower tier, viewed as lower tier kind of activities. But, no, I don't remember. I'm not sure that they ever came to—any of the senior administration—well, they don't today either, for that matter, come to any of the concerts that were performed. We might see an occasional faculty member at concerts. But you see, the issue is, as the problem is with MIT today, it's a non-residential campus. And, the faculty, busy as they are, tend to live away, or do live away, and some of them some distances. So gathering faculty to events like this is difficult, and it was more so then.

FL: Mm-hm. There seemed to be something in the air, not just at MIT, but culturally at large, lots of discussions about the role of humanities in education, but also kind of in cultural life. *The MIT Tech* had an article from May of 1947, and they mention a new student organization called the MIT Liberal Arts Society, that was to publish a literary magazine. Do you remember anything about that?

CB: I remember that—yes. I remember that it was formed. I remember that—I think the magazine they called the *Rune*. [Editor’s note: The title of the literary magazine discussed is not known. *Rune* started in 1974.]

FL: Uh-huh. So they started it?

CB: I think it still exists today—I think.

FL: Oh, so that’s the magazine they started?

CB: I think so.

FL: Uh-huh.

CB: If my memory—you know, it’s not as crisp on these things as one would like, but that’s my recollection. By—yeah. [pause] In terms of the—I was a member of the secret society Osiris. I don’t know if you’re familiar with that?

FL: No!

CB: That existed at the Institute at the time, and which was—it was an interesting organization. Shall I describe it?

FL: Sure!

CB: Are you interested in hearing about it? It was supposed to be so secret that you weren’t allowed to even say that you were a member of it, or mention its name—you know, that kind of thing. It was founded in 1904, so you can understand the societal or so—context in which these things were formed. It served the purpose of no-holds-barred discussions between the student leadership and the senior faculty and administration. It was a student run organization, and generally student leaders were elected to it by the students. If you were elected as a junior, that was a pretty big deal! I was elected as a senior.

There were some of my classmates, one or two of my classmates, one of them, certainly, preceded me. And also—and I think we elected the honorary members, who were the faculty. They were the senior administration. And the rule at Osiris, which was a monthly, we met monthly, to discuss issues of concern to the students with the senior administration, in a comfortable, non-adversarial relationship, as it were. The meetings were held in faculty houses, rotating monthly. We’d go to somebody’s house and have a buffet supper.

There were perhaps of the order of a dozen members of Osiris, and perhaps a dozen faculty members. And the rule was that everybody addressed everybody by first name. Now, you have to understand how hard it was, in those days, when even to be called yourself by your first name was—you know, many faculty members addressed you as Mr. Brenner, as it were, until you, they got to know you better. And to call Karl Taylor Compton “Karl,” it stuck in the throat! It was hard to do!

But the purpose was to discuss issues of consequence to the students, that were concerning them about life on the campus. Not the academic issues so much—I don’t remember that we talked about those. But I remember the issue of the literary magazine being discussed then at that meeting, for example. And it was an interesting place to be, to have that kind of relationship. And it was quite open, and

informal, and I don't think that we were ever shut down on issues that we wanted to talk about.

And I can't tell you now what those issues were, probably, well, food in Walker Memorial was one, and perhaps the academic pressure certainly might have been another, and the question of whether we might have football again, or not; I don't remember. All kinds of things that we would talk about.

That society came to a close, and I think properly so, but it came to a close during the Vietnam War, when the radical student group learned of it, and said that this has no place in MIT's culture, secret societies. And they learned of the venues where the meetings—the meetings were then being held, I think, in the Odd Volumes Club, on Beacon Hill, on Mount Vernon Street. And [James Rhyne] "Jim" Killian [MIT President 1948 – 1959], I think, was a member of the club, which is why we met there. And they learned of it, and started picketing the meetings.

And *The Tech* was at that time writing editorials against the society, and so it ultimately disbanded. And what—that led to Jim Killian, at the time, forming the—he was Chairman of the [MIT] Corporation—the Corporation Joint Advisory Committee on Institute-Wide Affairs, which replaced that, because its charge—its structure was beautiful. He had representatives of every school. He had six faculty members; he had three undergraduate members, including ex-officio the leader of the Undergraduate Association, or Institute Committee, as it was in our day, the Graduate Student Council Chairman, and two other graduates and undergraduates, the Alumni Association President, an ex-officio member, and five other Corporation members.

And the charge of the committee was to deal with the topic of concern to MIT, and study it for the year. And when I was on the Corporation, we dealt with some—it was right after, right at the time of the transition between [Jerome B.] "Jerry" Wiesner [MIT President 1971 – 1980] and Paul [E.] Gray [MIT President 1980 – 1990], and so that was the year that I was President of the Alumni Association. The concern was who the President should be. And this issue was dealt with at great length and with much emotion in the meetings. We revisited, for example, on one occasion, in one year, the question of need-blind admission.

And so, you know, the organization deals with serious issues, and Jim designed it with its compliments, so that every sector of the MIT community was properly represented, and voice was heard. So, the Osiris went away, but that was the context in which we tended to meet with faculty. There was no faculty advisor to *The Tech*, for example. There was no faculty advisor to anything. There was a drama coach, and there were crew coaches, and there were Glee Club itinerant musicians who came and coached the Glee Club kind of thing.

But we were pretty much on our—there may have been no faculty advisors, but I remember very clearly that one year I—since Walker Memorial was the only eating place on the Institute, you know, we were very sensitive to the quality of the food, and its price, as always! It was a cafeteria, the only place to eat. And I wrote an editorial saying how awful it was, and it should change, and so forth. And I don't know, a couple of months later wrote a companion editorial saying, complaining

about the fact that nothing has changed, and comparing the menu then with the menu now, and so forth and so forth.

And I was called into the office of Professor Leicester F. Hamilton, Class of 1914, and in the Chemistry Department, who was Chairman of the Dormitory Committee of the faculty. And he advised me, instructed me, to stop writing inflammatory artic—editorials like that! [laughs] And I think about that today! I mean, good God, can you imagine a faculty member saying that? [laughs] That would be the headline of the newspaper the next issue! So, but that was the extent that we had any kind of faculty involvement in the things that we as undergraduates did!

FL: Mm-hm.

9. Music appreciation course, theater, radio, other musical performing groups at MIT (1:41:47—CD2 47:35)

FL: So, when you were a student, there was one music course offered called “Introduction to Music” and the course number was E-46.

CB: Yes.

FL: And there were two professors who taught that from time to time: Dean [Mattison] Fuller, and William Greene [MIT Professor of English]. And you told me that you took the course?

CB: Yes, I did take the course. We were—the humanities—MIT has always had a humanities requirement—always.

FL: Right.

CB: And at that time our requirement was a year of English, a year of history, and then we had four electives. And in my senior year I chose a fine arts elective, in the fall term, taught by an architecture professor, and in the spring term, E-46 with Dean Fuller. And I still remember it with so much pleasure and gratitude for what it taught me, and what it introduced me to! He was a wonderful teacher, and taught us how to listen to music, and what do listen for.

And started out, the first symphony we ever studied was [W.A.] Mozart’s *Fortieth* [Symphony no. 40 in G minor, K V 550], movement by movement, theme by theme, and so forth. And he took us through the symphony, and showed us how it was—and then we, of course, went to Beethoven’s *Fifth* [Symphony no. 5 in C minor, op. 67] next, traditionally, and then went to more serious, more complex music—not that those are not complex—but subsequently. And of course, you know, I just couldn’t get enough of it; still can’t!

FL: So tell me about how, if you were, like, going through the Mozart *Fortieth*, were you actually reading scores and stuff like that?

CB: No, no, no, we were listening to the record. No, we weren’t reading scores; we were listening to the record.

FL: Uh-huh. Did he also play piano to kind of demonstrate stuff?

CB: I don't remember that he did, yeah. The classroom was in Building Two. Again, I don't remember his sitting down at the piano.

FL: Uh-huh. Do you know if he played piano?

CB: I don't remember if he did. And I'm thinking back, because I mentioned that I was in *The Drunkard*—or maybe I hadn't—

FL: Yeah.

CB: —but I played the lead in *The Drunkard* in Drama Shop. Yes, I did. And I'd never had a drink. I was sixteen years old, and I'd never had a drink. And so the cast decided that I ought to have a drink, and find out what it was to be drunk, you see. Or at least, have a drink. And so Dean Fuller offered to host the cast at a party at his apartment at, as I remember it, five and a half, maybe it was three and a half, Pinckney Street. And we all traipsed down there one Saturday evening, and he made whatever—well, I think we had, probably, rye and ginger ale. But I still wouldn't have it! I was so afraid to have a drink! And we played cards, and I drank ginger ale.

And I was thinking about what I remember about the apartment as we were talking, whether he played the piano, whether I remembered a piano in his living room. I didn't—don't know whether he even played, but I don't have any memory other than sitting at the card table, playing whatever we were playing, Michigan Rummy, or who knows what.

FL: Were there any in-house or in-classroom performances? Did any musicians come in and—?

CB: I don't remember any, no.

FL: Uh-huh. So what are some of the things that have kind of stayed with you, that you learned in that class? It sounded like it had a big impact on you.

CB: It did! Well, it taught me how, essentially how to listen to classical music of any kind. Well, certainly the symphonies. I remember as a young man, in my, having returned here, I had a date one evening, and I was talking about some symphony. And she said, "Are you still listening? I'm listening to Beethoven's quartets!" Well, I hadn't reached that stage yet, you see! [laughs]

FL: [laughs]

CB: I felt very put down, and I don't think we got there, with Fuller. We hadn't got to that kind of music. It was still largely orchestral music, and largely instrumental orchestral. We didn't have, as I remember—if we had opera, I don't remember it.

FL: Was there any discussion at all of jazz or popular music in that class?

CB: Not that I remember, no.

FL: Mm-hm. So prior to taking that class, had you been to any orchestra concerts? What was your classical music experience prior to that?

CB: I don't think I had any, other than that business of that guy, interrupting that guy in the dormitory with his symphony, which was on—you have to understand, pre-LP,

they were four double-sided twelve inch records. And he was playing them side by side. No, I don't remember any experience, except the *Hansel and Gretel* [Humperdinck]. That's about the extent. There may have been a concert somewhere back in there, but I have no memory of it.

FL: Mm-hm.

CB: But now I'm a voracious listener, of course, to all kinds. And one learns, you know. I like to listen to all music. When I went to prep school, there was some guy—I can't remember his name—but there was a popular song at the time called "Well, Get it!" And he would play it over and over and over again! And I learned to hate it! [laughs] And I sort of raised my nose at the popular music at the time, you know, that kind of music. But I like all of it. I guess there's some stuff, contemporary non-classical music, that doesn't appeal to me, but.

FL: Mm-hm. Yeah, and singing in the Logarithms, you obviously had a feel for popular music.

CB: Oh, yes, yes!

FL: Yeah. There was a student at the time, [William E.] "Bill" Katz [MIT Class of 1948], who wrote some of the music for the 1948 Tech Show, which was called "Frere Jacques." But he also, according to an article in *The Tech*, had a radio show on WMIT, a fifteen minute show every Tuesday. And it was called "Music from a Beat-Up Bar."

CB: [laughs]

FL: Do you recall that?

CB: No. I didn't listen to WMIT very much, no.

FL: Uh-huh. Did you know Bill Katz at all?

CB: Very well, yeah.

FL: Uh-huh.

CB: Yeah, we're still friends. I don't see him often. He became, ultimately, I think Vice President and Treasurer of Ionics [Inc.].

FL: Oh!

CB: A very important firm in water treatment.

FL: Mm-hm. Did you hear him play piano much?

CB: I don't remember. I don't remember hearing him, no.

FL: Do you have any recollection of, besides working at the Tech Show, and this radio program, what other musical things he might have done on campus?

CB: No, no.

FL: According to the article, it seemed like he was a pretty accomplished pianist, because he was taking popular tunes and making his own arrangements of them, and then playing them on that show. And I hadn't heard about that until it was just yesterday I

was looking through some old *Tech* articles and came across that. And I thought, hm, I should ask you about that. So there was a dance band called the Tectonians.

CB: Yes!

FL: Did you go to any of their performances, or dances that they might have played for?

CB: Yes, I'm sure I did, one or two.

FL: What was your impression about how well they played?

CB: I think they played very nicely.

FL: Uh-huh.

CB: I mean, to my late adolescent ears. Yeah, they played tuneful music, in tune and with good rhythm.

FL: Mm-hm, and they played for dances as well, right?

CB: Yes, mm-hm.

FL: Do you remember the student body's kind of attitude towards them? Were they kind of held in respect, or were they just another group on campus? Because they were playing for MIT social events, and I'm just wondering what people might have thought of them.

CB: I really don't know. It wasn't anything we talked about, or any vibes that I picked up about them at all.

FL: In a phone conversation we had a little while ago, about the MIT ROTC Band, you said you remember hearing them.

CB: Mm-hm.

FL: Tell me about that group.

CB: Well, I don't know who formed it. I don't know, really, who was in it. Well, I knew a couple of people, I'm sure. I wasn't allowed to take ROTC because I wasn't a citizen at the time. And since it was Reserve Officers Training Corps, you couldn't train to be an officer if you were not a citizen. So I was excused from whatever the number was—and well anyway, the eight terms, or the four terms, required of ROTC.

And they used to have a parade every Thursday afternoon at three o'clock, the ROTC contingent, which was held in the ground between the Western Parallel on East Campus, and Building Six. Of course, there was nothing between them at that time. And they would march around that, led by this band, which had a variety of instruments, brass—I'm sure there was a tuba. But it was a raggedy band. [laughs] It sometimes didn't play together all that well, all that in-tune. And one kind of snickered at them, but that was the extent of my memory of them. I never heard them in any other context. I never—I don't know that they gave a sit-down concert, ever. If they did, I didn't go to it.

FL: Yeah. The MIT Tech Show, which was this student written and produced musical—everything was written by the students—it had been defunct for a while, stopping in 1936. But then in 1947 it revived, and it was, the show that year was called “Liberal

- Life,” again, picking up on this theme of humanities at MIT. It was imagining what MIT would be like if it became a liberal arts school. Do you remember much about, kind of, what brought about the revival?
- CB: I don’t. I remember one of my classmates, Bob Hildebrand, the late [Robert B.] “Bob” Hildebrand [MIT Class of 1945]—he died quite young of a heart attack—quite young, as a matter of fact. But he was, I think, one of the—as I remember—one of the founders.
- FL: He was chair of the committee that was—
- CB: Yeah, that’s right. But I don’t remember what led them to do it, and, you know, simply learned that it was being done, and that’s great!
- FL: Mm-hm.
- CB: And I went to this performance in Kresge [Auditorium], and it brought down the house. It was a wonderful play! I remember laughing uproariously, and just loving it! It was very well done.
- FL: Is there anything more you want to talk about, kind of how the students thought of the Tech Show, and all that?
- CB: Well, I think the sense—they did revive Tech Show, because it continued for some years after that.
- FL: That’s right, that’s right.
- CB: And so it was very successful in that respect. And I remember that it was, when I returned, there was a fellow whom I—had been in my bunk at Freshman Camp, when we used to go to the Salvation Army Camp in Sharon [Massachusetts], off campus, for this freshman weekend, orientation weekend, at that time. It was pre-war, and then they discontinued doing that, and then after the war revived it for a while.
- There was this guy who’d been in my—I was a counselor, senior counselor, and this fellow, when I came back from England at the end of ’49, somehow, I went to see some of my friends who were doing—from the earlier years who were doing that year’s Tech Show, and there was at rehearsal somewhere. And there I met this guy from my bunk, who intro—what had been—was now a senior, and had been married, and it turned out his wife was—his mother-in-law was English. And so he wanted me to meet his wife, and so forth. And I remember going to that rehearsal, but I didn’t go to the show that year. And I don’t know how long it lasted after that.
- FL: The Tech Show went up through, like, the early seventies, I believe.
- CB: Oh, did it?
- FL: I forgot the exact date on that. So this looks like probably a good place to stop, and next time we can talk about your work on the Council for the Arts at MIT, and just music and humanities in general, and then, some of your own professional aeronautical work.
- CB: Sure.
- FL: Okay?

CB: Mm-hm.

FL: So, thank you so much for coming today.

CB: Oh, you're very welcome.

[End of Interview]