

Music at MIT Oral History Project

Sara Emerson Farwell

Speaking about her father

Arthur Farwell

Interviewed

by

Forrest Larson

June 14, 2007

**Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Lewis Music Library**

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Note on timing notations:

Recording of this interview can be found either as one continuous file or as split up over two audio CDs. Timings are designated in chapter headings in both formats, with the timing on the full file preceding the timing on the CD version.

Contributors

Sara Emerson Farwell (b.1923) is the fourth child and second daughter of noted American composer **Arthur Farwell** (1872 - 1952). Arthur graduated from MIT in the class of 1893 with a degree in Electrical Engineering. In his career as a composer and educator he was an important contributor to the development of a uniquely American 20th century classical music idiom.

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

Interview conducted by Forrest Larson on June 14, 2007 in the MIT Lewis Music Library. Duration of the audio recording is 1:43:11.

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. Sara Emerson Farwell background (00:16—CD1 00:16)

FORREST LARSON: It's my distinct pleasure to interview Sara Emerson Farwell. It's June 14th, 2007. I'm Forrest Larson. We're in the MIT Lewis Music Library. Sara is a retired actress and acting teacher, and daughter of the distinguished composer Arthur Farwell, who was MIT Class of 1893. The purpose of this interview is for you to talk about your father, but I wanted to briefly go over your professional background, so there is a context for what you have to say. So, you studied with Kristin Linklater, a prominent vocal coach?

SARA EMERSON FARWELL: That's Kristin Linklater, yes.

FL: Okay, and you acted in some Broadway productions?

SF: Oh! [laughs] Only once, and that was as an understudy, and I went on one night, on Broadway.

FL: What show was that?

SF: That was *Tea and Sympathy*. [Editor's note: by Robert Anderson.]

FL: Uh-huh.

SF: And I was understudying a secondary, not the lead. I also understudied the lead, but she never got sick! But the other lady did, so I went on.

FL: Okay, and then there were some other places that you acted and directed, like the Tyrone Theater in Minneapolis?

SF: Oh, there I was finishing my study to become a teacher of voice to actors.

FL: Okay.

SF: And that was a very interesting year. We met Tyrone Guthrie, of course, and Kristin was there teaching us. And it was a wonderful year, part of this grant that was a Rockefeller Grant I was on.

FL: Fantastic. And then at the Cleveland Playhouse, you did some work there?

SF: Oh, for a little while. I took one semester away from my teaching at the U. W. in Seattle, and went over to Cleveland, and did some work with the actors of the company, yeah.

FL: Fantastic! And then you were assistant professor at the Yale School of Drama. What years were those?

SF: 1970 to 1972 I was at Yale as an assistant professor, and it was the boss, the dean, who made me an assistant professor. And I began to get a little more decent salary, which was of great help, because I was taking care of my children.

FL: Absolutely! Absolutely. And one last thing: you acted in a one-woman show by William Luce? Is that how you pronounce it, L-U-C-E?

SF: Oh, that was *The Belle of Amherst*!

FL: *The Belle of Amherst*, right. Is that pronounced Luce?

SF: Luce. *Belle of Amherst*, that was a great privilege that, when I had a group of friends living in Westchester, we did it at the Scarborough School in Scarborough, New York. And it was a great privilege to be able to do this wonderful work that Luce wrote, and share it. I also did it in Arizona ten years later, when I was seventy! [laughs]

FL: My! Where in Arizona?

SF: Tucson.

FL: Uh-huh, and this is—?

SF: I had retired there.

FL: Wow! So this is a play based on the life of Emily Dickinson?

SF: Oh, yes, indeed it is!

FL: And according to my records, it opened in 1984? It opened in 1984, is that correct?

SF: Yes, that was right. I did it in Scarborough School.

FL: Right, okay. Tell me about your childhood piano lessons?

SF: Oh, well, we were all offered piano lessons on Dad's Mason & Hamlin, which was a wedding gift to my father and mother, as children. And some of the others did it, like my sister did very well with her piano.

FL: Was that Beatrice?

SF: Beatrice.

FL: Yes.

SF: And I did not. I hated it! I wanted to be out climbing trees, riding my bicycle. I was a tomboy! And the campus was a great place to run around and roller skate on, and that was for me! Much more important than learning to play the piano, so I didn't do it, until I went to boarding school. Later, I did study, some—a little. I had a good year. I got as far as "Für Elise"! [hums melody]

FL: Yes! [laughs] Right! Tell me about some of your childhood singing experiences?

SF: Oh, well I went to a summer camp near Brattleboro, Vermont, Camp Arden, named after the Forest of Arden, where I learned Shakespeare. And one year, I was sent my father's song that he wrote to a William Blake poem, "The Lamb", and I was going to save that for the trip to Toledo!

FL: Right, I have a place in the interview where you were going to sing that, okay. Did you ever sing in a chorus or a church choir? Community choruses or church choirs—did you ever sing?

SF: Oh, yes, yes! In Westchester I sang in the church choir, and as I was a smoker, I was singing tenor there for a while!

FL: [laughs]

SF: That's about all I can say on that. But in childhood, of course, I went to church with my mother. She was the devout churchwoman.

FL: Right.

SF: And we'd sometimes join the choir. And she always did a pageant, Christmas pageant, with the Christ child in the crib, and the children came up and gave their oranges to the Christ child baby, and all those things. And my mother was also, every year, read *Twelfth Night*, by Shakespeare, and she played all the parts! I think she was more talented than I was! [laughs] I really do!

FL: Wow! I want to ask you a little later about your mother's theatrical talents. All right, a couple questions about your family: so your full name is Sara Emerson Farwell?

SF: Farwell.

FL: And you were born in 1923 in Santa Barbara, California?

SF: No, I was born in Pasadena, California.

FL: Oh, that's—okay, the biography that I read was wrong.

SF: Oh, maybe Evelyn Culbertson didn't get that one right in the bio!

FL: Yeah. There are some other inaccuracies in that biography as well.

SF: There could be! She was a lovely woman, though. I guess she's still with us.

FL: Right. She did a tremendous thing.

SF: A big job! She's the one—is this a moment to tell about how she got those, all the works that were sold at auction, from a friend!

FL: Right.

SF: Who knew that she was a music teacher, and she would love to see all this. And otherwise it would have all been lost to the world!

FL: Right.

SF: All of Father's papers. And so, Evelyn is the one who had the effort, the interest, and the ability to write the biography, which is called *He Heard America Singing: Arthur Farwell*. [Culbertson, Evelyn Davis: *He Heard America Singing: Arthur Farwell: Composer and Crusading Music Educator*. 1992]

FL: Right, right, and that's—

SF: That was Dad.

FL: —a tremendous thing that she did.

SF: That's not family life, though. I'm sorry.

FL: That's okay. We'll digress a little bit, and we'll just come back. So, you told me the other day you were married to a Sy Milbert. Is that short for, is it Seymour?

SF: That's short for Seymour.

FL: Okay.

SF: Seymour Milbert.

FL: Okay.

SF: And that marriage lasted fifteen years. And he remarried, and moved back to where he loved another woman, and married again. And he died in Germany.

FL: I'm sorry.

SF: Yeah, and he wouldn't go back to the original name, which was Milikovsky, which I thought should have been our married name, because—but at Ellis Island, his parents, you know, they changed the name—

FL: Like so many people did.

SF: —to Milbert. I kept saying, “But Milikovsky is beautiful!” [laughs]

FL: It is. So your mother was also named Sara, Sara Weyer Farwell.

SF: I was named after my grandmother, Sara Weyer. She's the connection to Ralph Waldo Emerson, I think.

FL: Right, and was—

SF: She was second generation; I'm third generation, my children are fourth generation cousins of Ralph Waldo.

FL: Right, and you said that you referred to him as Uncle Waldo, is that correct?

SF: Oh yes, he was always called Cousin Waldo in our family.

FL: Or Cousin, yeah. Okay, then there's the—because of Ralph Waldo Emerson, that's your middle name, and your brother's name, Emerson, right?

SF: Just Emerson Farwell. But my eldest brother Bryce Farwell is the one who did the most wonderful work for my father, by writing a whole catalog of his works.

FL: That's a tremendous thing that he did.

SF: And I think you have that, don't you?

FL: We certainly do, at the library here. Arthur's second cousin was Abbie Farwell Brown, an author and playwright and poet? Abbie Farwell Brown, it was your—Arthur's second cousin. Were you familiar with her work?

SF: Not at all! I don't even know her name.

FL: Okay, I just wondered.

SF: Sorry!

FL: Yeah, okay.

SF: Dad didn't talk about her. Why, I don't know.

FL: [laughs]

SF: I got a lot of talk with my father. We were close friends.

FL: Uh huh, okay, and then just the names of your siblings? There's Bryce—

SF: Bryce, Arthur—both gone now—Beatrice, my elder sister, then me, I was number four, Sara Emerson. And two more: Emerson Farwell, and baby was Jonathan Farwell. No longer baby—we're all in our seventies and eighties now.

FL: Right, and then you had I guess a step-sister Cynthia?

SF: Yes. Dad married again.

FL: Right.

SF: Men do that, you know!

FL: [laughs]

SF: And they had a child. He married Betty Richardson, and they had Cynthia Farwell.

FL: Right.

2. Arthur Farwell—MIT & memorable events (11:20—CD1 11:20)

- FL: Okay, getting on to the life of Arthur Farwell, his dates are 1872 to 1952. He was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, and died in New York City. I'm going to give just a—say a couple things about his background. He was born in St. Paul, and when he was a child he took violin lessons, and he played, with his brother Sydney, he played the piano.
- SF: Yes, but he played the violin as a child, but he went to MIT not to become a musician.
- FL: That's right.
- SF: He wanted to become an electrical engineer!
- FL: That's right, and he had that lifelong interest, and as a child, interest in engineering and photography.
- SF: Photography—he made his own camera.
- FL: Right. The summer before he came to MIT, he talks about in his autobiography of playing some Schubert with some people, playing chamber music—
- SF: Oh, at home, in East Lansing. Those are the years from 1928 to 1936.
- FL: Well, no, this was before he came to MIT.
- SF: Oh, before MIT?
- FL: Before MIT, he played Schubert chamber music with some people, and that's what sparked his interest in music, before he came to MIT.
- SF: Oh! I don't know that either. He never told me what sparked it. He said it was falling in love with the Boston Symphony when he was at MIT.
- FL: Right, and then when he came to MIT and went to the Boston Symphony concerts, that furthered his interest in music.
- SF: Oh, that was his deciding change! He wanted to devote his life to music, from hearing what was happening at the BSO. And I guess he had gotten this, as you've explained, earlier.
- FL: So he was at MIT from 1889 to 1893, and he got a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering.
- SF: Yes, he said he almost flunked out! But he gave us a very funny story about, he was a DKE Fraternity. And they would sing [drums with hands], "We are three frogs! Along three logs! We all ran a rinkadum, a skinkadum, a skidee-idee-inkadum! Rip sty, squeeze 'em, bump!"
- FL: [laughs]
- SF: [laughs] Do you think that's wrecked the—?
- FL: That's okay, there's a shock mount on the microphone, so you don't have to worry about that.
- SF: Okay.
- FL: I got that so that people could pound on the table! [laughs] Okay, his senior thesis was called "Experiments on the Least Number of Vibrations Necessary to Determine Pitch."
- SF: Say that again.
- FL: Okay, Arthur's senior thesis at MIT was called "Experiments on the Least Number of Vibrations Necessary to Determine Pitch."
- SF: Oh, that explains a lot to me!

FL: Yes!

SF: He had friends among physicists. The two in California that he knew—I don't know their names. I know one, Dr. Hale, H-A-L-E, and that's probably why after the marriage they went to California, because of this intense interest in what science was doing. But of course, I'm no scientist, and I didn't follow that kind of thinking very well.

FL: Yeah. Are there any more—

SF: I love science. I think it does wonderful things, but anyway.

FL: Right, well I'm not a scientist either, so—[laughs]

SF: [laughs] Okay!

FL: Are there any other stories that your father told you about his MIT experience? Any students that he told you about, professors—?

SF: Oh, yes! There was Rudolph Gott.

FL: That's right. He was a pianist.

SF: He was a pianist, and a composer, but he didn't—he had a theme that he left to Dad. I guess he must have died young.

FL: He did.

SF: I'm sorry. [pause] And I don't know when the symphony was written.

FL: I forgot the date on that; I can get that for you later. Were there any other stories from MIT that he told you about?

SF: I think he was just so interested in the music by then that he didn't tell stories. He did entertain us at dinner a lot, with the MIT—I think the hazing that went on there was really something dreadful, too!

FL: Wow!

SF: I don't know what he had to go through, to join the fraternity.

FL: Uh-huh. Did he talk about any music that he did when he was an MIT student, any groups that he played in?

SF: He wasn't a—he must have waited 'til he got out of MIT to even study music, seriously.

FL: Because he was playing the violin.

SF: He showed his first works to [Edward] McDowell, and McDowell encouraged him.

FL: Right.

SF: And after MIT, he started going to New York, and meeting people. And in 1901 he began the Wa-Wan Press, in which he must have had a pretty wide influence, because the Wa-Wan Press published, for ten years, works of other American composers, and his own works, too.

FL: That is correct.

SF: So, you know, you spoke to me about influence once, and I didn't handle it. His influence was much wider than I realized, on the whole general picture of music in that period. Because toward the end of his life, when we were both in New York City, we went to a concert together once, and as we were looking for our seats, a man behind us said, "There goes the father of American music." I was very proud to hear that, but I was also being very young and sophisticated, so I didn't pay any attention!

FL: [laughs]

SF: But of course, I was impressed. And so perhaps we should all be a little impressed with Arthur Farwell. I hope so.

FL: Absolutely. Are there any stories that he told you about going to Boston Symphony concerts? Any particular pieces that he heard, artists that he heard, that he told you about, that were memorable.

SF: Well, I don't know when *The Rite of Spring* was written, by [Igor] Stravinsky.

FL: That would have been 1913, yes.

SF: Nineteenth century?

FL: 1913.

SF: So he might have heard that. Because he had a big reaction to that one!

FL: Yes!

SF: He wrote "The Blight of Spring"!

FL: Right! [laughs]

SF: Which is very funny to me, because—

FL: Right, that's part of his comic opera.

SF: —the music, the original Stravinsky, is gorgeous, and tragic, and haunting!

FL: Yeah.

SF: But apparently he wrote something else—

FL: Right! [laughs]

SF: —quite different, called "The Blight of Spring". "Pierrot's Lunacy"?

FL: Right, that's a parody on [Arnold] Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*, right. Those are part of his opera called *Cartoon*.

SF: Is it in his opera, *Cartoon*?

FL: Yes.

SF: I haven't—I have heard the songs from the opera. At Hartford College they were done by student singers.

FL: Right.

SF: And it should be produced! It's a wonderful story! It's the story of a young composer, American composer, having trouble getting published, which of course was his experience!

FL: Right.

SF: And there's a love interest. And there are funny songs about—one of them is "Americus Comes with an Opus", but of course, he's turned down. So I can't remember those songs at all, but it was a good experience to hear music of the opera. And I wish somebody would produce it.

FL: Even Beethoven makes an appearance in the opera. He's a character in the opera.

SF: Oh, yes, I think they kind of get mad at Beethoven. They want to see America have music! And there's wild Indians in it, and they hoop around! And of course, Dad wrote very

beautiful Indian arrangements, of Indian songs, early on in his career as a composer. But there's also cowboys in the opera. They come running onto the stage, and I don't know what happens to Beethoven, but he's not there anymore!

FL: [laughs]

SF: They replace him! Oh, I'm a little shouting here. I'm sorry.

FL: You're doing just fine! So when your father was at MIT, he also heard the Metropolitan Opera in Boston. Did he talk about that with you?

SF: I think he was a spear holder in the opera there, for a while. He probably had to make some money. Another thing he made money doing at MIT was doing other people's astrology charts. He understood that art.

FL: Wow! So he actually made some money with that?

SF: Yeah.

3. Arthur's teachers & early influences (20:57—CD1 20:57)

FL: So after he finished MIT, he first studied music theory with somebody named Homer Norris. He did tell you about Homer Norris?

SF: I've heard the name.

FL: Uh-huh.

SF: Is that after MIT?

FL: That was after MIT.

SF: Now see, I never knew, and I'm very glad to learn, that that's what he did, how he got his studies going, because eventually he went to Europe. I think that's after he met Thomas Osborne?

FL: Right, right.

SF: And that was down near Oswego, somewhere?

FL: Oswego, New York.

SF: In New York.

FL: Right.

SF: Yeah, he writes music when he's there, too. And Osborne—

FL: Who was also a pianist.

SF: —provided the finances for him to go to Europe, and study with [Engelbert] Humperdinck.

FL: Right. We'll get to that in just a minute. So, after he studied music theory with Homer Norris, then he studied composition with George Chadwick, and Edward McDowell, here in Boston, yeah.

SF: McDowell? Yes, it was McDowell who was encouraging him.

FL: That's right, right. Did he tell you any stories about studying with Chadwick or McDowell?

SF: I've heard the name; I really can't answer that well. So, I'm sure he must have enjoyed studying with him, right?

FL: Right, he certainly did, and he was very fond of them. When—

SF: He made wonderful friendships, you know.

FL: He certainly did.

SF: Throughout his life, yes.

FL: When Arthur was still here in Boston, he would make these trips to New York. The composer Antonin Dvořák was in New York.

SF: Oh, yes!

FL: He was director of—

SF: Oh, I meant to tell you about that! He was back and forth between Boston and New York, because his Wa-Wan Press was published out of Newton, Massachusetts.

FL: That's correct.

SF: His father had a house there, and he stayed there. And then he, in New York, he started to work as a music critic with *Musical America*.

FL: That's correct.

SF: I think he signed that as Mephistopheles!

FL: [laughs]

SF: [laughs] That was a monthly column, I guess.

FL: Right. So I want to backtrack just a little bit. When, during 1892 to 1895, Antonin Dvořák was director of the National Conservatory in New York.

SF: And all the young composers went to hear him talk. All the young American composers, at Cooper Union. Yes!

FL: Right, and you said that was in 1893, is that correct?

SF: I don't know the year; it sounds right.

FL: Okay, you mentioned on the phone the other day you thought—

SF: But he would have graduated from MIT. He'd been writing music.

FL: Right.

SF: So it's awfully close! Maybe it was later. I don't know. Anyway, what he heard from—I want to—is it all right to talk about what—

FL: Yes!

SF: —Dvořák advised the young composers to do: “Go out to your indigenous people, your American Indians, your cowboys, your people in Appalachia, and the Southern folksong singers, and get your American material.” He, in that lecture, did not predict jazz. My father predicted it later, about—well, I don't know; 1901 he was already doing Wa-Wan Press.

FL: Right.

SF: So it may have been that he predicted, that he wrote an article about how jazz was, I guess, coming up from New Orleans.

FL: Right!

SF: But it was not his—there’s always been popular music and serious music. And of course, we were all thought to love serious music, much more, although as teenagers we all adored the pop stuff, too.

FL: Right.

SF: But, I don’t think Dvořák predicted the jazz. Not yet, no.

FL: He didn’t mention that, no. All right, so your—

SF: So Dad took his advice, right?

FL: He absolutely did! He was one of the first American composers to really take that advice, and really be an advocate for making American music in that way.

SF: Absolutely, he was an advocate, and a helper to all the other composers with the Wa-Wan Press. Wa-Wan means “peace”. There was a Wa-Wan ceremony, it’s a peace ceremony—so, making peace with music, I guess. And that was an Indian ceremony, for peace.

FL: Right.

4. Arthur's European studies & travels (25:45—CD1 25:45)

FL: So during 1897 through 1899, he studied in Europe, funded by his friend Thomas Mott Osborne. And he first went to Germany and studied with Engelbert Humperdinck in 1897, who’s famously known as the composer of the opera *Hansel and Gretel*.

SF: Listen, you don’t need me here at all! You know more than I know!

FL: [laughs]

SF: It’s wonderful!

FL: Anyways, did he tell you stories about working with Humperdinck? He was very fond of him.

SF: Who was?

FL: Your father was very fond of Humperdinck.

SF: Oh, yes!

FL: Did he tell you about studying with him?

SF: No, he just said he did.

FL: Okay. Also when he was in Germany—

SF: He may have talked to his colleagues much more about Humperdinck, and about [Hans] Pfitzner; he was in France.

FL: Right, Hans Pfitzner. That was actually also in Germany. He studied with—he studied in Paris, and we’ll get to that in a second. But Pfitzner, that was in Germany as well. And while he was studying with Pfitzner, he met a poet, James Grun. Did he talk about that, his friendship with James Grun?

SF: A friend?

FL: Yeah. He met the poet, James Grun, in Berlin.

SF: Well, he didn't talk about him to me.

FL: Okay, because James Grun also encouraged your father to use Native American sources in his music as well.

SF: Oh, well, Dad did so many beautiful Indian songs!

FL: Right.

SF: Haunting ones—short ones, and longer ones. Oh, they're gorgeous, I think.

FL: So, did your father tell you anything about studying with Hans Pfitzner? Any stories about that?

SF: Oh, just the one of sitting on the steps of Notre Dame, and munching a whole bunch of goodies that they'd got at the nearby pastry shop, sat there eating them all night! [laughs]

FL: [laughs]

SF: But he did write a much longer thing. He called it his *Wanderjahre*. [Series in *Musical America*, 1909 entitled *Wanderjahre of a Revolutionist*.]

FL: Right, right, that's an autobiography.

SF: And I've never read that; I don't know.

FL: There's some great stuff in there. That's where I'm getting some of this information to ask you questions, because I read that.

SF: You'll have to get me a copy and somebody'll read it to me.

FL: Right. When he was in Germany, he went to Bayreuth, and heard [Richard] Wagner operas. Did he tell you about that?

SF: He loved Wagner operas. He heard them all there, where they're done.

FL: Right.

SF: Yes, that's true. He did talk a lot about Wagner, but I was so unmusical, I can't tell you what he was saying! [laughs] Except I do know that he was also criticized for sounding Wagnerian, sometimes, in some things. And Dad would say, "Well, we all stand on the shoulders of somebody," you know. And he honored Wagner's work tremendously. He told me the whole *Parsifal* story. Or was it—what's another Wagner opera?

FL: *Götterdämmerung*? Or, "The Ride of the Valkyries"?

SF: Ireland, they're in love? *Tristan and Isolde*!

FL: Oh, yes!

SF: Isn't that Wagner?

FLS: Yes, absolutely! Absolutely. Did he have any particular favorite Wagner operas?

SF: Well, when I was taken from my boarding school to hear *Tristan and Isolde*, in New York City, with some great singers, I went on down to my father's apartment on Twelfth Street, in New York. And he sat down, and played through the whole first act of *Tristan and Isolde*, on his piano. Oh! It was wonderful! But he knew it.

FL: Absolutely. Were there other favorite operas of his, other favorite Wagner operas that you remember?

SF: *Parsifal*.

FL: Uh-huh.

SF: Probably all of them. And who is that woman who sings and makes fun of the Wagner women?

FL: Oh, Anna Russell.

SF: Russell?

FL: Anna Russell.

SF: Russett.

FL: Russell, R-U-S-S-E-L-L.

SF: I never met her, but I have heard her do her takeoff of Wagner, and it is superb! It makes me very happy to hear that!

FL: Yes, right, right.

SF: It's very funny stuff!

FL: Right. And then after he studied in Germany, then he went to Paris in 1899, and studied with Alexander Guilmant, noted organist, in Paris. I'll repeat that again. In 1899, he went to Paris, and studied counterpoint with Alexandre Guilmant, a—

SF: Guilmant.

FL: Guilmant, okay. I didn't know how to pronounce that.

SF: Yeah, I don't know much about that.

FL: Okay.

SF: But I'm glad he did, because he really knew his stuff, my father. People are awfully impressed, if they're musicians, looking at his work.

FL: Right, right.

SF: He clearly knew—I have a friend who is a composer in Arizona, in my years there. And he said, “Well, your father really knew his orchestration.” He really did.

FL: So who was that composer? What was his name?

SF: Stern, Jacob Stern. He's in Tucson, yeah.

FL: Okay.

SF: He's working on an opera too, I think. I don't know what he's doing right now, but he's a very good friend. His wife is a beautiful painter, and she's my good friend.

5. Arthur's American Indian music (31:42—CD1 31:42)

FL: In 1900, your father came across a book by Alice Fletcher called *Indian Story and Song From North America*. Did he tell you about when he first saw that book, and how it affected him?

SF: What is the book?

FL: *Indian Story and Song From North America*, by Alice Fletcher.

SF: Oh, well he knew Alice Fletcher! They worked together sometimes, I think. And before the time of round, flat records, there were—

FL: Wax cylinders.

SF: Wax something.

FL: Wax cylinders.

SF: Cylinders.

FL: Right.

SF: And they could record on those!

FL: Right!

SF: And Alice Fletcher was doing that, too. I think they maybe made a trip together; I have no idea if they actually did. But they were good friends, and what else, I don't know.

FL: When he first saw her book, there were transcriptions of some of the Indian songs in the book, and that's—

SF: I never saw the book!

FL: Uh-huh.

SF: I wish I had! When I do my reading.

FL: Yes. Did he tell you any stories about working with Alice Fletcher?

SF: Well, he talked about her a good bit. I probably wasn't listening very well!

FL: That's okay! He made—

SF: He was—I'm sure he must have been fond of her.

FL: Yes.

SF: Because they were doing similar work, right?

FL: Right, right. I'm just checking my tape recorder here. Okay. After that, he made four western trips to study Indian music and Spanish American music between 1903 and 1907.

SF: Oh, that's a wonderful trip! He talked a lot about that.

FL: Right, and he met somebody—?

SF: He by this time had learned piano, and played his own works, Indian, and the California songs and Spanish American songs.

FL: Right.

SF: And you can buy that at the Loomis Museum in Los Angeles. I did that; I went out in Los Angeles to the Loomis Estate, and there you could buy copies of the California Spanish American songs, by my father. "Primavera" is one of them; it's a beautiful one.

FL: Fantastic, and that was Charles F. Loomis, who was an archaeologist and writer on the American Southwest. Let's try again here. You were referring to Charles F. Loomis, who was an archaeologist and writer on the American Southwest. They were good friends, right?

SF: They were very good friends. His picture, that I showed you, was taken in front of the—in fact, I've given it to MIT—it was taken in front of the Loomis estate, which he himself built, Loomis. And they were very good friends, and that was when he was friends with the

physicist also. And I think he had a little stretch at Berkeley, teaching. But then of course, by 1928, we all ended up in East Lansing, Michigan.

- FL: Right, we'll get to that shortly.
- SF: Alright.
- FL: Did your father tell you stories about collecting Indian songs, and some of the tribes that he visited? Did he tell you stories about that?
- SF: Well, I know of a picture of him with a headdress on, an Indian headdress, sitting among some Indians. I don't know what's become of it. It might be at the Sibley Library in Eastman School.
- FL: Right, where his papers are.
- SF: That's where all his works went, finally. We went there, to the Rochester School.
- FL: Right.
- SF: And we had a weekend there—it was all presented to him, all the manuscripts and books, and anything, was given to that library. I wish MIT had them, now I'm here! [laughs]
- FL: [laughs]
- SF: I'd love to have another look at them. But we did spend the weekend there.
- FL: Right. Did your father sing any of the Indian songs that he knew to you?
- SF: Well, we used to do the Navajo War Dance. I'd do it for you if there were any room on this floor. [laughs] [sings] "Heya, Heya, Heya, Heya, Hiya, Hey, Yah!"
- FL: [laughs]
- SF: There's much more to it. And do you know, there was a pianist who made a tour in Russia, and played Dad's "Navajo War—
- FL: War Dance?
- SF: War Dance, "Navajo War Dance". There were two versions of it, I think; I don't know which one. And the audience stood up and cheered, and clapped like crazy! His work was much better understood in Europe than it has been here. [laughs]
- FL: Did your father tell any of the Indian stories that he learned, some of the myths and stories? Did he tell any of those to you?
- SF: He must have, but they would have been part of the childhood story-telling. Excuse me. [pause] I don't know how you can bring this together, because I lost my voice for a moment.
- FL: We'll be fine. We'll be just fine.
- SF: Surely he told us some stories, but I don't remember them.
- FL: That's okay. One of the things that your father was known for, and still known today—they refer to him as an Indianist composer. But there was much more that he did than that, and that's sometimes—
- SF: Of course! He got very insulted when he was called an Indianist, because he thought that was just an early part of his work!
- FL: Right.
- SF: He continued to write in many forms, only the one symphony, the *Rudolph Gott Symphony*.

FL: That is correct.

SF: Which has been done by Walnut Creek Symphony Orchestra, and I think my brother Bryce had it in recording.

FL: I'd like to hear that sometime.

SF: I don't know if it still exists; we can find out.

FL: I'll have to ask about that.

SF: It would be there in Eastman.

FL: Right. So, as you mentioned earlier, the Wa-Wan Press, that went from 1901 to 1912.

SF: When it was sold to Schirmer's, and they didn't do a thing with it.

FL: Right. When he was working on the press, he worked with a fellow composer, Henry F. Gilbert. Did he tell you much about Gilbert?

SF: Sounds very familiar; it's ringing bells, but I don't know what.

FL: Okay, they both had similar ideas about American music, and they were both interested in Indian music.

SF: Oh! Gilbert was his name?

FL: He was. Henry F. Gilbert, right.

SF: Henry F. Gilbert. It rings bells, but I'm not connecting, sorry.

FL: Right, and as you mentioned, the Wa-Wan Press was sold to G. Schirmer, the publisher, but as you said, they didn't do much with it after that.

SF: No, not much with it.

6. 1909-1918: New York (39:24—CD1 39:24)

FL: In 1909, your father moved to New York, where he was critic, music critic for the magazine *Musical America*. He was also supervisor of Municipal Concerts in the Parks and Piers, and director of the Third Street Music School.

SF: Oh, that was the early period. This is before the wedding, even, when he was running all the music in the parks of New York, New York City. And there he did a very big pageant, in 1916, for the three hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare's death, 1916, okay?

FL: Right, we'll get to that. I have some questions about it; we'll get there. It was during his time as a music critic for *Musical America* that he met the composer/pianist Sergei Rachmaninoff.

SF: Rachmaninoff was introduced to New York by my father.

FL: Right, he wrote a very favorable review of the *Third Piano Concerto* in 1910, and that led to their friendship, from what I've read.

SF: Oh, well, you know more than I do! That's okay with me! [laughs]

FL: Later, you were telling me that you were introduced to Rachmaninoff when Arthur was back in New York?

SF: Oh, back in New York, in the later part of Dad's life? Yes, Rachmaninoff played in New York. I think he had his granddaughter with him, and I met her, and I met him, and he was beautiful, elderly—long, sad face. He was a beautiful man, and a great composer.

FL: Do you have any more recollections of that meeting?

SF: Just that we went to the—we went backstage and we met him, and his granddaughter, whoever was with him. No, you know, one doesn't. You just go out and have coffee and cake!

FL: Sure, sure. You were also telling me a story that you had heard another performance, a solo piano performance of Rachmaninoff, and then you wrote to your father about it?

SF: Oh, that was back in school, when I was, you know, being a smarty. We were taken to concerts from our boarding school, so I did hear him then. And I remember writing to Dad and saying, "Well, I didn't think he was that great!" [laughs]

FL: [laughs]

SF: And Dad wrote back and said, "Well, it may have been an off night!" [laughs] Eleanora Duse had off nights, you know, a great actress!

FL: Right.

SF: But I'm sure that was just me, being snooty.

FL: [laughs]

SF: Trying to be smarty. All right.

FL: So, your father, Arthur Farwell, was deeply involved, nationally, in the community pageant movement, which lasted from about 1910 through the mid-1920's, and he was a founding member of the American Pageant Association, which started in 1913.

SF: Well, he did so much work in the pageant, which was popular in that early period there. For quite a while, one big pageant after another. There was one my mother was in, in California. It was a very famous one, where she played a nun—it was a whole Christian thing.

FL: Right, called "The Pilgrimage"—oh, I forgot what it was called.

SF: That's all right, we don't have to remember the name of it. But he also worked with Percy Mackaye. Mackaye would write the pageant, the script, and Dad would do the music.

FL: Right, and they both had ideas about pageants becoming a new American art form. They saw this as a chance to make—

SF: Put America on the map, for its music and its pageantry.

FL: Right, but also saw pageants as a theatrical art form that was different from stuff in the theater—

SF: Oh, yeah. Well, it is, and we don't do them now anymore, that I see, anyway! And when Dad was teaching at Michigan State, in East Lansing, we would go to a summer festival kind of a thing that they would have on the Red Cedar River, and he would just shake his head and say, "Don't you wish you had seen a real pageant?", you know?

FL: Right.

SF: Because he had finished with those by the forties.

FL: So you mentioned Percy Mackaye, and the last name is spelled M-A-C-K-A-Y-E.

SF: Percy Mackaye was what his name was.

FL: Yeah, right. It looks like Mack-Kay, but it's pronounced Mack-Hi.

SF: Yes, right.

FL: He was a playwright and a poet. He lived from 1875 to 1956. And two of the big pageants that your father worked with him on, there was the "St. Louis Pageant and Masque" in 1914, and then one called "Caliban by the Yellow Sands".

SF: Oh, that was the one we heard about, "Caliban." That was the big one for Shakespeare's three hundredth anniversary.

FL: Right.

SF: And that must have been fabulous! They had Isadora Duncan, the very great dancer, dance down through the whole stadium, from the back of it to the front! I think the stadium was usually for sports. Well, you can imagine that scene. And then the scenes were down at the end, and they were scenes from *The Tempest*, in "Caliban," of course. [laughs] And Dad had a whole ring around the top of the stadium with trumpets placed here and there. And they announced the thing beginning, I guess. And imagine trying to get that timed!

FL: They had a telephone hook-up, so that all the different parts of the stadium, they were coordinating things with the telephones.

SF: That's wonderful that you know so much, Forrest! It's lovely.

FL: [laughs] And there were thousands and thousands of people who went to these pageants, and they got lots of press. But what's interesting is that both Percy—

SF: They got very good reviews, yes.

FL: Right, right. And a year later, "Caliban" was also produced in Cambridge, Massachusetts, at Harvard Stadium.

SF: I never knew that!

FL: Yeah.

SF: You're teaching me about my own father's work! That's great.

FL: [laughs]

SF: Well, you're a music person, of course.

FL: Did your father tell you any stories about working with Percy Mackaye, and what he was like, what it was like working with him?

SF: I guess he must have loved it. He always was so enthusiastic about anything he was doing. He wouldn't have done it if he didn't believe in Mackaye.

FL: Right.

SF: He must have loved him very much!

FL: They both were very idealistic people who—

SF: Yeah, big idealists.

FL: Right.

SF: And wanted America to be a big thing in music and theater.

FL: That's right.

7. Sara's mother: Gertrude Brice (47:05—CD1 47:05)

- FL: So in 1917, your mother married—your father married Gertrude Brice.
- SF: In 1917. That's right, because the babies came right after that. Seventeen, they began, and Bryce was 1918, Art was 1919, Bea was 1920, and then I came along, finally, in '23, in California.
- FL: Right.
- SF: But Bryce was born in New York.
- FL: Oh!
- SF: That was before they went to California.
- FL: Okay. So your mother Gertrude was an actress. She was born in Lima, Ohio, and then she went to a drama school in Cleveland.
- SF: In Cleveland, studied with the father of Tyrone Power, who was a very big movie star.
- FL: Oh, okay!
- SF: And he said to her one day—she was trying to do the, you know, the maid making the bed, in *Othello*—I forget her name in the play. And Mr. Power says, “You're making the bed as if there were crumbs in it!” [laughs]
- FL: [laughs]
- SF: So that was her story about studying acting. But she was very talented.
- FL: Excuse me, somebody's knocking on the door here, just a minute. Okay, we're resuming, talking about your mother and Tyrone Power.
- SF: We did that.
- FL: Okay. And then, after that she moved to New York to work in the theater.
- SF: She had the same struggle with the theater that I had later, but she said I did more with theater than she did. She was very serious, of course, but she was also very talented, and I'm sorry—she was beautiful! She certainly was more beautiful than I was. But she used to say to me when I was growing up and doing some work in the theater, in stock, and so on. And she'd say, “Well, you did more with it than I did.”
- I don't think so, because she went on doing anything she could think of. She started something called the “Intimate Theater”, in which she would invite people into the house, in Michigan, and she would do a play, all herself! And we kids were a little bit embarrassed by this, but she was very brave.
- FL: Wow, was that a regular thing, the “Intimate Theater”?
- SF: Not very regular. It was rare, but it happened at least six times, I'm sure.
- FL: Who was involved in that? Was it friends of hers, and people in the community?
- SF: Oh, she was known in the community. She was a big time churchwoman, and sang in the choir. She would leave early Sunday morning, put the roast in the oven, and Dad would make us flapjacks!
- FL: Right! [laughs]

SF: [laughs] For Sunday breakfast! He learned them at the lumber camp in Maine, and he loved, he loved being there when he was younger. I don't know when. And Mother was down at church, and she would get home in time to make Sunday dinner. But she was known in the community. She worked with whatever the drama league was downtown in Lansing, Michigan. We lived in East Lansing, but the community theater was in Lansing.

FL: So she was involved very much in the community—?

SF: Very much involved. She played a lot of parts. They did, oh, O'Neill plays—you know, serious plays. She directed for them; she did, my goodness, what was the Shakespeare play she did? And I was in it; I was Fleance. That's *Macbeth*! She directed *Macbeth*.

FL: Wow, so you were involved in it?

SF: I was a little kid, and I played Fleance.

FL: [laughs] Did you do any other community theater productions there in Lansing?

SF: I didn't, no. She did others.

FL: Right, and apparently your mother, Gertrude, also went to a performance of "Caliban," the pageant?

SF: I think it's about then that she met Dad. And they really actually formally met at a party in Long Island given by Kirk Brice. His name was Kirkpatrick Brice, and they all called him Cousin Kirk. So I have a brother named Jonathan Kirkpatrick Farwell. So Kirk was important in their life; he's the one who gave them the Mason and Hamlin piano at their wedding.

FL: Oh, my!

SF: And that's the one—we grew up with that in the living room, along with Beethoven's portrait on the wall in the living room, who scowled down right at you, you know.

FL: [laughs]

SF: Beethoven scared me. Of course, he's my favorite composer! [laughs] As children, you know, you have your own reactions as a child.

8. 1918-1927: California (52:22—CD2 00:00)

FL: So in 1918 the family moved to California, and your father was associate professor of music at the University of California at Berkeley.

SF: At Berkeley, that's right. Correct.

FL: From 1918 through 1919. And also while, I guess after that, he organized the Santa Barbara Community Chorus.

SF: That's where my sister was born. The family was living there, in Santa Barbara. And he did a beautiful thing with—that chorus, I think, still exists!

FL: Fantastic!

SF: That he began. That's why Evelyn [Culbertson] always chose the title of the book about him: *He Heard America Singing*. He was always starting singing groups.

FL: Right, he was very involved in the whole nation-wide community chorus movement, spoke about it at conferences, and was a real advocate for that. He was also instrumental in organizing the Santa Barbara School for the Arts?

SF: I don't know. I wasn't born yet!

FL: Okay, right. Then there was something called "Theater of the Stars", on Big Bear Lake?

SF: Oh, that's—from 1925, there's my very first memory! I was crawling on gravel, getting away from the tin tub they had given me a bath in. And that was up in Big Bear Lake, Fawnskin.

FL: That's right.

SF: Which is just above—what's the town down at the bottom of the hill? I forget, San Bernardino or something, around there. And that Theater of the Stars, there are pictures of that. And I think there's an article about it somewhere, but I don't have it to give you; I wish I did.

FL: And it was a natural amphitheater?

SF: Yes, I found it much later. In 1991 or two I went down to Big Bear Lake with a friend of mine, who drove a lot, and we drove all the way up to Fawnskin, at Big Bear Lake. And you see the lake, but behind there, there's woods, and it's all natural. And we found where the benches where the audience sat—they were still there, kind of broken. But you could look across and see the rise in the hillside there, where the actors in the "Theater of the Stars" stood. There is a photograph of my mother in costume in one of those things.

FL: Wow!

SF: And I, of course, was too young to take in any of what they were doing. But he got the San Francisco Symphony people to come out and play music there!

FL: That's right.

SF: So I thought that was pretty impressive work.

FL: We'll take care of that later. That's okay. Also while he was in California, there were some other pageants. There was the "Pilgrimage Play, 1921", and the "Pageant of Liberty"? Did he tell you about those?

SF: Must have been the first one you've mentioned, that my mother was the nun in, Pilgrimage.

FL: Right, and that was—

SF: It seems to ring a bell, but I don't know about the other. But that's when Dad saw what a real pageant was like, and then is why he could criticize in Michigan, at what little things they were doing.

FL: Right, and just to remind us, you were born in 1923 there. Your mother wrote a play called *Baby's First Christmas Tree*, and your father wrote the music for that.

SF: Oh, yes. *The Evergreen Tree* is what we called it!

FL: Oh! Okay.

SF: *The Evergreen Tree*. I produced that once, in a house we lived in, in New York. And that's lovely. There's some good carols in it that Dad wrote. "As Joseph I was walking, I heard an angel sing: [sings] This night shall be the first night, of Christ our heavenly king." I think that's Dad's. I can't promise you.

FL: I haven't seen the music for that. At some point I would really like to.

SF: But it's charming. He starts with a bunch of animals all talking to each other. "Somebody is coming! Somebody is coming!" [hums and sings] "Somebody is coming! Who can it be? Who can it be?" And I guess it's Joseph and Mary and the baby. I can't remember very well, but we were able to do some of it. The other thing I did with Mother, there, was a Dickens thing, *Christmas Carol*, with Scrooge?

FL: Yes, right, of course.

SF: And his dead friend who comes up. My mother played the ghost, and I played Scrooge. [laughs]

FL: Wow!

SF: We did things for people around, neighbors and things.

FL: So this was at the house?

SF: We just had fun!

FL: This was at the house in East Lansing, right?

SF: No, this is New York City, and she was quite old. And I was into theater stuff that I was doing, and teaching.

9. 1927-1939: East Lansing, Michigan (58:15—CD2 5:53)

FL: So we're going to backtrack just a little bit. It was in 1927 that your family moved to East Lansing, Michigan. Your father was invited to head the theory/composition section of the newly organized Music Department of the Michigan Agricultural College, which is now known as Michigan State University.

SF: Michigan State University.

FL: Right.

SF: You're correct. And of course, we called it the Cow College, because it was an agricultural college! So we could kid around that way. But he, of course, did very wonderful work there.

FL: He certainly did.

SF: And he was composing. I would run out to meet him—I was about nine, eight, nine, ten then—and if I were home from school, and not out playing with my pals, I would see him coming and run out. And we would meet out in the street, and we would hold—swing hands, and he would sing songs. And we'd be, like, [sings] "Nita, Juanita, ask your soul if we should part." And "Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer true, I'm half crazy all for the love of you."

FL: So there were some popular songs that—

SF: Then he'd come in, and he'd go upstairs to compose, and I would go bake cakes in the kitchen, and use up all Mother's eggs on what I called gold cake. [laughs]

FL: [laughs]

SF: Then I would take some cupcakes up to Dad in his attic study where he was working. And he would be either composing, or he would be working on his drawings of his visions, which we should talk about.

FL: We will get to that. We will get to that.

SF: And then he would always stop for me, and I would need something for school, like from a magazine, and he'd help me find it. He was so helpful! He was so delightful to be around, as a human being. That's what he taught me. His influence on me wasn't music, it was how to be a human being, and be thoughtful, and be kind, and be helpful—all those good things about being a human. I learned those things from Dad.

FL: So you were telling me about these music sessions at the house where your father invited musicians to come and play?

SF: Oh, yes, yes. Occasionally on Sunday afternoons, he would get colleagues to come over. And there was one, Michael Press, who I think had the cello. And they would bring their instruments, and play different chamber music stuff. And Michael Press would say [laughs] [with German accent], "Farwell, why do you write such difficult music?"

FL: [laughs]

SF: And others have said that, too. I heard it the other day, from somebody trying to play for me one of the *Emily Dickinson Songs*. And she said the accompaniment is very intricate. She owns a Steinway piano, but she doesn't play very well, and she's a good friend, a very nice gal. And she knows she doesn't play terribly well, but she played me a Beethoven bagatelle, so she knows something about music. So when she saw this, she said the accompaniment is very intricate.

FL: And those *Dickinson Songs* are some of his very finest work.

SF: But they're beautiful!

FL: They really are.

SF: They are beautiful.

FL: So these musicians that came to the house—were they faculty members at the college?

SF: They were colleagues. Yes, they were also teachers at the college. And the concerts I went to! He took me very often to something at the college. He also took Bea. He would take us one at a time to hear a local concert, either at college, or downtown in Lansing when there were touring musicians. That was where I first heard a cello concert, and I was very impressed with the cello; I loved it. If I ever studied an instrument, I decided it would be a cello.

FL: Do you remember who the cellist was? Was that Michael Press, maybe?

SF: No, it wasn't Michael Press. It was someone famous, touring. I don't remember the name.

FL: Uh-huh. Do you remember what music was on that concert?

SF: Oh, no. Sorry.

FL: That's okay.

SF: I don't know music that well.

FL: Are there other concerts that he took you to at that time that you remember?

SF: One of them was, one was Gladys Swarthout. She was a singer that was known everywhere. I don't think she did movies, but she toured a lot. I was little; I can remember her. She winked at me, because I sat down near the front. And Dad would sometimes at these concerts have to get up and stamp his leg down, because of a cramp in his leg? But he would sit again, and be normal. I can't tell you how beautiful a person my father was. He just was a delight to be with—great company. All his friends knew for the good human being he was, as well as a very fine composer.

- FL: Do you remember going to concerts at that time of music by your father, hearing performances?
- SF: No, I don't think there were any. I may be wrong. Is it in the bio?
- FL: There were some, at the college.
- SF: There were some?
- FL: And the Detroit Symphony performed something as well; I forgot which piece it was.
- SF: *Melody in E Minor*? Oh, this is the period in East Lansing when Dad bought the lithograph press! And he was so mad at Schirmer's for not doing, publishing more of his music, that he decided he would have to print his own. That's like Walt Whitman, who had to do his own *Leaves of Grass*. So he bought a lithograph press; he learned lithography. It was down in the basement, and I got to go and watch him in after-school times. And I meant, there was wonderful chemical smells! I mean, he had to use his scientific knowledge then, just to do it, you know?
- FL: Right.
- SF: And he would get all excited about some negative. He'd come running up the stairs to come look at it in the sunlight, and then bring it down. And lithography, he did at least five pieces of music. I can remember, I think, four of them. Two were Blake poems, "The Cradle Song", and "The Lamb", and "Land of Luthany". These were all piano works, I think. *Melody in E Minor*. And what the fifth one was, I don't know. And there may have been more; I don't know.
- FL: And he also did the artwork for those, not just the music?
- SF: Oh, yes, the covers were very beautifully printed, and he had designed them, and they were in color. I remember "The Cradle Song" was in beautiful, big red print. Yeah, he was something of an artist, too. Is it time to tell you about his visions?

10. Visions & intuition (1:06:18—CD2 13:56)

- FL: Sure, we can do that. These mystical visions that he had, and the drawings that he made of them—tell—
- SF: Dad was a visionary, and a mystic. He practiced what he called Intuition. He even wrote a book about it, which has never been published, but I hope we'll get to that. [Unpublished book manuscript entitled *Intuition in the World Making*.]
- FL: We'll get to that.
- SF: But what he did—I'll tell you the big one was in Boston Common, when he was young. I don't know if he was at MIT, or out of it, but he was walking in Boston Common, and saw a parade, a musical parade coming. And when the leader of the band pulled out his sword, Dad fell against a tree. And I don't know if he was conscious or unconscious, but he had a huge vision, and he has drawn many pictures of that vision.

And the first one was the Angel—I don't know if she's the Angel of Death, but she was an angel with a raised sword that was irregular, you know. What do you call that? Curved, a curved sword, lifted over a wall, and down below in the pictures he drew is all of Europe. And it was a prediction of World War One, how all was to be pretty much destroyed. And that was his, and there were many other acts to that vision. I can't tell them

to you, but there were—I don't know how long it took him time-wise, there in Boston Common, but in the drawings, there are about six drawings of that particular vision.

And those are some of the things—I used to go upstairs to the attic to see what he was doing, and take him a piece of cake? And he would be at work. I used to love seeing him just scratching black all over a picture of something that he wanted, like the one which was an Intuitional different experience called—it was about: how should a musician think of God? Or, how can a musician think of God? And that was the question. In Intuition, you ask a question, and then you get your whole mind quiet, like meditation, and wait. And in that total quiet that you create, which is not easy to do, because our minds never like to stop—if you wait long enough, then an answer will come to you.

There's a great deal more on that subject, but in this picture, the answer came this way: where man's song ends, God's begins. And I think I have to, at this moment, tell you about one of his techniques that he used, in writing music, was to get his mind all quiet that way, meditative, and then visualize an orchestra. He would already have a theme of some music he was writing, and he wanted to develop it. So he would, in that quiet state, visualize a complete orchestra, and ask it to play. He would ask that visualized orchestra to play music, and they did, and did it beautifully!

And he would hear it, all of it, harmony and all, and when it was over he would go immediately to his desk and write it down, the music that he heard from this orchestra. It's hard to imagine such a thing, but it's true. It was one of the ways he worked. So, that's Dad as a visionary.

FL: Are there some other things about how his visionary process influenced his music? Anything more you want to say about that?

SF: I'm sure there were more things; I don't know that I can tell you. I can tell you how he taught me to quiet the mind, which is not an easy thing to do. But in meditation, you must do it. And what he told me to use was an apple tree. And you start by picking off all the apples, and throwing them out. And you get rid of all the leaves on the apple tree, and then you get rid of the twigs, and then the branches, and finally the trunk. And then there's nothing.

And if you do this carefully enough, you can quiet the mind. For me, I was left with a theater curtain. And I had to pull the dust off this velvet black curtain, and then the light that's under the curtain before it goes up—I suppose this is because I was a theater person. And finally, I could get black, just the black curtain. And that's when I practiced meditation in my twenties, clearly that's been living out the rest of my life.

So this was—he could do it probably much faster than what I described. I don't know how he did it. He probably had other techniques for it. And maybe books, there are books written on meditation. I haven't read any, but I have meditated. It's a very beautiful thing, a way to learn. So, that is what he taught me.

FL: Mm-hm.

SF: Now, I thought another of his visions was more on the science side of things. He, too, had a vision of a theater curtain, but it was about to rise. And I think this was some kind of prediction of the discovery of the atom, and then the atom bomb, the fission of the atom.

FL: Right.

SF: Right? So this is the physicist's interest in his life, which was big, apparently. He had one that he drew; he drew this. And he called it The Atom. So, that's one, and there were many. There were twenty, twenty-five, maybe thirty such vision drawings in his later years. And in

those East Lansing years he was drawing them. So, we want to find them again, if we can. They may be at Sibley, some of them.

FL: I think some of them are; I don't know if all of them, but—

SF: You will have one, the one about “Where Man’s Song Ends, God’s Begins”. There was three chords, and you see in the drawing. One’s stripe up, another’s stripe this way, and another’s stripe that way, each one in white against that black that Dad used to do on a drawing. And there were three chords that went with that, musically.

FL: Oh, my!

SF: Right? You’ve heard about that?

FL: I’m really curious. I don’t know about that! I want to see these chords!

SF: [laughs]

FL: I want to hear them! I want to play them!

SF: Yes! I’d like to hear them, then you can play them, you musicians!

FL: Yes, right, yes!

11. Improvisation, composition & poetry settings (1:14:33—CD2 22:11)

FL: You were also telling me about these piano improvisations that your father did. He improvised on the piano and you danced?

SF: Oh, yes, that was in East Lansing. That was my favorite childhood time. Dad would come running down from the attic, and bang some chords on the Mason & Hamlin. My sister says he stuttered on piano, when he did that!

FL: [laughs]

SF: [laughs] But he was working out some composition. And then I would be there, home from school, and I’d say I want to dance. And he would improvise for me, and he would make it beautiful, and you know, much nicer for me to dance all over the living room floor. Because at my summer camp we always had a dance teacher. It was a theater camp; that’s where I learned Shakespeare, and began to do Shakespeare, there.

FL: So when he was improvising, what was the music like? Was it like—was it rhythmic, or was it more like Tchaikovsky, you know, ballet music, kind of dreamy? Do you remember what the music was like?

SF: It was just beautiful! Just beautiful to listen to, and full, when he used the whole keyboard. And rhythmic, because I could always time myself to what he was playing. It was just great fun, that’s all I can tell you.

FL: Would he ever improvise without you dancing, just improvise, and make up stuff?

SF: Well, I remember visiting him in New York when he lived uptown, 145th Street and the Hudson River, Riverside Drive. He would sometimes go and turn on the radio, and listen to the jazz players. And he would admire their musicianship; they were good musicians. But he never worked in that kind of music, himself.

FL: Right.

SF: He wasn't interested, but he did appreciate their musicianship. So he could do other things, but he just didn't do it.

FL: Right.

SF: And he never used anything, what the modern composers are using, the twelve-tone scale? No, he loved harmony too much, I think, although he could—he could play around. I think he wrote some pieces experimenting with—

FL: Using two different keys?

SF: Two different keys in one piece of music.

FL: Right. That was bitonal—

SF: I don't know if one in the left hand, and one in the right, or how he did that.

FL: That's what it was, and there were these things called *Bitonal Studies*.

SF: Bitonal?

FL: Yeah, right.

SF: Yeah.

FL: He wrote a number of those, and I would love to hear those some time, or at least see a score to those. If you have any of the music for those, I would love to take a look!

SF: Well, if there is, I don't have it, and it might be at Eastman.

FL: I'm sure it's there. Tell me about, other things about singing in your family when you were in East Lansing. Did the family sing together? Did you gather around the piano and sing songs?

SF: Well, at Christmas we sure did! Let me tell you what Christmas was, because it wasn't so much in the rest of the year. We did a little of that, but not a whole lot. But Christmas was a very special time! The Christmas tree was something that was hidden from us. We were not to see it until Christmas morning, when we went in to have our presents.

But weeks before he would give each of us money to go downtown and be able to buy presents for each other. And of course, we all got some special present at Christmas; we got our bikes that way, you know, to ride, whatever. And the tree itself, the decorations held little candle holders, in which were German candles about that high, real candles! And he would have, when we finally went in to see the tree, the two older boys, Bryce and Art, would stand around with buckets of water, and Dad would light the candles with matches. We had lit candles on our Christmas tree several years there!

FL: My!

SF: And I just thought that was magic! Nobody else did that. And of course, what we did was stand around together and sing "Silent Night". You could get through all three verses before he had to put out the candles, and then he had the help of Bryce and Art, you know, being very careful, blowing out each candle. And Dad did the tall ones. And we never had a fire.

FL: My!

SF: He was just amazing, isn't he? I would love to tell you, though, about a trip that, if we're getting toward the end—?

FL: The trip to Toledo. We'll get to that in a second. I want to ask you about your family love of poetry—Emily Dickinson, and William Blake?

SF: Oh, yes, Dad and Mother got all—you're right, Dad and Mother bought all the Emily Dickinson books as they came out. We even had the first one, which must have been 1904, that, her first book was done by—what was his name?

FL: I've forgotten his name.

SF: I've forgotten his name too, but I will get it, one time. Emily wrote to him; they had a correspondence back and forth.

FL: Oh, my!

SF: And finally, after she died, four years after she died, the first one was published. Then Dad bought that and other books of poetry. And Mother loved poetry. Mother wrote poetry; she wrote some very good poems, a couple of them published in those things that they do for amateurs now.

FL: Right. So how did your father initially start corresponding with Emily Dickinson? How did that start—do you know?

SF: He never corresponded with Emily Dickinson. She was dead!

FL: You said something about him writing her letters?

SF: He wrote songs based on Emily Dickinson's poetry.

FL: I thought she was passed away, but I thought you mentioned—

SF: Oh, no, no, no. He did never knew her personally.

FL: Okay, right. You mentioned writing, when you said—

SF: Writing songs is what I meant. What I meant was that he was writing songs.

FL: Right, I was thinking that she had to have been passed away.

SF: And they are published, they're the Boosey and Hawkes "Emily Dickinson Songs".

FL: Right.

SF: And I find them very lovely, and many people do. Paul Sperry sang some, and Dawn Upshaw sang quite a few of them in a concert in New York that I went to.

FL: Right.

SF: And she's quite a singer! Her articulation is clear, Dawn Upshaw, and you can hear the words. And one of them she did was about asking God to preserve in his kingdom a home for the rat! [laughs]

FL: [laughs]

SF: This was a Dickinson poem.

FL: Did your family—did your parents read poems to you? Did you have poetry readings, or were the books just on the shelf?

SF: Just books. The house was full of books.

FL: Yeah, but you didn't have poetry readings, and things like that?

SF: Mother, in her "Intimate Theater", may have read poems, solo, to her friends that came. But I never read poems. I read, I remember learning to read when I was four years old, in California! I got so excited, I ran over to the teacher—there was a little schoolhouse right next to the house we lived in, run by Mrs. Harris—and showed her that I could read this poem, and it was about a tree. And I knew that, and she was impressed. So I was impressed

—I could read now! So I did readings of poems later in life; a lot of them are in *The Belle of Amherst*, and they are Emily's poems. But I've done a poetry reading now and then for friends, just because I love them.

FL: Yeah, I'd love to hear you read some poems.

SF: Mother wrote poems, though, and I have a number of her—she wrote Christmas poems, sometimes in sonnet form, and sometimes not, and just lovely things! And I think she would have liked to have been published, too. But my son has inherited that talent; he's a poet, too.

FL: And your son's name is?

SF: He's the family poet!

FL: What's your son's name?

SF: David.

FL: David.

SF: He's David Milbert.

FL: Tell me about your mother's singing voice. What was that like?

SF: Oh, it was beautiful! She could have been a singer. It was beautiful. She used to sing when we went to bed. We'd come up to say the "Lord's Prayer" in Mother's bedroom, and she would sing songs. She'd sing sailor songs that were her brother's, he was an Annapolis man, Uncle Bill. And they were great fun, and she sang beautifully. And she'd sing—what else did she sing? I don't know, all kinds of things. "My heart is in commotion with the devil of the ocean," or the something, "and the ocean's roar!" I don't know. But they were songs she had learned from her brother Bill, as well as the ones that everybody sings.

We sang around the house. Bea and I used to sing out of our *Little Golden Songbook*. I don't know what Dad had to do with that, but I thought they were just, everybody had them. And you could open it and you could see "The Star Spangled Banner", or anything you wanted, all the famous American songs. And we sang out of those books. And they didn't have any Farwell in them, but they were all familiar songs.

FL: What was your father's singing voice like?

SF: What was my father's singing voice like? Mother's was lovely, but Dad didn't sing very often. It was usually an imitation of himself, I think. [laughs] I don't know how to describe what his voice was like; it was what would have been baritone, maybe, if he were singing something serious. I suppose if he worked for the opera in Boston, if they gave him a salary, he must have sung all right. But I don't know his voice well. I know his speaking voice.

He was—well, we had to speak the king's English in our house. We weren't allowed to do all that crazy talk that kids do in school. We had to speak the king's English. And if he said some word at the table that we didn't understand, we would say things like, "Whatever that means," and he would send us to the dictionary, and we had to look it up, and share it, and learn. So we all learned from Dad, good language, good speaking. Of course, I learned to love to teach it, too.

FL: Fantastic! So, you took a car trip with your father to Toledo, Ohio, to board a train to summer camp in Vermont?

SF: Oh, yes, to send me to camp. He always put me on the train to camp, and one year it was in Toledo. And we had to make a stop. Oh, this was when Dad owned a car! Which wasn't for very long—a few years, he had it, the Michigan years. And he called it Pe-gas-is, out of its

real name, Pegasus, which is a horse, I believe. And he called it Pegasus because it used up so much gas. So he was driving me to Toledo, and we made a stop in Jackson, Michigan, to have lunch.

And while we were having lunch, he drew something for me that connects with his visionary self. He drew a cross, like a Christian cross, and at the top, he drew on a napkin. He drew J at the top, V at the bottom, H on the right, and H on the left. And he said, "That is Jehovah in the Hebrew." And I understand that when he wrote his book, he didn't use J, he used I. But for me, he knew I wouldn't understand what that was, so it isn't Yehovah, it's Jehovah. And at the top, the J stands for God, the V at the bottom stands for Mankind, man, and the right is the mind, or the left, and the right is the emotions. I don't know which was which.

And that was an explanation of being to me, early on. I was just a kid! Ten, or something, eleven, maybe. But I remember it very well, and he talks about it in great detail in an article I'm giving to Dr. Munstedt [Editor's note: Peter Munstedt, MIT Lewis Music Librarian], so you should read that; you will enjoy reading that, Forrest. And then we went to the public library in Jackson. We still had a little time, so he looked up Blake, and brought out a book of Blake's poems. And he read to me "The Tiger," the famous "Tiger, tiger, burning bright, in the forests of the night, what immortal hand or eye dare frame thy fearful poetry." [Editor's note: correct stanza concludes with the word "symmetry"]. I don't think he ever wrote a song about it, but I think I could be wrong; there maybe a song that he wrote about it. And that, I think, can be found out. But he also read "The Lamb", because he said he had song in his head about that. And he did that on his lithography press, back in East Lansing. I went on to camp, and he sent "The Lamb" to me printed on his lithography press. And I showed it to the music teacher at camp, and they said, "Oh, we'll have you sing that," so I will sing one little bit of it.

FL: I would love to hear that!

SF: [sings] "Little lamb, who made thee? Dost thou know who made thee? Gave thee life, and big thee feed by the stream, and o'er the mead? Gave thee clothing of delight, softest clothing, wooly bright? Gave thee such a tender voice, making all the hills rejoice? Little lamb, who made thee? Dost thou know who made thee?"

And when I was a kid, I guess my voice was—it hadn't had been smoked away yet! And I'm now an old lady, so that's all I'm going to sing of that. But the second verse answers: "Little lamb, I'll tell thee. Little lamb, I'll tell thee. We are call-ed by his name, for he calls himself a lamb. He was meek and he was mild. He became a little child. I, a child, and thou a lamb; we are call-ed by his name. Little lamb, God bless thee. Little lamb, God bless thee."

FL: So beautiful.

SF: That's the whole thing!

FL: Mm. Thank you for sharing that.

SF: Forgive me for singing at all. I smoked for too many years, and now I'm paying for that! [laughs]

FL: But your singing there is still—I really enjoyed that; thank you.

SF: I think it's time to end this little interview, don't you think?

12. Arthur's spirituality, intuition & personality (1:33:02—CD2 40:41)

- FL: Can we spend just a tiny bit, a little bit more, on your father's spirituality? And if just a little bit more, you want to talk about his ideas about intuition? It looks like his mother, your grandmother Sara, was very influential on him about his spiritual ideas, and getting him interested in Eastern religious thought?
- SF: She, I think, was interested in Eastern religion. Well, Mother and Father both were Theosophists for a time. Mother remained one, and never missed a meeting of the Theosophists. And you know, theosophy means the study of God. So, there are many ways to think of God; there are many religions. And theosophy admits of any of them as ways to look at truth, ways to find truth, right?
- But Dad was beyond organized religion. He really was. He didn't church; he was much too busy composing. But his spirit was very high, very evolved, I call that. He's what we call an old soul. I think both my parents were sort of old souls. And I think I was very lucky to have them both as parents. Mother said, "Just be patient, just try. Just try to do your best." And that's what I got mostly from her: none of us are perfect. And Dad was closer to perfect! I must say, he did just about everything a human can do!
- FL: [laughs]
- SF: [laughs] Made all of us children. Then remarried, and had more, another child. I mean, it's wonderful! And wrote music that we listen to when we can. And I hope that will be more often, once people are ready for that music. Some of it is published; some of it is not.
- FL: Right, and we hope more of that—
- SF: Schirmer's published some. Dad published a few of his own, and there's more to come, perhaps. Only time will tell us that.
- FL: So one last thing, and then we'll go. Your father's book, called *Intuition in the World Making*, from 1948—is there any—?
- SF: Oh, from 1948? In 1939 he completed it! He was telling me what was in it, back then.
- FL: That was the date that I got. So that date is questionable? Okay.
- SF: I think he finished it earlier. But, it is a very complex—it would take a long time to talk all about what he thought about intuition. That is teaching from within; that's what it means. Tuition is learning, right? In is inside. And he had a method to do it, to get an intuition. One of his chapters in the book is "Hunches to Order."
- FL: [laughs]
- SF: We all get hunches, right? "I have a hunch," we say. So he took that into his discussion of how to get your answer, and part of it was what I described to you about getting the mind totally quiet. You have a question. You need an answer to it. In life, it happens to us all, all the time. Not all the time, thank God! [laughs] But, often. And we want an answer, and so his way was to quiet the mind, have the question clear, and in that quiet state of meditation, you await the answer. And, I guess the book tries to teach you how to do it.
- FL: Right.
- SF: I never practiced it well, but I did meditate, and to me that was the important part of it, really. And it's not easy! I did it for months and months in my twenties, and it just seems to me I'm living out, the whole rest of my life, whatever I learned there, in meditation. To me it was meeting God, and I knew you had to die to meet anything bigger than ourselves! [laughs] But

perhaps we are, in soul, larger than our bodies; I don't know. I certainly felt so when I was getting actors to relax on the floor, and I'd say, "Think of yourself as a hundred feet long."
[laughs]

FL: [laughs]

SF: "Fifty feet across your shoulders." And you'd relax, you know. I taught relaxation to actors, as well as voice. It was part of the voice teaching. And so I really cannot give you what's in that book. We're waiting for somebody to have the book that we will get published. We will see that it's published!

FL: I hope sometimes—

SF: It's next generation down that will do it. They're all emailing each other. It's keeping Dad in the world, in some way, which is nice.

FL: Absolutely. So is there any concluding thoughts, or observations, that you want to share, at the end of the interview here?

SF: Just the overall wonderful activity of Dad, of Arthur Farwell. He was never relaxed, except after supper at night. [laughs] Then he would play games with us. Even Monopoly he played with us, now and then. He taught us anagrams. But that was an after supper thing. And when I was a child, I'd climb on his lap, and play we'd slapping games, you know, catch your hand, and hold it, and try to get away, that kind of a game. [slaps hands] And then, or he would play chess with Bryce, who was the oldest boy, a teenager by then, good enough to learn chess. And Bryce eventually became a chess teacher. He did that in his retirement.

FL: My! You told me—on the phone the other day you were talking about your father's integrity and character, and you said you wanted to talk about that. Did you want to? His character and integrity? You had some things to say about that.

SF: Oh, activity? His reliability—you could always count on him. If he said he was going to do something, he did it. His king's English I've already spoken of. And Mother's family, when they were courting, I guess, Mother brought him home, and before she could bring him home, they said to her, "Does he speak the king's English?" So that was something that was known in our family, was the king's English.

We weren't allowed slang, or swearing. He never swore. He said, "carumba!" Or he said, "thunderation!" if he hit his head on the cupboard, or something, you know? He'd holler that way; he would not swear! I was fifteen before I heard my first swear word. I didn't know what that was! It just seemed awful. But in our childhood, there was no swearing, none of us; it wasn't allowed. And chewing gum wasn't allowed.

There were a number of things we were disciplined about. [laughs] Have to sit on a chair for half an hour. But we weren't ever spanked, physically. I think the only time I ever saw Dad angry was when Jonathan, who was the little one, about two or three years old, who was curious about this world, left the dinner table, went into the back room where all the best dishes were sitting on a pool table. The pool table had been a gift one Christmas, and the pool table has little metal ways to hold the legs in place. And apparently he fidgeted with it enough so that the whole table crashed, and all the dishes with it. Dad stood up. We all heard this; we were all at the table. He stood up, and his face was white! That was the only time I ever—he took him up to the attic. I'm afraid he got a spanking! Well, one of the stories of what happened in East Lansing. So that's how the wedding dishes were gone.

FL: [laughs]

SF: [laughs] And some other dishes.

FL: So, I think this is a good place to stop, and I want to thank you so much for sharing today.
This is just so beautiful of you!

SF: Well, thank you for having me. It's been a pleasure.

FL: Thank you.

SF: Okay.

[End of Interview]