

**Music at MIT Oral History Project**

**David Foxxe**

*Interviewed*

*by*

**Forrest Larson**

**August 8, 2003**

**Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
Lewis Music Library**

Transcribed by MIT Academic Media Services and 3Play Media.  
Cambridge, MA

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### **Contributors**

**David Foxe** received bachelor's degrees in architecture and music from MIT in 2003. From 1999 – 2003 he worked as a student assistant in the MIT Lewis Music Library. As a student he played percussion in the MIT Symphony Orchestra and Wind Ensemble, and also played piano for numerous concerts and events. His compositions include works for piano, voice, chamber groups and orchestra. He practices architecture in Boston, and continues to write music.

**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 August 8, 2003, in the MIT Lewis Music Library. Duration of the audio recording is 2:14:14.

### **Music at MIT Oral History Project**

The Lewis Music Library's *Music at MIT Oral History Project* was established in 1999 to document the history of music at MIT. For over 100 years, music has been a vibrant part of the culture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. This history covers a wide variety of genres, including orchestral, chamber, and choral musical groups, as well as jazz, musical theater, popular and world music. Establishment of a formal music program in 1947 met the growing needs for professional leadership in many of the performing groups. Shortly thereafter, an academic course curriculum within the Division of Humanities was created. Over the years, the music faculty and alumni have included many distinguished performers, composers, and scholars. Through in-depth recorded audio interviews with current and retired MIT music faculty, staff, former students, and visiting artists, the *Music at MIT Oral History Project* is preserving this valuable legacy for the historical record. These individuals provide a wealth of information about MIT. Furthermore, their professional lives and activities are often historically important to the world at large. Audio recordings of all interviews are available in the MIT Lewis Music Library.

## 1. Family background and early music experiences (00:00:01)

FORREST LARSON: This is an interview with David Foxe. It's August 8th, 2003. I'm Forrest Larson in the Lewis Music Library.

It is my honor and privilege to have David Foxe for an interview this morning. It's August 8th, 2003. We're in the Lewis Music Library. I'm Forrest Larson. And thank you, David, very much. Um, you just graduated this spring, 2003, with degrees in both architecture and music. And thanks so much for coming.

DAVID FOXE: Well it's very good to be here, it's—again, after a short break.

FL: [laughs] All right. Um, starting off with some of the—the obvious questions. Tell me about where you were born and grew up.

DF: Well, I was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1981. And I lived in the city of Milwaukee until the end of fifth grade. And then we moved to Sussex, Wisconsin, which is just west of there. And that's where I currently live.

FL: And that's a village, at least they way I've seen it described.

DF: Yes. Yes. Um, it grew up—It's now in a suburban, sort of, location. Like, it's surrounded by a lot of suburbs, but it is—the village itself has a population of, you know, between—about 5,000 people. So it's not very, very small. But so—But I'm used to—I mean, it's within a larger metropolitan, sort of, area. So—

FL: I see. Yeah. It's like some of the villages in—in—west of Boston.

DF: Right, right.

FL: Okay. Um, are there musicians and artists in your extended family, or are your parents, and stuff like that?

DF: Well my grandparents—none of them are musicians, but I—are proper—But I know that my—my mom's parents enjoyed opera and music and things while they were living in Chicago. Uh, M—m mom is a remedial schoolteacher but has also taught music for children—elementary school-aged children, and plays the piano. And my father, actually, has his master's in church music composition, from Concordia University in River Forest. And so he's been a church music director for a long time. And he was a pipe organ builder before that.

Now, granted, even though both my parents are musicians and that that's even not just an avocation, but part of their work, they—while providing an environment that was certainly encouraging of music, they did not take it upon themselves to be my music teachers. As such, they didn't want to be, you know, the people telling me to practice, practice, practice, and that sort of thing, I know, in the same breath as to, you know—you know, it's time for dinner, or something like that.

So while my—you know and so therefore, I haven't—Sometimes people assume that oh, since your parents play the piano, they must have taught you a lot about that. And certainly, they have been extraordinarily helpful. But it's I—it's not that I—that they really taught me and those sorts of things.

My extended family, the—there aren't many musicians. But my grandmother and my aunt are both visual artists and have taught art as well. And so, there's more of a—so perhaps that—the running family thing is that the visual art thing skipped a generation and that that's with me and my architecture and the, kind of, coming through with that.

FL: Just for the record, your parents first names—

DF: Oh, Gary and Katie Foxe.

FL: Yeah. And I'll ask you more about your—your father, since he's also a composer. I'm sure there's some—something that you got from, um—from him. Can you tell me about some of your earliest musical experiences that you remember, that stay with you today, as a child?

DF: I would remember being in, like, kind of, church/school, kind of, choirs or choirs in elementary school.

FL: Mm-hm.

DF: Um, I didn't go to religiously affiliated schools as I was growing up. But in various, you know—for, you know, Christmas programs and for—and holiday concerts and things for the spring, I remember having various—there was an annual thing, where they would—they had a large, kind of, cone-shaped stage that—that they had. It was green. It was in one of the local malls. And they would have different school groups sing, like, as if they were in a Christmas tree, and that sort of thing.

Um, so most of the earliest things that I—earliest things that I would remember would be singing either with relation to my parents or not. I did start—they had—You had the option of doing piano lessons at the public school where I went for elementary school. And I think it might have been second grade or third grade, something like that, that I had begun working with that. And you had, you know, the different colored books for whatever level you were in.

And I guess, throughout I've—I've—I haven't, necessarily, found good instrumental teachers that I've worked with for long, long, long periods of time. I've of course, been—the ones that I've had have been very helpful. But due to either scheduling or due to—either the teachers would be not critical at all or would be—have music choices that weren't to my liking and weren't very interesting, That—or simply that they were—it was hard to schedule a way to get, you know, to the lessons or whatever.

That I don't have, like, a list of, you know, of names or of people that stand out from—from elementary school in that way. I definitely remember, from middle school, my, um—I had a teacher named Terry Fojtic for choir and—and such. And I occasionally would play piano or percussion for that. And one of the most significant I would say, experiences would have been in eighth grade. I was part of the Project Create Children's Choir, which is affiliated with, uh, one of the local universities. And they actually, later that year ended up going to sing in Carnegie Hall.

And I wasn't part of that, but—because I had just joined that year—but we did *Carmina Burana*, and—we were the children's choir, obviously—and the—and we

did a number of other very interesting—We did one [Benjamin] Britten piece. We did an—an—the Mozart *Laudate Dominum*, from the K—what is that K. 332 or [K.] 337 Vespers? [K. 339] Um, and that piece, in particular, the—the Mozart *Laudate Dominum* but that was something that we had learned in choir very quickly and hadn't had time, really, to perfect.

But as we were going around to different schools and singing in our little, you know, five-mile tour of various schools, that we actually were—we ended up rehearsing in the bus, which is a rather interesting experience. And the piano part to that was very engaging. And it was from that that I decided that I wanted to go back and restart learning piano. Because I really hadn't focused on it much when—while I was in, you know, probably, sixth and seventh grade and that sort of thing.

And so, it was that summer, after eighth grade, that I would have been 13, I guess, that I then decided that I wanted to focus more on—on—on music. But that was where—it was because it was something that I enjoyed. It was something that was my choice, as opposed to something that I had to do as an obligation.

FL: Mm-hm. So your piano, up to that point, was largely self-taught, kind of with your—

DF: I would say that, like, like, I—the—the lessons in elementary school had helped, in terms of, you know, basic, like hand motion sort of things. And I could read music. I don't have a strong memory of when I learned to read music. But I had learned it at some point. And I had been—

I would say that music was something that was, sort of—I enjoyed. It was on the side. I had occasionally played, like, when the latest Disney movie would come out, I would go out and get, like, the book for the music from *Beauty and the Beast* or *Aladdin* or whatever, and—you know, and play through those, sort of—they're—They weren't extraordinarily simplified, but they're more straightforward kind of niche types of piano music. And I remember, you know, I—and I certainly enjoyed—enjoyed that.

But I think that the—the Mozart piece—which is kind of surprising, because I'm not, like, it's not that I have a incredible—It's probably not the only Mozart piece that I learned over a long period of time. I've played a couple of little short things. But it's not that—it's not quite the "Mozart Effect." It's not that I've become a classical era music fan because of that piece, in particular. It's just that it had a piano part. And it was something that I had learned through another medium, through singing it. I thought, wow, that would be an exciting, sort of, thing—to try—a challenge, to try to—to learn.

FL: Mm-hm.

DF: But I guess—I don't know about—I guess, in many aspects, it was self-taught from that on after. Because I then had the—I thought—I had—I had listened to piano music. And I wanted to learn the Gershwin preludes. And I—that sounds so nonsensical now. And I think that, you know, after learning a short, little Mozart piece that the next step would be to try [George] Gershwin's "Prelude No. 1." But that's what I did.

And so from that, I picked, you know, the—you know, a Chopin piece, a Rachmaninoff prelude, one of—just things that I found interesting or had heard—in—you know, some in movies, some that I'd heard in recordings and such. And it wasn't that—you know, most of the music that we would listen to at home would be, like, music that we were rehearsing for church or something like that. But it wasn't so much that there were tons and tons of classical music recordings around.

So that became a big part of things, that I would, you know, find recordings that I liked. And you know, you listen to one thing, and that makes you interested in something else, and this sort of thing. And then, deciding, well, what's an—a challenge that I could try to—to learn. And so that—So throughout high school, when I would learn piano pieces for the, like, state and music contests or for whatever, I—it would always be a kind of confusing thing. Because they would ask me at the end, And who is your teacher? And I'd say, Well, I don't really have one right now.

So it was a—um, it was a—I suppose, that that was sort of—it—it's not that I wouldn't have liked to have had a teacher. But it was an important sort of thing to be able to learn as much from the music itself, given that I, you know, had a bit of the finger thing, that I could know some basic things. But I'm still not technically very good at—at any of the instruments or things that I play. It's always that I can I—I can—I can figure it out in my head much faster than my fingers can catch up with me.

FL: Mm-hm.

DF: So that's kind of how that goes. And that's continued at the present. So—

FL: Tell me a little bit about your—your father's work as a—as a musician and composer.

DF: Well, my father was—let's see, he graduated—he got his master's in 1976. And he, I believe, was one of the first people who got the specific degree of master's in church music composition. And he worked with some really great instrumental dir—um, composers and conductors and such—Professor [Roger] Gard, Professor [Richard] Hilliard, and other people at—at River Forest [Concordia Teachers College].

And he has—he is—he does not so much write—like, I don't have a strong memory of, like, tons of, like, compositions, in the sense that he has, you know, a list of, you know, clarinet ensemble things or a list of this, that, and the other thing that he has done since school. What he's focused on instead is that he—as he directs the choirs and the instrumental ensembles—we do have a brass ensemble at our church for some occasions—that his skills in arranging, to make—to—for whatever performing forces are available. Um, that is something that, that—all of a sudden, okay, we have two flutes and a violin. What are we going to do on the second verse, and that kind of thing.

And sometimes it's just a case of making sure that everything's trans—that everything's transposed to the right key for whomever is playing. Because while I would take things like transposition and, you know, proper clefs and that sort of thing. Like, I can read whatever, and need—if I need to transpose, I can do that. But for many musicians who play more—on a more amateur sort of basis, that's a very important thing to try to make it work.



He has written many songs for, like, different—often for particular occasions for church events and that sort of thing. And I think that one of—And he also has a—is very good at combining traditional and more contemporary sorts of elements. That's not just—there's—I know that there are people who continue to write hymns, in the sense that they are, you know, things that mainly occur in quarter notes, with 19th-century tonal harmony that occur with, you know, standard four-part, kind of, choral, like, notation, and that continue to do that to the present. And I've written a couple short things like that. But he also—you know, the church music can also be things that are different, stylistically, from that.

Um, but it's actually—I would have never—if you had told me four years ago that I would end up with a degree at all similar to, like, a composition degree, I would have been a very surprised person. Because that really was not something that I would have thought of at all as being a large part of—you know, composition, in particular, as being a large part of what I—what I'm—what I'm about, until after I'd come to MIT.

FL: I'm going to pick up that trend, or that train of thought later. So your father's a full-time church musician.

DF: Now he's full time. He used to tune pianos and organs and a variety of other things. And he built zimbelsterns, which are these little bell apparatuses. They're a mechanical thing that go with pipe organs. Uh, it's a German, kind of, tradition but he's now—it's an electronic version of, like, real hand-bell castings, but the mechanism is electronic.

FL: So he has, kind of, an engineering, kind of, building background. That must have influenced you as well.

DF: Yeah. Well—and again, it seems like that, in retrospect. Though I certainly would have never thought of that. I am not—I am not that mechanically inclined in that regard. I understand, kind of, how they work a little bit. But the, um—I think that what comes through is that being able to deal with, not just, this is what the music sounds like, but that there's a lot of, you know, physical logistics to making music work—whether it's in a machine or in—in a, like, a setting of trying to get all the—the instrumentalists to assort and trying to fit them into a tiny little church space or something like that.

There's a lot of non-musical stuff that goes into music that you have to deal with in order for music to happen. Um, one of the more interesting things that happened is that in about—I think this is the summer after eighth grade or so. Maybe it was about the same time, or maybe it was slightly earlier. There was—but it was something in, like, between—I was, like, twelve or thirteen, or something like that. The, um—One of the local high schools was getting rid of their old set of timpani, and—because they were getting a better set. And so they, basically, asked if anybody wanted them. And my father thought, "Oh, okay, we'll take those."

And so we had a set of timpani laying around. And there was this—there was one elderly woman in her eighties, who had, like, at one point in her life, had played—must have played timpani for something. I have no idea what. But marked the—each—everything in the music with L's and H's for low and high and—in order

to remember which drum. And these were peddle timpani, that, like, took a huge amount of effort to change. They're not like the rocker peddle kind, where you can adjust it very cleanly.

And there was one other person who was mainly a pianist, who also occasionally played them. But very quickly, I—I found that this is something that I liked. And I remember—I think that, like, what we would do is that my father would have, like, the printed sheet music or, like, a photocopy of whatever the hymn or song was. And there's plenty of tonic and dominant running around in most of those.

So, like, granted, I didn't know the terminology at the time. But I got very good at tuning C and F, and G and C, and B-flat and E-flat, and all sorts of fun combinations that way. So that it became an interesting sort of experiment, you know, to go to the music store and figure out what kind of timpani sticks one could get.

And we promptly picked the ones that would work best for the acoustics of our church, which ended up being T4 Ultra Staccato timpani mallets, which as I now know are not the general thing that one would use for standard timpani playing. Those would be reserved for, like, a really—you know, I can think of a couple passages, in [Gustav] Mahler, that you'd switch to something really, really hard. But generally, you would use a much softer stick. But we didn't know this at the time.

And we found there was some person who was—like, gave little bits of percussion instruction. And I had—I went to, like, three percussion lessons. But she was very much a person who wanted, like, me to be, like, going back to, like, working on snare or wanted—or, like, wanted to know if I was interested in drum set, or something like that, which I had no desire for whatsoever. And I still don't like playing snare drum. And even though I can do it somewhat, it's not something that I would tend to focus on.

I liked that timpani had notes and that sort of thing. And that you could feel like you were part the music, as opposed to just part of the rhythm—not that the rhythm's bad. But again, it's a—as I look back in retrospect, it's a sort of self-taught, sort of, aspect. Because we eventually got a third timpani that doesn't match the other two. But between the three, you could get a variety of—um, of notes.

And so there would be cases where I, you know, I could hear what the bass line was doing. And by that time, my voice had changed, and so I was singing the bass line, instead of one of the other lines. And so, you know, being able to have—you know, to play along during the music, in church services, you know, that it actually was something that could help lead.

And this is something that I've never seen before or since, that the use of timpani or percussion instruments as—um, I would also play, like, other—depending on if there were other more contemporary songs that needed tambourine or wood block or a variety of other—we had a—we had a little set of wind chimes and that sort of thing. But to use the timpani, not just for, like, Handel's *Messiah*, or for something where there's a timpani part written in there for a brass prelude of this, that, and the other thing. But where, you know, on—there's a soft, little timpani part on one stanza of "Silent Night". Or that there's a—you know, that—with whatever the

song would be, that you're helping to trace out the bass line and—and follow along with what's going on with that.

And even though I don't do that much anymore, that was certainly a very helpful sort of thing. Entirely different from playing timpani in an orchestra or in a band setting. And I only played timpani in band in high school for my last semester of high school. And that was so strange, because you only had the timpani part.

I—All throughout, when I would play at church, you'd have—there was no timpani parts. You'd have the whole, you know, grand staff or grand staff plus the vocal line or whatever, with all of the music running along. And then, like, little red things—notes circled or added in, penciled in. And so I was very much seeing things in quote unquote "score notation" and feeling that, ah, this fits in with this and that the bass line is going *da-da da-da da-da boom*. And that this is where then, that comes in.

And so to be in a setting where all of a sudden, you know, you're playing the band transcription of *Marriage of Figaro*. And you have these oodles of rests. And you have to deal with that. And that you're not—you felt so much more disconnected, that, you know, the other people have the music. And then, all a sudden, you know, there's these couple little, heroic, you know, timpani strokes at the end. And that's what the extent of percussion would be.

Um, not—I mean, that's generalizing. But there's certainly percussion pieces where you are more prominent, in that regard. But being a pianist and—or being a—singing in choirs and that, you always have the whole thing there. And so, uh, that was a very big difference. I'm on quite a tangent here.

FL: That's quite okay. Sounds like your involvement with the church music was—was really influential for you in ways that, when you were doing it, may not have been obvious to you. But it looks like it's given you a lot of really useful skills.

DF: Yes. And not in—not necessarily in very expected sorts of ways. Like, I'd—I—A lot of what I'd be doing would be, you know, before I play, I need to make sure that, you know, that the sound system is adjusted correctly or that the—you know, the cords are running in a way that they aren't—that the choir people aren't going to trip on them when they're walking back and forth in front of the timpani. Or that, like, how do we figure out some way to hide the timpani behind everything so that they don't look like these big, kind of, shining copper things in front of the piano.

And again, working with the building of how—you know, we have a very bizarre, sort of, concrete block church building. So that, like, how do you—you know, what is the way that this is going to sound properly in the space? Um, and, like, how to make sure that you're not playing too loud or too soft, that it's not working that way. That a lot of those sorts of, either ensemble skills or logistical skills, or whatever you would want to call it, did not occur.

I mean, there was no conductor running around. There was no—It's not a—a typical, formal music setting. And I would have never thought that as quote unquote "chamber music." And I would have never—I don't know that I ever thought of anything as chamber music, or would have known what that meant until I would have been at the end of high school or beginning of college in that regard.

Since then, I—when I've been here at MIT—I don't want to jump the gun too much—but I continued. I—My father is the music director at a Lutheran church, and there's a Lutheran Episcopal Ministry here at MIT. And I've—I played one of the things that I actually wrote for a service my freshman year, towards the end. And the music director, who—or the student, who played the music for the services, was graduating. And they asked me to take over.

And so this was the first time, actually, I was playing piano for church. Because I played piano, but never for church, because there were plenty of other people that that was their only instrument. That was their main focus. They were much more skilled and able to do—Like, I always felt very awkward. Because I—like, doing hymns on a—at the drop of a note is a—is a very different sort of task than learning a piece of piano music and having weeks or months to sit down and figure out the fingering of this.

All of a sudden, you know, you're confronted with these hymns that have—like, you know, you have to be playing with a very different sort of technique, or even songs that aren't hymns. And so it wasn't until—again, like, that would have been two and a half, three years ago then, that playing hymns really became something that I—that was part of my repertoire. So that, like—Again, have I been doing "church music" quote unquote, for more than a few years? Yes. But would I—but very much not the typical, sort of, like, I don't play the organ. I don't play, you know, I haven't been playing hymns for, you know, oodles and oodles of years, or something like that.

FL: Mm-hm. What about your high school musical experience? You said you played one semester in the—

DF: Yes.

FL: - in the band. Were there other musical things you did in high school?

DF: Freshman year of high school I—this would have been the summer, then, after I had learned the—that piano piece and had been in that choir—I was—actually—I was, actually, still a soprano at that point. So I was in the—and since I had been focusing on singing so strongly during that year, I still had a lot of vocal control that way. And so I had—And because I could, like, read music, I was—they let me into the Select Show Choir, or whatever they called it, which was not the kind of typical choir, but it was a—a much smaller group of people. And so we sang—we did some little musical "Old McDonald" thing that we would take to the elementary schools and sing now and then. Various other sorts of things. And I did that freshman year.

But it wasn't—most of what I did, in terms of music in high school, would have been—I was in several musicals. Um, I was the minstrel in *Once Upon a Mattress*. And I was in *Once on This Island*, which is by Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty, who did *Ragtime* and a number of other musicals, *Seussical* and other things, since. It's an excellent musical.

And incidentally, it's—like, I was singing for that. It's an ensemble piece, so it's not that I had a solo vocal role. But it was that we had—we had—there were, like—like, twenty-some of us that were in the cast. And some of them would be

named roles. And then, those would recede back into the—the group. Because often, it's a kind of group storytelling sort of effort.

And I re—remember that with each of these musicals that I was involved in, it was often that I would end up with some sort of other task. With *Once Upon a Mattress*, there's a part that's supposed to be whistled by someone who's playing the nightingale, who's dressed up in this nightingale costume. And thankfully, I did not have to dress up in a nightingale costume. But they needed someone who could whistle in tune and memorize the part.

And so then, all of a sudden, here—you know, this is—it's a very interesting little modal French-ish sounding you know, quasi-medieval—not medieval, but like, minstrel sort of tune that had been written for the musical. And so, I was offstage, whistling into the microphone of that the piece was. And then, for *Once on This Island*, we realized, not too far from the performances, actually, that the pianists—like, the person doing the mus—the music direction is a pianist. And there was, I think—there were a couple—I think there might have been a flute or a couple other people involved.

But the—it's a very percussion-heavy score. It's—It has a lot of Caribbean and African influences. And for reasons that are a much longer story, I happened to have a miniature conga drum that was about 18 inches long that one could hold while—and wear while playing. Um, not the kind of big one that would be on a stand. And I brought it along, at one point.

And it turned out that, you know, we needed—I, of course, had the music memorized, because we had been learning the singing and choreography, and all this sort of stuff. And so we—I played along, and they're like, can you keep doing that? And so, I played the—what ended up happening is that I memor—Like, it's for a bunch of percussionists, but there's only one. And I was busy being on stage, so the—the—the conga drum lived backstage, in the center. Just kind of—

And so I would walk in, and occasionally I'd just be a normal character in the play. But then, when there were numbers, I would pick up the cong—conga drum and sing and play at the same time. That is not the easiest thing, by the way. But the thing is that it ended up being a very necessary part of the piece coming off.

But there was no written score that was the actual percussion part that we were practicing. Because we—when you're doing choreography, you practice with a CD, generally. Um, and what's printed is not—there's real challenges in printing exactly what percussion notation is. And we don't have, like, a whole arsenal of things that could take, you know, thousands of dollars, in a room full of things to—you know, to be playing all over. So—

Well, how do you get that out of one little drum that has a range of pitch of a certain size and has a variety of different ways that you can strike it? Well, I did that. And the—that ended up being rather serendipitous, because a few years later then—freshman year here at MIT—there was a student group that was doing the same musical. And they needed someone to do the percussion for it. And I ended up doing that.

But again, I never—this was the first time I had ever seen the music. And it was totally baffling. Because, like, you know, they had the percussion part sitting there, and I was thinking, oh, it's in 4/4 and not in 2/4? I had never thought of it like that. You know, or the whole way that it was written—it's just, the notation of it seemed to be kind of—it was an afterthought, at least for me, because I already had it more memorized based on what it had been before.

Not that I couldn't read it. But, um, I then ended up playing along and helping, when I wasn't playing to keep the rest of everybody in—in sync. It was a very small production.

But that would—the musicals and such would have been—And also, you know, like, playing for state music contests, I played timpani pieces or piano pieces. Or I also sang, like, "Bist du bei mir" [J.S. Bach, BWV 508], other kinds of things. But you could enter in several categories. And so that was—that was sort of fun.

FL: What was some of the music they really caught your personal attention during high school? Stuff that really moved you and—

DF: Gershwin's Concerto in F and *Rhapsody in Blue*. I now can look back on that and see—I actually just listened to the Helene Grimaud recording of Concerto in F yesterday, while I was here. And I can now identify that I liked, in Gershwin, that there was a harmonic complexity that was still tonal but that had lots of other influences. And I would not consider them all to be jazz influences at all.

Um, this is me, speaking as me in the present, as opposed to why I liked it then. Mainly, I—I think I had, like, found a cassette of—that had Earl Wild, or, you know, somebody. Like, it was a very old recording. And it just seemed very energetic. Uh, what are the other pieces that were very—I mean, the pieces, because—I don't—

Like, there is an extraordinarily wealth—an extraordinary wealth of music that I've not played. Like, I have not—I didn't play one of the beginning Beethoven sonatas. I never played one of the, you know, you know, Scarlatti sorts of things. Or the—I've—you know, I've occasionally looked at them or played through them, but I never really learned them. So that, learning, like, the Chopin E-flat Nocturne or the C-sharp minor Prelude of Rachmaninov or some of those other sorts of pieces that, because I was choosing them, in particular, that that was a very particular—I was the person choosing them, so they were en—enough of an influence that I would've made the effort to do that. Um—

I think that the—that I was struck by a number of the mixed meter things that we did in this one band piece that was in a strange, kind of, combination of 5/4 and a variety of other sorts of things. And that was one of the first times that I had really seen what mixed meter music could entail. Um, when I was in my—the—Like, in my last semester of—of high school, I was in a play that ha—was not—It's not a musical at all. It's *Rivers and Ravines*. It's a sm—relatively small cast. It was written in 1990, I think. And it deals with the crisis of these farmers in eastern Colorado during the 1980s and their sense of community and loss and this, that, and the other thing.

But there's a lot of references to music in it, from the "Mickey Mouse Theme" to "E lucevan le stelle" from *Tosca*, by [Giacomo ] Puccini. There's one character who keeps listening to that. And we had to find a recording of it.

And so the French teacher ha—is also an opera buff. And he had the Maria Callas recording of that, which has Guiseppe di Stefano singing the tenor part. That—It's a tenor aria. And he still is one of my favorite opera singers. And I'm not even that much of an opera buff now.

But that piece—I was very struck by it. Okay, so you have this musical. It has all these different sorts of, um—It has all these different, sort of, musical things that are alluded to throughout. But there—it isn't something that has music to it. And we were organizing this—it was—

That play was being performed at the same time that the art club was having a display in the hallway outside of the little theater at Hamilton High School in Sussex, Wisconsin. And we then had a set of—we had a tuba quartet. We had our xylophonist playing *Flight of the Bumblebee*. We had an assortment of things.

We had a little set of chamber music performances that I also helped to—organize for this. It's—We called it the Senior Fine Arts Display. And I had played parts of *Rhapsody in Blue* that I was learning at the time. And it just, kind of, smooched together. Um, there's many parts of it that I can't reach. But—but what I could play, I played.

Well, I decided to write a piece. And I started just while I was not on stage, writing down musical ideas. And I occasionally carried staff paper with me throughout high school and would write down various ideas of, like, you know, sometimes I thought I would write a piece for Christmas, or something like that and, of course, would never finish it until February or something like that, at which point it was kind of useless. Um—

But I started this idea. I thought, well, it would be interesting to try to put these, kind of, musical ideas together and write something for piano that would be this. And I wrote this piece for *Rivers and Ravines* and I—as a kind of overture—and played it, then, at the end of the concert, which is right before the play happened.

It had—I can now look at that and see that it's a quotation, sort of, piece, that it's using transformed—either rhythmically or harmonically transformed pieces from this part of "America the Beautiful" that ref—is referred to. There's part of, uh, a—There's a couple other hymn tunes that are—that are referred to in the course of—in—in the play.

Well, I—and it also—I can also look back on it and realize that it never uses a dominant. It doesn't have any major Vs. It has V without a 3rd. It has V with a minor 3rd. It has a bunch of other really funny chords that I still couldn't quite analyze. But it's just that that sort of analysis didn't make—I had no idea that that existed. So I simply would, you know, figure out the chord that I would want and figure out how to play it and write it down and that sort of thing.

And that would, I guess, be the first piece that I would consider to be something that I wrote, aside from, like, you know, a little something that sounded

kind of like Aladdin—the music from Aladdin, in seventh grade, or it's—it's little things jotting down. But that would be, like, the first thing that I would consider to be a finished piece. Would I play it today? I don't know. But, like, it's—that ended up being—like, I thought that that was a, kind of, one-shot, sort of, deal. I didn't, like, envision this being a major success. But this play seemed to inspire that it needed a little bit of music, or something like that. But that was something that ended up being a really interesting first foray into—not Gabriel Fauré, but at least a—

FL: [laughs]

DF: —foray into composition. Um—

FL: So, were there some other pieces that you wrote prior to coming to MIT?

DF: Like, certainly, I—I had a coup—Like, when I'd be playing on the timpani, I c—came up with a couple of ideas for things that would be—you know, I thought, oh, this sounds cool. I wonder if this would work? I—I had the idea—I was curious why there were no timpani concerto out there. I since have discovered that there are, but not often in the same vein that I was thinking.

But I thought, you know, we have—I—I mainly thought of writing something for piano. I can now look, and I thought, even when I was—if I was sketching something for timpani and other instruments, I could never think of it, like, outside of a piano texture, if that makes sense. Um, but I—I really didn't write. Like, I can think of couple little—like, they would have been, I would say, much more a, sort of, sketch sort of thing. There is—there is no, like, Opus 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, or something like that of—of a variety of different things.

And even to know, like, I had been in the band. I had been in the choir. But, like, we did not have—I must have seen a band score at some point, but we didn't have orchestras. Like, I would have never seen an orchestra score until I came to MIT.

FL: Did you get to—What kinds of concerts did you go to, growing up, and just your exposure to the—the wi—wider world of music? What was that like?

DF: Um, A lot of, you know—of either church music-related things. Or sometimes—I know we saw Bobby McFerrin and this—both doing—being Bobby McFerrin, but also conducting the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra at one point. I really enjoyed that. Uh, I did go, occasionally, to see the Milwaukee Symphony but I—but certainly not with any frequency. There was, um—

Often, I think I went to more choral sorts of things. Or, like, if there would be a—I—I mean, *Carmina Burana* is a g—is a good example of that. That I would have never thought to have gone to that. I would have not thought of that as a concert to, like, you know, oh, Mom and Dad, I want to go see this piece of 20th-century German composition because it has, you know, interesting parallel motion and—

[laughter]

DF: —that sort of thing. That wouldn't have been on my list of [inaudible]. I distinctly remember, when we are learning that piece that it doesn't have—well it doesn't have key signatures, in the traditional sense. It has—like it'll have 3 over a quarter note, or



something, at the top of the score. And when we learned the piece, we often thought that they were typos. Like, that when it would switch from 3/4 to 2/4 that we thought, oh no, that can't be a quarter note, or something. Like, that—and we got to the performance, and all of a sudden, you know, it's—it's going in this kind of funny, mixed meter. And it was a very disjointed sort of thing.

Um, but I would have—In terms of what concerts did I go to, I don't have, like—I certainly—I remember seeing—I—I saw—the Waukesha Symphony did *Scheherazade* [by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov], and a number of other, like, things like that. And this was—This would have been during high school.

Uh, I remember seeing one of our best French horn players playing the Mozart horn it's a—just with the—for a music contest, but playing the—one of the Mozart horn concerto things and really thinking that that was pretty incredible. Not so much that the piece itself was excellent or that the transcription of it was outstanding, but that, wow, that's a pretty outstanding player that can play all those note so fast and so clearly and that sort of thing. Um—

FL: Mm-hm. I want to digress a little bit. And hopefully there's a way you can describe it in brief. Um, how did your interest in architecture develop, you know, prior to MIT?

DF: I became interested in architecture because I was—I really enjoyed the, kind of, math and science, sort of, analytical perspective on things. And also that I really liked—I had been a history buff for a long time. And have—Not in the sense, necessarily, of, like, going to all sorts of famous battle sites or something like that. But I liked reading about things and writing about things that way.

And I also, then, gradually, ended up having more of an interest in visual art. And architecture seemed to be the—something that combined all of those. And remember, at this point, that even though we're interviewing in a music library, that music was very much a sort of thing that happened on the side. It was not at all something very primary. So that I thought that I would be interested—that this would be an interesting sort of thing to do.

And I had started, like sketching little house plans or making little models. You could buy little paper models of houses and stores. Basically, the short version is that I—of how—why my interest in architecture is kind of where it is now is that I would—I thought, well, if you're interested in biology, you take biology classes. You're interested in writing, you write, while you're in high school.

I'm interested in architecture. And you can't take architecture in high school. You can take drafting. That's not the same thing. I should go and travel and see different pieces of architecture. And so en route to seeing family, or visiting different people I would figure out, I—you know, well, there's this place I've read about. Maybe we could stop there.

And one place led to another. And this is how I became interested photography. Because I figured I should take—if I had been there, I—I might as well take a picture and try to figure out what it is. One thing led to another, and 600-some places later, I came to MIT.

But it was that I ended up seeing a very non-standard history, mainly of 20th cent—early 20th-century residential architecture in the Midwest and Northeast. Um, and that then I learned design through various summer programs and little things to explore architecture along the way. But it was not necessarily through, like, I really liked building decks I liked—you know, we had done a lot of house remodeling. We did—That's not the case. It's more through the study and the experience and visiting and that sort of aspect. And that's become very strong, even to the present.

FL: Mm-hm. So, when you came to—when you applied to MIT and came here, you were primarily thinking of—of architecture.

DF: Yes. And I—I, definitely, was intending on majoring in architecture. I took a seminar in it freshman—first semester of freshman year. And also thought, for my HAS distribution course that I'll take Intro to Western Music, which is 21M.011. And even though it's constantly made fun of by the more senior members of the music faculty, I really enjoyed that class.

Because it—even though I was interested in music, I had never heard, like, Perotin or Machaut or any of that kinds of—And I really hadn't heard a lot of, like, any, like, Brahms or other sort of thing—There are all sorts of random holes in what I had I ever heard. And so, that course was really very—a very helpful sort of thing. Because even though it was a survey, it—that's kind of what I needed at that point.

FL: Mm-hm.

DF: And I also had Dante Anzolini as my recitation instructor. Who was one of the more—He had played almost every—or conducted almost every piece that we were listening to. But he was too disorganized to find where that piece was, to point out, you know, the recordings. And it was—It was an interesting introduction to Dante at that point as well. So—

FL: We'll get—get more into him later. I have a question for you there. Um, when you first came to MIT, I remember when you came to—to the Music Library, you had a particular interest in the Music Library. But it also made me think that there was something musically astute about you as well. Um, what were your plans for—for music at MIT, when you came here? What were you—

DF: I was thinking that I—

FL: What were your initial plans?

DF: Well—I very much was conscious that it had a good music pro—that there was a good music program here.

FL: You did know about it before you came.

DF: I did know that. And I had—that was part of my decision, that I wanted to be at a place where I could pursue other interests and not feel like I was stuck in architecture 24/7. And I did not under—Like, I think that I had—one thing they'd mentioned John Harbison's name, who I had not heard of at that point. There was a variety of other little things that way. But I thought, oh well, maybe I'll take a few classes.

And then, eventually, towards, you know, the end of freshman year, I thought, oh, maybe I'll do a minor. It seems easy. And it seems to be, not easy enough, but, like, it's not a structural impossibility. And of course, I started working in the Music Library at the beginning of freshman year. And that ended up continuing for all four years.

And I thought that was a good sort of thing, because it meant that I—it was paid decently. There were friendly people to work with. And it meant that I could also learn something about something that was a bit of an academic interest, but was kind of on the side. Of course, I ended up with a double major and got—you know, finished the complete major, not a joint major in music. So that that was a pretty big change,

FL: Mm-hm.

DF: Big modulation there.

FL: Can you briefly describe some of your other, you know, work in other visual arts medium besides—media, besides architecture and painting and photography and stuff like that?

DF: Sure. Well, a lot of it, kind of has—it's hard to completely separate from the architecture. Or the other way around—that, like, I've done many watercolor sketches for building design or for studio projects or photographs of—so much of what I learned, in terms of photographing buildings or photographing models, has come out when I'm then simply doing photography and traveling or of different objects.

The—Incidentally, the—a strange connection to music is that the photograph on the cover of the MIT Undergraduate Research Journal that I had given to you is a photograph of the inside of a percussion instrument. So, you know, they—they meet in strange ways. But the—I've had several—I—I mainly focus in watercolor, a little bit of acrylic, and in drawing media and mixed media, of course, between those.

And I've had several art shows, in—um, both in Wisconsin and in part of ones here in the—in—at MIT and in Boston, in general. And actually just got back from a trip to France, where I was studying with a—as part of a visual art program, Drawing and Painting in Southern France. So that the visual art component would be something that was very much towards the side.

I've not—I've taken art classes, but I have not—I don't have a—like, a large studio art background beyond what I had done in high school and small—like, smaller short-term sorts of things during the past four years of college. And I've found that that's actually much more helpful for where I was at, that I wanted to be—when I would have time to focus on that, I could. But that when I needed to be focusing on other academic sort of things, I could then see how I could apply what I knew in photography or visual art in a more—as kind—to serve what I needed academically in architecture.

FL: Mm-hm. I want to pick up, a little later, about when you came to MIT—um, and obviously, there were different things you can specialize in, if you are a music major and what led you to composition—but I want to backtrack a little bit. Um, and I have some specific questions about some of the performing activities. But you want to just

give me kind of an overview of the—the groups that you played with. Um, because there's probably some stuff that I don't know about that you—that you've done.

DF: Um, let's see. I—I very naively auditioned for the MIT Symphony Orchestra in my freshman year and, surprisingly, made it in as a percussionist, even though I had never been in an orchestra before. And I can—can now realize and, you know, that that was a very, very helpful experience, beyond what I could have imagined it would have turned into. So I was in MITSO for freshman year and parts of sophomore and junior year.

I was in Wind Ensemble or Wind Symphony—or it's had several names—with Fred Harris over, parts of—again, parts of sophomore and junior year. I was in the MIT Chamber Choir with Bill Cutter for parts of junior and senior years.

And I played—let's see, I did a chamber music piece that was for flute and percussion with Ole Nielsen [MIT class of 2000]. That was a premiere for—of a piece that Charles Shadle had written. I have been the music director for the Lutheran Episcopal Ministry for the past few years and have played for them for three.

And let's see, I played with *Once on This Island*. That was the only theater thing—theater music that I did while I was here. I then had my final recital that I did at Baker House with Ida Wahlquist-Ortiz [MIT class of 2004], who is a violinist. Um, and I think that that's, pretty much, the extent of what I've played in. Don't know if I'm missing something or not.

FL: Were there some miscellaneous accompanying things you did for recitals?

DF: Yeah, I—Well, I played a little bit. I also was part of the Young Composers Ensemble, while that existed. And that they—I—I accompanied one of—for one of my own pieces, that someone else was singing. That was sophomore year. And the—I actually didn't do as much, kind of, random accompanying for performance.

But I have read through a number of things, like, with friends or with various things that way. And then, of course, senior year, the Stephen Prokopoff donation concert was a very big part of things, both in terms of library activities and also in terms of performing.

FL: Right. Um—

DF: I guess the common thread would be that I didn't do one thing for four years. And I was—That wasn't because I was, for a lack of—for being indecisive. A lot of it had to do with scheduling. And a lot of it had to do with wanting to try to learn the most from each opportunity.

FL: Absolutely. When you played with the MIT Symphony Orchestra, under Dante Anzolini, can you tell me some of the things that you learned from him that have stayed with you, as both a—a performing musician—pianist—but also as a composer? I'm sure there's a lot that's, kind of, rubbed off.

DF: Right. Well, I mean, first of all would be the pieces that we did. I mean, first concert included the [Edward] Elgar *Enigma Variations*. Second concert was the [Alfred] Schnittke Viola Concerto and Mahler's Fifth [Symphony], then [Stravinsky's] *Rite of*

*Spring, West Side Story*, [Maurice] Ravel's *Daphnis and Chloe*, Beethoven's Fifth Piano Concerto—I did the tympani for that.

The choice of music is so in—decisive and incisive, I suppose. But very—a very particular sort of thing. Being able—like, I don't know that I would have ever understood how Mahler works, if I hadn't taken the time of listening through all of those rehearsals. And the thing is that when you're a percussionist, very often, you are listening through a lot of those rehearsals. That it's not—and we generally have decent seats too.

That—there's not—What I—So much of what I got out of that—I mean, through the whole *Enigma Variations*, I probably played fewer than a—than twenty notes. I—You know, there's not that many cymbal crashes in it. And some of them are probably wrong as well. But the thing is that I got a chance to see all the details with, like, figuring out bowings with the violins, all the little tempo changes, the idea that—of what the role of a conductor was, of trying to explain how the balance of the different instruments was going to work for, you know, building up in the "Nimrod" variation, the big adagio thing.

Um, the way that, like, the different tempos related—all sorts of things. Like, I had never been in an orchestra. This was—I was completely baffled that the violins were in tune. I—I found that to be, like—And so when—The fact that they were in tune, at all, seemed to be such an incredible thing. I was—I thought that was—they were such good musicians.

And then, when he would be so critical of them that, you know, they're not together, they have no idea what they're doing, they can't find their place, I thought, it sounded—you know, at first, I—it sounded good to me. I mean, it took a long time for me to be able to understand, what were the kinds of musical issues that one could actually listen for?

Because I had—I was simply listening and thinking, oh, that sounds pretty good and not really listening carefully to all of the little different things—of why the bassoon has to go slightly sharp, in order to tune to the piano in the Beethoven piano concerto, the idea that—that E-flat isn't the same thing for every instrument, and that a piano isn't—you know, the idea that E-flat and D-sharp could be different was a—you know, mind-boggling, for one thing.

But I—I would say—And of course, that same year I had him for 20th-Century Music in the spring. And you could do your assignments for that either as written papers or as compositions. And I just sort of—I don't know what, exactly, gave me the idea that I could do this. But I thought I would.

And so, like, you'd listen to the first assignment. You listen to a bunch of Ravel and [Claude] Debussy and different things, that—you know, to learn about French Impressionism. And I hadn't played a great—I had played some Ravel and some Debussy along through high school but not a great deal. And I thought, well, but this is interesting music. I'll—I'll write something in this style. And that ended up being one of these pieces that I, with a bit of revision, ended up being a fairly finished piano piece.

And had a—as I can now look at it, has quite a bit of me that isn't—just, like—It's not just a copy of, like, a bunch of pentatonic chords stacked together and then, you know—you know, a bunch of diatonic stuff at the end. It's not—It's not just a formulaic sort of thing. But I found that very comfortable, whether writing, like, for, you know, something impressionism, something that was, kind of, a post romantic sort of thing, a little bit of something that tried to be Stravinsky-ish.

The *Were You There* variations, which ended up being variations on a hymn tune that- I was very much influenced by the [Charles Ives's] *Concord Sonata* and very—and all sorts of things that way that it's hard to separate out, like, what, in terms of Dante [Anzolini] the musician, Dante the teacher, Dante the—like, in this case, looking at composition. I'll never forget, he put one of my pieces up. Because when people would turn in pieces, he would play them for the class.

And the way that he would analyze them was totally different from how I had ever thought of, when I was writing it down. It was, like, well, I didn't think that was an added 7th, 9th, or anything. It was just that it's two parallel 4ths. And that's what happens to be in the bass. They're two separate layers. Whereas, I was conceiving things as, you know, separate layers, thinking of, like, the Debussy prelude, like, wall or something like that.

And he was, then, looking at how they stacked up vertically. And I thought, oh, this is an interesting sort of thing. Of course, at the same time, I was in 21M.301 and was, for the first time, learning what tonic and dominant meant, which now that I look back on that, was a rather bizarre semester. Because, like, trying—like, I had been—you know, I was writing, like, little four-part harmony sorts of things that were about four measures long and trying to learn how to do that without parallel voices. And meanwhile, writing Debussy music, where it's all par—you know, quasi-Debussy music, where there's all of these huge parallel things zooming along in many octaves and with all sorts of, like, Lydian added things that—I'm surprised it turned out at all coherently.

FL: Wow. Um, there's some later questions I'm going to ask you about in relationship to your early compositional experience. Um, that's—

DF: Part of the thing, also, is that that was when I—I had Charles Shadle for 21M.301, for that first Harmony and Counterpoint class. And he—when I—at one point, I brought in one of the pieces—the—the *Were You There* one, that, uh, the piano piece that I had written for Dante's class. And that was the one that I played for—ended up playing for church at one point. And that I've—that's—I've probably played that among the most of other things I heard some—because it's—it works well. It's not—and—It's not too long, not too short. And it's been—uh, it's—it's a piece I happen to still like.

And he very—was very helpful in realizing that I had picked up on something that was larger than a 21M.301, sort of, issue. And while he did not, at all, let any—any of my, you know, counterpoint errors slide as a result, he wasn't going to diminish the rigor of that, um, began taking an interest in what I was writing of my own music. And he's been one of the most helpful teachers that I have ever had, in that regard.

And so I've ended up—When that next October, which is a year after I had first been in the MIT Symphony [MITSO] Dante [Anzolini] asked Charles [Shadle] if he thought that I could write a piece—that, you know, if I could learn to write a piece for the orchestra. And the net result is that Dante did ask me to write a piece for the orchestra. And Charles helped me learn about orchestration sort of things.

And that—And then, MITSO played that piece *Of the Lake*, then, the next May, and—or at least excerpts from it. And that was—so I ended up—I was still working with Charles in, like, for—I'd had him for a few classes. But that then I had begun working with him on a more individual, sort of, basis. It wasn't so much that, like, now today we're going to do the trombone line. And we're going to stu—And, like, that he would walk me through the process. But that he was very helpful for answering questions and for trying to—He wasn't afraid to tell me when something was really, simply not working.

FL: Mm-hm.

DF: And because I needed—I—I couldn't always tell that and be able to have any sort of clue of what was going on. In term—Because I had had such—People here assumed I had much more orchestral and music experience than I actually did in that sort of direction—

FL: Mm-hm.

DF: - a composition direction or, simply, an orchestral sort of direction. So—It was a very quick learning curve, in that regard, to go from being in the orchestra to writing for it, within a little over a year.

FL: Mm-hm. Well, you seem to absorb things very, very quickly. And that has stood you and stood you well for your time here.

DF: It's, kind of, almost a necessity for some things at MIT, or for learning how to, you know—learning how to grasp material fast enough, so that you can move on to, you know, whatever it's preparing one for.

FL: But even how you're able to absorb various musical languages like that—that piano piece, variations on *They Were There* [*Were You There*]. Um, that—there's the—you know, even before you mentioned to me, I heard, kind of, the [Charles] Ives influence. But yet, it's not a—a copy of Ives in any way at all. But it um—there are some things in there that said, Hm, that really caught my—caught my ear. And you obviously—

DF: And that piece is essentially—that's not too different from how I turned it in as a class assignment, you know, halfway through second semester. There's a couple little things that changed, but essentially, that's pretty much how it was.

FL: And then, this says a lot about Charles, as far as not insisting that you write things that are in this very, kind of, sterile, academic mode of imitating Mozart and Beethoven first. And because you had a chance to—to let your—your imagin—imagination go, as you were learning.

DF: And instead, imitating it later. I mean, my last assignment would have been—I mean, my last assignment for 21M.304, the la—the last composition course that I took, was

a string quartet in a very Mozartian sort of style. And that was also for Charles. And so at the same time that, like, I'm busy writing stuff for my recital and doing other sorts of things for—that are in many different styles, that then towards the end, to return to something and that it's not just that you have to get past Mozart before you can get to Ives.

That you can, like—It was quite an incredible task to then figure out, how do I write something that's that stylistically clear, that's that—you know, all the details and all the rigor of this worked out in a way that, you know, were—you can't just insert a 5/4. You know, you can't just add, you know, another, you know, 5 notes to the chord. You have to figure out how to solve the musical problems, and get this to work in a way that is within an—a given style.

And I think that—I mean, his own music is very comfortable in many different styles. He's not someone—He uses that variety of styles as part of his compositional language. And I think that that's—I've—I—I think that's a good lesson. Because I would hope that, when I'm writing music for church or for orchestra or for, like, something for theater or something for, um—Like, I wrote a small piece that was for a—accompanying an architecture film project. I would hope that I wouldn't be able to treat those differently.

I would hope that I would not think that the solution to all of that would all sound the same amount of harmonic density. We have the same amount of rhythmic drive. I would not want to be able to, you know, that—oh yeah, there's another piece that sounds like this.

For as much as I like John Adams's music or like you know, Ives's music or like, you know, a number of things, sometimes it's so recognizable that it's help—it's great when you discover that those composers can do things different as well, that they're not just, you know, about a certain sort of, oh yeah, I've heard, you know, like even Gershwin, that, you know, is it recognizably Gershwin? Yes. But it can be a whole variety of different things, depending on what the music was needed for and that sort of thing.

FL: Right. Um, can you talk about your experience with MIT Wind Ensemble under—under Fred Harris. Any particular moments that—and experiences that stand out for you?

DF: Well, Fred is a percussionist, and so that was an interesting sort of thing, because—Whereas, Dante is not, that he would be more—that Fred was more attentive to specific percussion sorts of issues. And we did some percussion ensemble sorts of pieces, [Thomas Gauger's] *Gainsborough* and [Thomas Brown's] *Gift of the Madupe*, and some of these other things.

I was struck by how there's—While there were some pieces that I was very engaged with, there were some—just as with orchestra, But that there's something—there's some gaps in wind ensemble literature that, like, I learned that I'm not a fan of Percy Grainger and of many other—you know, that there's some—that learning that being part of an ensemble is that there's going to be some pieces that you really like. And there's some pieces that are less to one's liking.



But Fred was very helpful, in terms of seeing—I mean, he—he helped with, uh—he did a little conducting seminar over IAP that one could just learn a little bit about conducting. And that was a—I—I am not yet but, at all, a conductor. But that was a very interesting sort of exploration.

And I think that, let's see, one of the—we also then ended up doing Evan Ziporyn's clarinet concerto, *Drill*, bass clarinet concerto. And that was—that—that's a piece that took me a long time to understand at all. But to—once I—That was a very percussion-intensive sort of thing. Both because that's how Evan writes. But also because that's what we needed. And so, I think that being able to see more of a range of what percussion could be was—was—was helpful in that regard.

FL: What about your experience with, uh, the MIT Chamber Chorus with Bill Cutter?

DF: That was—That—That was a very enjoyable and re—really great experience to be back singing. Um, there's a lot of downtime, when you're doing percussion. And it was really nice to be back and doing it in an—something instrumental. I mean, something musical, where there is—you're really having to pay attention to tuning and ensemble coordination together.

Because you see, the thing is that in percussion, it's rare that you're having to blend with another instrument. One of the best exam—examples of that was with Fred—just to back up for a moment—was when we did the—There was a concert Gunther Schuller's 75th birthday. Um, I was playing the tympani for that.

And there was, like, it's a Gunther Schuller tympani line, which requires—every single note is tuned. Like, there's no B-flat, E-flat sort of thing. There's, like—it was—It required all sorts of melodic things to be done with the tympani. And atonal—or relatively atonal things that you had to be able to tune wide leaps and all sorts of things that way.

And that was one of the few times that I—like, I'm trying to blend with the trombones or something like that. That's very unusual in percussion. Switching to Chamber Choir, now all of a sudden it became that, you know, really focusing on singing, not just for a sight singing sort of idea for, like—or vocal ear training, whatever, for, like, a—for composition or for Harmony and Counterpoint.

But where, you know, we're doing these Bach motets and learning, wow, when I'm singing this, I can really understand how the texture of the music is working in a way that just from listening it would almost be sensory overload. That when we—you know, the Frank Martin pieces that we did. We did *Dido and Aeneas*.

That learning how to do—that how to understand things about harmony, about—the—about, like, the real blending of different forces that happens so much with other instruments, but don't happen as much with percussion that—or with piano, for that regard. Because you can't—you know, if the note's out of tune, you can't change it in a piano as much or as easily.

Whereas, you know, realizing how to, you know, get everything very precise. And Bill's also very energetic and a lively sort of person that made—made it a—a lot of fun.

FL: Did you sing any of his music, when you were in that chorus?

DF: Yeah. We did one of his—his pieces of church music, which seems to be the recurring moti—the recurring motive of this conversation. We did that for—like, we—we traveled and did a couple of concerts at—where our accompanist is—Karen Harvey is the music director at a church. We did one of his like, it's, I think, a version of "For Unto Us a Child Is Born," [from *Messiah*] something like that. And we also did—read through some of his Herrick poems and things. And that was—that was also—I mean, to be conducted by the person who wrote the music is a very—that's—It's subtle differences. Because, I mean, one can know the music extraordinarily well, even if you didn't write it. But it's—you know it in a different sort of way.

FL: Mm-hm, mm-hm. Are there things you learned from him that—that will stay with you as a musician and composer, as you're a composer?

DF: That one can conduct with the other hand and still figure out a way to be leading the, um—he sometimes conducts in a very different sort of manner. And that was—at first, it was a bit confusing. But it's a good ex—it's a good thing to understand that one can—that there are different ways of leading, different ways of learning music, in terms of, do you try learning the piece all the way through, in order? Do you grab the various sections and then try to put them back together?

Um, I certainly would—I think that—I think that a lot of the lessons from that would be also things about how it's important to—I mean, it's a—vo—singing is much more, you know, it's—the whole rest of your body that's involved as well. I think that's also—He's, you know, in terms of making sure that, you know, with warm up exercises and that sort of thing.

Which is—You know, percussion is also very physical but in a different sort of way—mostly in terms of trying to move those darn heavy things. Um, but there's—I—I think that—And also, of course, I've sung with—with, um—we did the Ives Fourth Symphony. And I was singing as part of that.

And that getting a chance to learn an Ives piece, not just from hearing it, but from being in it and being a part of it. And that was Dante conducting. So that Dante—sitting down and being able to, you know, look at the score of Ives's Fourth Symphony and play a—a suitable piano version of what was going on is kind of, you know, that's a feat in and of itself.

But that—that's a piece that I had enjoyed before I'd been in it. But getting a chance to see, okay, well, these are the types of, you know, issues that when you're trying to sing in it and singing with an orchestra, as opposed to just, you know, choral stuff in and of itself. I think those are all valuable lessons and...

FL: Wow. Um, besides studying with Charles Shadle—and we'll get back to him shortly—you also studied with John Harbison and Edward Cohen. Can you tell me about some of your experiences with them and things that you learned from them?

DF: Sure. I had Ed Cohen for my second Harmony and Counterpoint class. He's a much quieter and more subtle person than Charles is. And that ended up being, I believe, one of his last classes as before he became ill and passed away shortly the year after.

And I was, um—I believe also that Charles had studied with Ed Cohen when he was at Brandeis.

So there's a, kind of, interesting sort of twisty tangle of teachers there. But Professor Cohen was—I think what I appreciate so much about people in the music department as a whole is that even if they realize that I had talents in these other sort of projects that I was working on—that was the semester I was starting to think about the orchestra piece, and I was writing a percussion piece. I was writing a number of other things—that they still wanted to make sure that I had learned as much as possible from the things that were more exercises.

That when writing a set of piano variations, that—you know, could I have done a set of—You know, at that point, I had heard the [Frederic] Rzewski “People United [Will Never Be Defeated]”. You know, I wasn't planning on writing anything at that kind of scale. But, like, I could have thought of piano variations and said, well, no, I'm not going to write in a tonal idiom at all. I'm going to, you know, do a whole fragmentary sort of thing. Um, but I'm really glad that while I was in an academic sort of setting that, you know, he was—wanted me to take that as far as I could, within the bounds, within the design of the—or the—the scope of what that assignment was.

I had John Harbison then the next semester—um, or the—for the next class that I had. Similarly, he—he actually allowed quite a bit of stylistic freedom and allowed a lot more tonally outlandish sort of things than I would have—than I—than would have been allowed both before and after, in Harmony and Counterpoint, sort of, settings.

But was still very perceptive of being able to—I think that the—one of the commonalities that I've seen with the really good teachers that I've seen is that—and this is true in architecture as well is that instead of trying to make you write in—or design or do whatever, in their style. I mean, I know what John Harbison's music sounds like. I played—When the orchestra did [*The*] *Great Gatsby*, you know, the overture.

But being able to—in the amount of time that it takes to place the music on the piano and decipher what the handwriting looks like, to be able to say, these measures are going in a direction. And that one is then going backwards. And you need to change that, because it's not—you know, that's not a progression. That's, like, it's going someplace, and then it can't decide what it wants to do, and then all of a sudden we're back.

That being able to understand, almost from the inside out, instead of looking at it and saying, you know, I'd rather have a chord with an added 13th there just because that would sound cool. Like, there's—it's very easy to say, well, this is what I would do here. Um, it's something very different, as a teacher, to be able to see, okay, well, you know, this is the pattern you've set up. I think I'm beginning to understand what this is, even though it's not complete.

But to try to say, okay, this is—in order to make it more consistent, or to make it—Or I—I also got marked down, by Professor Harbison, for being too normative. I got—I—that it—this movement of the string—I think it was a minuet or—it was—it was some piece that, it simply was proceeding far too much as was expected. That it

needed—that there—that the—the moments when all of a sudden there were surprises.

Or, like, it went in a very different harmonic or textual direction, that those were good. But that, you know, everything was far too correct throughout. And that was an interesting thing to get marked down for. But it's—I can understand where that—where that comes from. It's not that everything needed to be, like, blatantly wrong. But that you had to, you know—if you just kept playing by the rules forever, you would have—it wasn't going to be the most musical decision.

FL: Mm-hm. Um, your—you spoke earlier about working with Charles Shadle. Um, and you worked a lot with him. Are there some—some lasting, kind of, musical values that that you learned from him that stayed with you? Or just things that, when you're composing, that are—that you—will be with you for your lifetime?

DF: Well, I think one would be that what I had said before, that one has—it's a good thing to be comfortable in many different styles. Um, for as much as there's a lot of things about John Harbison's music that I really enjoy, he—there's some—some of it tends to, like, it has a certain level of harmonic complexity that is rarely simpler than, and it often goes more complex.

But in—I—being able to understand that it was an okay thing to, all of a sudden, have a moment in a piece or a—an element to a piece that was extraordinarily tonal, either for—either for, like, as a musical gesture or to fit like, I'm thinking of Charles's opera, the *Coyote's Dinner*, or some of the other things that he's worked at, where all of a sudden the musical style is the element in and of itself. That, like, this very outlandish twelve-tone thing goes with this character. And this, sort of, marching music goes with the other one. And this, you know, seductive tango-ish or, like, other sorts of, you know, more complex sort of things follows with another character. That, uh, he also has helped me understand the difference between, like, things that are structure and things that are effect. That when you're—that—At a certain point there is—like, in the orchestra piece or in the *Chorale Variations*, the chamber orchestra piece that I worked with him on, which is probably one of my most major works that I've done to this point.

That deciding, okay, at this point, we need a big crescendo of something, a big, kind of—There needs to be effect—an effect there. Every single, little note is not important to the sense that—important in the sense that, we need to hear that the sextuplet is happening against the triplets underneath, against the—the 16th notes in the—in the violin, or something like that.

That's an—Right now, what we need is an effect for dramatic effect, for structural effect, that it's this big preparation for a very clear downbeat. And we just need a lot of, not noise, but a lot of complexity before something simple and learning to understand when that would work.

Or in terms of orchestration sorts of things, that he's mentioned many times, you know, that a lot of what orchestration is, is about effect. That it's not—and that helped so much, then, when—when I would be, then, playing in a Ravel piece or playing in a, um—or in something else. I mean, you think of, like, the bird things that

are happening in *Daphnis and Chloe* or the—some of the other things in Mahler, that the orchestration itself is the effect.

That it's not that that low oboe note is interchangeable with it being played by a—by a viola or a trombone. It needs that low, growling oboe sound, that that's—It's not just another D-flat. Um, or that we have—or that, like, in *Daphnis and Chloe*, that you have all these different layers of things running around and that it's not that that's a melody. That's not something that we need to know every detail about. But that's, you know, a little gesture that's on the side.

And I think that that was a—I wouldn't—I don't know that I would never have thought of things that way. But that makes—you know, that's actually how a lot of percussion writing is. Sometimes it's about the structure. It's about the harmonic outline, about where the piece is going.

And right now, I'm working on a transcription of his *A New England Seasonal* cantata, a piano transcription of it for rehearsal purposes. And when I was meeting with him yesterday, that was one of the more important things to try and figure out, you know, what's the mo—What's important here? We can't transcribe the whole thing. We—you know, what parts are really essential for listening and—and for following along.

I think that being—that that's a—that's been something that has stayed with me. You know, some of his music I've—I have a lot of understanding of, because I've played it or heard it—others that I'm not familiar with. And it's not even that my music really sounds like his at all.

But I think that that's—it—I think that that's been one of the—the strongest, sort of, things is that because it doesn't sound—we don't write similar kinds of music, necessarily, that that conversation could be a very meaningful one.

FL: Mm-hm.

FL: You wrote an article for the MIT Undergraduate Music Journal called—

DF: - Research Journal.

FL: Or Research Journal—yes, it's right here—called MURJ—M-U-R-J.

DF: Yes.

FL: It's published in fall of 2002. And it raises a lot of interesting questions. And you start off looking at some of the shared language and terminology between music and architecture. And to quote you, you said, "Parallels between architecture and music show that it is the descriptive, semantic language that is shared, rather than the actual content." And that's a—that's really insightful observation there. Um, I have a number of questions about that. But do you want to just comment about what, kind of, brought you to looking at that issue?

DF: Well, a lot of people would ask me, well, are you—you know, have you heard the quote from Goethe, or from whomever, that architecture is frozen music? And I didn't know if I had thought of that or not but, you know, if the frozen music had thawed into architecture or if was just kind of melting or what it was doing. Um, other times,

people wanted to know if I was interested in acoustics or concert hall design, or something like that, because I have these two interests.

Um, I actually have many more than that, but these were the two that I was pursuing as majors. And these are valid questions. But what I realized is that, you know, people would say, oh, they actually kind of go together, because, you know, they feel—they both have rhythm and, like, there's—are they—we—we talk about orchest— I'll never forget the first day of architecture studio, that architecture is orchestrating tectonics to create a sense of place. Or there's a sense of, uh, all sorts of musical terms or words that are used.

And what I realized is that it's actually that—what I said, the descriptive language that's what—is what makes that interesting. It's not the that, like, when you're thinking about the rhythm of windows or of—of—you know, elements in architecture that you're, you know, tapping out, like, an actual rhythm. But there's the—the visual rhythm or that, um—the rhythm—How fast—how fast do you go through, like, is it a bunch of hallways, one after another.

Is it, you know, when we would talk about this, right?— even the idea of orchestrating, the idea that when you're an architect, you're trying to coordinate all these different elements of the structure and systems and the light and the form and the materials, and all sorts of things that way. That—Are there any violas involved? I don't think so—not often, in architecture.

But is it important to understand, like—I mean, these are really issues of hierarchy, of syn—of creative synthesis and this, that, and the other thing. And I began, then, looking at how I could examine that in a more, you know, in a written format, you know, using a totally different medium of writing—written language. But trying des—describe how that descriptive language was—was similar between them.

Because for me, I don't find that, like, I'm—I want to write music about my buildings or something like that. Or that I'm inherently interested in—if I designed a concert hall or something that might be interesting, but not inherently, just because it involves music. I think that there's a lot more that you can learn, in terms of trying to—you know, with both architecture and music, you—as the composer, as the architect, you're not necessarily the final producer of the—of the project.

There will be other performers. Or there will be other builders. So it's a communicative sort of thing. You're trying to communicate the design or the intention or the content of the piece for someone else to make. And so therefore, it's very different from, like, comparing music and poetry or—you know, the poet writes the poem and there it is.

Or, you know, comparing architecture with visual art, where, generally, if you're a painter, you are the person doing the actual work. You're not just instructing other people. Sometimes you are, but you're not just instructing other people to do it. Where it's—it would be rare for the architect to—or the composer, in and of themselves, to be the only performing force, the only building force involved.

And so that was part of why I decided—I wrote that article for a variety of reasons and for something that had occurred and that there had been the possibility of

earlier. And then I decided—earlier that calendar year, and then I submitted it. And it was part of the MURJ in the fall.

FL: Mm-hm. This similarity between the languages, they're obviously metaphorical and poetical—poetic. But, as you point out, some people have tried to find literal correspondences between the two, which is why it leads to confusion. Um, do you find them—the metaphors between the two helpful, if it's seen metaphorically?

DF: Yeah. I think it can be. I think I'm not trying to be wishy-washy here. But I think that there's—it can, even in examining the—you know, when someone tries to make a literal equivalency of, like, something that's kind of synesthetic. That, you know, it—This space sounds like a trombone playing an E-flat *mezzo forte*, or something like that.

I'd still be interested as to what it is that would make someone want to describe it in that sort of manner. But I think that there's—I think that there's a much stronger comparison in terms of creative process. And even about some of the issues that we've talked about here, about, do you do things in a certain style, in a—you know, do you—in terms of stylistic imitation before branching out into other things. Or what's the relationship there?

And so, realizing that, you know, when we think of—you know, we're—we study and make quote unquote "Bach chorales" in music. Um, you know, harmony and counterpoint, sort of, settings. And yet, as Debussy points out and as I quoted in the article, that Bach would have been the last to have been following many of the rules that we would, you know, ascribe to, or would analyze or add on.

And that there's this kind of tension of how do you—you know, how—I think, right now, there's—there's still many elements of music that are taught with this, sort of, you know, working within a set style. And that it would be—like, whenever I was writing these pieces that were more on my own, like, the music—20th-century music class or the pieces I wrote for Charles, you now, kind of, these were all sort of independent sort of things. They were not within an—you know, an academic prescribed, sort of, assignment sort of setting.

And meanwhile, on the other side, in architecture, they assume that, you know, people are just designing based on that when you were not coming in with a knowledge of all the orders of columns and this, that, and the other thing. And that we're just designing based on the materials and the program and the kind of facts and figures of what we need to do. And that, presumably, were doing so without stylistic preconceptions.

But realistically, when you get down to the nuts and bolts of it, there—you know, we're not the first person—people that ever used columns, or to ever use steel in a certain way, or to ever use a certain set of forms, that, you know, the way that we're taught shows—you know, makes us—that there is actually a bit of a stylistic, um, I don't want to say, like, ulterior motive. But there's a certain style to what one is creating.

So do you acknowledge that up front and then work out of that? Or do you, kind of, work with the assumption that there isn't a stylist—a stylistic overriding goal

and then gradually develop something out of it? It's a—they're—they're really complex issues. And they're not—and part of what also makes them confusing is that outside of academic architecture and academic music, there are whole, huge worlds of architecture, of things that are built, of music that is played, that is not typically thought of in an academic sort of way.

And so these are really complex sorts of—of things, and I think that the fact that you can keep finding the parallels are not so much that, you know, a suburban ranch house does not sound like pop music. But one can make the comparison, and say, okay, how, you know, with something that is far more proli—you know, has proliferated throughout the country. It's something that there's a lot of this, that there's a lot of consistency. And there's—there actually isn't.

If you sit down and analyze it, there's a style to both of these things. There are elements that you can identify. But they're not—these weren't created with the kind of, like, someone saying, well, how shall we, you know, make the two by fours that it expresses the structure of the—of the suburban drywall.

That's not really what's going on. And I think that that tension—that's one of things that I'm currently, kind of, thinking about. That, like, where—you know, where does the analysis or that stop? Because if I can, you know, find these elements or, you know, sit down and be analyzing an Ives piece or analyzing a Ravel piece, or something like that, well, you know, what can I find and still glean from what's interesting from music that, you know, some people may feel that's just pop music or that's just movie music or that's just something like that.

But how can you find things of value in what's around you? And the same thing happens in architecture. Like, not everything is designed by an architect. You just, you know, there's that house on the corner that has really cool stone work. You know, I don't—I'll never know who did that. But that's a really fun thing to be able to learn from.

FL: Mm-hm. I'm getting back to your—your article in MURJ. The way that you use the word "design," and you're looking at how it's used, making comparison between the two disciplines. And it certainly struck me. Um, the musicians that I have been around and the education I had, we rarely used the word "design." And we—and if—If it's used, it's used in a very narrow sense of the word, referring to—to rigidly fixed forms.

And for you, it's a very different thing, and—can you talk about your—how you use that word "design," and how it refers to the process of composition. Because you use it in an active, kind of, form or an active way. But can you talk about the relationship between design and music and architecture?

DF: Well, the way that I use it is—I said in the article that music is really thought of as the design process. And when I'm thinking about, like, designing a building or some sort of—you know, or landscape element, or something like that, sometimes—you know, one way of thinking about it is just in terms of its geometry, or in terms of the shape and size of things.



But another way of thinking about it is to say, well, what if, you know, you entered it, and it had this, kind of, very, you know, open, airy, sort of ambiguous sort of feeling. That as you get farther in, that it becomes, actually, you know, quite dark and confined. And that there's little, kind of, hints of what the spaces are on the other side of the walls.

But that then, you know, after going through this, you know, a certain type of—you know, an experiential contrast, basically. That then there's some third element. And then, well, let's think about what third element would be. So then, thinking about that, as the design, would be, what are those elements? What are the materials that go along? Is the material that you start with at the beginning, does it ever come back?

You know, I'm thinking, literal, like, wood, stone, plastic materials. Does that—only—Are they completely different from one to the next? Um, what is the—How do the transitions occur? Are there—Are they elided? Are they kind of blurred? Are they very abrupt?

These are issues that, frankly, we could—you know, you could describe some parts of, you know, anything, you know, Berio's *Sinfonia*. This—This way, you could describe any number of musical pieces, even to the point of, like, I mean, something as typically classical as, you know, Beethoven's Fifth, or something like that. That what are—that thinking about how elements recur, how the transitions happen, and thinking of it, before—before or almost aside from, you know, there's an E-flat there.

But thinking of it, instead, as, well, I want to have this, sort of, really, you know, rhythmically driving sort of entrance. And that there's going to be—you know, that even as the tempo changes, of the stuff underneath it—there's another layer or there's a slower sort of melody that's emerging out of that—that that fast, rhythmically driving section will keep reappearing in—through whatever's in the middle.

And when I think about [Benjamin] Britten's pieces or about a number of—you know, some Ives pieces—I'll always be a Ravel fan, in many regards—but there's a sense that, you know, it's not just that, oh, we're building towards a climax and then there's a conclusion, or something like that.

The Britten Double Concerto for Violin and Viola, there's a—there's a whole way that the—at the end of this kind of Tarantella 6/8 in the last movement that there's a very abrupt—sort of, you know, emerging out of this very loud orchestral stuff that—And there's this little texture that is reminiscent of the beginning, but very, very soft. And the only—I—It has such—That would—I would think of that as in—in a very spatial or architectural sort of manner.

Because you have something that's very big and then also there is a return to something from the beginning but in a much smaller, sort of, sense. That, is this going to come out of, like, theme and variation form? No. Is it going to come out of a last movement that happens to use lots of things in grouping of three and, like, other sorts of concerto conventions? Not necessarily.

But thinking of it, like, this is the orchestrate. It's a combination of the orchestration, the harmonic movement, and all these sorts of things that—it goes back to what I talked about with Charles, an effect, and all sorts of things that way.

It's not something that I have—As you can tell, it's not something that I have a very short, clear explanation for. But I would—I think that that's an important sort of thing to consider, like, not just, do you want to write a piece that's in this form? But really, what is the identity? What's the kind of personality that each of those sort of things have. Because they can—that can be part of what makes the music exciting and interesting, and not just—and not aimless.

I think there's a lot of contemporary music—you know, music that is written in the present tense—that it feels either monotonous or it's hard to follow. Like, is there a—you know, where we—when are we going someplace, and when are we not going anywhere? Um, and I think that one of the things that helped me to understand listening to other people's music was to think of in the sort of sense that oh, well, it's not just that you have first theme, second theme, you know, in development, but that you have, you know, introduction to something that's going to come back later.

There's going to be—I mean, you could even describe sonata form in this sort of design process sort of thing. But you—It's—It's much more based on the experience of what it is to hear it, as opposed to what is the—you know, okay, I'm getting this theme from the retrograde inversion of the fugue subject in the beginning.

And I'm trying to fit this back in together with the oboe, or something like that. It's not just about what the details are from a compositional standpoint. But what's it like to really experience the music. And how can the listener make connections.

It's like, in my orchestra piece, that, yeah, there's a recapitulation at the end. But the important thing is that you're feeling a melody that you've heard—a slow melody that you haven't heard a very long time, now with all the fast stuff that has been going on since, underneath that slow melody. That you have two elements you've experienced separately. And now, you're experiencing them together.

FL: So for you, the difference between organization and design is, for you, design is the experience.

DF: Mm-hm.

FL: Okay.

DF: Yeah.

FL: Okay. That's—

DF: Or it's very focused on what you can actually hear. Not necessarily what you can hear on first listening, but what you can actually discern, as opposed to, like, there's a, you know, that twisted throughout this is, you know, the—the theme from some other piece that has—that I've—that we've never heard of, being played backwards and upside down.

I think that I, for as much as I appreciate knowing and learning, and being able to understand the way that something's put together in a, like, scoring reading, sort of, sense, I think it's still really important what it actually sounds like.

FL: And that's missing from a lot of traditional musical analysis. But there's—there's more and more of that—that coming into play.

DF: Right.

FL: But your way of looking at—Now that I understand your—what you mean by design, that's a—that's a really interesting perspective on that. Um, in this MURJ article, you also were looking at the education—the collegiate education of—of composers and architects and how that's changed over time. Some interesting observations.

Um, we can't get into all the questions that it raises for me, but I have a question here. Um, could a composer become well-trained without mastering 18th century harmony and counterpoint? Could they, for an instance, use Henry Cowell's dissonant counterpoint as a model, in texts by Charles Seeger and Vincent Persichetti, as a starting point?

Um, you were talking about how the architecture education here starts with—with contemporary language and not starting with—with classical models.

DF: Right.

FL: Um, what's your feeling with music that way?

DF: Well, I am going—this—this actually relates pretty well, because they mesh with the *Rivers and Ravines* piece that I wrote before. You know, certainly, I could—I think it's important to be able to identify the elements, or the vo—in terms of vocabulary. Like, even if you're studying contemporary architecture, you need to be able to say, what's a column and what's a beam?

Like, I still need to be able to describe—I think that describing things as major or minor, or quartal or quintal, or none of the above, or—or something like that, is still very important. Um, not that you have to be able to categorize or identify everything, but that you need some kind of—If you're going to consider it to be something that you've studied, as opposed to something that you just, kind of, like, do by ear or just as an avocation, I think it's important to be able to—to figure out some way of communicating and describing what it is.

Could they start from a different model? Well, I would—like, I am fairly certain that I heard tonic and dominant harmonies in some—at some point in my life before I wrote music. And I'm being sarcastic, because of course I did. But the fact that when I was sitting down to write a piece of music, that, you know, it happened to be in five—it happens to be in 5/4.

It happened, you know, to be in all sorts of different sorts of harmonic things. I—I didn't feel that—I never saw harmony and counterpoint as a, kind of, prereq to—prerequisite for the—the creativity. On the other hand that was—that only worked because I could—I was playing it.

Um, I've seen—I—this goes a different direction than what you're asking. But I'm going to—I want to bring this up. Tod Machover works in the MIT Media Lab. And I worked for him in—this past spring. Um, doing—teaching music in Boston area elementary schools. And they have—their group in the Media Lab has a number of very interesting things with teaching children about different musical compositional sorts of skills.

But they have, in their aim to—I'm very pleased that they have chosen to focus, not just on things for virtuosic performers, but also on teaching tools. But it kind of takes—part of one of my criticisms—criticisms of it would be that it allows this creativity and actually a lot of the design kinds of things that I would talk about a few minute—that I talked about few minutes ago, in terms of what's the overall shape of the piece, and all that. It gets right to the heart of that in a very interesting sort of way.

But because there's so many layers of hiddenness, it—the children aren't actually, physically playing anything that they can't all—they also can't identify it as easily. And so I think that it—going back to your—how you phrased the question, could they start with, you know, without 18th-century things first? Yes. Might they find it incredibly interesting to rediscover it at some point along the way? Absolutely.

But there doesn't—that's not an excuse then for saying that it is—that, I mean, that for any sort of lack of rigor or lack of being able to communicate it. Because if it's just—you know, you need to be able to know what the notes are or how that—you know, how that works. Maybe you'll end up describing it in a very different sort of way.

I mean, you can describe some—learning that you could describe something as a quintal harmony, not just as, well, that's as far as my hands can reach, with 5th and between. That was really cool, because there's an actual name for that, that that could be a—that that could be a part of things. But—and not just an unnamed, sort of, external sort of thing. There still needs to be the rigor in being able to describe it, in order for it to go further than simply a face value sort of description.

FL: Wow. Um, there's still a lot of questions. I, uh, let's see. Let's try some of these and not get too detailed, just so we don't run out of time. You talk about designed elements in the process of composition. Are they necessarily preconceived? And would they—do they change in the course of—of actual composition? Um—

DF: Sometimes an element can be just simply the—that there's a particular chord that recurs in a particular register. Um, sometimes it could just be a gesture, an effect, or something like that. I think that it's—I don't—I don't generally compose and sit down and have, like, a list of—here are my six elements that are going to be used in this piece. And they're all on a separate piece of paper, and that sort of thing. Um, and then all of a sudden you can see those exact same things recurring.

It doesn't—I don't really think it works that way. But the nice thing is when you think about the missed elements with a bit of identity, then you don't have to—every time you get to a downbeat or to a climax and you want something, like a kind of landmark to keep the list, or, oh, now we're into the next variation or now we're into something that—you don't have to solve every problem from day one again.

FL: Right. So—

DF: You don't have to reinvent the wheel.

FL: —for you, you don't need a great deal of preconception before you start a piece.

DF: I often have—I do—often do have sketches. But I don't—and—or, like, generally, about halfway—or not halfway, maybe a third of the way into the piece that I'll often then have a kind of shorthand that, you know, well, there's—Now I know it's going to be a piece that's in variation form. And I kind of know where it's going. But there—that—I want to get—In order to get to this point by the sixth variation, I know that four and five are going to have to be really different from what I thought of at the beginning, and something like that.

So I think that there's—you know, I—I do appreciate the value of sketches, and that sort of thing along the way. But it's not, like, available forms, or like—something like that, where there's a—you know, these, kind of, discrete sort of things that exist outside the piece. And they're kind of floating around.

FL: Right. Um, have you written anything using a dissonant musical language? The—The scores and the music of yours that I've—that I'm familiar with, it's very third-based. It's not always traditional, you know, tonal harmony. But it's—It's very, kind of, third-based. Have you, or do you, envision anything in the future that may use more, kind of, dissonant harmony?

DF: I'll get from second base to third base to home plate, or something like that. [laughter] I don't know. Um, let's see. I—There are elements of *Were You There*, the piano piece, that employ a more cluster-ish sort of texture. The most recent piano piece that I've—that I wrote for my recital—that wasn't on the recordings here, I think—um, is—it does use some third based elements. But it ends up being, I would say, it—it's well, not overly dissonant. There's a lot more uses of—of strange sevenths, and that sort of thing.

I guess I would—Do I envision that for the future? Many people who listen to my music find it dissonant enough already for them. Um, and that's—and depending on the setting for which you're writing music, I have—like, I've sometimes have allowed—there's one of my church music pieces that has C major G—let's see, C major E—E major and G major all—no. C major, E-flat major, and G major, superimposed throughout, three triads. Yes, it's third based. But those are being combined in a very different sort of way.

Um, the one other thing that I would have to mention that might change, in terms of dissonance, or something like that, I started playing viola in the past six months. And what dissonance or consonance means on a stringed instrument is entirely different from piano, or from a number of other things.

I mean, there's—that's another lesson from choir music, is that these chords that you would play on the piano, and you would be, like, oh, my gosh, what is that trying to be? And you'd—And you'd—like, the end of the Britten *War Requiem*, or something like that. You'd never want to hear that on a piano. And you hear it on a choir—I heard it at Symphony Hall, with Seiji Ozawa conducting before he left. And

those tritones are so marvelously in tune that all of a sudden there—the tritone isn't dissonant anymore, at all.

FL: Yeah.

DF: And the perfect fourth that it is coming from, it's, uh—it's, like, you have to resolve out of that. So, like, I think that a continuing exposure to those sorts of things, that all of a sudden, you know, minor ninths can actually be relatively non-dissonant. And that's an important, sort of, lesson that you'll never get from a piano really.

FL: Mm-hm. I have some concluding questions. Um, I know I've asked you this before outside of the interview. Um, and it's a—it's a tough question, but all the people I've interviewed have found this question still worthwhile. Is there something unique about the educational environment here at MIT that encourages a kind of creativity that might not be found at a more traditional university?

DF: I think part of it is the structural way that the curriculum is set up. That there's a—an allowance for taking courses outside of one's declared major and a flexibility in being able to choose a major. That is not the kind of thing that, you know, if I was applying to Cornell, or something like that, which has a very good architecture program and a very good music program.

But one applies into that program, upon entrance to the university. You do not have the choice, or the leeway, of switching in the same kind of—in the same sort of manner. It's not—I suppose it's not impossible. But there's—The way that I could enter as an architecture student, take classes in engineering and urban studies, and in physics and everything else, also take classes in music and decide to add another major.

I think that one of the biggest strengths of MIT is not just the—not just the atmosphere, but that there's a—that the system is set up to allow for that kind of flexibility.

I do think that the—it's the—there's so many multi-talented people here. That that makes—that tends to encourage one to be accepting of, or encouraging of, one's own many talents. As opposed to trying to be just parceled into one sort of direction. Um, but I think that that's a—I think that it's also that MIT has the faculty and the—and things like the Music Library and other entities that are outside of just, who's on the list of faculty, that helped to encourage one to be able to do something like what I've done.

That I don't—you know, if I had simply gone to architecture school, it was not an inevitable thing at all that I would have been—done—had done as much music. And even if I had come here and—it's not that—it's not a given. I think it has a lot to do with meeting people in the Music Library, people like Charles, people like Dante, people like all of these, you know, all of the student performers that I have worked with. All of the people that I've, you know, been in performances or on orchestra tour, or whatever.

But that there's—that you end up learning all sorts of things that way. That, you know, would I have ever known Quincy Porter's compositions if my architecture advisor [William Porter, pianist] didn't happen to be his son? Probably not.

But there's an—you know, it's—that—I think there's all sorts of things that way. That it's the people that would make more of the difference, as opposed to, simply, the Institute as a kind of grand overall mysterious abstract entity.

FL: Mm-hm. Um, do you find, in at least your experience here, that students and people who are trained as scientists or engineers bring a particular kind of creative focus and discipline to their work? That, um—

DF: Well, I think that that often is—makes one very diligent and very creative, in the sense of being able to play well, of being able to have a lot of technical mastering and expressive fluency, that, you know, this is something—this is a set of skills that I'm very—that one can be very comfortable with. It doesn't necessarily mean that that's the same thing as compositional creativity, of creating something new.

Off—and I—And that's not a criticism of my fellow students. I'm just saying that it's not—there's many types of creativity at work here. And some of it is more, in effect, re-creative. In a sense that, this person can play an incredible set of—of, you know, he's an—an outstanding second violinist. He's—This person is a—has been, you know, first chair flute of this, that, and the other thing.

This person—you know, that they're very, you know, outstanding musicians in that way. But they could be great collaborators in a compositional effort. But they—it's not the same thing as—that those people, because they're great musicians, would instantly be skilled at composing.

And I think that sometimes those are lumped together. That, you know, these—that peop—that all these sorts of people are musically creative. And that's true, in a general sense. But literally creating something new is not always—and sometimes—you know, I'm—I would—At this point I'm a better composer than I am a performer, in many regards.

And I'm—I know that there are certain performance things that are just not my strength, due to, you know, what my technical strengths are. That it—that doesn't—Those are two sides of a—of a coin. It's not that both of them are—necessarily, go together.

FL: Right. Right. One—one last, concluding question. Besides being a place of employment for four years, how would you describe the MIT Lewis Music Library's role in your musical education and development? I know that's an unfair question, but, um—

DF: Well, since I'm having this interview in the Lewis Music Library and that I've been here—It's—It's not often that one finds a place that is influential on so many different aspects of one's education. A place, as in—in terms of, like, both a physical place, in terms of the—but also as a, like, what all the attributes are of the library.

I mean, I came here, and I—I very much liked being in libraries. But I had not been a library worker, like, at the public library at home, or something like that. And being able to learn, to be more familiar with basic, sort of, like, desk person, office, friendly, helpful sorts of skills. These are, I guess are going to be, kind of, run-on sentences, as usual.

But the thing is that it allowed me to understand, okay, well, this is what it's like to work with, you know, the people, you, Forrest [Larson], and Christie [Christina Moore] and Peter [Munstedt], who are in charge and all the different responsibilities and projects that you have and trying to work with that. Also, like, with the other students, being trained by someone like Jason Krug [MIT class of 2001], who had been here for so—so long and learning that wow, this is something they're —this isn't just a campus job that, you know, helps towards grocery money, or whatever. That there is—this is something that you can really get some learning benefit out of as well.

What was quite unexpected was that the Music Library would end up being so—so much a part of other things. I—That I ended up doing these display cases for it. And sometimes had some of my own photographs in, along—alongside other things. I had—um, learning about the whole way that music is organized. And that became so helpful for things like Senior Seminar or for other music classes, in terms of trying to understand, what are the organizational issues of musical scholarship?

Of, like, if—if one is writing a composition and one gives it a title, what does that really mean from how it's going to—from the perspective of how it might be made available for other people? What are the, you know, different ways that you can find new pieces that you've never even thought of?

Also, that simply the sheer depth and breadth of the collection is something that allow—that has really been such a big part of broadening my musical vocabulary and interests and such from—

You know, it's one thing to take a class in African music. It's another thing to have a class in African music and have African music to listen to. That, you know, it's one thing to—you know, to talk about or read about these various pieces. But when you really have recordings and really good recordings of what they are or really good scores, or, you know, the manuscript of this, that, and the other thing. There's a whole different level.

And then, that really, kind of, all came together with when I worked with cataloging the Stephen Prokopoff donation, that you'd have this music that is often quite obscure. And that here I'm applying the kind of logistical, organizational library skill sorts of things, in terms of assigning call numbers and figuring out where it—how it should it be organized. But then realizing that this could be a real connection to Lois Craig [Associate Dean of Architecture and Planning, MIT, in 1980s and 1990s], to her—through her late husband, to all of the performing aspects, that this was music that needed to be heard in real life, and, you know, in person.

And so I ended up, you know, organizing the—the concert and doing the program and all the different sorts of things and ended up playing in it as well. And I guess I was doing that kind of casually, but it was—this was a project that ended up occurring over ten months, from the summer until this past spring

And it's really—I mean, working in the Music Library is not simply about the fact that I have a lot of call numbers memorized. Or that, at some point, someone came in and couldn't find a piece and asked if they could hum it to me and if I could find it. And it ended up being the *Gypsy Airs* by [Pablo de ] Sarasate. And you'd



never—he was looking for a violin concerto. And you'll never find that under violin concerto. And I could find it. And why I happened to know that, I have no idea.

But that's not exactly what—I mean, that—those are fun aspects of Music Library life or the fact that we have Beanie Babies that have catalog numbers. But I think that it's being able to have a place that has a rich enough collection and that has helpful enough people and learning that that can—you know, that was so much of—You know, being a composer is not just about writing your own stuff, but that, you know, seeing how other people have written music.

Being a—you know, whether it was singing in a piece or playing in a piece, or something. But it's not just that this is a—the Music Library is like—I don't want to say that it's like a crutch or that it's, like, something to fall back on if I don't know something. You get so much of an added perspective by having the wealth of material and experience.

And that's the sort of thing to work from. And it's definitely something that I have missed, since I was—have—have been gone, for even a few months. And it's something that I will continue to miss. But it also means that I now understand, ah, these are the types of ways that as I'm looking for new pieces to play or looking for new things to learn from, that these are the types of ways.

And that—you know, when I—you know, finding, you know, there are other music libraries. They're at other institutions, of being able to understand, you know, how to—how to really use library resources well. That it's not just, you know, a repository or a place that stuff happens to live. But that it's something much more interesting and exciting than that.

But it's a really big honor that you would have asked me, as—as a—as a music student, but also as a library person, to then come back and be on the other side of the—of the microphone, or whatever. On the other side of the—the coin, to be able to be part of this oral history project. I know it's something that's—you've worked on—a lot. And it's—it's these kinds of interesting, peripheral projects that are part of what make, you know, the Music Library a really interesting place.

FL: Well, It's been a real—a real honor and privilege to have you this afternoon. And there are so many other questions that I wished I could have asked you. And I trust that sometime in the future, we can have you back for—for another interview. Thank you so much, David.

DF: Oh, you're very welcome.

[End of Interview]