# Elinor Armer Oral History

## San Francisco Conservatory of Music Library & Archives

San Francisco Conservatory of Music Library & Archives
50 Oak Street
San Francisco, CA 94102

Interview conducted July 8 and 10, 2013
Emily Laurance, Interviewer

# San Francisco Conservatory of Music Library & Archives
# Oral History Project

The Conservatory's Oral History Project has the goal of seeking out and collecting memories of historical significance to the Conservatory through recorded interviews with members of the Conservatory's community, which will then be preserved, transcribed, and made available to the public.

Among the narrators will be former administrators, faculty members, trustees, alumni, and family of former Conservatory luminaries. Through this diverse group, we will explore the growth and expansion of the Conservatory, including its departments, organization, finances and curriculum. We will capture personal memories before they are lost, fill in gaps in our understanding of the Conservatory's history, and will uncover how the Conservatory helped to shape San Francisco's musical culture throughout the past century.

**Elinor Armer Interview**
This interview was conducted at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music on Monday, July 8 and Wednesday, July 10, 2013 by Emily Laurance.

**Emily Laurance**
Emily Laurance holds a B.A. from Oberlin College, an M.M. from the New England Conservatory and a Ph.D. in musicology from the University of North Carolina– Chapel Hill. Her 2003 dissertation was a study of Gustave Charpentier's opera *Louise* (1900) and its relationship to realist aesthetics in the operatic tradition. In addition to French opera and aesthetics, Laurance has research interests in nineteenth-century American music, the French romance of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and the early pedal harp. She co-founded the duo DoubleAction (with tenor Thomas Gregg), an ensemble that specializes in harp accompanied song from 1770 to 1840, which they perform using an 1829 single action pedal harp. Her recording credits include Luciano Berio's *Sequenza II* on Neuma Records as well as the Squirrel Nut Zippers album *Perennial Favorites*, which won the Recording Institute Association of America's Gold Sales award. In 2005-2006 Laurance held a postdoctoral fellowship at the John W. Kluge Center at the Library of Congress. Before coming to the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, she taught at UNC–Chapel Hill and Duke University.

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94102

## Elinor Armer

*Elinor Armer in her Conservatory studio, 2013*

Elinor Armer has been associated with the San Francisco Conservatory of Music since 1969. In 1985 she established the Composition Department and served as its chairman for eleven years. She studied composition with Darius Milhaud, Leon Kirchner and Roger Nixon, and piano with Alexander Libermann. Recipient of numerous awards, fellowships and commissions, Armer has performed and lectured throughout the country, and her works are performed regularly in the United States and abroad. Armer is one of the co-founders of Composers, Inc., and a member of ASCAP. Her compositions are published by J. B. Elkus & Son, a division of Subito Music Corporation. Among her best-known works is the eight-part fantasy, *Uses of Music in Uttermost Parts*, written in collaboration with Ursula Le Guin. Her many references include the Elinor Armer Archive in the University of California–Berkeley Music Library and *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians.*

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**LAURANCE** This is Emily Laurance interviewing Elinor Armer at the Conservatory of Music on July 8th, 2013. We're going to get started by asking a few general questions about your background. So good morning.

**ARMER** Good morning.

**LAURANCE** The first question – would you tell us about your early history a little bit? We'll start with your life – where and when you were born.

**ARMER** I was born in 1939 in Oakland, California. But at the age of two months I was taken by my family up to Davis, California, where we lived in a little old house in the middle of town while our future house was being built. We moved into that house when I was about two. So all my growing up years were spent in Davis.

**LAURANCE** What was Davis like then?

**ARMER** Very, very small. It was very much like being out in the country. Our house on Oak Avenue was at the very edge of town, and behind us were fields. Now of course the same house is in the middle of town, and Davis has grown to abut Sacramento on one side and Woodland on the other. So there's hardly any non-Davis in that whole big area.

**LAURANCE** What took your family to Davis?

**ARMER** My father was an engineer. Initially he was hired by the Agricultural Engineering Department there. He eventually was not happy there because he did not like university life, or the hierarchy of the department did not work well – and felt a little stifled. This is a theme that has run throughout our family, because we are all originals and somewhat anti-establishment in many ways. So the University rubbed him the wrong way and he stopped working for them and went to work for Spreckels Sugar, which was a sugar company in California. He designed a lot of machinery for that particular industry.

**LAURANCE** If your father was an engineer for Davis, and at Spreckels, then that was after he was an acoustical engineer.

**ARMER** That's right. Before I was born he had been an acoustical engineer, and in fact had gotten his master's degree at UC Berkeley in acoustical engineering, and evinced a fascination with speakers and audio – sound production, and so on. I don't know which decade before I was born, but it has to have been I guess the '30s, he went to work for Magnavox, which started in Emeryville, California. He developed stereophonic speakers, and coined the word 'stereophonic'. So he should be really credited with that. I mention it at every opportunity

because he never got rich or famous [laughter] but when you think about it, that was a major contribution. So of course even after I was born he was fascinated with setting up speaker systems in our living room, and had all the old recordings of locomotives coming towards one, just to test the aural perspective. And I became very familiar with the woofers and tweeters. He told me that when they were developing stereophonic speakers he wanted to call the low ones – the bass ones – boomers. But they chose an animal kind of sound – woofer – to go with tweeter. [laughter]

**LAURANCE** Oh, yes! So many things you don't necessarily think about that make sense once you think of them.

**ARMER** Well, there are so many things that people don't think about, as far as their origination goes. They often hear a piece of music and it doesn't occur to them that somebody wrote it. They think it comes in cans, or something. Or they look at an illustration in a book, and it never occurs to them that somebody actually painted that. The reason I bring that up is that my father's parents were artists, and they lived in Berkeley. My father grew up in Berkeley, and my grandfather was a commercial artist, who actually did some of the work on the Sun-Maid Raisins girl, and the Hills Brother Coffee man. He originated the Del Monte logo, and the Carnation "C." But he also illustrated books which my grandmother wrote. They had lived with the Navajo, and wrote books about the Navajo for children. One of them won an early Newbery Medal.

**LAURANCE** Which one was that?

**ARMER** *Waterless Mountain*. Laura Adams Armer was my grandmother's name. I have some of the originals of his illustrations for the various books that they did together running up my stairway in my house. And I get this ancestral buzz every time I go up and down the stairs. It's so nice. I adored my grandfather, we had a correspondence all my high school and college years, before he died. His lineage goes all the way back to the gold rush. His father, my great-grandfather was a merchant in San Francisco – part of the Jewish community. So that part of my heritage goes back considerably, and is part of the reason that I have always felt so much at home being part of the Conservatory's history, because of its having been born here, and so many of the people who support it are part of that – come from those same ancestors – from that same body of early San Francisco merchants and businessmen.

**LAURANCE** I was going to ask, were you parents musical at all?

**ARMER** My mother was very musical. She was a writer, too, and also wrote children's books, but she played the piano really nicely, and she sang. She had a beautiful alto voice. Her father had been a Methodist Evangelist, and so the house was full of – the piano bench, I should say – had a lot of hymnals. That was where I first started sight-reading, and

enjoying four-part harmony. There were musicians in her family, and she liked to sit with me when I was very, very young – either on her lap or next to her on the piano bench, and she would play and sing. We had lots of songbooks with children's songs in them. That was for me a very happy part of my childhood. And then when I was becoming a pianist she wanted to take up piano again, and so very often she would be playing some of the same pieces I was playing. It was a thing that we shared, and I enjoyed it very much.

**LAURANCE** How old were you when you started piano?

**ARMER** Eight. Relatively ancient. [laughter]

**LAURANCE** I know what you mean, yes. [laughter] Did you have any other instruments you played?

**ARMER** No, not at the time. I started piano just sort of accidentally. That too, had to do with being in Davis. There was a couple – the husband was Norwegian, and he was hired by one of the departments on campus – agronomy, or something. His wife was British, and happened to be a piano teacher. They bought a house – in fact I think they built it – on the same street. And so we became acquainted with them, and it turned out that she wanted to start having a piano studio in town, and it was just extremely good fortune that I started piano with her. She was trained at Eastman, and in those days even that long ago, Eastman was training future music teachers and piano teachers to give lots of ear training to their students. So fifteen minutes of every lesson were spent from the get-go with ear training and dictation. I was doing four-part dictation on her little blackboard with staves on it by the time I was nine. I loved it! It literally was child's play. The very things that I ended up teaching years later that college students considered very difficult and an obnoxious obligation in required courses, were simply fun. I think the older you get, the more of a chore those things become – but if you start kids out with it, it just couldn't be more enjoyable. And that had as much of an influence on my becoming a composer as anything.

**LAURANCE** So you didn't start studying piano in any way with your mother.

**ARMER** Well no, but I started playing by ear. She used to tell me that when I was two I would just smash on the keys and go "aaahhhhhh." [laughter] She didn't actually undertake to teach me anything. But I loved to fiddle around.

**LAURANCE** It was the availability of it.

**ARMER** That's right.

**LAURANCE** And your father, was he musical also?

**ARMER** He played the flute rather well, but not professionally and not a whole lot by the time I was born. He had been more of a student flutist in his UC Berkeley days with the orchestra there. But he had a wonderful flute. It was a Haynes flute with a Powell mouthpiece. It was a beautiful flute. And in spite of that our dog would howl every time he would play it. But I think that wasn't his musicianship. I think it was the overtones. [laughter]

**LAURANCE** When a dog howls I don't think it is necessarily criticism.

**ARMER** No, no it isn't. It hurts their ears. Either that or they think it is a fellow dog howling, which causes them to howl.

**LAURANCE** It there anything else you would like to add about Davis as a place to grow up? Musical experiences, or the kind of community it was.

**ARMER** In those days Davis was so small and also it is important to remember that I grew up in the '40s and '50s so that when I was very small World War II was … in progress, shall we say? And there was a fear on the West Coast. There was concern that we would be attacked by Japan. So we had all of the activities that countries in Europe had to go through except for actually being bombed. But we had black outs. My mother worked down at the train station as a look-out for enemy planes. I had nightmares about bombs and dreams of glory of capturing Hitler. My sister and I shared a cabin up at Fallen Leaf Lake one summer. And there was a Navajo rug on the floor with swastikas on it, which is a very ancient symbol, but I wouldn't walk on it. So the war left its mark but in no way severely or dangerously. I was just aware of it. I was also aware – because my father was half Jewish – later I became aware of the concentration camps and the Holocaust. And then in the '50s, the Cold War, the McCarthy era, it was a very, very conformist period. And there was a lot of social paranoia. If you weren't just run-of-the-mill ordinary, WASP, whatever – you were suspect. Even some of our friends were brought before the House Un-American Activities Committee. Our family was a little bit of an odd-ball family in Davis. My mother cultivated a lot of their friends in the English department since she was a writer. She also worked there as an editor. So it was a little bit like Berkeley north in that respect, but musically, I'm trying to think how this affected … I remember that there weren't very many musicians in town when I was a child. I was not aware of it. And certainly I only knew one or two other kids who took piano lessons.

**LAURANCE** So nothing in the schools?

**ARMER** We sang. I do remember in my kindergarten being a part of a rhythm band. That had a major influence on my life. The major influences from my early life were my kindergarten rhythm bands, radio, and Spike Jones. [laughter]

I have an older brother and I had an older sister growing up, and they were ten and eight years older than I was. So I heard a lot of 78 records, the things that they liked. But my parents also played records all the time. My father had even been involved once in helping to invent the records changer on jukeboxes. So the whole 78 syndrome was very familiar to me. I loved records and I loved cowboy songs and I loved polkas – and there was music going all the time. I must say I look back now and appreciate that my parents, especially my mother, really prided herself on being sort of up to date with things in the arts. They had a lot of impressionist prints around, plus paintings by my grandfather. And they played records. I remember from the earliest 78s that I heard Shostakovich's first symphony, Prokofiev's *Classical*, all of the sort of palatable modern things of the day. Plus we had an old 78 which I still possess, of Gershwin playing *Rhapsody in Blue* with Paul Whiteman's band, which I was fascinated with. In fact it was a little scary to me, but I listened to it all the time. When I graduated from Davis High School I played that with the Davis High School orchestra.

**LAURANCE** Ah! There was a high school orchestra!

**ARMER** There was! By that time there was! Listen, by the time I got to be a teenager there was also a pretty darn good music department developing on the [UC Davis] campus. In my early teens we became friends with Jerome Rosen who was the first chair of that department and then was also chair later. He and his wife were good friends of our family. When I was a senior in high school, by that time I was already known as the town pianist – and in my teen years I was taking piano lessons from Fritz Berens who was the conductor of the Sacramento Symphony. He taught me a great deal about style and repertoire and we went to all their concerts and I loved to listen to and look at what the orchestra was doing while he conducted them. But … now I'm trying to remember why I brought that up.

**LAURANCE** Can I just inset a question here?

**ARMER** Sure.

**LAURANCE** The *Rhapsody in Blue* recording, why did you find it a little scary?

**ARMER** Oh! Well back to that, then I'll go about what I was about to say. I think it was that first thing on the clarinet. You know that thing, the glissando going up there and also … I'm not sure. I wish I could say exactly. Edgy! I found it very edgy!

Anyway, when I was in high school, by the time I was a senior, Jerry Rosen asked me to play the piano part for a Hindemith *Trombone Sonata*. The trombonist, Don Brewer, was then the music director of our high school orchestra. This was my first public grown-up performance. It was at a concert on campus with campus intelligentsia and so on. He coached us for months on that piece. And I really got to like it – I still don't like Hindemith very much – but that experience was memorable. I do remember having done it so well, and it being so well received, that I was just wildly happy afterwards. I always enjoy performing. From the get-go my piano teacher would have little recitals, and I loved playing, but I most loved that at the end of her recitals she would have little games and contests involving identification of intervals and tra-la-la, just to show what she taught in the way of musicianship. And of course I would always win the prize, which was almost always a box of chocolate-covered-cherries. Those experiences really made me feel as if music was what I did. It wasn't anything I became, it was just who I was. That's pretty much how I feel about it now. It defines me.

**LAURANCE** I also wanted to follow up about something else. You mentioned cowboy songs, you mentioned polkas … what else … you mentioned Shostakovich and Prokofiev … what were your older siblings listening to on the radio or bringing home? The other question I had was – where did these 78s come from? Was there a music shop in town? Or were they mail ordered?

**ARMER** I'm darned if I know. I wonder if my parents owned them before they came to Davis. We also listened to a lot of classical stuff. And then LPs came out when I was in high school and by then of course it behooved the town to have a record store. I bought a lot of LPs right there in Davis. My first LP was a recording of all of Adlai Stevenson's campaign speeches. He was one of my heroes at the time.

**LAURANCE** You were madly for Adlai. [laughter]

**ARMER** That's right. Both times he ran. My sister and brother both loved the popular music of the '40s. And they had such good songs in those days. Every now and then you hear one resurrected for a commercial on TV, like *Don't Fence Me In*. They're using that. That takes me straight back to the '40s. My sister played the piano a good bit too. And I remember even when I was very little I would hear her sitting at the piano making up goofy stuff. She loved to be goofy and funny. She could have been a musician and a composer and a pianist too, probably, but somehow when I came along people made way for me to be the one in the family that was doing that. It was like "why bother"? They didn't want to … and there was such a big age difference anyway that her interests took her in other directions. But a lot of the pop songs, and then later in the '50s a lot of the musicals – all the early Rodgers and Hammerstein – I remember my sister getting *Oklahoma!* on the 78s for her birthday and just being so thrilled, and then one of the records broke and she was in floods of tears. I remember, you know, dramas

around 78s. We had an old 78 that my grandmother – my mother's mother – had made. They had had her recorded on this, she was singing *Oh Little Town of Bethlehem* and maybe *Silent Night*. She was very religious, a fundamentalist Christian. She had a recurring nightmare that a steeple was falling on her. [laughter] Which it must have done at least five times because she had five children, [laughter] of whom my mother was the youngest. But that's another story. I am such a mongrel as far as, you know, my various religious heritages. Which is why, of course, if I'm anything now I'm a Unitarian Universalist, which is sort of all-embracing. When we pray we say "To Whom It May Concern." [laughter] Not to take any chances, you know. Not to leave anybody out.

But I loved the excitement around recordings and records. How often we would exchange them as gifts. Then into my high school years, my parents started buying me – and my music teacher, before I switched to Fritz Berens, would get me really, really wonderful LPs of William Kapell playing the Rachmaninoff *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, which I used to listen to over and over and over. One of the early LPs I got was, on the A side, *La création du monde*, of Milhaud. On the B side was something by Jacques Ibert, I loved that music. I didn't know who either of these people were. But I was told, I had a teacher in high school who was very interested in my musical abilities – Fred Brandeis. He was very worldly and cultivated. He had lived in Paris and so on. He was very interested in my going to Mills College because he knew who Darius Milhaud was and he knew that he was teaching there. And he had a big influence on the directions that I took from high school on into college.

**LAURANCE** What did he teach?

**ARMER** French. And also our art teacher Lois Castor was a friend of the family's. She wanted me to major in art. I was a very good drawer – and portrait drawer and painter. I did a lot of that as a child and I made a lot of clay figures. I thought about majoring in art but I didn't. I also thought about majoring in English, because I loved to write, and I still do. And I still draw and I still do all of these things. But music was the one that captured my heart.

**LAURANCE** Well this is a slight afterthought … but your father's job as an acoustical engineer at Magnavox – you talked about him inventing stereophonic sound and the term stereophonic – do you think that background of his had any influence on your going into music?

**ARMER** I do. I do because in a funny way, I think that young people – little kids – as they are growing up, find ways to capture their parents' attention. And they find things that they share with their parents or vice versa. And they foster those things. And certainly my father's fascination with and joy in sound and verisimilitude in speakers and that kind of thing had an influence on me. And I say that radio did too because I was amazed at how they made sound effects. I went with my girl scout troop one time when I was about ten to a station in

Sacramento and we saw how they made the sound of explosions – they would put BBs in a balloon and shake them. And you'd get this "buurrrhhhhhssss" sound – and you know the coconut shells on the chest for the horse hooves – things of this kind. It was all so low tech. I adored that, because there was no visual distraction. When you heard these sounds, all the world was a Foley board and your imagination was called into play so actively. You could imagine anything you wanted just from hearing these sounds. I so appreciated the effect that sounds had on me. The fact that we listened to the radio all the time, that we had these speakers and we listened to the quality of reproduction. My father always sort of kept our equipment in the best possible shape and was diddling with it and fussing with it.

Then later when I was a performer – a pianist – a performing pianist, and when I had my pieces done, my father was a very interested listener. But his commentary was not about my performance or skill or that he just loved how I played this piece or how I wrote that piece, he made very specific comments that showed a very particular understanding of what I was trying to do, in either a performance or one of my compositions. And he would make observations, like once he said, "You know, I notice that so many of your pieces you use all of the instruments as if they were percussion instruments" and I said, "That's exactly right" – I have an obsession with percussion because of its capacity to make thousands and thousands of evocative sounds that pique the imagination. In fact I wanted to be a percussionist and finally I actually had that opportunity. This was typical of Mills College in those days. They would do very innovative things and give students rare opportunities. I think it was when I was a sophomore, they wanted to have two of the faculty pianists, Bernhardt Abramovich and Naomi Sparrow, were asked to play the – I think it was probably the West Coast premiere of the Bartok *Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion.* I don't think it had been done out here. Rather than hire two or three professional percussionists – well they did hire Peggy Cunningham who was later Peggy Lucchesi who was the timpanist with the Symphony, to play the timpani. But then they hired a guy, a professional percussionist, to teach two of us – students in the music department – how to play all the other instruments. So for God's sake, here I was, going "mama-daddy-mama-daddy" with my sticks on the snare, which is how you do rolls slow motion, all Christmas vacation. And I learned to do rolls on the snare, I learned to do soft rolls on a regular drum, I mean, those are hard things.

**LAURANCE** They are. I know, actually. I have been thrown into that role myself. Not at that level though. I wasn't playing Bartok.

**ARMER** Well, this was so specific, and of course I was fascinated with the piece, too. It had a huge influence on my composing. From then on, everything I write that involves percussion at all involves it to such a fault that it is considered my prime vice. [laughter] I so, so indulge in it. And I've written a few pieces that are only for percussion. But I also think that goes

back to radio and to Spike Jones and his band. And I mention Spike Jones – nobody now knows who I'm talking about. They think I'm talking about the film director – you do! [laughter]

**LAURANCE** I was actually going to suggest that myself. All this interest in sound effects and radios, that must be part of what was so appealing about Spike Jones.

**ARMER** Well totally it was. And you know, this sort of irreverent way in which he could absolutely screw up a song. [laughter] By making it wacky. There was something about that impish humor that I sort of inherited too. I mean, actually, that was typical of our family too. There was a strain of irreverence running through all of us – except possibly my sister, she was much more conservative.

**LAURANCE** But you said that she was the one that did goofy, goofy stuff at the piano.

**ARMER** That's right! That's right! I know. But then she stopped … because I was doing it better. You know? And that always made me feel terrible. It made me feel really, really bad when I think of that. My brother has stayed wildly imaginative and is an inventor just as my father was. He worked at the radiation lab in Berkeley for many, many years. He's retired, he's ten years older than I am. But he built an electric car from the ground up in the '70s, which was his own. He tried to interest General Motors in it, and "no way", because they were all married to the oil industry. Now, of course, that has changed a little bit, and electric cars are okay. Since his retirement he has been working on actual combustion engines that are more efficient. And he's in contact with Detroit and will eventually go back as soon as he finishes the one he's on now that may be more efficient than any of the others…. But he also has a quality that my father had and that I have, of not quite fitting into the mainstream. And having difficulty in school. And thinking of things differently than other people do. I liken them both to da Vinci, and in fact right now I am writing a piece for our Baroque ensemble here at school about da Vinci that is going to be done in a couple of years. And I'm dedicating it to them because he had this same polymath fascination with everything, but it was mainly "how do things work?" And that absolute joy in finding the answer to that question in the world around us. In nature, especially. Everything that da Vinci learned about levers and gears and pulleys and whatnot he learned from studying the human body and animals' musculature. How they did things. That's something that both my father and my brother – my father was and my brother is an original. For better or for worse. And so am I, I like to think. Which is just a kind of armed truce with academia.

**LAURANCE** That's true of a lot of people in academia. [laughter]

**ARMER** Yes, I understand that.

**LAURANCE** Let's just turn back then to your mother again. Where was she in all of this? And also, her work as a writer, her work as an author – did that have an effect on you to see sort of what you could be?

**ARMER** Yes it did. And her enjoyment of slightly more oddball company from the University. But she was not as free with this inventive side of her nature. Because, I think, of the very repressive background that she had come from. She always felt a conflict, especially in the old days of Davis, with its conformist society. It was a time when you were supposed to sort of keep down with the Joneses. And not do anything uppity or show off-y. I think she really thought that she probably should look after her family first and do her writing on the side. Which was good and bad. Because … I know she had a secret drawer in a little room – part of her and my father's room, there was a little office space there where she had her Underwood typewriter. And she would frequently be typing there. But she kept all of those manuscripts secret. This was often fiction and often sort of auto-biographical fiction. She would say, "Don't go in there." This was 'a room of one's own'. This was what Virginia Woolf was talking about. But it was a very small room and very seriously guarded. It wasn't quite as Virginia Woolf imagined it. I think it would have been nice if the room of one's own inside my mother had been a little bit more open, she would have been a happier person. But she did, after my brother and sister grew up, and I was in high school, she had considerable success with children's books. And did publish quite a few, some of them really excellent. And she was profoundly encouraging. She was very responsive and excited, whenever I would do well. But I think a part of it was sort of "my son the doctor" kind of pride and excitement. Which parents are entitled to and mothers, especially. You know there's a Yiddish expression "schepping nachus." I don't know if you know what that means but, you know, parents, Jewish parents, "schep nachus," it means they achieve pride and glory from the achievements of their children.

**LAURANCE** Reflected glory.

**ARMER** Reflected glory. And at the same time I've had years of therapy and I can look back and honestly say there was a slight aspect of envy in my mother sometimes when I would get really noticed. She would be very proud and excited on the one hand, but then I think that she was also envious. And I understand why now, because she never let herself go for things the way she let me do. So that would kind of explain that. We, on the other hand, were very close and did share an understanding of what it meant to create something and we talked about it a lot. I was very proud of her when her books where published too. And sometimes before they came out she would pay me to read her manuscripts. And I would say, "Mom, this girl would never have said that!" [laughter] Things like that. You know, my mother and I were inordinately close from my early childhood on. I mean – again for better or worse. It couldn't hurt as they say, but on the other hand, it made for going away … it made for some difficulties later on in life.

**LAURANCE** I was just also wondering if you – what kinds of things did you take from your parents – encouragement of your own creativity with your own child rearing, encouraging creativity in your own children.

**ARMER** My two darling adopted kids. Of course I was wildly excited when my kids would do anything creative. I'm very happy that my daughter, who is now eighteen, is intending to major in music. And plays the viola and has played a musical instrument from early childhood. Well no, she was eight too when she started violin. But, she is just a natural. She's from Africa. She is so naturally gifted musically and has an ear to die for. And now she has taken up voice, appropriately waiting, I think, because it's not terribly good for kids to start singing in their early teens. I mean, you know, in a trained way. But she is very, very excited about it now. And she has an exquisite voice. I think she wants to be a voice major at some liberal arts school. I'm very, very excited about that. I also give her occasional piano lessons. But only when she asks, and I have never pushed her. I have only applauded. I have to congratulate myself for that! [laughter] Because it allowed her to find her own way and not feel as if I was looking over her shoulder all the time. I think this is important – I do think that there is a kind of privacy that people need, children need, all people but children certainly, being people. They need a kind of space around them to explore whatever it is that has captured their fancy. And if you're constantly saying "Oh dear that's just wonderful! You must be a genius!" My father's mother did that all the time, and she was a total nut case and practically … well never mind this isn't about her … much as she'd like it to be. [laughter] Anyway, kids need to find stuff out on their own but it's very great for them to know that you're there, to help them when they have some questions or need some feedback. My son was very musical, as a child, but did not choose to pursue that for a variety of reasons. Just like he was very artistic. Children, I see now, watching my friend's kids grow now too, children from early ages are very good at a lot of things. You can't simply say that because they bring home this exquisite abstract art work that they have done in art class in the third grade, "Oh my God! He's going to be another – a great artist!" I think that was the last art thing my son did. But it's so gorgeous that I have it up in the house. [laughter] You know? But it was just a phase. I think that it was nice for both my kids to grow up with parents who were artistic in many ways and loved art and music and literature.

[Break]

**ARMER** Because of all – listening to records – especially the records my brother and sister liked – I developed a very early deep fondness for jazz. I also found out that playing pop tunes and jazz things by ear and making my own jazz arrangements of things was a great social asset. It was ironic that Olive Shipstead taught me so much about keyboard harmony and encouraged my ear training to the extent that I could do anything by ear. By the same token, being British, she wouldn't – she refused to teach me anything about jazz. So I just went and found out myself. [laughter]

**LAURANCE** Was that also true of your later piano teacher? Fritz Berens?

**ARMER** Well by that time I was really into the piano repertoire and doing the jazz on my own so it wasn't an issue. But he was not willing to show me much about composing. Which I was also doing quite a bit of by the time I was in – I mean I composed from the get-go. I composed from the time I started piano lessons all the way through high school and then on. But I can see why it was an annoyance to him if I would ask him to listen to something I had written or help me notate it or something. Because he had studied composition too and he was also a composer. He knew how much was involved. It was like, as if to say, "We can't possibly get into all of this! You have to take counterpoint and harmony and blah blah blah blah." Well, so I did. [laughter]

**LAURANCE** Did Olive Shipstead have anything to do with your composing when you were younger?

**ARMER** Absolutely! Absolutely. She would encourage me to compose. And I would always write things sort of modeled on whatever I was playing on the piano as a piano student. And then she would program my pieces on her recitals. "Elinor will now play a piece that she composed called *The Click Beetle's Funeral*."

**LAURANCE** Is that a – was that a piece?

**ARMER** That was an early one I remember.

**LAURANCE** Alright, I just have to ask, what was the inspiration for *The Click Beetle's Funeral*?

**ARMER** I'm damned if I know. I … you know, I grew up very close to nature.

**LAURANCE** What is a click beetle first of all?

**ARMER** A click beetle is a little beetle … I remember seeing one as a child and being fascinated with it. It's a little beetle that as it's put-put-putting along on the ground, if it feel threatened or sees danger nearby it goes "Click!" and jumps up into the air, like a … [laughter] it does, it goes "Click!" and it flips up into the air. I don't know. I did that to be silly.

**LAURANCE** Does it then die when it goes "click?"

**ARMER** No, no, no! I did that to be silly, because the whole – I know – very often I was humorous because I was going for laughs. Sometimes to the detriment of my own work. It was like, "Okay, you don't have to do that for this to be a piece that people are going to listen to." It was the performer part of me. Our family was always – we were always vying for attention and response from each other. And humor was a huge part of that. But sometimes it just sort of got dragged in by the heels like that. It was a piece in a minor key so I thought, "Oh, I'll be really funny and call it *The Click Beetle's Funeral*. It's interesting now, remembering that, how much that was a symptom of my approach to things as a performer. I still sometimes tend to take a light or a humorous approach to serious subjects. It's only in the last fourth of my life, up to this point that I have learned to stop doing that. It is a kind of form of self-apology. And it also bespeaks a lack of faith in one's own message. So I've stopped doing it. But by the same token I love to laugh and I love to make other people laugh, so, I'm just a little more discreet in choosing the opportunities for that.

**LAURANCE** I had one other follow-up, back when you were talking about radio. What were your favorite radio programs?

**ARMER** *Fibber Mcgee and Molly*.

**LAURANCE** Excellent radio show!

**ARMER** And then later *The Halls of Ivy*. I was with my parents in southern California and we went to see that radio program. And I got Ronald Colman's autograph. Let me see, what else?

**LAURANCE** Do you still have it?

**ARMER** Yeah!

**LAURANCE** Wow.

**ARMER** Oh, we're going to get into autographs in a minute here, because I was a great autograph hound when I was a teenager. I think I still have some autographs on programs and on photographs in my garage somewhere. Included in that batch of memorabilia, I think – I hope – is a program given by Peggy and Milton Salkind at the Davis campus. They were doing four-hand – modern music for four hands. I was about fourteen when I first heard them play.

**LAURANCE** That's wonderful.

**ARMER** Yeah.

**LAURANCE** Somewhere you say.

**ARMER** Somewhere. I think it still exists. I hope I didn't at one point clear out my garage to such an extent that I threw out some of those things. I've always promised Peggy Salkind that I was going to show her that.

**LAURANCE** Just to finish up some of these questions we have here….

**ARMER** Sure.

**LAURANCE** Do you have anything to add about other music teachers from your childhood, or your musical life in high school?

**ARMER** If I haven't already said it, I think I greatly discovered the social value of music. At a time when I was feeling not particularly successful socially, it was kind of my key to at least to being noticed and in demand, whether I was madly loved or not. It was a form of mattering. And then of course I developed friendships, special friendships, with other kids who were also musical. Some of those have lasted. It helped shape my public image which also made it kind of rhyme with myself – inner self-image too. The performing part of being a musician has more to do with my neurosis and particular personality than the composing part. The composing part is less concerned with getting a reaction. It's more about making something. I have, in spite of how much I'm talking for this interview, I have considerably lessened the extent to which I am still a performer. I find it a little bit suspect, you know? I find that I don't have to do that anymore. And it's a great relief. But it also makes me very sensitive to the emotional makeup of all my students – my music students – with regard to their need to be understood a certain way or responded to in a way, or accepted in a certain way. Those things affect how they compose, and particularly I will want to be saying some things about the particular needs and – well, the whole phenomenon of being a woman composer. Certainly in my high school days … well my friends all … I had grown up with all my friends. Most of us went from K to 12 together. We just knew who each other were. I remember on the other hand, when I was preparing to start looking at colleges and so on, and to think what I wanted to major in, I said to my father, "You know, I think I might … I think I want to be a composer." And my father said – and this was a symptom of the times and our culture as well as his own background, "Well, I guess there have been <u>some</u> women composers. There was always [sneeringly] <u>Chaminade</u>." [laughter] I'm sure he had played some Chaminade on the flute. You know, that was the only woman composer he knew. But he said it so scornfully, and I thought, "Oh God, I may have to do this against some odds here." But it was with the encouragement of some people like Fred Brandeis on the other hand who would have been <u>angry</u> at me if I hadn't! It was that important. And it was that apparent to some people that I better just jolly well do this.

Even when I went to Mills College, at first I toyed with, as I said, majoring in this, that, or the other, but the very people around me and the teachers in my music classes and so on virtually insisted that I was one of them. This capacity for making up stuff and playing by ear continued to serve me socially when I went to Mills College. I remember as a freshman, there was one night every fall where all the dormitories would put on major, major skits in the gymnasium – which was like an auditorium for that. And our hall, Orchard Meadow Hall, was the closest to the music building. It had most of the music majors, and so we would do these extravaganzas. Well when I was a freshman I was new to all of this and these other people, older girls, were putting together our hall's show for this night. They were doing this skit about David and Goliath. All the short girls were going to be Israelites and all the tall girls were going to be Philistines carrying hockey sticks. And this wacky brilliant loud Jewish girl from New York, all of those are almost redundancies, Lois Brandwynne was running this creation and she was going to be Queen Saul. I already was familiar with who she was because she took piano from the same person that I was taking it with. She and some other people were down in the basement of our hall trying – she made up very funny lyrics – and they were down in the basement of our hall, trying to put music to make tunes out of this. None of these older, very, very high-powered, successful, well-known and highly regarded music majors could make up tunes! And they said "There's somebody upstairs, a freshman, who knows how to do that. So somebody go get her!" So they dragged me down, and I looked at these tunes and I said, "Well sure, all you have to do is …" and I started doing it at the piano and they said, "Oh, good, good, good! Keep doing that!" And my reputation was made. I could do something that all these brilliant famous people couldn't do.

**LAURANCE** They weren't composers as their majors then I take it.

**ARMER** Well, no. Let's see, in the music department you either majored in composition or in musicology, music history. But they had a lot of piano activity. My piano teacher was Alexander Libermann, who really was the making of me as a pianist. He also taught Lois Brandwynne who to this day remains my best friend. Because at that time, every time I would hear her play I would be so knocked over, I would say, "This women, whoever she is, has to be my friend for the rest of my life." And so it came to pass. Another one was – well she's now Cheryl Seltzer but her name was Cheryl Stern, another student of Libermann. Cheryl Seltzer and Joel Sachs were the founders of Continuum in New York City, which has been a new music presenting group for forty years now. And Joel runs – I'm bringing this up to the present because so many of these old stories do come full circle in the present day. Continuum has recently dissolved, after forty years they figured they had done enough. They were a very significant presenting organization in New York City. But Joel is still working at Julliard and sort of runs the new music scene there and organizes summer programs performed by the best Julliard students. And in a couple of weeks some of these students under his auspices are playing my second string quartet at MOMA. And who should be putting me up in her apartment with her and

her husband but Cheryl Seltzer. I'm going to New York with my old buddy Lois, and we are going to have such fun. This is one of those lifelong things and the thing that I always tell my students about these years in their lives is that this is where the rest of their lives' friends are going to come from. Right here and now and to remember that, and also their professional colleagues. They will know other people and marry other people and do things with other people but it starts here. And that has certainly been true for my life. Between my freshman and sophomore years of college I went to Aspen with a friend of mine, who was a violinist and had been to Aspen a few times. I was eighteen, that's where I met Alden Jenks, that's where I met Paul Hersh.

**LAURANCE** My goodness.

**ARMER** I met briefly – the opera conductor – Jimmy …

**LAURANCE** Levine.

**ARMER** Levine. Thank you. We didn't stay acquainted, you can see why he dropped off my memory chart there. That's where I met people who have remained my friends and sometimes colleagues and sometimes performers of my pieces and so on, from that time on. But I'm digressing, how did you get me started? Where were we? You were talking about high school.

**LAURANCE** Yes, we were. But … we seemed to have landed at Mills.

**ARMER** Yeah, that's right.

**LAURANCE** Through the encouragement of Fred Brandeis.

**ARMER** That's right! That's right. Yes. Well thank you Fred, for that. You were right.

**LAURANCE** And you mentioned – you've already mentioned Alexander Libermann.

**ARMER** Yes.

**LAURANCE** In relation to both your studies at Mills and your friend's studies with him also. So how is he the makings of you as a pianist? If that's indeed what it was.

**ARMER** Well he was just a superb piano coach. And of course Olive Shipstead, I owe everything, in a sense, for having gotten my ear opened and remained opened. And then

Fritz Berens just for that wonderful experience of being around an orchestra a lot and learning some things from a very fine classical musician about style. What makes Schumann different than Schubert. What makes Brahms sound like Brahms. What makes, you know – I learned a huge amount and I became very good in high school, but then when I worked with Libermann and had all of these older pianists also shining, I was determined to rise to that level as much as I could. Then after I graduated from Mills I was one of Libermann's assistants. He felt that I was destined for teaching more than a concert career. I did some concertizing, which I can talk about later. He was the one that first got me started in my career as a piano teacher. And he also gave a series of lectures on how to play, practice and teach piano, which were legendary. He had given this series several times and people flocked to hear them. I, however, had been given a good old Wollensak reel-to-reel tape recorder for graduation from college. And I taped all of these lectures and then I transcribed them – much as this is all going to be transcribed. And then I put them in good English and edited them. When Libermann died, several of us got together and funded a fine printed, limited edition of these lectures, edited by me. It's called *A Comprehensive Approach to the Piano*. I believe the library has a couple of copies of that. I still have a lot of copies. It's a very, very wonderful book for teachers of any musical instrument. I mean Margaret Rowell used to swear by it, the great cello teacher.

**LAURANCE** Do you still have the tapes?

**ARMER** You know, I don't. They fell into the hands of somebody that was chosen to be the executor of Libermann's estate, who was just very acquisitive and wanted to get his hands on anything he felt like taking. So he took them, but it doesn't matter because … I think I still have the exact transcriptions. Let's see … I'm sorry – again I took – I ran with the ball.

**LAURANCE** No, no, no. That's alright. As you should. As you should feel free to. I was just wondering … you had started talking about Alexander Libermann and so….

**ARMER** Well that's right, that's right.

**LAURANCE** Maybe we should talk a little bit about Milhaud and your studies with him.

**ARMER** Oh, absolutely. Because both Milhaud and his wife, Madeline, were friends of mine for years after graduation. He brought to Mills – well, the whole faculty there was stellar. The atmosphere was incredibly innovative and exciting, and it was really a dazzling musical center of activity in those days. It is not now. And I do believe that that center has shifted to the Conservatory.

But in those days, well, Milhaud's being there was part of the excitement, you know. We took lessons up at his house, which was on faculty row, on the campus. He was in a wheelchair and

couldn't come down to classes. His wife occasionally could be seen wheeling him around or driving him around campus. But he of course preferred to teach in his house. He was only there every other year. So I had it – just the right timing with him. I had him in my sophomore year and senior year. And we would go up in – it wasn't individual lessons, we would go up in groups of five or so and look at each other's works and play them on the piano. People have so often asked me "Well what did he teach you? What was he like as a teacher?" I can't to this day say exactly what he taught me. But there was something – because he didn't teach composition as a "how to." He taught me more simply by example. One of the things that he did in his own life had a great influence on me and on my teaching – he simply continued to compose – all the time. He did not edit himself to the extent – well some people say he had the bad habit of putting pen to paper – one reason he wrote so many things. But it's not as if he didn't think seriously about what he was composing. He thought long and hard in his mind. And then he would go to a beautiful creamy sheet of manuscript paper, and in pen write out the thing, and blot it, and send it his publisher. Without revision or reconsideration or anything. But that's because it had all been done in his head. And he also did not espouse any particular school of composition. He also was so full of living history and anecdotes and stories about Paris in the early part of the century and all *Les Six* and all of the activities in his own composing life that were really profoundly more instructive, in a way, than if he had said, "Ok, here's how you do a twelve tone row, and you must not do this and you must not do that." He never taught composing negatively. It wasn't that you weren't allowed to do something. And he recognized if you were on a roll with something and if you were developing a style that seemed to be your own – it didn't matter what it was that you were writing. He had a lot of students that would come back to visit him after having studied with him, particularly on the G.I. bill, like Dave Brubeck and Jerry Rosen, and there was a TV composer named Pete Rugolo. And Lenny Rosenman, who wrote for the movies. Some of them would come back and apologize to him that they had gone into more commercial kinds of music. He said, [in French accent] "It doesn't matter," he would say in his wonderful Provencal accent "what you are composing. If it is written for a certain purpose and it fills that purpose than you have done a good job." And as an example he said, "There was a radio jingle that I just love: [sings] Mr. Clean, Mr. Clean, does your house in just a minute!" I thought, "Oh my God! I'm studying with this man?!" [laughter] But I see now what he meant. Music is music for God's sake. And a musical impulse is a musical impulse.

**LAURANCE** Did he go into any depth about the merits of the Mr. Clean jingle? The musical merits of it?

**ARMER** No, no, no! Because it was what it was. For me, the merits of it were that it gave rise to that anecdote. [laughter]

**LAURANCE** Yes.

**ARMER** But I think I knew even at the time, you know, in reflection, I realized, he was talking about a kind of purity and directness and simplicity. There was no reason to be wildly complicated or to be wildly dissonant and what I learned was that I come from a line of succession, compositionally, that is French. Some people come from a line of succession that is German. And then there are a few other possibilities.

**LAURANCE** Russian, yes.

**ARMER** Russian! And now Asian of course, although that's a whole other story. But just in musical training of those times you could see the parallel paths. And I learned, over the many years what I consider to be the French approach, which is a kind of sensual enjoyment of sounds and chord progressions and timbres and melodies, just for their own sake in the moment rather than as they relate to some kind of a system. So you can have chord streams and you can have ravishing harmonies that don't resolve properly just because the thing isn't about tension and resolution, it's about the beauty of something in the moment. And that was very important for me, just simply to have that association and in many ways I had more to do with Madame than I did with him. I took a lot of her French courses and conversational French, and so on. And then after I was an adult, when I would go to Paris after Milhaud had died I would visit her at every opportunity.

**LAURANCE** Was she there every year or was she also just there every other year?

**ARMER** No, she was there every other year too. He was quite dependent on her for his mobility, they were like that. And also they were first cousins, very few people know that. So they'd known each other as children too.

**LAURANCE** Forgive me, I'm going to ask you a leading question which I shouldn't generally do.

**ARMER** It's alright.

**LAURANCE** Did [Edgard] Varese have any influence on your interest in percussion and timbre – did you know much Varese as you were studying?

**ARMER** I wouldn't say that, no. Because I didn't discover Varese until I had already discovered percussion.

**LAURANCE** Right.

**ARMER** But certainly when it was pointed out to me I said, "You go, fella!" It was – and there's another – that fascination simply for instrumental timbre, too. And how to construct pieces based on timbral relationships and contrasts and so on is also, I think, very French.

**LAURANCE** Who were some of the other colleagues you had that were composition students at Mills?

**ARMER** Bill Bolcom. They did have male graduate students, as they do now. No male undergraduates. Bill came when I was sophomore, we were about the same age. He may be a year older, but he was precocious so he was ready for graduate work at a fairly young age. And we became friends right away because we both enjoyed wacky wordplay and goofing around at the piano and had a very similar sense of humor. I admired him utterly. I invited him to one of the dances. Mills would have these dances and girls could ask fellas to them, they were usually at the Fairmont or something. [laughter] I remember Bill and me just emptying the dance floor because we found a little room off the ballroom that had a little upright piano in it. And we started fooling around doing jokey stuff at the piano and everybody started trying to fit in to that little tiny room and dozens of glasses appeared on the top of the piano. He would do things like play a Bach invention – say the F major one, with the right hand in F sharp and the left hand in F. All the way through, perfectly. You know, one these kind of "so what" things. But they were like parlor tricks. Utterly amazing. We would just get into howls of laughter doing goofy things together. He was a West Coast person too. He was from Washington. Who else did I know at the time? He's the only one of the composers … Janice Giteck became my friend in later years but she wasn't at Mills when I was there, but she's another one that studied with Milhaud. Most of the friends that I retained from my college years were either musicologists or performers, pianists.

**LAURANCE** Alright, well, we have a couple other names here. So, anything you'd like to volunteer about your studies with either Leon Kirchner or Roger Nixon?

**ARMER** Roger Nixon was at San Francisco State, I can say a few things about that later, where I got my Masters.

**LAURANCE** Okay.

**ARMER** Kirchner was, at that time, a recent arrival at Mills and rather young, very handsome and sort of rakish fellow. So many girls had crushes on him. I remember he conducted the chorus, and after chorus rehearsal, which was usually on Thursdays as I recall, some of the girls in our dorm would come back to the dorm and have a little ceremony where they would burn incense to Leon Kirchner and bow before…. [laughter] Anyway, I can tell you that one of the things, two of the things, that he conducted had a major influence on me, and here again they

were extraordinary opportunities. We did perhaps the second performance of *Les Noces* – Stravinky's *Les Noces* – that had been done on the West Coast. Some Mills girls apparently had done it before our group. But again I think that I was maybe a sophomore or junior, and I was the second piano in that, and he conducted it in his sort of ape-man way of … with his hair flying and very macho conducting of this piece. But it was perfect. It was rhythmically perfect. He trained the bejeezus out of us for that. Especially the bells, the four pianos clanging together at the end of that piece with very particular lengths of rests between them. You had to count like a son-of-a-gun. And he had us absolutely under control there, and it was a wonderful performance and a thrilling experience. He also conducted an opera performance that we did, I think it was *Dido*. All the faculty were really important performers in the Bay Area and loved to do these Mills productions. This is not the case now, but I was in the chorus and I loved singing in the chorus, I learned a whole lot just being in a chorus. But particularly that one. They were always trying sort of new things or new approaches to old things. And trying things that other schools would not dare try because whoever heard of teaching eighteen-year-olds how to play percussion enough to play the Bartok *Sonatas for Two Pianos* – I mean it's ridiculous. Who do you think you are?! Well, we did it. And that's because the faculty and the student body, as far as the music department was concerned, they were filled with people who were experimental and just saturated with enthusiasm and ambition. I mean, not professional ambition but musical fascination with, "Let's see if we can do…." "Let's put on a musical!" said Mickey Rooney to.… [laughter] You know, let's do it, we can do it. So we did. And Kirchner, actually I didn't study composition with him, he gave a couple of analysis classes that were fascinating. And we too remained friends after Mills.

**LAURANCE** So perhaps … your academic career … you did your undergrad at Mills and you did graduate work at State. And then also, you were at Berkeley.

**ARMER** Well, I started to do some graduate work almost immediately at Berkeley, and then I didn't complete it for some reason … I think I moved to San Francisco. I wasn't ready to continue. When I first graduated and took an apartment in Berkeley, I took a night course, an extension course at UC, simply because I wanted to give a noon concert at Cal, and you had to be a student. So I did that. But then later I took a few graduate courses, but I didn't continue my graduate work there. I did move to San Francisco and it wasn't until I was almost thirty, well I was in my late twenties and I think I was thirty by the time I got my Masters at San Francisco State. I just wanted to get out in the world and do something and make a living as a piano teacher and as a teacher at some private schools in the area. But during that time, just to sort of find my way. I didn't want to keep doing school right from … let's say I took about ten gap years. [laughter] Or nine.

**LAURANCE** Where those the years you were concertizing?

**ARMER** I did a little concertizing. I did some concertizing on a local level. I took jobs at places like Dominican College when they had a lower school and I was teaching young kids piano there. And I became friends with one of the nuns who had been a concert pianist before she took the veil. We started doing four-hand and two-piano music together and she got some sort of special dispensation to perform. We concertized as a duo team for several years, up and down the Catholic school circuit in northern California locally and had a wonderful time. I learned a whole lot by doing that too.

**LAURANCE** What was your repertoire?

**ARMER** Well, at that time it was like when the Salkinds were duo pianists. They had to commission stuff because there were only a few things in the standard repertoire and you couldn't do them over and over, like the Schubert *F Minor Fantasy*. Of course we did it, but I mean that sort of de rigueur but, we found transcriptions of things for two pianos, which I wasn't always totally fond of. Some things don't transcribe so well, some things do.

**LAURANCE** You must have done *Scaramouche.*

**ARMER** You know, I did *Scaramouche* with Laurette Goldberg but that's part of the Laurette Goldberg story. We did the Brahms Haydn Variations, which I loved, that was my favorite of all the pieces we did. We did Mozart, we did all kinds of stuff. And she had done some very, very sexy arrangements of the *Rosenkavalier* waltzes for two pianos. I told her that she should be excommunicated for that. I mean we did them very, very well, and I very much enjoyed those years in doing that. Let me see … where were we?

**LAURANCE** Oh well, it suggests here that you might have some comments on the differences of the institutions that you were at, the culture of them.

**ARMER** Oh that's right! Well, in the case of going to San Francisco State, which I did in my late twenties, it doesn't bear comparison with Mills because it was such a different part and time in my life and a different kind of school and I was doing it simply because I had been – I also taught at the Katherine Branson School and was the Music Director there for years and developed a lot of courses and taught piano. All of those experiences helped me, added to my repertoire as a teacher. And they were always situations where nobody was telling me too much how to teach what I was teaching. Especially at Katherine Branson, I got to make up courses to teach they had never had before and it was great, great fun. I loved those years. But ultimately I decided that it might be a good idea to get a Masters, in case I wanted to teach somewhere else or just because I felt like going that further step. I was living in San Francisco at the time so I went out there and got some very good instruction. I took orchestration from Herbert Bielawa who now lives in Kensington and is a neighbor of mine – a friend – a very good composer, and there

was actually a little orchestra there that played our orchestrations. Now when I took orchestration from Milhaud, we never got to hear it! Which is just kind of ridiculous, it's like, you know, practicing swimming on dry land. [laughter] But we got thrown in the water at State and that was great. Roger Nixon was my composition teacher, and there were many things that he taught me that were very valuable, to this day. He also was very kind, and remained my friend, and helped introduce me to, or write letters of introduction, to publishers in New York and you know, helped me stay connected. He always followed my career faithfully, and had me teach piano to his twin daughters. It was a nice relationship and he was a good teacher and a little bit unsung. I think he was a better teacher than he got recognition for.

**LAURANCE** Do you think that was partly because of where he was?

**ARMER** Partly, I guess. Partly where he'd been – well, he'd gone to Cal, he had been a colleague of Andy Imbrie and you know, some of the big shots, when they studied at UC Berkeley. And he came from humble beginnings and had taught at Modesto Junior College and things of that sort and worked his way up. He also didn't get a whole hell of a lot of recognition as a composer except in the long run for his band music.

**LAURANCE** Oh really?

**ARMER** Yeah, he had quite a success with band music. Concert band.

**LAURANCE** Wind ensemble?

**ARMER** Right. He also … he himself took piano lessons from me. I tell this to our students in the Composition Department here who sometimes resent or don't understand why we are so big on giving them some keyboard foundation as composers. I always tell them the story of how my own teacher in graduate school said to me that he felt he could compose better if he could actually play the piano. He was a clarinetist. And it's true, some of the stuff that he'd written for piano was very hard to navigate because he wasn't a pianist. So I was happy to do that.

**LAURANCE** Anything else that you'd care to say about your time at State or for that matter your time at Berkeley, which you haven't really talked about much?

**ARMER** Well, no – my comments about Berkeley would have more to do – well there was one very fine teacher when I did graduate work there, John Swackhamer, another lesser-known unsung composer. A fabulous teacher. It was John who later had the department in Berkeley hire me to teach there for a couple of years. He too said a couple of things that were guiding remarks in my life. I remember when Libermann died, Lois Brandwynne asked me – she

was going to give a memorial concert, and she asked me to write a little piece in memory of him. I was puzzling over this and I said to John Swackhamer, "I don't know quite how I should approach this. Should I write a piece that Libermann would have liked? Should I write a piece about how I feel about his dying? Should I write a piece that will make other people feel some way about his dying? Or remembering him?" He said, "It doesn't matter, as long as it's a good piece of music." I sort of had to think about that, but then of course for the rest of my life I have understood what he was talking about. If a piece of music – again, as Milhaud said – if a piece of music is for a certain purpose and it fulfills that purpose it's a good piece of music. Then Swackhamer was saying it has to hold together musically. It has to scan. It has to make sense in and of itself.

**LAURANCE** If it's a good piece of music in and of itself it's more likely to serve the function.

**ARMER** That's exactly right! That's right. Then you get the best of both worlds. So then I taught later at Berkeley. That was in the '70s and I was already teaching at the Conservatory but I taught there as well for a couple of years. I was hired as a temporary lecturer in musicianship and harmony. I loved teaching those classes and I was extremely popular, which kind of galled some of the other teachers. It was a time that was not good as far as women musicians were concerned. There was an incident there, while I was teaching there. One of the women that was a lecturer was up for possible promotion to something more significant than lecturer. I heard the story about how people in the faculty meeting were arguing about this. A well-known harpsichordist, who shall remain nameless because he said such a heinous thing said, [in exaggerated accent] "The gods of music are male. Music is a male art." The only person who argued with him was Philip Brett, God love him, who said, "I am a member of a group that is often discriminated against. And as such I resent that remark." He was referring to being a homosexual. You know, being the only thing worse than being a woman. [laughter] I remembered hearing that story and being horrified and outraged by it.

**LAURANCE** Do you think that is a risk that you run within an academic department that's dominated by musicologists?

**ARMER** Yes. [laughter] And I can understand it being dominated by musicologists because the whole state school system relies on the government for money and they get money for what they call "research." Composition is not something you research, but musicology is. And ethnomusicology, and whatever. Even computer music. All of those things that involve research are much more sexy in terms of government funding and so on, and just reporting back to the government. And, it is not a conservatory. Certainly it's not about performance. If you're not about performance you can't be too much about composition either. Because composing music is only part of the process and one does it in hopes of its being performed.

**LAURANCE** Right. I'm just thinking of other departments that I would describe that way.

**ARMER** Yes.

**LAURANCE** Actually Chapel Hill has a department that is very dominated by musicology and is known for that. So that said, I think composition is not a fertile ground for that. Other state flagship schools that are known for musicology sometimes are but usually they're schools of music not departments of music.

**ARMER** There you go. That's it.

**LAURANCE** So they have a performance component that helps keep it fertile.

**ARMER** That's right. That's considered legitimate. That's exactly right.

**LAURANCE** So it might not just be the musicology's presence it might also be the performance school's absence as much as anything.

**ARMER** Yes. That's a very good distinction, absolutely. But I have to tell you what happened in more recent years, after that awful faculty meeting – I was asked to compose something for the Berkeley Music Festival, which is a summer thing where they do principally early music. But this was a few years ago and they were featuring things to do with women. So of course that's why they came to me, because I was local and known to them and I was a woman. And I compose. I was also asked to be on a panel where I think, I can't remember the exact title of the panel, but it had to do with women composers in history. And so I was on this panel and I started out by relating this story. [laughter] There were these sort of shocked gasps, and afterwards….

**LAURANCE** Everyone knew who the harpsichordist was?

**ARMER** Well, no, I didn't say any names. And I didn't say harpsichordist. I just said – I didn't say any names, I left it as anonymous as possible. Afterwards, I also delivered my speech on whatever else I was supposed to talk about in a highly professorial way, and after it was over, Joe Kerman came up to me. And he said, "Elly, that was brilliant!" Then he took my arm and he said, "Was that me?!" [laughter] I was howling to myself, because he had this collective guilt.

**LAURANCE** That's hilarious.

**ARMER** I know! I said "Oh no, Joe. You wouldn't have said…."

**LAURANCE** Clearly he thought he was….

**ARMER** That gave me such pleasure.

**LAURANCE** Well, do you think we're ready to turn to the Conservatory now?

**ARMER** I think so! Absolutely.

**LAURANCE** So, when and how did you become associated with the Conservatory?

**ARMER** Well, let's see. After my second girl's school stint, for a while I thought, "You know, my life isn't going anywhere. I would like to try something different than teaching music." And there was one year where I got a job working for Walter Landor and Associates, I don't know that it still exists under that name, but they specialized in what they called environmental design, basically advertising logos and things of that kind. Curious coincidence, because my grandfather had done that too. Their offices were on a ferry boat in Pier Five. So it was a very chichi and tony kind of a thing. I worked there as a writer and I wrote educational filmstrip scripts. But they also found out that I was a composer and I did a fair bit of composing for commercial purposes too. But I was basically very unhappy in it. It was a bad year in my life. My sister had just died and I was having sexual identity problems. I couldn't decide if I was going to go this way or that. I was not having any relationships either way. And I didn't get to do music much. But it was an interesting year. I got a lot of gigs writing film scores for educational films after that, for years after. I was actually fired from that job. The only time in my life I was actually fired and it was because I was so depressed in it that I just didn't give a damn and that was apparent. So they took me out for a very expensive three martini luncheon just to celebrate having had me there for a while. It was all very friendly. And on the top deck of that boat was a little museum of logos and advertising things and there were even a couple of things that my grandfather had done. So that was a nice little touch there. But I was glad to get out of that. By the same token, I was glad in subsequent years to have the association with one particular filmmaker, Paul Fillinger, who did a lot of educational classroom films. I wrote the music for those, very often using children from the Prep Department here to sing the songs involved in the scores and so on. And players from the student body and so on. But anyway, it was after that troublesome sort of lost year with Walter Landor that I just thought "I have to get back to teaching music." And I got in touch with May Kurka. Now May Kurka at that time was the head of the Prep Department, but I had known her in the early years of living in Berkeley as a very young adult. She had lived right around the corner from where I lived and we were sort of neighborhood piano teachers. And we became great friends. She was great friends even from her

own college Juilliard years with the Salkinds as well. I forget how it came about but she took me on to teach in the Prep Department with great enthusiasm. And said, "Oh by all means, come here and…" So I went to work right away, in about '69.

**LAURANCE** Teaching in the prep division?

**ARMER** Teaching in the Prep Department, teaching piano. Then, almost immediately, also summer classes and Saturday classes in musicianship and ear training and composing even. Anything I wanted to teach. And adult extension. Milton Salkind was all behind this. Milton did more than any other administrator in my life to make a teacher out of me. He could spot teaching ability but he also loved to – one of the major things he did for the Conservatory was to maintain his relationships with important high profile people in the community who would become board members and who – I mean he was a name dropper's dream and he frequently told May to send me celebrity students and I taught – I was supposed to teach Janis Joplin. She wanted to come improve her ear training. She kept not showing up, so I called her on her boat in Sausalito and she said she'd found somebody in Sausalito and then she offed herself. And that was the end of that. I was very sorry, I would have loved – it would have been very interesting. I taught Herb Caen's son, who is probably middle-aged by now. And people of that sort. I got to invent night courses for adults.

**LAURANCE** Such as?

**ARMER** Such as "The Closet Composer." I had a group of adults who just loved to compose as a sort of hobby, but they'd never really studied it. So they all got together and wrote stuff for each other and had a ball.

**LAURANCE** That's a good idea.

**ARMER** It was just wonderful. The thing that I know, is that everybody is a musician in some way. More people do things like that than you would ever imagine.

**LAURANCE** Yes.

**ARMER** And what it does for them to be legitimized in that way is extraordinary. It's so valuable. It was so joyful to do things of that kind. Then Milton wanted me to give a sort of music appreciation/history class for some of the ladies on the board. And we had a ball. I mean, I could name drop all of the names almost that are on that plaque outside on the Milton Salkind Terrace. People who gave money to the Conservatory. About every member of that class has their name up there. One of them even insisted on bringing her husband, just because he liked to mouth off about what he knew about music history. So it was very goofy and fun and we

had a ball. I was writing something at that time for a friend, a singer – a kind of cabaret singer in London – and we thought she was going to premiere it at the Edinburgh Festival. She ended up not doing it there, but she did it in London – but at the end of that class before that summer all the ladies got together and gave me this little cigar box or something decorated with tartan and with plaids on it, and it was filled with pound notes – they didn't have euros then – but it was British money that they had all brought back from various trips. [laughter] It was just so cute. Everything was a love feast. Everybody liked each other and had fun together. Those were good times.

**LAURANCE** So was that the dominant characteristic that you remember about those first days of the Conservatory?

**ARMER** Yes, I remember that sense of being given free rein. It was like a kid being given a huge box of crayons and a wall-size piece of paper. You know, it's just – go! Go for it. Do what you can think of. And May Kurka became one of my dear friends. And great martini partners. [laughter] She could put them away in those days and so could I. But we just always had fun together. Laughed about the same things.

What happened was that I was still teaching in the Prep [Department] when they called me from UC Berkeley and wanted me to take this temporary job. So I did both. I think there was one year where I actually did not teach at the Conservatory. But I missed it badly. So the next year that I taught at Berkeley, I also taught at the Conservatory. Let me see, I'm trying to think … it was after I got back from teaching at Berkeley that I decided that I would qualify to teach in the collegiate division. Dick Howe was the dean at that time and he totally agreed. And Milton agreed. So I began to teach undergraduate classes in musicianship and harmony and whatnot. Let me see how that worked…. It was soon after that, I think it was in the late '70s, you'd have to find this out from some other history source, but we didn't have a graduate program in those days.

**LAURANCE** In anything?

**ARMER** In anything. At some point in that time it was established. About the same time, perhaps a little after that – it was in the mid '80s, we still didn't have a Composition Department. But I had been doing a lot of teaching in a lot of areas. And I had again been allowed to teach graduate seminars or even undergraduate classes in whatever I wanted. So I would choose things that I had always had a great curiosity about or interest in, like the Bartok string quartets, or like *Wozzeck*. So I got to learn along with my students. I was trying to stay at least one scene or one movement ahead of them. I had done all the reading which I then told all of them to do. But it was very, very lively and great fun. Then one year, in about the mid '80s, I was talking to Dick Howe about my contract for the next year and we were trying to give me

enough of a course load to be employed full time. We were sort of casting about. I didn't have composition students. John Adams had had some composition students, and they had not been happy with him and they were also taking piano from Milton Salkind. So Milton Salkind sent them to me. But we still didn't have a department. But at least I had put in some time having a better go with these kids and Dick said, "Well, of course if composition were a department and you were a department chair that would give you an extra hour on your course load." And I said, "Then make it a department. And make me the chair." He said "Oh … what a good idea." [laughter]

**LAURANCE** Glad I thought of that. [laughter]

**ARMER** Yeah. [laughter] And the rest is history. But that was the sort of inglorious way that it all began. But it's part of the same self-made, self-styled, self-appointed career that I've had right along. You know without having to – I applied, by the way, to keep teaching at Berkeley after those two years, and in spite of what a popular teacher I was, I didn't have a PhD. and I didn't qualify and I didn't look good on paper, so they couldn't hire me to stay on there. They did hire – this is where I met Sonja Neblett, she was also a temporary filling in at the same time. They kept her for a couple of more years after that, but then she needed work and then I said, "Come on over, Sonja."

**LAURANCE** So what was the Composition Department – what was the scope of the new Composition Department once this happened?

**ARMER** Well, it became a major that people could apply for. Milton was a little taken aback at this prospect, he said, "Well, do you know how to make a budget? Do you know how to…?" And I was like "Wait a minute! Are you sure…?" I honestly can't remember all of those details, but we did have a department and a budget and an enrollment. At that time – we took on David Conte and Alden Jenks was also teaching composition, and electronic stuff. And me. So we had a small enrollment of comp majors, but in those first few years it grew, and half of them one year were women. I was so happy about that.

**LAURANCE** There are not that many now.

**ARMER** No, it comes and goes – the number of women that we have – it grows and shrinks. It's a lifelong battle, it will never be ideally equal. In Western civilization the battle is never over – it's just more or less of a battle, depending on when you're alive. I do like the fact that I've had a very, very large number of women students, some of them now extremely successful. Olga Neuwirth came to me when she was eighteen just to do some undergraduate stuff at the Conservatory. She came from Austria – I don't know why or how she got there, but she started taking lessons with me unofficially – this is before we were a department. I think she

took the little Wozzeck class that I had devised for undergraduates. She has become somebody – there was just something on her in the New Yorker – Alex Ross totally misunderstood her, but never mind. She's in demand. Another student that I had whom I call my "composing daughter" is Aleksandra Vrebalov, who is also having a major success – she was from former Yugoslavia. And New York, too. She's done a commission or two for the Conservatory. One of my early male students was Dan Becker, I call him my "composing son." I love it that we now share an office, and he's my boss. [laughter] In those early days I also taught David Garner, he was in my first counterpoint class with Aaron Kernis and Elizabeth Le Guin. What a batch to begin one's maiden voyage! I was hopelessly spoiled. It was never like that again. I knew a lot of people when they were students at the Conservatory who are now faculty, like Scott Foglesong and David Garner. I knew Robin Sutherland. It's really my family, the Conservatory. We grew up together. A lot of the people are still here. Some of them have died. That includes the staff that was there on 19th Avenue. Colleen Katzowitz was the registrar. She and her husband both – he was a jack-of-all-trades and one of his trades was that he started a little café in the old building which we named – I named it – Opus One. He would do fast food and flip burgers for us. And then that space became the library.

**LAURANCE** I remember that space.

**ARMER** It was tiny! A tiny, tiny library. But they were like family. And Julie Karres I wanted to mention too, because she was at the switchboard, and the receptionist. Every day that you came there you dealt with Julie, who was such a character that every morning coming into that faculty room, which was also where the switchboard was – which was also tiny – every morning was like a sitcom. Everybody was such characters, and we all had these funny sometimes cantankerous, sometimes humorous relationships. Almost everybody had wonderful senses of humor in those days. Well, of course Robin Sutherland's off-shade humor is well known. But so was Scott's, in his pre-Buddhist days. And I was always known for cracking jokes, not all of them clean, and Beulah Forbes, this wonderful black woman who taught ear-training and was a jazz pianist and had worked with Oscar Peterson, and was such a treasure – she taught Solfege like God. [laughter] We were all characters. And we all grew up together, and it was a wonderful time. Some of that of course is still true, but some of it's also lost. As happens in life – you can't bring everybody on board all the time. People die, people move, people change. But I feel that the Conservatory has provided a continuity in my life that I wouldn't trade for anything. Because I still intend to be here as long as I can function and will be allowed to be here, as simply part of that continuum. Because I've learned so much, and been allowed to experience so much that not to use that wisdom and experience in the same place that gave it to me would be a terrible waste.

**LAURANCE** I'm sure that if you used it somewhere else it would not be a terrible waste. But it does have a very nice continuity to it.

**ARMER** Well, I'm seventy-three, I'm not about to go somewhere else at this point. Except home. [laughter] I do teach privately too, and always have given lessons at home, either piano or composition.

**LAURANCE** Do you still teach piano now?

**ARMER** Yep. I have some piano students that I've had for many years. I have one who shall remain nameless, but when he dies he's going to give a third of his fortune to the Conservatory. I'd just thought you'd like to know – stick around. [laughter] We will remain solvent. And I'd like to take some credit for that.

**LAURANCE** Probably you should. Let's deal with this last question and then a short break, if you don't mind. I warned you that I might have to take breaks more frequently than you. [laughter]

**ARMER** Well, no, I'll need a break. I have to watch myself, because I have limited energy, too.

**LAURANCE** Do you want to tackle this last one, which is kind of a doozy? Are there special challenges faced by composers who work within an academic setting?

**ARMER** Well, yes, is the short answer. It certainly depends on the academic setting. Now I do not consider the Conservatory a very academic setting. I don't mean that as an insult, but that is not its primary thrust. It's not a university and it's not a liberal arts college, it's a music school. I don't consider that the pursuit of compositional studies is a challenge here. I think this is one of the best places you could do it. By the same token, there are some people who shouldn't even go to school. They should just compose. There will always be people like that. People like my brother who don't thrive in <u>any</u> school setting. But as schools go, I think this is one of the best places anywhere to study composition. But as I've already said, I think in state schools and universities it's varied but less conducive to creative work.

For studying composing of any style, we have brought to the department, and the department has brought to itself, a continuing tradition of not espousing any particular method or school of composition, but simply helping the students find their own voice, and to inform it, encourage and grow it.

There are some schools that are absolutely deadly to the study of composition. There are some universities across the United States and in Europe that are much better – the University of Michigan I think very highly of. And there are some music schools per se that I don't think are

conducive. Juilliard is not. You have to make a distinction when you're just talking about music schools, between ones that are performer mills, or those more universal in their approach and offerings. Some liberal arts colleges have good music departments. My daughter wants – as I said – to be a music major. I don't particularly want her to come here, and she doesn't want to come here anyway. It wouldn't be appropriate, somehow, as I'm working here it wouldn't work. She wants to get away. And I want her to get a really well-rounded education. Also the performing musicians are so heavily competitive that it might be crushing to her. I think she will do very well at a liberal arts school.

**LAURANCE** When will she make that decision?

**ARMER** She's looking at schools now. She's between her junior and senior year. But she's at the Oakland School for the Arts, which is already predisposing her to certain approaches to education, and sort of expanding her interests. She's interested, for example, in music production. And different styles of singing, including pop stuff. She's got the voice for all of those things. By the same token, she's a violist, so she can be in demand wherever she goes. [laughter]

[Break]

**LAURANCE** Tell us, if you would, what the Conservatory meant to you, for your career as a composer.

**ARMER** It was extremely helpful. Not only because I was working with fellow faculty members who were superb musicians and frequently asked me to write pieces for them, but also because there were special programs, like in the summer they would have a special concert series – Chamber Music West, most notably – with visiting performers playing with our people. I would frequently be asked to write pieces for Chamber Music West. Also people like Joan Gallegos, who was one of my teaching colleagues, conducted outside of school a women's chorus at that time called Veil of Isis. I remember her commissioning me to write a piece for them. So a lot of our faculty who were similarly involved with outside performances would ask me to write music for them to do on other concerts besides the ones at the Conservatory. As a result of that not only would I get a lot of commissions that I didn't have to go scrambling after, but I also got extremely good performances.

Everything that I wrote in my earlier life for cello was for Bonnie Hampton. Now, what better way to cut your teeth as a composer for cello, than with Bonnie as your player? Then for her and Nate Schwartz, her husband, and for the Francesco Trio with them. They commissioned me, they encouraged me, they taught me, they played me. It was wonderful. I even remember using – I may have mentioned – kids in the Prep Department for those early film scores that I wrote,

because they were based on little children's songs that I would make up. The filmmaker wanted them to be sung by children. So everybody got to be part of these things, and it was always very adventurous and fun, from that level up to the highest level of professional musicianship. What an opportunity. I can see why a lot of the composers that you read about in history were associated with conservatories.

**LAURANCE** Do you want to say anything about how the Composition Department has changed since you first started?

**ARMER** It's grown, and its reputation has grown. One year, after we had hired David Conte, I decided I wanted to take an unpaid leave of absence. Which is not like a sabbatical, because I think you get paid for those. But anyway, that's when David suggested we bring in Conrad Susa, and that's how he came on board. But I'm digressing, the question was …?

**LAURANCE** Well, not really. How has the Composition Department changed?

**ARMER** Well, it's grown, as I said. And having brought Conrad on board, that was a major change. Then later, David Garner. Our enrollment has gotten to the point now where I don't want it to get any bigger. It may in fact be a little larger than we are able to accommodate. One of the earmarks of our department that we're all really proud of is the opportunities afforded our composition students to hear their music either read or performed. We can't accommodate all of them if there are too many. In the early days, instrumentalists and vocalists would run screaming in the opposite direction if a composer approached them. We worked very, very hard first to establish détente, and then to make things such that the performers actually welcomed these opportunities, and that is pretty much now the case. Which is a major improvement, and it took decades to bring that about. Just like the enrollment of women – it goes up and down, and forwards and backwards – but by and large, it's moved forward.

**LAURANCE** Are there any other students, just for this session, that you'd like to touch on, that you've had in the past? You mentioned a couple, Olga Neuwirth….

**ARMER** Well, Olga Neuwirth and Aleksandra Vrebalov, Dan Becker and David Garner. My students are so numerous. I made a list of the composition majors that I taught since the beginning of our department, and it was about … I can't remember how many it came to – somewhere between forty and sixty. That's a lot when you consider that they were here for two or four years each. My reason for doing that was that I'm going to be celebrating my seventy-fifth birthday in the 2014-15 concert season, which I'm calling my "Diamond Jubilee" season. I want as many performances of my pieces as possible – I'm writing some pieces for the occasion. Our department put out a call to a chosen group of students that I've had in the past inviting them

– each one – to write a small piece for two to six instruments – and Nicole Paiement's on board with this, with the New Music Ensemble – to put on a concert of works by my students from the past forty years as a kind of *festschrift* thing. My publisher, Subito Music, has agreed that they will publish this album too. So it's a nice opportunity for the kids. At that time I needed to single out ones that I thought A – would be enthusiastic about this and B – would write something that would be effective. I could say that those were my favorite students, but I don't want to name names. They all had something to contribute to my life in one way or another, and some of the most challenging ones taught me the most about teaching too. Some of them have gone out into the community and have made significant careers for themselves, not just as composers but as new music presenting people. And so they help each other that way, and our program sort of feeds into itself that way. When they leave here they have colleagues that are waiting for them to join them and do stuff out in the world. But it would be difficult for me to single out any more people. I mentioned Sasha Vrebalov because I call her my composer daughter – because we have a long-standing friendship that is very warm, and the same of course with me and Dan [Becker]. There were times even in the old days when he was a student where he would housesit for me and take care of my dog, and things of this kind. But that's about as far as I can go in being specific.

**LAURANCE** That's fine. This is a good place to leave it today.

**ARMER** I think so too.

**LAURANCE** Thank you so much, we'll continue in a couple of days.

**ARMER** Excellent, I look forward.

[Return on Wednesday, July 10, 2013]

**LAURANCE** Maybe we can make sense of this list a little bit by talking about people who relate to the Conservatory? I don't know who you'd like to start with, but …

**ARMER** I should probably put these in some order. I've already mentioned a lot of people, but why don't I look at the list and see which ones go the farthest back, and then work my way up from there?

**LAURANCE** That sounds like a good idea.

**ARMER** I think that probably my oldest friend on this list that I stayed friends with and interacted with every day, practically, from the day we met, was Laurette Goldberg. When I first lived in Berkeley, just out of college, Laurette and Lois Brandwynne – the pianist to whom I

referred yesterday – were both sort of my big sisters in helping me get into the musical world. I was teaching piano at Dominican Lower School and at home, and I was doing some composing, but I had not established myself as a composer by any means. They were both very active musicians in the community. Laurette was in her pre-harpsichord days. Sort of "BH" – Before Harpsichord – which is very long ago. Laurette was actually the pianist for the Oakland Symphony, under Gerhard Samuel. I do believe that at that time – this would have been in the early '60s, that the Conservatory was considered to have a branch in the East Bay, and that you could teach prep-age students for the Conservatory in the East Bay. I do believe that Laurette was doing that at that time. We were just friends, and enjoyed each other very much, and would play – we did some four-hand stuff. We played several programs for children and young people, and that's when I played *Scaramouche*. Then Laurette discovered the harpsichord. She began by playing a little harpsichord in the window of a little café called Vin et Fromage. In the front window. She did that for a couple of restaurants. It became a sort of thing of the day, that musicians could appear in the window, playing, inviting people in.

**LAURANCE** Sort of like a silent movie.

**ARMER** Very much. Well, Laurette was anything but silent. [laughter] At any rate, everything that Laurette touched turned to "Goldberg." [laughter] Ultimately, as the world knows, she really established a beachhead for early music in the Bay Area, starting with harpsichord. She developed an unbridled passion for it – for harpsichord and of course became the principal harpsichord teacher and the only harpsichord teacher, for a while, and spread the gospel of harpsichord. I even took a few lessons from her about how to play Bach on the piano in an "echt" manner. She was so intense with me that I found it overwhelming – I couldn't continue lessons with her. Nevertheless, our friendship remained intact. I remember Laurette saying a couple of things that have been mottos for my life. One was, "If at your worst you perform well enough, then you are a professional." Another one was, "Never let lack of money keep you from doing something you really want to do." And of course she became the standard bearer for that belief, and went on to start the Philharmonia Baroque and whatnot. She also managed to convert Israel to harpsichords. She brought the first harpsichords to Israel, which is an interesting note.

Laurette was such an original, and so driven by her passions for Bach and early music and harpsichord, and so on – she was just a very compelling person to know, and very inspiring. I tried to model myself after her a little bit in those respects. She actually gave me my first commission. It was unofficial, but this was I think when I had just turned thirty, I had gone back to San Francisco State and had just gotten my Masters. I was living in San Francisco at the time. That was when she had the idea of asking me to write variations on a theme that Sweelink had also written variations on. She gave me two tunes that he had written variations on, and let me choose. So I chose one called *Mein junges Leben hat ein End* – not because of its title, which was a little grim, but because the melody for me lent itself to playing with, and varying. It had a

very, very clear structure and a lot of scale passages, and a lot of very distinctive motives and so on that could be done things with. And she sat me down and showed me all the kinds of sounds that a harpsichord could make. You know how I love that kind of a thing – there again, it was an ear-opener for me, because one thinks of it as rather limited, but it is not, especially as a solo instrument. I later wrote a piece for her and what was then the New Music Ensemble, I believe, under John Adams, though Joan Gallegos conducted it. It was sort of a mini-concerto. That was less successful, partly because I was green for writing for larger ensembles, and partly because one could not overcome the inaudibility of the instrument in that setting. But *Mein junges Leben* variations by me have really been a sort of main-stay of the modern repertoire for harpsichord, and numerous other harpsichordists have played it. In fact just this summer, one of her students from years and years and years ago, Yonit, lives in Ireland, and she's playing it in Ireland this month. That's an example of the benefits that I have had from teaching at the Conservatory. People are playing my things all over the world who knew me here. They sometimes ask me, "Have you written anything for such-and-such? I have a small orchestra – or – I play in a string quartet – or – I have an ensemble at such-and-such a university, and so on." Laurette also was the one who encouraged me to take an unpaid leave of absence at one point. She always showed me by example and by her encouragement, how to dare to do things.

**LAURANCE** May I just ask – you may have mentioned this – but how did you meet Laurette Goldberg?

**ARMER** Through Lois. I think they went to the same synagogue.

**LAURANCE** So she was not at Mills?

**ARMER** No, no, no. Lois married fairly soon out of college, and established herself in Berkeley at that house where she still lives, which is about a mile from where I live now. And plied her piano career. Anyway, I have many, many, many anecdotes about Laurette. And I miss her, to this day.

And then of course, as I mentioned, I met Alden Jenks when we were both about eighteen, at Aspen. I also met Paul Hersh there. We would go trout fishing together. That happened several times in years following, even after he was married we would go fishing together. Let me see who else is on this list from those very early days…. I think the next will have to be May Kurka, whom I mentioned yesterday. The rest were all befriended from within my Conservatory career.

Bonnie Hampton: for all the years that I lived in my present house, which is almost forty, she and Nate Schwartz lived very nearby, down the hill on Spruce Street. I live up in the Berkeley hills at the top of the crest. I knew Nathan before I taught at the Conservatory because he taught at Dominican, but in the college, proper. He didn't drive, and so I would drive us both over on

Mondays. The nuns – I like to think – thought we were having an affair, because we would often meet for breakfast and show up together. Of course they had nothing to entertain them very much in the way of titillation so … I'm sure that was a nice thought for them. [laughter] I always loved Nate, and even once fancied he might make a nice boyfriend, but it didn't turn out that way. I knew Bonnie when she was married to Colin Hampton, and she had taught – actually, I knew her in my college days. To be accurate, I knew her before I knew Laurette. She was a very young faculty member at Mills when I was there. I often turned pages for her and for violinist Nate Rubin. In fact I turned pages so often that people would say, "Always a bridesmaid, never a bride." [laughter] Well, I managed to be a bride a few times. People like Bonnie, and Nathan Rubin, and some of the players – Jean Louis Leroux and Peggy Cunningham – performers, singers – Edgar Jones – all of the performing professionals that I knew at Mills really set the standard for professionality and musicality, and remained sort of icons for me to this day; and Bonnie was one of those. Even as we have become friends, she still to me is an icon. I aspire to that same kind of dedication and total absorption in music that she demonstrates. I don't think I have achieved it to the extent that she has. But people like that remain inspirations to me even as we become friends and get older, and as age in some sense makes us more equal. [laughter] The great leveler before death.

I knew Andy Imbrie because he lived next door to Lois. For the two years that I taught at UC Berkeley, of course he was on leave at that time, and a couple of other teachers, which was the reason, I believe, Sonja Neblett and I were called in as substitutes for some courses. But it was Andy who gave me his personally annotated – in pencil – copy of *Harmonic Practice* by Sessions, which to me was the bible for teaching harmony. Well, no, the Bach chorales are the Bible, but this was like something that explained that bible. But Andy had taught out of it for so long, and of course studied with Sessions, that he had found all of the exercises which if you did them would result in parallel fifths, and said, "This one doesn't work." He had actually gone through and clarified and crossed out a few things. I still have that book. It's out of print, and it's been a long time since I used that to teach harmony, but it always remained the foundation of my teaching harmony. Later in my life, I went over at his invitation to Andy's house and played him some tapes of my compositions, and he was suitably impressed, and sort of unofficially welcomed me into the family, as it were.

Just going down the list … of course I knew of Milton and Peggy Salkind, as I mentioned yesterday, before I became friends with them or before I worked at the Conservatory. In fact it was when I was still teaching piano in Berkeley recently out of college and May Kurka was teaching piano around the corner, I was practicing piano in my front window one morning on Cedar Street in Berkeley, in a little duplex that I lived in at that time – I think the rent was seventy-five dollars a month – I was practicing at the piano and at some point I looked out, and who should be walking by just out on a walk, but May Kurka and the Salkinds. So I ran out, and greeted them and we talked for a while. And then I remember in later years, not very long after

that, through Laurette I also knew Gary Samuel, and people who played in the Oakland Symphony at that time. They had every year a benefit gala. For some reason I ended up triple dating – I went with – gosh, I can't remember his name, he had some job at the Symphony and he was a friend of Gary Samuels, and May went as Gary Samuel's date, and I went as this guy's date. But it was obvious that they would have been each other's dates if this had happened now … and then of course the Salkinds. Peggy actually likes to remember that time, that the six of us went together. Maybe the black and white refers to San Francisco's gala – dance. This wasn't black and white, but it was the equivalent of that. So I sort of knew the Salkinds socially, and that was well before Milton became the President. But then when I came to the Conservatory I was a known quantity to him because of that earlier acquaintance. I'd like to say about Milton Salkind that he was one of the most important people – perhaps the most important person – in the development of my career as a teacher. Because he allowed us to experiment and to be creative and then he went to great lengths to find students for us that not only would prosper under our teaching, but sometimes they were very well known. He was very socially astute, in that respect. He helped put the Conservatory on the map simply by fostering friendships – and having friendships – with most of the wealthy people in San Francisco. And also as a performer he knew many of the well-known world-famous musicians, from all over, because he and Peggy had had a significant career.

**LAURANCE** That's how you got your celebrity students.

**ARMER** That's how I got my celebrity students. That's exactly right. For better or for worse. Once in a while … I had to tell Herb Caen's son that if he didn't stop putting his feet up on the keys and farting in class, at his lessons, deliberately, that he was out the door, and that he would not be allowed back. [laughter]

**LAURANCE** And?

**ARMER** Well, so, he stopped. In fact he developed great fondness for me. It was as if finally somebody was giving him some structure. Anyway, it was great fun teaching and working at the Conservatory in those early years. It was like a grand workshop, where everybody would talk to each other about what they had come up with and how they were doing and make suggestions to each other. Now that I'm working on this piece about Leonardo da Vinci, I've been doing a lot of reading about his life. When he was a young man, he was of course in the workshops of his teacher with a lot of other young painters and sculptors and aspiring artists. It was in his youth, that same kind of exciting, profoundly inspiring and stimulating sort of turmoil going on, all the time. We all had a sense of pioneering something. I really like to think that professionally I grew up with the Conservatory, that professionally that was my family. And it still is.

Let's see, who else is on here? Well, Mack McCray was there, in all of those early days too. In those days we were not as close as we are now. Most recently I went with Mack and his wife, Meikui, to Shanghai for the Chamber Music festival there, and had an opportunity to talk to them and be with them. It was one of those situations that made me totally appreciate having known them all of these years, but also being miffed with myself for not having pursued more of a friendship. But maybe it wasn't possible until now. We were different people in those days.

Sol Joseph I wanted to mention, too. He taught harmony and was as devoted to harmony and the teaching of it as Laurette was to Bach and to harpsichord. Just one of those old-timey really, really good teachers who loves his subject and teaches it with humor – particularly a Jewish flavor of humor. We just loved bumping into each other. One of our halls is named after him – the recital hall.

**LAURANCE** Margaret Rowell?

**ARMER** Margaret Rowell. Margaret I came to know later. I don't think she was there as early as I was, even though she was considerably older. She was an icon for me even before I met her, just because everyone knew who Margaret Rowell was … one of the most important cello teachers anywhere, in our time. Besides that she was unflagging in her enthusiasm, and her sunny, joyful, intensely good-natured personality and approach to life. She was just always, in an almost childlike way to me, thrilled with the beauty of music and good playing, and communicating how to do that. She was one of the teachers of something other than piano who very much valued the Libermann book that I helped put together. She told all of her friends about it. Which told me that she was a teacher's teacher. She was the epitome of what a teacher should be. And she lived not even a mile from my house in Berkeley, too, which was nice. In her last years I remember going over there for one reason or another and helping out with things.

Dorothy Steinmetz was at the Conservatory in the General Education division. For starters, we shared the same birthday, October 6th, which always gave us a big kick. We didn't always have a lot of social interaction between instrumental and composition teachers and voice teachers, and the General Ed people. But Dorothy was the exception in that, and I valued her humor and her observations very, very much. She sort of set the standard for the General Ed end of things, and I miss her, a lot. A lot of these people I miss, because they are there, and then they're not.

**LAURANCE** I was wondering if you had more to say about Joan Gallegos.

**ARMER** Yes, I do. When I came back from teaching at UC Berkeley I then felt qualified to teach musicianship at the collegiate level and so put myself forward to do that. Joan was teaching – in fact she virtually established the musicianship curriculum. She lived in

Berkeley as well, so for many years we commuted together. Sometimes Sonja Neblett would join us, when she lived in Berkeley. I am grateful to Joan because she went out of her way to find composing opportunities for me within the Conservatory. She would be on the program committee for Chamber Music West, the summer programs. She would cause them to ask me to write them a piece. She also directed the New Music Ensemble early on. And then, as I said yesterday, when she had the women's chorus called Veil of Isis, she asked me to write a piece for them too. She was always sort of putting my name out there and always believed in me, and that meant a lot. I do think young composers need people to go to bat for them regularly. I always remember how generous Milhaud was with letters of recommendation. And Milhaud had hundreds of students – he had many, many students. He was very generous writing letters of recommendation, and I try to be too, just in his memory. Because I think it's very important. It doesn't matter how busy you are if somebody wants you to do that. The only place I draw the line is if it is somebody I haven't seen or heard hide nor hair of for twenty-five years, then it's a little bit awkward. That happens rarely.

Dan I mentioned – Dan Becker was my graduate student in the early years of our having a graduate division. I was always very fond of him, and he was very talented. As I said, he would occasionally housesit for me if I went away, and take care of my dog. I remember chewing him out because I had told him he could have anything in the fridge, and I had forgotten and left a very expensive bottle of wine. [laughter] Poor kid, it wasn't his fault. Anyway, as I said before, the fact that Dan is now chair of the department and that we share an office, those facts just tickle me. That's nice. Those are real examples of it being family here, for me.

Never in any of these years at the Conservatory did I feel the weight of rank. Either the responsibilities of having it myself, or the possible humiliations of doing something wrong in the eyes of somebody who had a higher rank than I do – we didn't have rank! We were called "instructors" and then that began to look sort of inconsequential on our letters of recommendation, so we tried to decide what our titles should be, since we didn't have rank or tenure, or even much of a salary. [laughter] Somebody suggested "Lord and Lady." [laughter]

**LAURANCE** I like that.

**ARMER** I would have enjoyed that too, but we ended up with "professor." I've always been very tickled to be called "Professor of Composition" at the same time as not having had to go through the tribulations of getting a PhD. Or having to step on somebody's face to get there.

**LAURANCE** Or to step on someone's face to get tenure.

**ARMER** Exactly. And as far as tenure is concerned, look what happened. I came here and I haven't left yet! There are other kinds of tenure. Let's see, who have I left off here?

**LAURANCE** Maybe you would like to say when you met Colin [Murdoch]?

**ARMER** Oh, Colin! For goodness sake, yes. That was kind of a watershed change, when he became President. He had been Dean before, and then we had one disastrous year when he was Dean that the Board made a terrible mistake and hired somebody who shall remain nameless, who was just a complete flop. Had no idea what he was doing. So after that, Colin virtually rode in on a white horse and became President, and of course his contributions with respect to the building – the new location, and so on, are already legendary. But before that I valued and liked Colin, always. He had always that soft-spoken demeanor which really could be seen after a while as an iron fist in a velvet glove. I remember one time when I was approached by the head of the Music Department at San Francisco State – they wanted to hire me away from the Conservatory. I was seriously considering it, and I asked Colin if he'd write me a letter of recommendation. He said, "I would be very honored and pleased to write a letter of recommendation for you, but I have to tell you that if you take that job I'll shoot you in the knees." [laughter] One of the things I have to say of a very personal nature that always endeared Colin to me – when I was fifty I was with another woman. I came out, and we wanted to live together, and she gave birth to a son. They moved ultimately over to my house and we were together for many years. We also adopted a little girl, but at the time that our son was born, Dawn McGuire, my former partner, still lived in San Francisco. She was in a San Francisco hospital. I was of course present at my son's birth, and then running around the whole next day taking care of things. I had to call in to the Conservatory and say I wouldn't be there at school, and also I had to say that I couldn't come to the faculty meeting. I learned afterwards that Colin announced the birth of my son at that faculty meeting, and there was great joy and applause. And I think – you couldn't understand how much that meant to me.

Have we left anybody out? Oh, good – well, Conrad. Conrad, as I said, the year that I decided to take off a semester, we had to find somebody else. David Conte suggested Conrad. So he came on board, but the rest of the story is a wonderful story of a wonderful friendship. In many respects, Conrad is a brother to me. If Dan Becker is my composing son, and Aleksandra Vrebalov is my composing daughter, Conrad is my composing brother. You know, Vivian Fine is my composing mother.

Conrad and I hit it off from the start and I do remember that when he first came on board and I was on leave, I went to a party where Robert Commanday was with his wife – the then music critic of the San Francisco Chronicle. This was I think in the '80s, but even then the status of women musicians in the profession was shaky. I remember Commanday saying to me, "Well, I

understand that you've become a Conrad Susa." And I said, "No, Bob. He has become me." [laughter]

**LAURANCE** What an odd thing to say – on his part.

**ARMER** Conrad is a friend that I talk to outside of school a lot, and not just about school things but about music, and about life, and about philosophy and literature. He's just a wonderful friend.

**LAURANCE** I notice here a name, who we hadn't mentioned.

**ARMER** Dick Howe was a wonderful character. Very warm and extremely intelligent, and quite connected with the East. I think he came to us from … I'm sorry, the details elude me, but he was another person who was not an administrator per se. He was a human being. He was perfect for Dean at the time that he was Dean because he fit right into that sort of un-doctrinaire, creative atmosphere that prevailed at the Conservatory then. He also was such a decent, good hearted human being, that he could handle some of the squabbles and misunderstandings and personal misfortunes and so on that always come up in a school and with a faculty.

**LAURANCE** Let me actually skip a little bit, because you just brought up Vivian Fine, and I wanted to hear about that. So there's a question about the composers that most influenced [you], and how your compositional style developed, or changed – what is the genesis of what you consider your style, or styles?

**ARMER** Well, I can't think of – this sounds haughty in a way – I can't think of anybody whose music influenced me except people that I've already mentioned. It wasn't Vivian's music as much as her friendship. And her encouragement. Because I met her at a relatively young age. Even when I was thirty, I was still pretty green professionally, with regard to composing. I had not learned to take myself really seriously, and I only reluctantly put myself forward. I very seldom felt comfortable promoting myself. I frequently felt myself sort of "hat in hand" approaching publishers or even performers outside of the Conservatory. It was partly because of the times, and partly because of my own personality. Vivian was a role model, because she had never let anything stop her. She was also a very funny, bright woman, and she was very, very good to me. I'm trying to remember – oh, we met in Berkeley, through some mutual friends. I think Stephanie Friedman, the singer, her parents were good friends of Vivian and her husband, Ben Karp, who was a sculptor and artist – a painter. She came to hear something of mine, and she was struck. When I went to New York I visited with her, and I shared some of my music with her and heard a performance of hers – a piece of hers out at Hunter College. I believe it was the premiere of her *Brass Quartet*, which remains an important

work in the genre. She was always observant about my music, but never condescending and talked me to as an equal. Then in subsequent years, whenever I was in the East I would visit her in Vermont, at Bennington, and I would stay with them and we would share whatever music we were each working on at the time. It was very important to me, because there was no woman of the generation older than me who was a composer that encouraged me, or understood me – what I was up against or what I was trying to do – except for Vivian. I try to be that to my students, especially my women students. I have been that to them, and I still am. And it still matters. It has not to do so much with inequality, as it has to do with simply the difference between genders. It will always be necessary for women composers to have women role models, and sympathetic colleagues just as men have had all through history. Only until recently – the last fifty years – before that no one thought of having women composers as role models, or reading books about harmony or counterpoint by women authors. The canon was provided by men, and of course now we're getting into the whole world that Susan McClary opened up. That's her bailiwick, but I'm awfully glad she opened it up. So in a way, it's been a very good time for me to be alive because I got to be there when the shift came. I like to think that it's a little bit – not easier – but more welcoming and a little bit more possible for younger women composers now. Because by the time the women's movement hit music, my attitudes and my personality and neurosis and the whole business had already been pretty well formed. I was saddled with some things that prevented me from taking full advantage of that, but I did my best to bring younger women composers on board, and I still do. Sometimes the good old days of that women's movement in music have dimmed. It hasn't remained glorious and forward-moving. As I said yesterday, it's a bumpy ride. It goes up and down on the graph.

**LAURANCE** Let me just ask my own follow up – do you feel being the only woman on the Composition faculty … I recall Ruth Bader Ginsburg's remarks before Elena Kagan and Sonia Sotomayor were brought onto the Supreme Court, which was, she talked about being lonely because she was the only woman on the Supreme Court after Sandra Day O'Connor retired. She felt like – I think judging from her quote, I think she felt a little bit burdened being that one woman and then having it be a little diffused – she was very grateful for that. I wonder if you ever feel that way.

**ARMER** No, because the Composition faculty is only part of the Conservatory faculty, and on the contrary, I have kind of liked becoming "Ma Barker and her boys." [laughter] I've kind of liked being the only one. I'm trying to think what it would have been like if we had brought someone else on – but I didn't miss the company of women in my work here because there were so many all over the place anyway. And also, I was never in a position of having to vote for things in opposition to my male colleagues, in the way a justice would have to do. I'm sure the issues are different there, and the sexual roles and perceptions are much more pitted against each other than in this situation.

**LAURANCE** Would you talk a little bit about Composers, Inc., which we haven't touched on?

**ARMER** Sure! I wouldn't mind at all. Let's see, I'm trying to think of when that started. I was at the Conservatory. I think it has to have been in the late '70s, early '80s. There was a group of people – men – young men – some of whom I knew, who were all composers. And they wanted to start a collective where they would be presenters of new music, including their own. They wanted to establish an organization that could also be a platform for their own compositions, which is a very sensible thing for composers to do. I had been part of another group called – oh gosh, I can't even remember the name of it now – in Berkeley. One of the people in that earlier group, Allen Shearer, was also part of this later group. They got in contact with me, asked if I wanted to be part of it, and I said yes. So our first meetings, before we were even incorporated or had a name, were in my kitchen. [laughter]

**LAURANCE** How many people?

**ARMER** Five, I think. The personnel has changed over the years, but two of the composers that have remained the same in that are Frank La Rocca and Marty Rokeach – Martin Rokeach. I remember in the earliest meetings trying to decide – I think it was I who put the name forward for Composers, Inc. Then of course we went through the process of incorporation, and so on. But we all did a huge amount of fundraising, on a very hard working, un-proud level. I remember one of our group got us some kind of job serving drinks and refreshments at a theater on a regular basis, in some way that we got paid for it – I can't remember what the situation was but we worked very hard to get money to start putting on concerts. As we became more established we lost one of the original founders, he moved away – Mark Miller. I believed that was when we brought on Ron McFarland, there was another … somebody left and then we brought on Bob Greenberg. Somewhere in the course of that we established a composer's award – a competition – the Lee Ettleson Award. Suzanne Ettleson was a friend of mine and a great supporter in San Francisco of new music. She endowed that award in memory of her husband, Lee Ettleson.

**LAURANCE** Where did you present?

**ARMER** In San Francisco. We started out, I think, giving concerts in the Green Room at the War Memorial building. Now it's in Herbst Hall. We worked very hard finding good programs and planning seasons and it was – the whole experience for me was very, very enjoyable and meaningful. Again, I was older than most of the guys – I was sort of "Ma Barker and her boys" then too. I guess I'm getting kind of used to that. As the last of three children, much younger than my siblings, sometimes just to sort of turn things on their end and become the top of something is to me exhilarating. But it's all playful, I don't take myself terribly

seriously in that regard, but I enjoy the respect, if not deference, and I enjoy the camaraderie, and the acceptance and belonging. I enjoy that in Composers, Inc. just as I've enjoyed it all my life at the Conservatory.

**LAURANCE** You discussed, a bit, the nature of being a woman composer, I don't know if you have anything left to say about it … let's just move to this because it's really specific – it says here, "Tell us a bit about your relationship with the publisher J.B. Elkus & Son." How the relationship started?

**ARMER** Oh, right! Yes, I can tell you how that started. When I was just out of graduate school, Roger Nixon, my teacher, had given me several names of publishers to approach in New York – that being where publishers were. [laughter] He had even written them letters of introduction, so that I could then approach them and they wouldn't think I was an unheard of nobody. One of the places I went was Broude Brothers … I think it was Broude Brothers, I don't think it was Alexander Broude, there were two different ones. At that time, Jonathan Elkus was living in the East with his wife and son, and working for Broude. I met him there, and he was so kind and gentlemanly to me – extraordinarily. I don't think I knew at that time that Jonathan's father had been Albert Elkus, who had chosen the building on 19th Avenue when he was President of the Conservatory, I didn't make those connections, I hadn't started at the Conservatory at that time. At any rate, I had a really – I wouldn't say even a blazing, or a modest success, trotting off to New York with my scores under my arms. I learned a lot, and I established some – I did get one bite, Lawson-Gould published a choral piece of mine as a result of that visit. My acquaintance with Elkus was probably the most important thing that I brought back from that early foray into the publishing world. Because then, in later years, when I first started teaching at Berkeley in the mid '70s, his mother, Elizabeth Elkus, who was this wonderful British lady, fiery British liberal, (a very no-nonsense, very bright woman, who had been absolutely devoted to her husband and adored her sons) – she and Madeline Duckles (Vincent Duckles' wife) when I was first hired at Berkeley took me to the Faculty Club and caused me to join – they said very few women had been teaching in the department here and "We want to celebrate." [laughter] I told Elizabeth Elkus that I had met her son in New York earlier, and that he was <u>such</u> a gentleman! Of course she <u>purred</u> to hear that.

**LAURANCE** He still is.

**ARMER** That's true. Unusually - he has a kind of European elegance about his gentlemanly-ness. It's unusual. It's not East Coast. If it's not European, it's West Coast. But it's also particular, I think, just to the Elkus family. I think pretty soon after that, or maybe at that time, Jon and Mickey and their son moved back out West. After all, Jon was raised in Berkeley. We had mutual friends, and we were at a party at one of our mutual friends' house, and he told me that he wanted to start his own publishing concern, and he wanted to publish my works. I was

just – no one had ever said anything like that to me before! What?! What a concept! So the rest is history. He did publish a lot of my things, starting with *Mein junges Leben*. He was more than just a publisher – he was always my friend and mentor and advisor, who always helped me in the profession. Kind of showed me the way in a lot of areas, and helped me make decisions about what to do with my music. He never told me how to compose, which was a nice thing. But he remained my publisher, to this day, except that he's virtually retired, and has turned his body of works by various composers over to Subito Music Corporation, under Steve Culbertson in New Jersey. But I believe that the works he published are still available there under the egis of J.B. Elkus & Son, a division of Subito. Subito is also publishing my stuff, as well, now – from here on. It's all part of the same situation. Also along the way I had another publisher – Ann Basart – the music librarian at UC Berkeley. Her husband was Robert Basart, who was a wonderful composer as well, part of our Berkeley bunch. She started a publishing concern called Fallen Leaf Press. For a while she published a number of my things as well, but then Jonathan took those over under his imprimatur when she stopped doing that. I have considered Jon a really important person right along, all these years, as a person to go to when I have any questions about what to do professionally. He was very, very helpful when I started collaborating with Ursula Le Guin. This is a good segue.

**LAURANCE** It is, but let me pause right there because that is a good segue – hold that thought. I think we should take a little break.

[Break]

**LAURANCE** Well, we left off at a cliff hanger.

**ARMER** Well, what was it?

**LAURANCE** It was music in *Uttermost Parts*.

**ARMER** That's right! Let me back up – are we on the air? Yes.

**LAURANCE** I assume so.

**ARMER** Well, I don't want to waste a breath, because if we're not – we are? Good. Alright. Let me backtrack and say how I happened to know Ursula Le Guin. My father grew up in the house next to Ursula's childhood home on Arch Street in Berkeley. Her father was Alfred Kroeber, who started the Anthropology Department, and after whom Kroeber Hall is named. She grew up in this gorgeous Maybeck house which my father watched being built when he was a kid. The Kroebers were friends with my grandparents, who were both artists and had lived with the Navajo, so my grandmother considered herself something of an anthropologist as well – in

fact kind of an honorary Navajo. So I had heard about Ursula Le Guin all my life, and of course I got such a kick out of it when her daughter Elizabeth became a student at the Conservatory, and was among the people in my first counterpoint class, which I talked about yesterday. It was through Elizabeth that I actually met her mother. It was at Elizabeth's wedding in that house on Arch Street next to where my father had grown up. We both had heard about each other, but had never met. I was sitting on a couch and I motioned Ursula over and told her who I was, and she knelt [laughter] and we both just fell to being friends. It became imperative to collaborate. She was to a week the same age as my brother, they shared their second birthday parties on a sidewalk on Arch Street. This is something I learned from my mother. My brother was born the day after the stock market crashed. Anyway, I used to think that his birth made that happen. [laughter] The summer after we met I was going to the MacDowell Colony, and I needed a project to be working on there. I had been asked to go by the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players – they had commissioned me to write something. I had worked with Stephanie Friedman before and just loved the way she sang, and wanted very much to set something by Ursula. So I foolishly (not knowing any better) asked her if she had ever written any poetry. As it turned out she had written volumes, and even had some loose-leaf poems unpublished. She sent me a whole bunch of things, and I put together a cycle of poems from these various sources, and set them for mezzo and several instruments. That's what I worked on at MacDowell all that time. The cycle is called *Lockerbones/Airbones*: these are made up words from one of the poems.

**LAURANCE** What's the instrumentation?

**ARMER** I'm trying to remember … flute, violin, piano, and percussion. I think that's all. That was premiered by the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players the day after my father died. So I was under considerable strain, but it was a success in spite of that. I so enjoyed working with her poetry, and we so enjoyed our new friendship that we decided to do something from scratch together. Ursula's father had gotten a wonderful old farmhouse up in St. Helena during her childhood. They had always gone up there in the summers. Ursula now lives in Portland, and was in Portland at that time. Occasionally she and her husband Charles would come down and be in St. Helena and would invite me to come up to the old farmhouse and spend some time with them. So there were Ursula and I lounging around on ancient rusting lawn chairs, on the yellowed grass of this wonderful place, thinking of the most preposterous ideas for a series. We were making each other laugh so hard that we were just falling off our lawn chairs. [laughter]

**LAURANCE** What were some of the things that didn't get used?

**ARMER** We actually used everything we thought of. It started with one piece. It didn't grow into a series until we decided that it was doing that. I think the first thing that we thought about was – and we also had a correspondence – typed letters – we did not have

computers, in those days. So we would write letters back and forth with these outrageous notions, and came up with the idea of – I think I said, "What if music was food? What would it sound like?" So she, as often happened, responded with an entire scenario. She would do that – she would come back with a whole poem, or a whole little drama written out. She invented this herd of animals called "lyrovus." Instead of giving milk, they gave music. Instead of cowboys, these conductors would lash the herds of lyrovus through the streets of the village, and the villagers would sit on walls and by the side of the road and listen to them sing three times a day, so they were nourished. I don't want to go into great detail with each piece that ended up in this series, but the premise of every one of them was that ridiculous. The extent to which we could be ridiculous, or wacky, or imaginative to an almost grotesque degree was part of the fun. It was the freedom. In that sense, that's what we treasure about our collaboration and our friendship. Only the two of us could have done that, or been that way.

Then of course I would get commissions, or have reasons to write other pieces for other forces, so I would think of something that music could be to make each of those pieces about, and propose it to her. Over the course of about ten years we formed an archipelago of islands, each of which had a society that used music in a different way. Ursula is very fond of archipelagos. You look at the fantasy and sci-fi books that she has written, and she has often illustrated them with her own maps, including archipelagos and islands. So she ended up making a map of this particular archipelago, which was called Uttermost Parts. It was a true collaboration – sometimes I would think of things to do with the words, and sometimes she would think of things to do with the music. We tried to use every combination of words and music that we could think of, including one without words, and another without music, so we really covered all bases. [laughter] This ultimately was recorded on the Koch International label. Jon Elkus was particularly instrumental in forming a group of us that were like a little company that saw to this production. Jonathan was part of it, and Ursula was part of it – and Don Ehrlich – the violist – was part of it. He had played in one of the pieces and had adored Ursula Le Guin's writing. He just wanted to be part of this. We were headed up by an advisor whom we paid well to help in the production of this, Miriam Abrams, who had been one of the early founders of the Women's Philharmonic. The orchestral piece that was in this series actually starts it on the double CD recording. This was a piece performed by the Women's Philharmonic, under JoAnn Falletta. That particular piece I do want to mention. It's been performed more than any of the pieces, around the country. It's called *The Great Instrument of the Geggerets* and it's about an island that is an instrument. It's an island where the whole thing is designed to be plucked and blown and tweeted and bowed and …

**LAURANCE** Struck.

**ARMER** Struck. And everything else. The inhabitants of it are also designed to play it – they're seven-legged and can do any of these things. They have to keep playing this island,

or it will sink. This was all ordained by the god Gegg, a deity who was very fond of music. But as with all of the other pieces, this one was sort of a metaphor for reality in our lives. You have to keep playing an orchestra or it won't survive. When you think about it, that makes perfect sense. But there again, the opportunities to be imaginative were so great that the whole experience of doing this ten-year project with Ursula really, greatly, added to my composing chops. Because she taught me – this association taught me to do what she does, a lot of her science fiction books are about entire societies that she writes about almost in the manner of her father, who was an anthropologist. She studies these people on other planets, or in other times, in imaginary places, and she goes to these places like an anthropologist going out in the field. She interviews the inhabitants, and explores to see what it's like. You go with a completely open mind – in a sense you go into one of these things totally passive, and totally curious. That allows an abundance of material to come into your mind. As if it's coming from some other place, and you are simply allowing it. That is such a wonderful way to be an artist. I now try to get my students to do the same thing, and some of them are so relieved to be allowed to do that.

Composing isn't a "how to" thing, and you can't go to a book that tells you how to compose. The only thing that can tell you what to compose is yourself: your own musical impulses, and your own imagination. How to do it, of course, you can get a little help. But it was really – literally mind blowing. It gave me great joy, and great expansion as a composer. Jonathan [Elkus], yes, was a part of that, and of course published all of the pieces. I believe some of them can be heard on Ursula's website now. She recently emailed me, "Would I mind…?" I said, "Certainly not!" Also, *Lockerbones/Airbones*, is on another link – you can just Google that piece, it's in an interview of Ursula and me by Persimmon Magazine in the fall of 2010. But all you have to do is Google "*Lockerbones/Airbones*," and you can hear that cycle too, with the words just scrolling by. It's a very nice way to listen to it.

**LAURANCE** How many pieces are there total in *Uses of Music in Uttermost Parts*?

**ARMER** Eight.

**LAURANCE** You've talked about Laurette Goldberg, and your collaboration with Ursula Le Guin, any other pieces that you want to discuss?

**ARMER** Maybe bodies of work. I've written an awful lot for voice and piano; a number of cycles. Because I love words, and I feel a kind of special attraction to try to augment them and surpass them, if you will, with music. Sometimes in my earlier work I wrote things that were quite difficult for the voice, and not much more doable in the piano part. But I have learned a lot over the years to write more for the voice. Part of my skill in that now comes from having been part of a Composition Department where we have regular art-song contests and choral music contests, where I work with people who are setting words. Also I learn from them what

they have learned from other teachers here – David Conte and Conrad Susa in particular – so that's another way in which teaching here has taught me. Just less than a year ago I completed a song cycle for Alla Gladysheva's daughter, Masha.

**LAURANCE** Right. She's going to be a student here in the fall.

**ARMER** She is going to be a student here. She's going to sing that cycle, too. That's one of my most recent ones. It's called *Will You, Won't You: A dance suite for mezzo and soprano* – and so in other words –

**LAURANCE** What's that from?

**ARMER** The Lobster Quadrille. In *Alice in Wonderland*. Each poem in the set is about dance, in some way. The music for each one has a regular dance rhythm to it and structure, like a sarabande, or a tango, or sicilienne (that's not exactly a dance form) I found that a very useful way to set each poem, as a kind of strict structure from which to slightly deviate now and then. I found that I was writing for the voice and the piano in a slightly more conservative way, with much more care, especially about the voice part – in letting it be something that was really idiomatic and welcoming for the voice to sing. Partly because Masha is a young singer, and I didn't want to throw something at her that Jan de Gaetani would have sung. [laughter] But it taught me a lot, and if I write any other choral music – haven't done much of that – as with song cycles, I will also be slightly more conservative in my harmonic language and intervallic leaps and so on, because I have found that choruses don't take to too far-out stuff. Even if they did – even if they busted their fannies doing it – it doesn't come off very well in voices.

**LAURANCE** It wouldn't, in multiple –

**ARMER** That's right. As a matter of fact, I remember in the old days of our Composition Department we frequently had visiting gurus and masters, if they happened to be in town. Three times we had Lutoswaski to the Conservatory to talk to our kids. On one of those occasions he and I went to lunch together. I was working on a piece for chorus and orchestra for the Le Guin *Uttermost* set. He asked me what I was writing, and I told him, and asked him if he had ever done much for chorus and orchestra, and he said, "No, it doesn't work very well." [laughter] You're limited in what you can do. Of course, one has to have limitations of some kind for any project, because otherwise you can just flounder trying to decide between all the possibilities. It's very important to be limited in what you can do and the materials you use. It's only responsible to think about what the performers can do, what people can listen to, and so on. I would say that as I've grown older, I have become a little bit more conservative in my musical language. But by the same token, more expressive and free with it. When I was much younger I tried very hard to be <u>modern</u>. I remember Vivian Fine telling me about that too – she said, "You

can always tell when it's a young composer because it's so dissonant." [laughter] There comes a time when you just relax and you let your musical impulse come out of you untrammeled by the need to reinvent the wheel. Now I tell my students, "You can't do that. There's no point in trying. There's almost nothing that hasn't been done. By the same token, whatever you do will always have your own personal stamp on it. So you don't have to worry!"

**LAURANCE** Well, that's good advice for lots of things.

**ARMER** Yes! Isn't it. Now that you mention it, yes.

**LAURANCE** Any other pieces you'd like to mention?

**ARMER** Oh, yes. We talked yesterday about my film scores for educational films, I enjoyed that enormously. That was all so liberating.

**LAURANCE** What sort of courses were they for?

**ARMER** Oh, they were for children – classroom stuff, on a variety of subjects. Let's see, I've written two string quartets. One of them is going to be done next week at MOMA in New York City. I'm really very attracted to chamber music, and I did a piano quintet for the Shanghai Festival, which was in April. It received its Shanghai premiere, it had been done here before. But these players played it so well, it was better than I even imagined it. Now that's a wonderful thing, when that happens. It's always wonderful when players bring something of their own to your music and make it more than the sum of its parts, even more than you imagined it. It completes the process of making a piece – a piece isn't finished, I don't think, until it's played and heard. As the composer you're only just one part of that circuit. But this surpassed anything I had even imagined. They brought to it such a brilliance that it was very thrilling. I hope anything even half that exciting happens next week. These are Juilliard students that are going to be playing my string quartet. I've written some for orchestra, not as much as I'd like to. I wrote a piano concerto – of course I've done a lot for piano, and all of it I would say was premiered by Lois Brandwynne. And some of it, much of it, was commissioned by her. A few years back Andrew Mogrelia, the then-conductor of our orchestra here at the Conservatory premiered the piano concerto that I wrote for Lois. It's a problematic piece, it's difficult, a little bit thorny to listen to but I happen to like it very much, and I hope it gets some more performances while I'm still alive. That's the sort of thing that you can't bank on because it's so difficult to get together the forces for that or to find any other pianists besides Lois. I mean I'd be happy to have Lois do it again with any orchestra, but for some other pianist to do it would be … it's one of those things where you just indulge yourself and do something that you've always dreamed of doing regardless of whether it's practical or not. And we have to have projects like that right along. But I've done an awful lot – well, not as much for piano as you would think,

considering I'm a pianist. The reason for that is that composing is my way of playing other instruments, and I said yesterday, I've done an awful lot for percussion, and music that involves percussion.

One orchestra piece that stands out in my memory as a lovely, lovely adventure was a piece commissioned for the Oakland Youth Orchestra, which they took on tour in Greece. I went with my then-partner to Greece and we followed them all over as they played this piece. It's very accessible and somewhat conservative because it's for a youth orchestra. Although I did not write down to them, I more indulged my own youthful impulses. It is called *Call of the West*, and it is a sort of homage to California, which I feel very … I love California, I love being a Californian. I love being a chauvinist about California. I want California to be on the musical map, as much as New York City. And by God, because of the Conservatory alone, it's getting there. Also because it's closer to the Pacific Rim, which is coming into its own culturally too, as far as the United States is concerned. So that piece starts in the mountains. It's just a little suite. It starts in the mountains and goes through the hot valley and then gets into the city and out to the Pacific. It's been well received, and they loved it in Greece. Partly because … I planned it partly for that tour because California and Greece have some geographical or geological things in common. And indeed when we were in Athens, it was the hottest day in recorded history. When you think of recorded history in Athens, that goes back pretty far. [laughter] That was a lovely experience. I will undoubtedly think of other parts of my oeuvres which I'll wish I had mentioned, but …

**LAURANCE** Well, I'll just ask you this. Since I have – this is one that I've heard recently, is that harp piece that you wrote. Sarah Voynow played it. I'm going to guess … what year is that from, approximately?

**ARMER** Oh, gosh. It was in the '90s sometime.

**LAURANCE** Maybe a Harp Society commission?

**ARMER** Yes, it was. It was a Harp Congress – the third international – right.

**LAURANCE** I hear that piece, and I hear you talk about how much you are into percussion, and exploring percussive sounds, and I think, "Ah!" That's – you don't approach the harp certainly like a piano, or a pianist. You approach it like a percussion ensemble.

**ARMER** Well, I wrote it for Marcella deCray, who was also somebody I knew through the Conservatory, although I think I may have known her before, because I gave her daughter piano lessons when I was living in San Francisco. But somehow, on the other end of my life, more recently, Marcella had always been a very, very important supporter of new music.

She was one of the people who started the Composers Forum and she was constantly commissioning new pieces, and premiering them and performing them. And teaching them, too. It was again, a situation where I sat down with her and listened to her show me all the different things that could be done on the harp. I already had an idea for this piece – some ideas. I asked her to try this, and try that, and so I knew that those things could be done. So it was one of those pieces that was designed for the particular propensities of the instrument that were not necessarily featured in other harp music, you know what I mean? I didn't want to do a cliché. I'm sure that harp literature is full of very similar pieces. At least I would think so.

**LAURANCE** Well, that's a much longer conversation. [laughter]

**ARMER** I know, I shouldn't digress.

**LAURANCE** I'm the wrong person to say that to, and just keep it short.

**ARMER** Oh, okay! I'm sorry.

**LAURANCE** I could go on at length about harp literature, but I will not.

**ARMER** Okay, well, I made some wrong conclusions there I guess.

**LAURANCE** Oh, no, not necessarily, but there's lots more to be said on the subject.

**ARMER** I'm sure there's tons that I don't know. But it had to do with designing it for Marcella, following our conversation. She wanted to bring something slightly different to the congress. So she asked me and a couple of other composers to write pieces for that.

**LAURANCE** When it was one of the works on the contemporary … you know, we had that concert of Bay Area composers, and Bay Area harpists, and it was quite interesting to see what the variety from fairly conventional techniques to non – it was on that concert.

**ARMER** I wish I could have come – there was some reason, I was out of town or something. I really wanted to come to that. It sounded, if anything, more interesting than the situation up in Tacoma when she played my piece. There, I have to say, one got the impression of harp music being sort of generic. I walked into one huge hall where there were booths and people selling harp music, and displaying this and that, and there were about three hundred harps in there, and they were all sort of tuning up and strumming and doing things at the same time – it was an uncanny sound. It was a most amazing sound. All these harps, just kind of quietly doing their own thing.

**LAURANCE** John Cage like, actually.

**ARMER** Oh, it was wonderful. I loved it. But I wouldn't indulge myself to the extent of scoring something for three hundred harps. There are composers who would. [laughter]

**LAURANCE** There is a question here, and I would like to see what you have to say about this: "In what direction would you like to see the Conservatory's Composition Department go in the future?"

**ARMER** Well, the question sort of assumes that I would want the direction to change. I don't. It also assumes that things are linear. The Conservatory Composition Department has become a really – I like to say and think – a really successful venture. We've gotten quite a reputation, and we have more people applying every year. I think it's because of the abundance of performance opportunities and being in the presence of other really top notch musicians, which is a very important arena for composers to get into. But one thing I do not want to happen, is any more growth in the number of comp majors that we have. Because we will not be able to serve them properly. There simply won't be time or resources to do all of their music, and to afford them those opportunities.

I can't think of how I want anything to change, except that tendency to growth – as if more is better. I think that all of us in the Department, as far as we're all concerned, it's reached maximum, and even perhaps now, is slightly too big. We've always had composers from diverse places around the globe, but we have a rather remarkable variety in that way now. People from all over, and of course a far greater proportion of Asian students than we used to have. This calls for a different approach in some ways, because we have all, in our earlier lifetimes, been accustomed to thinking of music as we were all brought up – in the Western and the European tradition. I think of course our faculty is going to have to change and flex a little bit, because I will have to retire, perhaps due to death [laughter] but I can't go on forever. I would like to see them bringing in some younger people, including some women composers. Just because I have been the keeper of the flame, in that regard here, someone else has to do that. Someone else has to, every now and then, nudge the guys and say, "You can't say that." Or, "Don't take that approach." Or, "You're not paying that much attention to her." Or, "You're assuming the wrong thing." This will always be the case. It has nothing to do with – this is not a criticism of men, and it is not a favoritism for women, it is simply that there is that difference that I was speaking of. As we bring more people on board, and the present ones leave, we will need to be mindful of those things.

It could be very useful to have an Asian composition teacher. Although there is that strange anomaly of the way contemporary composing is taught in some of the Asian conservatories. It's all about the Western European tradition. And it's back there in the '60s, some of it. They're still

thinking that it's really modern to be dissonant. [laughter] And that's sort of the bottom line – and complex, and complicated, and hard to play, and hard to listen to. [laughter] So we need to be flexible, and keep – be sure we don't get anybody in the faculty that espouses one school or another. By the same token, we each compose actively. That's important. Not to get somebody who does it because they're through composing and the only way they can make a living is to teach. This is not a good idea. Active composers. If it were possible budget wise, without involving too much expansion, it would be nice if there was a little bit more – if we had the wherewithal and equipment to teach more about film music. I think that would be nice too. But this is just sort of on my wish list. There's been a push in that direction.

**LAURANCE** Right. I think we're at the place [in the interview] where we have some odds and ends. There's a question here, and this may be a little like the last question, but – do you have any advice for current or future music students?

**ARMER** Besides what I dish out ten hours a week? General current or future music students…. Yes, but I'd have to think about that. I want to try and sum up in a few words what I have advised people my entire life, and that's no easy trick. Basically, find out who you are and become that person as much as you can through your music. I have already some bits of advice that I would give people, but it all kind of falls under that heading. Composing is not a "how to" thing that somebody can make you adhere to, it is a world that somebody can show you around in. Where you can gain entrance by continuing to compose. Regardless of what happens in your academic career or your personal life, you must continue to compose. That I learned from Milhaud, which is sort of where we came in.

**LAURANCE** Finally, I left this question for last because I thought – well, I shouldn't say that because I should ask you if there is anything else you want to be asked.

**ARMER** Oh, no, no, no. Not right now.

**LAURANCE** There's this question – looking back on your career – and I certainly wouldn't mind if you repeated anything – what are some of the key life events that have helped shaped it?

**ARMER** My career as a composer?

**LAURANCE** I would say – however you define your career. Certainly as a composer, but as a musician …

**ARMER** As a musician … as a human being.

**LAURANCE** As a human being. I think that is up to you to interpret.

**ARMER** Well, it comes down always to the people that I gained, and the people that I lost. It always comes down to people. The death of my sister, when I was only thirty, and she was thirty-eight, had a profound influence. The birth and raising of my children. All of the deep relationships that I've described in my life at the Conservatory. And I have to say, several years of therapy with a very good therapist, I recommend that, [laughter] for anybody, whether they're in music or not. In relation to my career as a musician, I learned through therapy to burn away my tendency to want to perform and show off, and to retrieve and hue to the motivations that matter more, with regard to making music. Simply because I am responding to my own musical impulse and trying to manifest my own musical imagination. Not to get strokes. There is a tendency, and this I wish I could tell to all students at all times – there is a tendency to mold yourself to the way you want the world to see you. That is something that I was able to see when I was doing it myself. It's not the reason that we make music. We don't make music for the applause – that's gravy, that's nice. We don't make it for the reviews, we don't make it for the … we make it because we have to. It's who we are. That's why I said my advice to students is, "Be who you are in your music, and honor it and stay with it and grow it."

It's not been a rocky life. There are no really shattering traumas that were visited on me. I said to somebody the other day, because we all have things that we have to cope with, and struggle with, and deal with, all the time, but somehow through all of that I feel that I have myself as a musician, and I have my music to do. Even when things get very bleak, and I'm overwhelmed and exhausted, I make myself feel better and more healthy by composing. Or even just thinking about what I'm composing. And so I said to somebody the other day, "You know, I've decided that I lead a life of bumpy grace."

**LAURANCE** I'm also struck, by these whole conservations, how much you talk about friendships. Of course it's partly designed that way, to talk about various people, but it's quite obvious that that's been an important, defining theme.

**ARMER** Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. Music is a social phenomenon. At the same time, you have to get along with yourself and be willing to function in absolute isolation. At the same time you have to have that other place to go to. If you're always just hanging out in your friendships, you sometimes neglect the part of you that is only you. And you sometimes forget why you want to express yourself musically. If you keep just hanging out with other people, it doesn't matter how much you love them and how much they love you, you're not attending to your friendship with yourself. You are, in some sense, always "on" or performing for others. You have to balance that. So there is no disgrace in being alone. We are socialized to think that there must be something wrong with you if you spend a lot of time alone, or if you prefer it. But that's not true, you have to be able to do that, and benefit from it, and value it.

**LAURANCE** Is there anything else that you think we should …?

**ARMER** Well, I'll probably think of it tonight.

**LAURANCE** Well, if you do it doesn't have to be the end of the conservation.

**ARMER** You've been very exhaustive in all of this, and also allowed me to just go on and on.

**LAURANCE** It's been delightful to listen to.

**ARMER** Well, good.

**LAURANCE** Well, I think, at this point, I'm just going to thank you.

**ARMER** Well, my great pleasure, thank you! You'd make a good therapist too, you're a good listener!