

Robert Commanday 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 November 1 and 5, 2014 and January 5, 2015
Corey Jamason, 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.

Robert Commanday Interview

This interview was conducted on November 1, 2014 at Mr. Commanday's home, and on November 5, 2014 and January 5, 2015 at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music by Corey Jamason.

Corey Jamason

Corey Jamason is a Grammy-nominated harpsichordist whose playing of Bach was described in the *Los Angeles Times* as displaying "the careful, due balance of objective detachment and lofty passion." He appears frequently with American Bach Soloists, with whom he is principal keyboardist and co-director of the ABS Academy held each summer at the Conservatory. He has performed with a variety of ensembles including the San Francisco Symphony, Los Angeles Opera, Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, Musica Angelica, Camerata Pacifica, Yale Spectru m, and El Mundo. Festival appearances include the Berkeley, Bloomington, San Luis Obispo Mozart, Music in the Vineyards, Whidbey Island, and Norfolk festivals. In 2007 he conducted performances of Monteverdi's *Orfeo* at the Bloomington Early Music Festival in celebration of the 400th year anniversary of its premiere and from 2007 to 2014 was artistic director of the San Francisco Bach Choir. He is co-artistic director and conductor of Theatre Comique, a new ensemble specializing in late nineteenth and early twentieth century American musical theatre. Recordings include performances with American Bach Soloists, violinist Gilles Apap, and El Mundo, with whom he performs on the 2012 GRAMMY-nominated CD *The Kingdoms of Castille*. He is a contributing author to the *History of Performance*, published in 2012 by Cambridge University Press and is preparing an article on the performance practice of early 20th century musical theatre for Oxford Handbooks Online, to be published in the fall of 2014 by Oxford University Press. Jamason received degrees in music from SUNY-Purchase, Yale University, and the Early Music Institute at Indiana University where he received a D.M. degree. He joined the faculty of the San Francisco Conservatory in 2001, where he is director of the school's historical performance program and professor of harpsichord.

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94102

Robert Commanday



Robert Commanday and Corey Jamason, November 2014

Robert Commanday, founding editor of San Francisco Classical Voice (www.sfcv.org), the Bay Area's web-site journal of classical music criticism, before that was the San Francisco Chronicle's music and dance critic for almost 30 years. He has been an essayist, a lecturer and served as a lecturer in music at the University of California, Berkeley, at U.C. Santa Cruz, San Francisco State University, and the University of Victoria. Educated at the Juilliard School of Music, Harvard University and the University of California, he followed a career as conductor and teacher at Ithaca (N.Y.) College, the University of Illinois, and at UC Berkeley for thirteen years. There at Cal he conducted choral groups and other ensembles including the Oakland Symphony Chorus and prepared choruses for the San Francisco Symphony. He was president of the Music Critics Association of North America, the recipient of the Deems Taylor Award for Music Criticism, the John Swett Award and was honored as citizen of the year by the Il Cenacolo society and the Harvard Club of San Francisco.

Robert Commanday, or Bob, sums up his life as "blessed" – first to have been born to parents who loved music and prized education above all. That got him into Juilliard as a school kid, through Harvard and for graduate work at UC Berkeley. Luckily, in World War II, he was trained and occupied as a cryptanalytic translator of encoded Japanese. More luck helped him move from Ithaca College and University of Illinois posts to Cal where he conducted choral groups for 13 years, and met Mary who would become his wife/partner 18 years later. He was also leading other ensembles including the Oakland Symphony Chorus, preparing choruses for the San Francisco Symphony, serving as a Lecturer at Cal and guest at four other universities. He served as president of the Music Critics Association of North America for four years, received the Deems Taylor Award for Music Criticism and the John Swett Award for service to education and was honored as citizen of the year by the Il Cenacolo society and the Harvard Club of San Francisco. That sums up his first two careers before a phone call out of the blue led to his becoming the San Francisco Chronicle's Music and Dance Critic for another 30 years. Five years later, he founded the Bay Area's pioneering web-site journal of classical music criticism, San Francisco Classical Voice, turning musicians into music critics for eight years before deciding that enough was enough.

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Saturday, November 1, 2014

JAMASON This is Corey Jamason, and we're here at the home of Bob Commanday – November 1st, 2014, as part of the San Francisco Conservatory Oral History Project. Bob, thank you so much for agreeing to do this.

COMMANDAY My pleasure.

JAMASON We've divided the questions into three basic sessions. Session one being a discussion of your earliest years and your education, your early teaching and the general music life in the Bay Area in the 1950s. So I'm wondering if we can start at the very beginning – if you can tell us where and when you were born.

COMMANDAY I was born in Yonkers, New York. June 18th, 1922. Yonkers was an industrial town. It was originally a watering hole, and in WWI it became an industrial town. It was a town that in memory strikes me as very interesting because of its Dutch heritage and because of the first-generation Italians that lived there as workers, and the first-generation Polish people that lived there. Growing up, we related more culturally to Manhattan, where my father had his printing business. My siblings and I were a little bit snobbish about Yonkers, but that's where I grew up.

JAMASON You say your father had a printing business.

COMMANDAY Yes.

JAMASON Did you grow up in a musical household?

COMMANDAY Yes, both my parents were musicians. My father played trumpet all his life, until middle-age when he switched to French horn, implausibly and ineffectively. And my mother played piano. They both loved music. My mother was essentially more musical. I feel that the talent I have of that sort – her sense of humor and her musicianship and love for music – I think I inherited a lot from my mother.

JAMASON Was she your first piano teacher?

COMMANDAY No, when I was five or so they got me a piano teacher. But either through my fault or because the teacher really wasn't the right one, I didn't take to the piano very well. Later on, when I was ten or eleven, my father suggested that I take up another instrument. I didn't like the clarinet then, for reasons I don't understand now, so I started with the flute.

JAMASON It sounds like a very musical, busy home. Could you describe perhaps some outside of the home, formative musical experiences that you remember? A concert, or a radio broadcast, or anything of that sort?

COMMANDAY Yes, well, I was very fortunate both because of my parents' love for music, and because of the proximity to New York. When I was very young they would take me into New York for major recitals and performances of one kind or another. I was privileged to hear the great artists Josef Hofmann, and Brailowsky, and Fritz Kreisler and I remember my mother taking me to the D'Oyly Carte visiting performances of Gilbert and Sullivan operas, and to musicals – Victor Herbert and the like. I remember attending the first production of *Porgy and Bess*, and things like that. I had a real early exposure to great musicians, and that was important for me.

JAMASON I'll say. It's sort of remarkable to be there at that time, and to hear those artists. Were you present at Josef Hofmann's farewell concerts?

COMMANDAY I don't remember that specifically. I do remember hearing the Sunday afternoon New York Philharmonic broadcasts all the time, and things like that.

JAMASON So when you were growing up – you mentioned Victor Herbert and the D'Oyly Carte – so you were listening to Gilbert and Sullivan, and our own brand of American operetta. Were there certain kinds of music that you were more drawn to as a boy? Or were you just eating it all up?

COMMANDAY I was drawn to classical music. We didn't have record collections in those days. My uncle, who lived nearby, had records. But I didn't have record collections. I was interested in jazz, and listened to – my cousin had an extraordinary collection of popular music on recordings, and I listened to that a lot. I remember at the age of fifteen, going down to New York to the Village Vanguard, and staying there until two in the morning (or I didn't get home until two in the morning) listening to the great jazz artists – the names are escaping me now, but I'll remember them in a few minutes. I was not an aficionado, but I loved jazz.

JAMASON Did you attend performances on Broadway of George Gershwin shows, or Rodgers and Hart shows?

COMMANDAY Oh, yes. Again, aside from the ones I mentioned, *Porgy and Bess* and Gilbert and Sullivan and such ... later I attended first productions of the great shows *Oklahoma* and *My Fair Lady* and *Chorus Line* and all that ... but I was already an adult by then. I don't remember going to hit musicals – the Cole Porter shows, the Gershwin shows, when I was young. I don't remember that.

JAMASON I'm fascinated by the *Porgy and Bess* performance. Can you describe what your feelings were at this performance?

COMMANDAY I was very much taken by it. I remember getting a recording of it, but it was by Lawrence Tibbett, not by the African American man who first sang Porgy. I remember that record with the principal arias on it. That kind of firmed the impression that the original made on me. Physically, I don't remember the production, it was too far ago.

JAMASON Would you be able to speak to your impression of how the performance style has change – for instance, from the original performances or even the original recording to recent performances, let's say by the San Francisco Opera?

COMMANDAY Oh yes. There's no question that the original performances, as I recall it, were more strict. There was less freedom in the singing. That is – I think there was a self-consciousness about doing this music on an opera stage. I think the subsequent performances I've seen of *Porgy and Bess* become increasingly free and easy. The chorus role becomes freer, and less formal. In that sense, as a dramatic production it becomes more convincing.

JAMASON Fascinating. You mentioned that you didn't initially take to the piano, but I understand you attended Juilliard and studied with Irwin Freundlich?

COMMANDAY Oh, yes.

JAMASON So what happened in the interim to make it so that someone who didn't take to the piano was at Juilliard studying with Freundlich?

COMMANDAY That's a funny story. With the encouragement of my father, I worked on the flute very seriously. I started to go to the Institute of Musical Art, which was the undergraduate Juilliard (it became Juilliard itself later on) in junior high school. I went to the Institute of Musical Art in junior high school and high school, steadily. I didn't do much with the piano. I didn't feel comfortable with the piano; making music on it wasn't easy for me. As we'll go later on in my career, what I got out of the Army as a result of my musical experiences on the side, was I wanted to become a conductor. So I spent a whole year preparing to enter Juilliard as a graduate student (because I had already graduated college) in conducting. But to enter Juilliard as a conducting student, you had to pass several examinations – one on an orchestral instrument, one on a piano, and then you had to write a fugue in a classroom. The only thing that troubled me was the piano, because I was not very good at it at all. And so I studied piano very intensively for a full year before entering Juilliard; I practiced about eight hours a day for that year. I went and took it [the examination], but I made the mistake of concentrating so much on the piano, that I

had worried about, that I think I should have memorized the orchestral score I had to conduct for the audition. My piano teacher, Reah Sadowsky, was trying to make a pianist of me and had me playing music way over my head and beyond the demands of the audition. So I was accepted as a graduate student in piano, which was the last thing I wanted. And that saved me from what might have been a worse fate, an orchestral conductor's career. I was assigned to Irwin Freundlich. He was critical of my fundamental technique, and took me back to the beginning. To my great surprise, after several months of studying with Irwin, for the first time I could play a piece and feel as if I were making music on the piano, and expressing something. So I was very grateful for him, he was a great teacher. That's how I wound up as a graduate student at Juilliard in piano – quite by accident.

JAMASON That's very amusing. Did you also subsequently study conducting at Juilliard?

COMMANDAY No. After that year at Juilliard (as I say, I was out of the Army) I was concerned to get a job while there were jobs. So I wrote to thirty or forty different colleges that had music departments, and offered my services. I was accepted as an instructor at Ithaca College in New York. That was my first job.

JAMASON I'd like to talk about that, but I'd like to back a little bit before we do. I understand that you studied, before going into the Army, both at Harvard and at the University of California? Or was it just at Harvard?

COMMANDAY I didn't study at the University of California until I came out here to work at the University. While I was working at the University I took classes towards a master's degree.

JAMASON Studying at Harvard, can you describe the scene there musically? Classes or professors that made an impression upon you? What was your degree in?

COMMANDAY When I went to Harvard, assuming I would major in music, I was mentored by a friend of the family (or a friend of a friend) who had what we call a cram-school in Harvard Square. That is, a school that helped students study – that charged private tuition to coach students. It was a significant amount of activity – Franklin Roosevelt's sons were both in that cram-school. He [my mentor] said to me, "If you're at Harvard, you should take advantage of the broader disciplines there. Rather than be a conservatory student at Harvard, try to mix it with other studies." That interested me, and I proposed a double major in music and history. There was no such major – the only dual major at Harvard then was history and literature. So they accepted the idea, and I was given a tutor in history as well as one in music. The upshot was

that while I was at Harvard I took all the classes I needed to major in music, but the distribution courses I took in related history and other fields that could justify the mixture.

JAMASON You mentioned formative musical experiences in the Army, but at Harvard when you were taking these courses, were there particular experiences in conducting, or in playing, that were extremely meaningful for you?

COMMANDAY Well, at Harvard, I didn't have the inspirational, or strong musical instruction that I had had privately. My last and most important flute teacher was the principal flute of the New York Philharmonic, John Wummer. When I went to Harvard, I was assuming that I would study with Georges Laurent, who was the principal flute of the Boston Symphony. But when I got there and saw how hard I would have to study, I knew I wouldn't have two hours a day to devote to flute practice, so I said, "I shouldn't study with Laurent if I can't practice two hours a day." And so I didn't continue studying flute while I was at Harvard. I played in the orchestra and had a good experience at that. I played solos and such, because I was fairly advanced as a flutist by that time. My strongest musical experiences at Harvard were with Donald Grout, the great musicologist, who was my tutor. At Harvard, every student has a tutor, which sounds like it's a support thing, but what a tutor does is assign his students readings and studies to fill in the gaps between courses. Because you only took four courses a year at Harvard, so there'd be a lot of gaps in terms of the disciplines you were studying. That was very useful, and Donald Grout was a real – for me, the one inspiring figure at Harvard. Walter Piston, who taught harmony, was one of the poorer music teachers I ever studied with. I studied piano with Willi Apel, to try to pull that back up. Willi Apel was very important, and Hugo Leichtentritt – the great early musicologist there. But Donald Grout was really the formative influence on me at Harvard, in music.

JAMASON Quite an interesting group of people. Were you hearing new works of Piston during this period?

COMMANDAY Oh, yes. You could hear it at the Boston Symphony, because Serge Koussevitzky did play contemporary music; he commissioned important works of Bartók and Copland and Piston and others. Probably you heard more new music at the Boston Symphony than in other orchestras around the country, because of Koussevitzky. The one Koussevitzky experience I had was strong. I couldn't sing in the Glee Club because I was playing in the orchestra, which rehearsed in the evenings when the Glee Club rehearsed. I sang instead – I knew I wanted to sing, so I sang in the Chapel Choir, which was a better experience because it had Archibald Davison as the conductor. Really, I think, singing under him those years, is one of the things that got me involved in conducting in the Army when I was there. At one point the Harvard Glee Club was going to sing the *B Minor Mass* with Koussevitzky and the Boston Symphony, so I got into my tuxedo and sneaked on stage with the Harvard Glee Club, and sight-

read it, just to have that experience. That was wonderful. But it was Archibald Davison, “Doc” we called him, who was the other formative experience in terms of my later work as a conductor.

JAMASON For this performance that you snuck into – the *B Minor Mass* with Koussevitzky – do you remember the general forces – the size of the choir, the size of the orchestra?

COMMANDAY It was much too big by today’s standards for Bach performance. The Harvard Glee Club and the Radcliffe Choral Society probably amounted to 125-150, and of course the Boston Symphony was full strength. It was the kind of *B Minor Mass* that was being performed in those days.

JAMSON Sure. But it must have been remarkable to do it with Koussevitzky.

COMMANDAY Oh, sure, it was.

JAMASON How did it come to pass that you were conducting in the Army?

COMMANDAY I went into the Army in the infantry. In basic training, you didn’t have the energy or the time to do anything on the side. But after basic training I was transferred into what was called then the Army’s Specialized Training Program – ASTP – which had a language component, and an “engineering” component. For reasons that I’ll never understand, they put me in the engineering, which turned out to be sort of like high school civics and elementary studies. I much later realized that the reason for the ASTP was insurance against the possibility that the war would last very, very long, and that they would need to replenish the officer base in the Army. They put potential officer material into this program to hold them in a bank, so to speak, and keep them from being shot up and lost. I think that was the purpose of the ASTP, because the actual training, say in the engineering area, was minimal. I wound up in Clemson, South Carolina, which was then a tiny men’s military school like Citadel – not the big school that it is today. So I was there, and then while I was there I created a men’s choral group. For recreation, and also to get them out of physical exercises. We did that. Everywhere I went from then on, I would create a male chorus. Again – that was never my assigned duty, that was done on the side.

Eventually, I finally went and asked for a transfer into the language program, and I wound up at the University of Michigan Ann Arbor studying Japanese. This was an extraordinary group of men who had been sent there to study Japanese – two hundred men who were chosen because they were all college educated, they all knew two languages, and they had an IQ above whatever the base minimum was the Army wanted. The Army would assume with this background, we could learn another language. Well, out of that group of two hundred soldiers, I made a fifty piece band. While we were studying Japanese, we wrote a musical comedy – wrote the book, the

score, orchestration, cast it with some of the coeds, and produced it on the campus in Ann Arbor, Michigan. That was a formative experience, because I had so much responsibility. Later on, when we were trans-shipped to another post in Virginia, I created a male chorus there. And then in my final posting, which was in Arlington, Virginia, where I was a cryptanalytic translator (translating decoded messages that had been intercepted) we prepared a musical there on the side. But the Japanese were defeated and the war was over before we could get it on the boards. So that one never happened.

JAMASON That's fascinating. And so, at the end of the war, is it at this point you were writing to the colleges and began work at Ithaca College?

COMMANDAY I didn't start writing until after I had finished that year at Juilliard. And then that summer after I finished at Juilliard I wrote thirty, forty colleges and that's when I got – at Ithaca College, the Dean of the School of Music was a German (Victor Ludwig von Rebmann) who had gone to Heidelberg and had what we called a “Schmiss” – a scar from a saber duel on his face. He was a real old Heidelberger. He had an emotional attachment for the German tradition of the male choruses, so he really wanted one at his school. Ithaca College was primarily a teacher's college, but it had a very strong music department and a very strong athletic department. And so I was brought there specifically to create a male chorus, and also teach other courses in harmony and musicianship.

JAMASON That's wonderful. How long were you teaching there – at Ithaca?

COMMANDAY Just one year, because something extraordinary happened. The male chorus turned out to be pretty good, and it turned out Donald Grout, who had been my mentor at Harvard, was now the music chair at Cornell University. He heard what I did. A former teacher at Cornell University, a man named John Kuypers, was now at the University of Illinois as Dean of the School of Music, and he needed a choral director. So he came around, and Donald Grout recommended me. I auditioned using the Cornell – I was granted to use of the Cornell Sage Chapel Choir, and I auditioned with the Mozart *Coronation Mass*. Kuypers offered me a job. There was a catch to this – he offered me the sun and the moon, but he only gave me Pluto. So I was double-crossed, and that's the beginning of another story.

JAMASON Well I'd be very curious to hear that story.

COMMANDAY Well, I got to the University of Illinois. It was a big school, it had a faculty of sixty – and it was a school of music. The choral department was in shambles, and so I had to rebuild the university chorus, rebuild the a cappella choir, the women's glee club. There was a men's glee club, but like the men's glee club at Cornell, it was a popular group in the Fred Waring tradition – not a serious male chorus like Harvard, Yale, and others. So I had nothing to

do with the male chorus or the glee club at Illinois. But the other groups I did, and I also helped with the establishment of the opera workshop at the University of Illinois, which was one of the earlier ones. In addition to that, because of this strange composite contract I wound up being offered, part of my contract was in university extension. So in order to reach out to the choral groups in all the high schools and the University of Illinois, I created a publication called *Illinois Chorus*. I'd travel around the state visiting Illinois choruses in high schools, and wrote up and published this little journal. It was a good experience for me, because I got a good look at what was an extraordinary public education situation in Illinois. When I eventually came to California, I could see a contrast, because the traditions in the Midwest in music education, and the levels of instruction and performance were much higher in the Midwest. That gave me a base to evaluate what was happening in California when I came here. So anyway, I did very well, I thought. In the spring he created an excuse to tell me he wasn't going to rehire me the next fall.

I much later realized that I was never hired on the basis that I thought was the case, but that I was a placeholder. He wanted an older, established, well-known figure – couldn't find one in time, but had to have someone in that position, so he hired me as a placeholder. It turns out that this man, Kuypers, was doing terrible things in the operation of his department, and double crossing other faculty members, and talking behind their backs, and planting stories with one about the other, and it became a very unhappy situation. After he told me in the spring of my first year that he wasn't going to rehire me, I complained to the dean, and the dean insisted that I be retained for another year. During that second year, two things happened. Forty members of the sixty member faculty caucused in someone's home and everything came out of all the dirty tricks this man had been playing, and the nastiness of his administration. It all came out, and we all complained to the dean of the Letters of Science. We were asked to write letters of complaint outlining our individual complaints, and the man was removed as dean. But it was already too late for me, because he had already hired my successor. At that time there was a graduate student there in linguistics named Joanne Bostrom, we were dating, and we got married that spring in Illinois. Happily, the composer Andrew Imbrie, with whom I had struck up a friendship in the Army at Arlington Hall – he was teaching music at Cal. He knew I had to leave Illinois, but he knew there was a post available at California. He told me about it, I came out, interviewed for it, and was given the job. So at the end of the academic year in Illinois, my wife and I came out here.

JAMASON Do you recall the year?

COMMANDAY Yes, that was the late spring of 1950.

JAMASON I'm curious – for a young man, a young faculty member, who had these incredible experiences as a very young man in New York, and later in Boston – what was your

impression at first of the general musical scene in California, and in the Bay Area? As compared to the East Coast and whatever expectation you had when you arrived here.

COMMANDAY It was impressive. I didn't compare it to New York because the concentration of activity in New York is so unique that there's no point in making that kind of a comparison. But the professional level of the Opera and the Symphony certainly was important to me. The Opera didn't then compare to the Metropolitan Opera. I didn't mention earlier that also as a very young person, I would go to the old Metropolitan Opera. That's where I started opera, was at the Met, and heard some of the greatest singers – Rosa Ponselle, Salvatore Baccaloni; Giovanni Martinelli was my first Italian tenor. I had a great introduction at the Met to opera when I was young. The level at the San Francisco Opera wasn't that high then – it quickly picked up in the mid '50s. But of course Pierre Monteux had the San Francisco Symphony. The power of his talent and his leadership made this orchestra play better than it would have seemed possible, given the shortness of its season. In those days, the San Francisco Symphony played a season of fifteen or sixteen weeks, and the musicians all had to play other jobs during the rest of the year – nightclubs and theaters and wherever they could find work. They didn't have the stature of the orchestras in Boston and New York, Chicago and Philadelphia, by a long shot then. They did play very well because of Monteux, so that was impressive. Chorus work here was pretty good, but not in the schools, because one interesting thing occurred. The groups that I conducted at Cal – the University of California Glee Club and the Treble Clef Society – the men's and women's groups which sang separately and overlapping their rehearsals, sang together.

One of their traditions was that they were operated administratively by student managers – a manager went up from sophomore, junior, senior manager. The kids really ran the show, administratively. One of the traditions they had was the high school singing festival. These student managers would invite sixty high school choruses from all over the state – that is, from Nevada City and up – down as far as Fresno and Clovis, and these choruses would come to Cal on a Saturday morning in the fall, and sing in different rooms at Cal for judges who were not awarding them prizes – first, second and third, or anything like that – but were giving them constructive criticisms – that's what they received from this experience, and they sang for each other, of course, competitively in that sense. They were grouped by size of school, so that the big school choruses would sing in this room, and the smaller school choruses in that room, and the next smaller schools' choruses would sing in another room. At noontime they would go up to the Greek Theater, have lunch, and the Glee Club and Treble Clef would sing a short recital for them. Then in the afternoon they would go to the Cal football game. That was a great experience, and they ran that every year I was at Cal, for thirteen years. It was a very strong activity that the students did. But it gave me a chance to see what the level of high school choral singing was in the state, and over the years in the '50s it declined as music education support declined during the '50s. Some school systems like San Francisco never had really strong school choirs. Others

were surprising – Modesto and Richmond and Castlemont High School, which was even then all African American – the Castlemont High School was singing choruses from the *B Minor Mass*. So there were some remarkable things going on. During the time that I was conducting these groups, I had a chance to judge competitions at choral festivals and also conduct as a festival conductor mass choruses and those kinds of things. That was a good experience, I did a lot of that.

JAMASON I understand that around this period was when you started working with the Oakland Symphony Chorus?

COMMANDAY This was late in the game, as we'll get to it. I left Cal in 1963, after thirteen years, and at the very end of my tenure at Cal – I don't know whether it was '60, '61, or '62, I don't remember the exact date, I'd have to look it up, I was asked to take over the Oakland Symphony Chorus, which had had a slow but uneven start. The year before it hadn't really done very much, and then I took it over. The conductor at the Oakland Symphony was a man named Gerhard Samuel, and the situation was very interesting because in the early '50s, when I arrived, the Oakland Symphony was a community orchestra – volunteer. In the mid-1950s, Piero Bellugi was brought into Cal to teach and to conduct the Cal orchestra. He was asked to take over the Oakland Symphony. He half-professionalized it. He moved it towards a professional orchestra. When Gerhard came, he made it a fully professional orchestra and started producing a repertoire that was the match of a repertoire anywhere. He did more not only contemporary music, but more interesting mixes on his programs than anyone else was doing. It developed a great following from Berkeley. So at the Oakland Auditorium Theater, which is a small theater on the northern end of the Oakland Auditorium, it had the best acoustics of any auditorium being used for a symphony at the time – after all, the San Francisco Symphony was performing in the Opera House and acoustically that was not good at all for them. So you were in the presence of the music when you were in that hall. You really were immersed in it. It was a good orchestra, with very good repertoire, so Gerhard developed a big following. He was doing works that the San Francisco Symphony hadn't even thought of, like Charles Ives' *4th Symphony*, and Berg's *Lyric Suite*, and other things that the Symphony had never done. So it was a strong operation.

Also, at that time in Aptos (which is just below Santa Cruz) developed what was called the Cabrillo Music Festival. It was called Cabrillo because it was held at a little auditorium on the Cabrillo College, which was the community college in Aptos. The community down from Santa Cruz to Watsonville supported this very nicely. Gerhard asked me to create a small choir to work at this festival. So I had a chorus of about twenty-five, thirty – mostly consisting of people who came down from Oakland, and a few that were natives of the area down there. We did several choral works within a two or three week period, and did extraordinary things there. The West Coast premiere of Mozart's *Idomeneo* was one of the things we performed, and an opera by Haydn, Rameau's *Hippolyte et Aricie*. So it was very exciting, and his programming there was

wonderful. For me, the Oakland Symphony Chorus became very special. We did with the Oakland Symphony about three choral works a year, and they were a group of average vocal talent, but they were dedicated people that did a lot of woodshedding, so we could do that many choral works. At one point, late in my experience with them, we did Beethoven's *Missa solemnis*, which they learned in seven rehearsals. I loved that group. They performed way over their heads. To me those two choruses were special. I tried very hard – because, in the last three years of my tenure at the Oakland Chorus I was already the Chronicle's music critic. I tried very hard to convince the Oakland Symphony to reach out and perform in Berkeley and Walnut Creek and Hayward and Alameda, and the manager of that orchestra – they never had the impulse or the strength to do that. I jokingly told the Berkeley Symphony people at a public event in which I was talking recently, that they have me to thank for the existence of the Berkeley Symphony because had the Oakland Symphony followed my advice and performed in Berkeley, there would have been no Berkeley Symphony. But since no one would consciously take the advice of a music critic, the fact that I proposed it guaranteed that the Oakland Symphony would never perform in Berkeley. And that's why the Berkeley Symphony was born.

JAMASON That's hilarious.

COMMANDAY As far as the Oakland Symphony history was concerned, after a while of my being both the music critic for the Chronicle and conducting the Oakland Symphony Chorus, it became evident that I should give it up. Not because there were that many complaints about it, but I felt that the opportunity should go to someone whose profession it was, and I was now a professional critic, and should not try to do a dual role and work as a conductor. I knew that I had to give up conducting if I were going to continue being a music critic. So I gave it up, and two or three years later, some conservatives on the Oakland Symphony Board that were openly critical of his programming, because it was unconventional, and secretly critical of the fact that he was gay, they eventually forced him out, which eventually led to the death of the Oakland Symphony as we know it, because the succeeding conductors and their following wasn't strong enough to hold it together. That's another long story, about the bankruptcy of the Oakland Symphony.

JAMASON Well, we're going to spend most of this second session speaking about your career as a critic, but since you brought it up, I am curious to know just from a personal point of view, what were your feelings at this time as you said you were giving up conducting, giving up an active career as a performer. Did you have mixed feelings? Was there confusion? Or was this an easy decision to make?

COMMANDAY A – I loved conducting and I still do, more than anything. So it was an easy decision, but it was not a happy decision. That's really the way I felt about it. The other thing was – first of all, I would have liked to do more orchestral conducting than I did. I did

some, and we'll talk about the last conducting that I did professionally, later. But in order to be a choral conductor, you have to spend a large percent of your time recruiting singers, and do a lot of the administrative work yourself. This business of always recruiting singers, and having to do that ... after all this wasn't Bob Shaw's Collegiate Chorale, where people would just come because they wanted to sing with Bob Shaw. Whereas I was always able to get singers to come and work with me, it was that kind of activity – having to do that – that I was tired of. The actual conducting – that was never a strain or an effort. It was clear to me, too, that to be a conductor on the side, when younger people coming along need that in their careers, didn't seem to be fair, and that I should use my stature as a critic to take advantage of.... I did conduct for three years – the San Francisco State University had (still has) a Sunday afternoon series called the Morrison Concert Series. The head of it at the time was a wonderful violist, Ferenc Molnar, and for a time the principal viola of the Symphony. He invited me to conduct an orchestra of my choice. So I created – at that time, there was very little work being done of interest in the chamber orchestra genre, so I saw an opportunity to program something for chamber orchestra that would be very interesting. So for three years in a row I did a pick-up orchestra using men and women from the Oakland and San Francisco Symphonies, and created an orchestra of let's say twenty – I don't remember the exact number. And was able to do very interesting programs once a year. That was fun, I loved doing that. But there again too – I had to be the contractor, I had to do the administrative work, and that was tedious. It was worth it, but it was tedious.

JAMASON What's your impression when you look at the general scene now? It seems to me that there's an enormous amount of choruses in the Bay Area. Does this surprise you?

COMMANDAY It was a surprise. There are five hundred choruses in the Bay Area. There's a woman named Helene Whitson who has made herself the doyenne of chorus work around here. She has a little publication, and she's the one who did the statistic on this. And that's wonderful because it creates a fundament of the musical scene that's not seen, and people aren't aware of, but it's there. It's very effective. It especially reinforces the fact that the high school choruses aren't that well developed – the ones that still exist. So it does take that form, and that's wonderful. About seven years ago, the Music Critics of North America – I was the president of it for two terms in the '80s, and it was in the days when there were newspapers, it was very strong and active – many hundred members – and at one of their annual meetings in the East, they put out a questionnaire and it was voted that the San Francisco Bay Area was the second most active classical music scene in the county. We already knew it was the second most active dance scene. I thought this was very impressive, because we had after all, four or five contemporary music ensembles working independently, and the regional orchestras as well as the San Francisco Symphony and the Opera, and then the other opera companies – there were then several opera companies in the Bay Area. There was one in Oakland, there was one in Walnut Creek, there was one in Palo Alto. One had a brief life in Martinez. There was a lot of activity. It was a thrill to be part of that. In relationship to that, and importantly connected with that, was the

support of newspapers. When I came here there were four daily newspapers in San Francisco, and newspapers in every town around, and most of them had music critics. In the 1980s, Andrew Porter, who was then the music critic for the New Yorker Magazine, came out here for a semester to teach at Cal, and naturally attended performances that were going on while he was here. He said flat out that when he would go into the press rooms, and saw the number of music critics that were showing up, he said, “There’s a more active music press here than in London.”

JAMASON Wow.

COMMANDAY I thought that was extraordinary, given the number of major symphony orchestras alone in London, and the two major opera companies and the rest. But in any case, that’s what he said. We had San Mateo and Richmond and Berkeley – all these towns had music critics. It was great. That of course helps importantly in supporting the music scene, because of all the writing that was going on.

JAMASON We’re curious, given that we’re coming to you from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music archives, if you might be willing to talk about some early days at the Conservatory, or any interactions you had in the ‘50s and the ‘60s, with some of the founding members and some of the more celebrated faculty. I’m wondering if you ever had interactions with Ada Clement or Lillian Hodghead?

COMMANDAY No, I never met them, not at all. The first president of the Conservatory that I met was Milton Salkind’s predecessor – what’s his name? I have a block on his name, I’ll have to look it up. I didn’t have a close relationship with him, so that’s why the name doesn’t come easily to me.

JAMASON Was it Albert Elkus?

COMMANDAY No. Well, I knew Albert Elkus very well, because he taught at Cal. I was close to his children, and to his wonderful wife. Albert Elkus was special. There was another man who came after Elkus, before Milton Salkind.

UPDIKE Robin Laufer.

COMMANDAY Yes, that was his name. He was a very nice man, but I didn’t have a working relationship with him. I was aware of him. I had little occasion to go over to the Conservatory. Milton Salkind and his wife Peggy – Milton was in Irwin Freundlich’s piano class with me at Juilliard, that’s where I met him. He was engaged to Peggy Salkind, who was not studying with Irwin, but with Olga Samaroff Stokowski. So we were friends from way back, and then he became the president here. So I had a nice friendly relationship with Milton all through

his tenure here, and could observe what was happening. But I never taught at the Conservatory, I never had a professional relationship with the Conservatory. But I would occasionally come out here, and members of the faculty like Bonnie Hampton and Nate Schwartz were very good friends of mine. Many of the faculty were very good friends of mine.

JAMASON How would you characterize the position of the Conservatory – the impact of the Conservatory – in San Francisco’s musical scene? Let’s say, in the early ‘50s and ‘60s. Obviously they had a great impact on their students, but was it an organization that was active – that the general public was going to chamber music concerts, or different kinds of concerts there, or was more on the sort of sidelines?

COMMANDAY As long as they were out on 19th and Ortega there wasn’t the public involvement in terms of attending that there became after. Before the renovation at 19th and Ortega where they created a recital hall – the recital hall was simply a large classroom. And so giving recitals there was not what it became after the renovation when they created that recital hall. I think from that moment on – from the renovation on – the public became much more involved. Especially the outreach to Board members, and the Board members outreach to their friends. That’s when it became an audience thing. I think it’s clear that the music community supported it, because they did have the financial support to keep it going. After all, it did give employment to Symphony members who did a high percentage of the orchestral instrument teaching there, and so forth. It was always the leading music school in San Francisco. I always wished that it would create an East Bay branch, especially for the young students – primary areas that McCarthy later was in charge of. I think if they had a branch, say, in Oakland, it would have done a lot of good. Because to ask young students to come from the East Bay out to 19th and Ortega was a hell of a stretch. They could very well have hired a small facility in the East Bay and done it here. There wasn’t the initiative and the thrust to do that. I was critical of that.

JAMASON Interesting idea. I suspect now that it’s on Oak Street it’s a little bit more centrally located.

COMMANDAY Oh yes, because now they can reach it by BART, and it’s a much better situation from that standpoint.

JAMASON I think the Conservatory was only at its first address for just a couple of years when you arrived in the Bay Area. Do you recall ever going to its building on Sacramento Street?

COMMANDAY Never.

JAMASON I'm curious to know more about the general scene and your impression of it in the 1950s, early '60s. You mentioned earlier – you alluded to the quality of the San Francisco Opera changing in the mid-1950s. I'm wondering if you could speak to that, and any personal recollections you might have of Kurt Adler?

COMMANDAY Kurt Adler is a whole chapter. Before Adler came, Gaetano Merola had a very old school type of opera where they did many operas with only a couple of performances of each. So they had turnover productions – that is, the productions were very fundamental and uninteresting. They weren't creating new productions for operas that came along – they did eight or nine operas in a short season, just churning them out. So staging and production, from a standpoint of today's qualities, was very rudimentary. So Adler came in, and he established a different kind of thing where they did fewer operas with more performances of each opera, and then they could invest more in the production values and in the hiring of a director. Under Merola, the same director did one opera after another, he churned them out. Most of the singers that came went through the motions that they remembered from their other performances elsewhere. So, in effect, a performance would be, from a staging point of view, a macaronic performance where say five principals were each contributing staging from their own experiences. It was a very different kind of thing. And then Adler professionalized it, in the kind of way that we're familiar with today. As was legendary, he was a very tough, strict director. Not a paperclip moved without his approval. There are all kinds of very amusing anecdotes about that. And then when I became music critic – well, before that I had a very amusing experience. He was doing *Lohengrin* one year. *Lohengrin* requires a lot of male chorus – more than can be supplied by just the men in the opera chorus. So I was called by the Opera and asked if I could provide an additional male chorus. Well, I called up my alumni from the Cal Glee Club. They came in, thirty or forty of them, and we rehearsed the *Lohengrin* choruses for any number of weeks. They supplied the supplemental male chorus for this *Lohengrin*, and they each received five dollars for each performance. It was all very good, they went down to Los Angeles, they performed with the San Francisco Opera in Los Angeles, and then when they came back I called up the Opera and asked for tickets for a performance. To my astonishment, although I had done all of this work for nothing, no – they couldn't give me complimentary tickets. So I raised hell. That's how cheap it was, you know. And then of course they did, eventually. I was not a music critic then – when I became a music critic I had wonderful fights with Kurt Adler. We'd go toe to toe, and it was wonderful because I knew what he knew that I knew, and he knew what I knew that he knew, and so they were wonderful battles.

JAMASON These were amicable battles, though, I gather.

COMMANDAY Well, you know, they were professional battles. That was a good relationship, and I can tell many anecdotes about that history between us. But, by and large, he never did anything like calling me up, if I gave a very critical or negative review of a

performance. He never would call me up and row with me, he was professional, he accepted what I said, whether he liked it or not. I'm sure most of the time he agreed with me. Most of the time his criticisms of his own production were more severe than mine – I'm sure of that. So that probably also held him back from being too critical of me. I felt we had a mutual respect, all through it, although we had our arguments. I enjoyed the relationship, and I think he respected me, and that was fine.

JAMASON In the early days when you were here, in the '50s, did the Symphony and the San Francisco Opera Orchestra share players?

COMMANDAY Oh, yes! The Opera Orchestra was mostly San Francisco Symphony players. I don't know whether 60 or 70 percent of the San Francisco Symphony players played the Opera, but that's what it was. That made things difficult, because it meant when they started their own seasons – the reason for that is the reason the San Francisco Opera has the fall season exactly when it does. Because it had its season before the San Francisco Symphony would go into action. In those days, by the time the San Francisco Symphony started in late or mid-November, the men were tired. Because they had been in all these Opera rehearsals and late performances, and such, and they were tired by then. So the Orchestra would start at a disadvantage for that reason. When they opened Davies Symphony Hall in 1980, and split the Opera and the Symphony Orchestra, that was the best thing that could have happened for music in this town. They had their option whether they would go with the Opera or stay with the Symphony. Some preferred to go with the Opera, and most stayed with the Symphony. That was a change of life. All the standards went up then – both orchestras played better.

JAMASON That's fascinating. And so the season, as it's currently broken up for the Opera, has its origins because of this?

COMMANDAY That's right.

JAMASON Fascinating. I understand that there were many discussions over the years of changing the format of the season at the Opera, and having more of a continuous season. Do you know why that's never – now that the orchestras are completely divided – why that's never changed?

COMMANDAY I think it's based on a number of issues. A basic issue is that the tradition here, and what the Opera constituency is accustomed to, is a fall season. And then later on, there came a spring season – or there was spring opera, and then later on a little summer season. I think the fact that the audience was accustomed to that helped keep it where it was. The second thing was the availability of singers. A big problem, even today, is getting singers to come here. David Gockley has recently spoken about the fact that a singer can stay in Europe and sing in

two or three different productions in different companies within a month. When he comes here, he can only sing in one production for say, three weeks, or whatever the period of time is. So he can make much more money in Europe.

JAMASON Well, it's fascinating – I'm very curious to know your thoughts about how that's changed over the years. You mentioned hearing Martinelli and Rosa Ponselle in the '20s and '30s. What's your impression on the impact this has on performers today? That a singer in Europe can be performing or in production, or in rehearsals for several productions at once – as opposed to the old days, when singers would come to an opera house and sing in that opera house – at least for the duration of one production?

COMMANDAY There's no question, in the old days when flying wasn't as easy and as fast and as comfortable as today – when they would come out here with their families and stay for a month, they were more relaxed and it was a better situation – no question. When they fly in and then fly out ... it's more difficult today for general directors of opera companies to operate. I suspect that some of the replacement problems we have – that is to say, singers getting sick and having to cancel – has to do with this flying and coming in a place with a shorter leash on their home-base than before. I think there's probably more vulnerability to colds and other problems now than there was then. I think the level of singers – it's just a question of whether opera companies can pay enough and be seductive enough to get the best singers. But I think we get an appropriately high percentage of the better singers here today. I don't think we're missing the Rosa Ponselles and the Giovanni Martinellis today. We're hearing them.

MARY Do you want to say anything about nineteenth-century singers coming to San Francisco?

COMMANDAY Oh, that's a whole other story. I'm writing a book on the subject. But the nineteenth-century was a whole different thing because they would come here for months. Whole companies would come here. There were thirty companies in the nineteenth-century who came here and stayed for periods of time. So it was a different situation. But then we weren't necessarily getting the best singers either, because the ones that wanted [to be] a transplant from Europe for several months at a time were not the best ones.

JAMASON I'm very excited to read this book. It's a fascinating subject. I know that Adelina Patti was here, and that Tetrzzini was beloved here.

COMMANDAY She was discovered here.

JAMASON Oh, that's right. Was it at the Tivoli Opera?

COMMANDAY Yeah, at the Tivoli. She had done well in Mexico, but her career didn't take off until she sang at the Tivoli, and by chance Gaetano Merola came through here as an accompanist or something, and he heard her and sent a postcard to the Met about her. I've seen that postcard that the Met has in its museum, recommending her. Her career took off really significantly – she was already doing well, but it took off significantly.

JAMASON That's going to be a wonderful thing to read. I know the Tivoli has a very unique, marvelous history in this town.

COMMANDAY About four thousand performances.

JAMASON Incredible. I love the fact that, from what I understand, that millionaires could be sitting next to workers, and everybody was sitting there with a cup of beer, enjoying a performance – a real people's opera house.

COMMANDAY Right. That's exactly what it was.

JAMASON Wonderful. Just a few more questions about the Symphony. Could you talk a little bit more about your impressions of Monteux – as far as the general style – the sound of the orchestra? Maybe contrasting it with what happened later, at the end of his tenure?

COMMANDAY That's easy to do because the contrast became so strong. It was a beautifully unified orchestra under him. I'm sure that the sonority was nowhere near what it is today. I don't think that the level of performers in the orchestra (whole section wise – the viola section or the double bass section) had the sonority that it does today. There's no question that it does – it's just they played musically as well as could be done in those days. Towards the end of his career here, even though he conducted twelve or thirteen weeks a season, he became a little impatient and tired of dealing with the union. Maybe just even dealing with the same orchestra that much. He was glad to retire when he did. But when he retired, the orchestra's president was J.D. Zellerbach, who was called Dave, which was his middle name. He exerted too much influence, and the choice of successor narrowed down to some marvelous names. I think George Szell was one of the names – William Steinberg, and even Leonard Bernstein. And then they wound up choosing – or Dave Zellerbach influenced the choice of this conductor who was a Catalan – he came from Barcelona, but he had been conducting in South Africa – Enrique Jordá. Enrique Jordá, whom I got to know very well, would have been ideal as a dean of a conservatory. He was an elegant man with a fine education. One of the mistakes he made with the San Francisco Symphony was he talked too much. He talked them to death, and they got very impatient with that. He had a wonderful sense for repertoire, so he did program beautifully, which brought him the respect of Alfred Frankenstein, my predecessor at the San Francisco Chronicle. Al Fried, who was the music critic for the Examiner, was more critical of him as a

conductor. Well, as became legendary, standards of playing went down terribly. Not only standards of playing, the members of the orchestra (and this is a fact) became really indifferent. They didn't practice at home, they didn't maintain their instruments, they took up different hobbies. The famous double bass player had a sailboat, and another one was a photographer, and another collected automobiles. One man that I knew very well who had a prominent violin shop said, "The violinists wouldn't get their bows rehaired, or their violins properly maintained!" The morale was just awful. I heard some pretty terrible performances. So things were very bad, and the history speaks to that. I worked with Monteux when I prepared my choruses at Cal – we'd join with the University chorus, and sometimes the Stanford chorus. We would do the major works with the Symphony, so I prepared works for Monteux. I had one very funny experience with one particular performance with him and his temper. But he was wonderful. I could tell you the anecdote, if you're interested.

JAMASON Please.

COMMANDAY It was Berlioz's *Damnation of Faust*, and the male chorus is dominant. If there are twelve choruses in the course of that, eight or nine of them are primarily male choruses. Well, the University and the Stanford chorus didn't have enough men to make a dent in that, so they asked me. My men were going to go on tour in the state, as we did every year in January. They were reluctant to distract from our rehearsals to do that. I said, "We'll just have to learn the male choruses, you won't have to learn the mixed choruses." So, "OK," and we did it. So we showed up at the first rehearsal, which was in Wheeler Auditorium at Cal, and my men were sitting in the middle in the front, and the other choruses were around us. The first chorus was a mixed chorus, so Monteux got up – this was his first rehearsal with the chorus – he motioned for the choruses to stand. It was a mixed chorus, so my men didn't stand. "Why don't they stand?!" "Well, Maestro, there's this arrangement that they'll just sing the male chorus." "Oh, no! Everybody must sing everything!" And he went into a tantrum. So I went up and said, "I'll work on the men, it's all right, they'll be able to sing all the choruses." But he was still angry. By the time we got to the soldiers and students chorus, which is a very complicated chorus – one part in 6/8 and another part in 2/4 – when it came one against the other, the soldiers and the students, he was still angry and he took it at a terrible clip – not even French people could sing it that fast. And then he was very angry. I said, "I'll get them up to tempo, they'll be able to do it." And I did rehearse it so they could. Come the performance, he goes along and takes it at a perfectly nice, normal tempo. So I went backstage after and said, "I noticed this, and you can feel confident that you can take it much faster." "Oh no, that's the correct tempo," he said. Well, that was fine, and we went through the rest of the performances, and they were fine. That summer I was in Tanglewood, and he was conducting Berlioz's *Requiem*. The tenor who had been the soloist in San Francisco was also the soloist for that. He told me that Monteux had been raving all over the place about the wonderful performance he had in San Francisco ... we had never heard about that. But that's OK, he was a great man, and I don't hold anything against him. The problem with

the collapse of the San Francisco Symphony was very serious, and it was made more serious when it came time to renew Jordá's contract, and J.D. Zellerbach exerted his influence and renewed his contract. I was very fond of Jordá, I prepared works for him, too, and Mary sang with him (my wife, in my choruses). And so I was very fond of him, but things didn't go well for him and the orchestra was in bad shape. It became well-known.

JAMASON In the Monteux days, was there anything about the sound of the orchestra that could be characterized as "French"? Regarding the sound of the strings, the shimmer, that sort of characteristic French sound. Did that transfer out here?

COMMANDAY I wish I could tell you that I had a real clear memory so I can answer that. Colleagues of mine recall the sound of a singer twenty, thirty, forty years ago. They are recalling the effect of that performance on them. I challenge whether the sound of that voice is really in their ear. There are certain exceptions – the sound of Flagstad was unique, the sound of Caruso was unique. There are certain singers ... but, by and large, you don't have absolute recall of sonority, I don't think so. All I can remember was the unity, the transparency, the clarity, and the ensemble, but not the sonority; I just don't think I can recall that. Also, I was listening to the San Francisco Symphony in the Opera House, where the acoustics were terrible. Now my sound for the San Francisco Symphony is in Davies Hall, so that orchestra is prejudiced by the fact that they weren't playing in a good hall. It makes a big difference. I'll never forget when Josef Krips took the San Francisco Symphony to Japan on a tour when they were still in the Opera House. When they played in Osaka, I wrote in my review, "This is the first time the San Francisco Symphony could hear itself."

JAMASON Wow.

COMMANDAY It was a total change for them to be able to hear themselves. It affected their playing enormously. What the San Francisco Symphony could do in the Opera House, under Monteux or whomever, was prejudiced by the fact that they couldn't hear themselves very well.

JAMASON That's fascinating. I want to ask you about the hiring – I understand that the orchestra was, as all orchestras were in the '40s and '50s, really lacking in diversity, to say the least. As far as the makeup of the orchestra – men, women, African Americans, etc. Was it covered in the press the orchestra hiring Charles Burrell as a bassist, who I understand was an African-American musician?

COMMANDAY I don't think so. I must say that it should be noted that Monteux hired women. I don't know if it was the first major American orchestra to hire women, I can't say that, but I remember who they were. There were women hired in the San Francisco Symphony – a

cellist that we knew that Mary worked with, and some violinists, and of course the harpist, because harpists were traditionally women. So Monteux did hire women. The absence of black, or African-American musicians, I don't think had much to do with the fact that they were black. I think it had to do with – they didn't have the opportunities and the family support and the financial support to achieve the technical level that qualified them to compete. I'm sure there were mistakes – I'm sure there were individuals that could have and should have been hired, but across the board in the country I think that was a basic problem. Later on, and I don't know when the screened auditions were introduced – I think that's a historical thing, and one could find out from the union when screened auditions were introduced. When screens were introduced, then there was no question about men, women, black, whatever, because you couldn't know who was behind the screen. There are famous cases – I know the Cleveland Orchestra wound up hiring a left-handed violinist. He played like this [gestures]. Because of having to coordinate with the players, he had to sit on a back stand. Otherwise it wouldn't work for him to sit next to a right-handed violinist. But behind a screen they had no way of knowing he was a left-handed violinist.

JAMASON To sort of lead into our discussion in our next sessions about your work as a writer and a journalist, who were some of the critics you mentioned earlier, when you first arrived in the Bay Area that made an impression upon you? What was your general feeling about the state of musical criticism in the Bay Area? I know that you had said that it was remarkable as for the amount. Were there particular writers you admired – either here or elsewhere?

COMMANDAY Well, yes, there were, but most of the critics in the Bay Area were supportive writers. They wrote positively most of the time, unless a performance was an obvious disaster. Far and away the best critic was my predecessor, Al Frankenstein, who not only had a good ear, but his style of writing was absolutely superb. Even when one disagreed with him, he wrote very well. He had humor and an inventiveness that was special. He was for the same reason an excellent lecturer in both art and music. He covered art and music for the Chronicle. Al Fried, who was actually longer on the job than Al Frankenstein, had also covered art and music. Al was a good writer – a little bit more positive and less perceptive ... let's put it that way. As far as critics elsewhere in the country that I read – growing up in New York of course I read Olin Downes, and the early Virgil Thompson, who was the most interesting critic of all the ones I knew, and who became in my critic years a friend and colleague. We got along very well. Harold Schonberg also became a very good friend and colleague, but I was critical of Harold because of his rather unreasonable rejection of certain styles of music, especially twelve-tone music. It was a knee-jerk response on his part. I don't think – if there was any influence on me, it might have been by Al Frankenstein, but only in terms of wanting to develop the kind of freedom and humor that he had – not to try to imitate his style, because I don't think you can. You have to write conversationally. The one thing I learned, and didn't realize until very late in my career, is how I became a journalist. I had no journalistic experience in my life except for writing a couple of columns when I was in high school. But I had done a lot of writing academically, and then I

wrote program notes for the programs that I was conducting. But I had no journalistic experience. I never realized why it eventually became easy for me – or how I developed a style unconsciously. It's because I was an inveterate letter-writer when I was growing up. I realized late in my career that journalistic writing is epistolary writing. You are writing a letter. When you have that approach, and you're not writing a letter with anybody in mind, you develop a relationship with your reader in your style, as if you are writing a letter to the reader. And that's the trick. It's not something you can learn from a teacher, or even necessarily by reading other people's reviews. It's your own style because that's the way you write a letter. And so after I was at it for a while, someone would compliment me, and I'd be kind of surprised. Because in the first couple of years it didn't come easily.

JAMASON Do you remember the experience of your first printed review for the Chronicle?

COMMANDAY No, I don't, but I know that I would have writer's block.

JAMASON What was the turn-around time in those days? Would the article happen the next day?

COMMANDAY That was fortunate, because shortly after I started writing, we weren't overnighting. Overnighting is when you come in at eleven o'clock after the performance and write it for the next morning's paper. In those days, two things: our deadline was twelve noon the next day – twelve or one o'clock in the afternoon – it was very easy. Early in the game I had some overnighting to do, but mostly, for much of my career, I had until late the next morning to do it, and that was fine. Except for the opening night of the Opera, when from a news point of view they wanted it the next day. So what I would do is, between acts I would go to the telephone and do a review of what had just happened to somebody on the other end who was called a "catcher." I was very fortunate because the catcher – the editor of what we called the Datebook section – was a man who was very familiar with music, would go to a lot of Opera and Symphony performances. I didn't have to spell out any names for him, and he knew what I was talking about – I wasn't just talking to some reporter in the paper. Initially, of course, I'd kind of choke up at the idea of just talking a review into the phone of something that important. And then after a short spell it got to be fun. It really got to be fun. Then I would go back to the next act, and if there were any significant changes in what the tenor had done that was so bad in the first act, I would make the necessary corrections and move it on. Then at the end of the opera I would go and tie it up and it would come out the next day. For me, that became a lot of fun, actually.

JAMASON That does sound like fun. In those early days, what was the frequency and how was it determined – would your editors make assignments? Did you pick out which performances and how many a week you would go to?

COMMANDAY The head critic was the boss, and I made the decisions. Nobody else in the newspaper. We were fortunate because eventually we had a staff of three – myself and two others. We were also covering dance. So every week I would make a sheet which would give the assignments for everybody for the week, and I'd chose who would go to what and when, and space it out, and pass it out. We'd give the editor of the Datebook section a copy, and she knew what was coming, and that was it. That was fine because I never got any orders from above "To do this" or "Not do that." It was always my choice. My first Datebook editor was the younger sister of a very famous journalist called I.F. Stone. I.F. Stone wrote a political weekly in the East, and he was a very sharp and progressive writer. He was very famous, and she was a very smart woman. Her specialty was film, and she did a certain amount of film reviewing herself. She was the Datebook editor. When I came on, it was a good thing for me, because she was something rare on a newspaper – she was a teacher. She could teach, and most of my colleagues who have gone into journalism from scratch, to become newspaper critics overnight, never get much coaching or teaching, they just have to do it and work it out themselves. She was tough on me, and in my initial months she would have me rewrite a lot. Rewrite articles and stories, and give me tips about, for example, how to do an interview, which I had never done before. What kind of words to use that were complimentary, and what insidious words I could use to characterize someone without actually criticizing the subject. It was fun. At first, she did make me rewrite a lot, and so I learned a lot from her, that was very important.

JAMASON This is the last question for today's session, and it's a big one, which we can certainly continue next time. I'm wondering if you can speak to your thoughts on the role of the music critic. I myself have been fascinated as a reader all these years, to notice a variety of styles. Some writers in a very subtle way, without seeming to speak down to the reader, educate the reader about the subject – about the repertoire, etc., while in the guise of a review. Other reviewers just simply going at the performance itself. As far as the education of the public, the reader, who may not have been in the performance, and as far as the role of the critic in general, I'm wondering if you can speak to this?

COMMANDAY There are two ways to define the word "role." In the first place, the role of the critic today is determined by the circumstances at the newspaper he is working. Because in a sense today, a music critic is more often than not asked to cover other things than classical music. He has to cover pop, jazz, rock – he might have to cover drama and other subjects for the paper because they're so tight. So the role in that sense is one thing that is his role in the newspaper. That's not what you're talking about. You're talking about what is the function, or purpose, of music criticism. I talked about this a lot, because the Music Critics Association has

two or three periods of time a year when they would have at a music festival somewhere, six or eight fellows – beginning or aspiring critics that would work at this festival under the guidance of a senior music critic or two. So we did a lot of teaching of music criticism. There's always been no end of lectures and talks about music criticism, like the ones coming up here with the Rubin Institute. In a sense, I'm almost glad not to be involved in those panel discussions, because I've done it so much. But I finally boiled it down to what I considered the purpose, or role, of the music critic. The first and fundamental role of a newspaper music critic is to engage the reader in the musical experience. To draw him into what happened – what did happen and what might happen, and what that reader could think of might happen in another performance. The means by which he does this is the critical thing, because the point of view, the opinion of the quality of the performance ... is one of the means, important but still a means to the end of engaging the reader.

The second thing is that the subject is, for the most part, the music being played, not the performer – even when the performer is a renowned celebrity. Now we're getting to the means by which the critic will engage his reader, and that includes the opinion. Now of course if it's a great celebrity – a performance of Vladimir Horowitz or Arthur Rubinstein, obviously you're talking about the level of performance at a whole other point of view than if you're talking about a new person making a debut, or a debut locally, in which case you're looking for new qualities of a different personality. So then as a part of the means by which you engage the reader is the opinion of things about the music that were inherent in the music that the performer brought out, or didn't bring out, and the way the performer brought those things out of the music, or didn't bring those things out of the music. These are the means by which he engaged part of the subject. If interesting, unusual things happen, then you bring that into the means of engaging the listener. Because you have to assume that if it's a very sophisticated reader, then you have to engage him because he doesn't need it. So you have to engage him because he doesn't have to read your review to know what he heard. If it's a totally unsophisticated reader that didn't even go to the performance, then you have to make him wish he had, or want to go to another one. Even if what you're saying is negatively critical, you would like to engage him in that and make him feel like with a ball game, the fact that he couldn't hit or he couldn't pitch, is still of interest. Not that it was a terrible experience and he wouldn't want to go. So you're always trying to engage the reader at whatever level of a reader you are. You can't write to specific readers – when I was asked, "Who are you writing for?" I would say, "Myself." I never thought anybody was reading it! It's like an actor looking in the audience's faces. You become self-conscious the minute you think you're writing for specific people, and that people are actually sitting down seriously ... I just was writing a letter, and whoever read it ... that was it. So that's my sense of what the role is.

JAMASON After the initial apprenticeship that you described – working with Judy Stone and working on certain writing aspects, for the majority of your career, would you

characterize your work style as one of a lot of rewrites – or was it a draft or two, and there it was?

COMMANDAY When friends of mine ask me in my early years, how it was, I say, “It was a little less painful all the time.” Because initially you’re very self-conscious and it’s very painful and you do a lot of rewriting. And then you do less rewriting, and then it gets down to just correcting, or self-editing. Less rewriting and more self-editing. The more you do it, the more it goes from one thing to another, and you get to a point where you can just write it out. I don’t know if I ever got as fluent as Harold Schonberg or some others, but your fluency improves.

JAMASON Well Bob, this has been fascinating. I look forward to our next session. Thank you very much, indeed.

COMMANDAY My pleasure.

Wednesday, November 5, 2014

COMMANDAY Now, about becoming a music critic, which was nothing that I planned on, or had any experience in. I had been working at Cal for thirteen years and through a really strange and incomprehensible decision that was made by the chair of the department, Joe Kerman, I quit. I went to the chancellor and told him I was quitting. He tried to get the decision reversed, and couldn't. It was irrational, and I just walked away. I had a wife and two little children, and no job. I lived on my pension money that I withdrew for several months. I don't know where that would have gone. My wife was teaching, so we had a little income. All of a sudden, after several months of this, I got a phone call from Alfred Frankenstein, who was the very noted and much admired music and art critic of the Chronicle. He asked me if I would ever consider coming over there and writing music reviews. He told me that he was planning to retire as music critic, and just stay on as art critic. Well, I went over there. The whole idea intrigued me, because in the first place, writing for a newspaper struck me as show business. The curtain goes up every day and you're on. That was kind of exciting. And also, like most musicians, I had complained a lot about music critics and so here was a question – put up or shut up! I had the musical training, so it was up to me. That intrigued me, and I went over there. I wasn't hired right away, I did piecemeal. They weren't prepared to take me on at that point.

I had been committed to the chancellor of the University for the following fall to produce and conduct a one-act opera by my dear friend and colleague Andrew Imbrie. It was an opera called *Three Against Christmas*. It meant that in the months before November, 1964, I had to engage a cast – cast it – and engage an orchestra and serve as contractor for the orchestra, and the like. I guess I had a role in choosing the director, who is a dear friend, Arthur Conrad, and the designer, Henry May, who was on the faculty at Cal. So I knew I couldn't take up a full-time job while I was doing that, and I made that clear at the Chronicle that that came first. I wrote some little reviews then – that is, in the spring of '64. I don't really recall how many reviews, or how much I did. And then I got into this position producing this opera, which really absorbed me very much. There were some interesting things connected with that. We produced the opera, it performed for two nights in Hertz Hall, a double bill with a Mozart opera ... a one act ... not the *Music Master*....

JAMASON *The Impresario?*

COMMANDAY *The Impresario*, that was it. Michael Senturia, who conducted the University orchestra – he conducted that. It was a separate production. I thought it went very successfully. The orchestra was all members of the Oakland Symphony, whom I knew because I was working with the Oakland Symphony Chorus at that time. We had good luck in casting the five members of the cast, and it worked out, I think, very well. The tape recording that was made then stands up today, when I listen to it I'm very pleased with it. So that was a really good

experience. It was right at the time the Free Speech Movement was starting, so there was some troubled activity on the campus before the second performance. Not protesting our performance, but just coincidental with it. But our performances came off in spite of that, or disregarding that, and it went off fine. It became obvious to me that with what had happened on campus, because of the Free Speech Movement, and the changes that were happening and its effect on student activities and the like, that my work, had I stayed at the University, would have been very seriously hampered. It would have been very difficult and hard for me to do what I had been able to accomplish in the thirteen years I was there.

So it was just as well that I left. In the following January or February of '65, the newspaper made me an offer. I held out – they made me an offer of the base pay for a reporter, and I had made it clear that I would come to work but they had to equal the salary I had been getting at Cal. I held out for that, and I got it. So then I went to work – Al Frankenstein was still writing reviews, and there was another man named Dean Wallace, who was his assistant in both music and art, and he was writing reviews. Then along came me. Initially I would be assigned ... whatever. Because Alfred and Dean – particularly Alfred – would take the most interesting things and Dean would get whatever. If there was a change in cast in the opera, Dean would take the second performance, and then if there was still another change, I might take the third performance. At that point, that's the way that was working. But I got to do some interesting things in those years when Dean was there. Dean certainly couldn't have been happy about my presence, because he knew that I was being groomed, and would rise above him in the ranking, and probably replace Alfred. He was not unfriendly, but it wasn't a happy experience for him. He had a casual, relaxed journalist's attitude – coming and going. Judy Stone, who was our Datebook editor, was always looking for him. The cry, "Where's Dean?" went out all the time ... he had gone off somewhere. Then I started writing, and of course my experiences starting to write – it was difficult for me, because I wasn't used to this sort of writing. I was very self-conscious about it. Stage fright, I guess you'd call it, so I would choke up.

Right in front of our desk was the desk of a wonderful man called Paine Knickerbocker, who was the drama critic. He looked like the name sounded, he was a very elegant gentleman, very suave and delightful. He saw me pacing back and forth when I was in one of my blockages, and he would fix me with one eye and say, "Don't press." I never forgot it. So as I mentioned earlier, Judy Stone had me rewrite quite a number of things and taught me how to do interviews, and about the news stories. I took to doing the news stories, that seemed interesting, as a matter of fact. So I wound up doing a lot of that. Eventually, Al Frankenstein kind of phased off, more into art and less and less and less into music. Finally he stopped doing music, and then I wound up being the music critic. The way it worked was that the music critic would make a schedule for the following week of who was to cover what. Those were assigned, and he would give a copy to whoever the other reviewers were and to the Datebook editor. I made those decisions, and we covered both music and dance, so we were busy.

Early at that time there was a project at the University of Southern California called the Rockefeller Institute for the Training of Music Critics, or something like that, which had a big foundation grant. Six or seven aspiring young writers – mostly with some experience and all with musical background were students there. They would study there under the direction of guest critics who would come in – senior critics who would come in and supervise them. And then they would write reviews of things in L.A. – not so much for printing, but as exercises. I went down there as a senior critic and did some of that. Another interesting part of that was the second year of each of these fellows' programs, they were assigned to a newspaper or magazine. The newspaper or magazine would take them on – would not be obliged to print what they wrote, but the fellow attached to that newspaper or magazine would be mentored by the resident music critic, who would decide whether or not what they were writing would be published. So we had four at the Chronicle from the Rockefeller music program. One who wound up after he worked with us with the Denver, Colorado paper. Another who went to Houston. And then there was a woman – I don't know where she went. Finally, one of them was Heuwel Tircuit. After his year, we kept him on. Additionally at that time I hired a woman I had known, who had sung in my Oakland Symphony Chorus and my First Methodist Choir, named Marilyn Tucker. She had a musical background. Originally I hired her more as a secretary to the department, but then she started doing reviews, and she became a reviewer.

So we wound up with a staff of three – myself, Heuwel Tircuit, and Marilyn Tucker. That's the way it was for pretty much the rest of my tenure there, until something happened with Heuwel very late in my tenure, maybe a couple of years before I retired. That's another story. Heuwel was a very colorful fellow. He was a well-trained musician – a fine pianist and a timpanist. Living in Japan, he had trained the percussion sections of several Japanese orchestras. As a pianist, he had studied at LSU, where he majored in music. He was a gifted composer. So he knew what he was talking about, but his talking was very swinging ... he had a loose and easy way of writing that both entertained and annoyed the readers. So he had both followers and serious critics. He was the lively actor in our operation, and that was always something to deal with. I enjoyed him, frankly, even though some of the things he did got to be a little pushy and annoying.

In terms of my colleagues at the paper, my fondest memories of the nearly thirty years I was on the Chronicle was my associations with the other journalists – all of them. They were an exceptionally interesting, curious and amusing bunch of people – men and women. A thing that astonished me, especially in retrospect, was that in comparison with the academic world, the ethical relationships among the journalists was at a very high level. There wasn't the politicking and the backbiting and that kind of thing that went on in University departments – or jealousy, or any of that. In fact, I felt there were only three instances in my thirty years where I observed an unprofessional and uncollegial act by one of my colleagues to another. So they were an

impressive group, and this is a major reason why the decline of journalism and the profession has been very upsetting to me. And of course there were individual members who were distinguished, like Herb Caen. His office was only about twenty feet from my desk, and we became rather good friends. I admired and liked him, and I think he respected and liked me, and we got along wonderfully. All I can say about Herb Caen was that he spoke the way he wrote. People that got used to his kind of casual style – it was not a writing style, that’s the way he was. If you knew his writing, you knew him. It was charming. There are any number of anecdotes about him. Those are old stories, the same with other people on the paper. One of my fondest memories is of the first editor who was there when I arrived, Scott Newhall, who was an extraordinarily gifted and colorful person who sat in an office that was loaded with souvenirs. His desk was covered with trinkets – behind him on the wall was an old battered brass cannon from Corregidor. He had a little bathroom off there, and it had flocked wallpaper in it. Across from him sat Dolly Rhee, his secretary, who was the niece of Syngman Rhee, the South Korean President/dictator. She was a piece of work. She would be talking right over him, and she called him “Dad.” She called the editor “Dad.” He’d be talking to someone on the phone (and I heard this) and she’d say, “Don’t let him talk to you like that, Dad!” and then she’d let loose some sailor’s expletive and carry on like that. The Scott Newhall anecdotes are legendary. He designed that paper, and even to this day it has his imprint on it. He made the Chronicle the paper that it became at its height.

JAMASON In those days, Bob, was there a discussion of the tone of style of writing, or was that thing never discussed?

COMMANDAY The only comment you ever heard about style was that it should be lively. What that meant is that it should be personal and free, and engaging. There was never any “From the top” talk about ... your writing is getting self-conscious or should be this, or should be that. Nothing like that ever happened. The publisher of the paper was Charles Thieriot. The Thieriotics were members of the family that founded the paper, and the owners of the Chronicle were a board of about twelve to fifteen people who were either de Youngs or Thieriotics – we called them the “Family.” Charles Thieriot was a kind of a snob in a way – although we all called him Charlie. There wasn’t a formal relationship between us – between him and the journalists. But he was a very picky and financially tight, penny-pinching person. We used to say, “He has the mind of a French petty-shopkeeper.” There are all kinds of legends about Charles. My favorite one was that I would cover news-stories about music. I guess I enjoyed it, so I covered that a lot. I remember one time the Symphony was on strike, and I was covering the strike. Obviously my writing was more sympathetic to the musicians than Charlie would like. I have to say at this point that I did a lot of writing. Every week I wrote a full Tuesday column – that is, the whole length of the page – a full column all the way to the bottom of the page. And on Sunday I would write a Sunday piece that might be a whole page, or a page and a half.

JAMASON All this in addition to the reviews?

COMMANDAY All this in addition to the reviews and news stories and other stuff. That's how I wound up with ten thousand bylines when I retired. I guess I must have gotten pretty facile. In any case, I did that and I covered a lot. I had a conscience about music activities in the city that I felt should be discussed. There never seemed to be a lack of subjects for a music column, or what we call on Sunday, a "Think piece." It shocked me subsequently, to see that even in The New York Times today very rarely you see a think piece, where a writer is getting into an issue and discussing it in an essay. This to me is the heart of the matter. In many ways, I feel it's more important than the reviewing.

JAMASON Do you think the reason they're not there is that the editors just don't allow space for it?

COMMANDAY No, I think that if The New York Times music critic wanted to write on a subject, they'd give him the space. That's his job. Obviously with what's happened to newspapers, there's less space available. When I was doing it, the space was not at a premium. There was an expression called the "News hole." What this meant was that first the advertisements would be placed on the paper, and the space that remained was the news hole. What was available in terms of reviews and news stories would be put by the Datebook editor into those slots. There was a category called "Shorts." A short was a little two or three sentence announcement of an upcoming event. You used it as a filler – they just plugged things in to fill up space under a review or an interview, or whatever was going on. So we wound up doing a lot of writing. How did I get onto this?

JAMASON Well, you were talking about the think pieces, and the different kinds of writing.

COMMANDAY Oh, I know why. I was reviewing the strike of the Symphony. Charles Thieriot decided because obviously as a publisher and a kind of Brahmin in San Francisco – a man who prided his background and his wealth and all that – he was hardly favoring unions. In fact, he had a relationship with the unions at the newspaper that you might call adversarial. He made a decision that he didn't want his music critic writing labor reviews – it should be the labor reporter to do it. Fine – if that's what they wanted. But I had already written my Tuesday column for the next day on that subject, before he had made the announcement. So I came to work the next day, and I saw the publisher and the managing editor huddling over the managing editor's copy desk on our page. I said, "Uh oh, this is trouble." So I went back to my desk, and sure enough I was called back ... "Gordon wants to see you." I went up there, expecting to be chewed out. Well, the publisher, Charlie, turned to me, and said, "What do you think about your name?" I said, "What do you mean – what do I think about my name?" "Well, it says here 'Music World

by Robert Commanday' and that's too long. How about 'By Bob Commanday?'" He hadn't even read it – he hadn't paid any attention to what the substance of the review was! I said, "I don't want to go by Bob Commanday," so we settled on just eliminating the "By." So it would be – "Music World, Robert Commanday" – and that was the issue. He was like that. He would do things like go to the Pacific Union Club for lunch, and someone would tell him about the jewelry robbery the previous day, and he'd come raging back to the paper about why we hadn't covered it – and we had. There are all kinds of funny stories about Charles, and I could go on at great length, but it doesn't matter. Like I could talk for half an hour about Scott Newhall.

You raised the question about whether the role of the music critic has changed since I began writing for the Chronicle. Well, as I just suggested – I don't think music critics are writing think pieces anymore. My successor, Joshua Kosman, whom I helped engage – a committee of three of us hired him – he never took to doing news stories on his own. If he were assigned, he'd do it. He didn't seem to like to ... and think pieces, he didn't generate them. He's a very highly intelligent person who thinks a lot and reads a lot, and I could never understand why he couldn't generate interest in doing Sunday pieces, or think pieces. That's the way he did. The individual music critic more or less sets the character of what he or she does, according to their preference. He doesn't like to do think pieces, so he doesn't do them, and then Chronicle didn't have them. So the role didn't change, the critic changed. The same today with The New York Times, or the other papers. It's changed now because the papers are so shrunken in space that music critics are only given the chance to review the most important things, and many of them are asked to cover several things that they previously wouldn't cover – other fields or maybe operetta or musical comedy or whatever. So the role hasn't changed, the newspapers have changed.

JAMASON What would you say to a young musician starting perhaps what may be an important career, who has a great deal of difficulty merely getting a review from a major newspaper because of this problem of so far fewer reviewers?

COMMANDAY The only answer I can give is the answer I came up with when we founded San Francisco Classical Voice. Because important events were not being reviewed, and something had to be done about it – particularly contemporary music. That was one of the biggest things in my mind – that here we have four or five contemporary music groups, and they weren't being covered. So that's what generated the initiation of San Francisco Classical Voice. There's nothing a performer can do if the paper doesn't cover it. It's just tough luck. You asked about other colleagues – Al Frankenstein was a man ... he could write so smoothly and with such a humor often so insightfully. I don't say his musical insight was great – it was sharp and keen and experienced, and he could write like a fish. He was really a journalist. I'd come into the paper and his desk was next to mine when we were working together. He'd have a stack of mail, and he'd go through that stack of mail – just bing, bing, bing, bing, bing – and would toss it in the wastepaper basket and never answer it. He did not have the conscience about responding to

letters that I developed, particularly in the latter half of my career I pretty much answered everything.

JAMASON Do you mean letters from readers?

COMMANDAY Yeah, letters from readers or from professionals, from performers. There was a category of letters where if a reader wrote a very sharp and angry letter to a critic, we'd call those "Die Letters."

JAMASON Die letters? Like, "Die, critic, die"?

COMMDANY Yeah, like "Drop dead." There are funny things ... Art Hoppe the columnist, he wrote back to a lady who sent him a Die Letter. He said, "One more letter like that and we'll be forced to cancel your subscription."

JAMASON That's marvelous.

COMMANDAY You had to have thick skin. You couldn't be sensitive about it. Even subsequently, there have been a couple of occasions, not many, when I've written to a writer at the Chronicle – and I make it clear that I had been a colleague for many years – and they never answer. That's just the way it is. Al Fried from the Examiner was a great colleague, we got to be very good friends. He accepted me right on. We would do many, many things together. We toured – when the San Francisco Symphony went to Europe they took both of us – we travelled together. There was never a question of talking about performances we were going to review – we would never discuss anything we had just heard, or were about to hear.

JAMASON Interesting. So you mean, after the performance, if you were going out for a drink or something, you wouldn't talk about it before you wrote...?

COMMANDAY No, never. Unless something extraordinary happened – obviously if it was an extraordinary performance, or an extraordinarily bad performance or something, you couldn't just ignore. Al Fried and I became really good friends. We were better friends than he was with Alfred Frankenstein. He actually preceded Alfred in this work in San Francisco – he came before Alfred when he came to the Examiner. But Al Frankenstein tolerated him. He wasn't his friend, but I liked and admired Al Fried. Al Fried – he covered everything, he was just a one-man show, a one-man band. But his attitude was – if he wasn't there, it wouldn't happen. He would go to everything, he was amazing in that coverage.

There's another on the list here, Arthur Bloomfield, who worked for the Call-Bulletin before the Examiner bought the Call-Bulletin. He was the son of a very wealthy San Francisco doctor. I

don't really know how much musical training Arthur Bloomfield had. He had been a great opera fan, and grew up in San Francisco and with the San Francisco Opera, and had been listening to opera all his life. So he considered himself an opera guru. I was always surprised because Al Fried was his boss – or should have been his boss – was a great gentleman. Arthur Bloomfield would just kind of push him aside and take engagements that the first critic, Al Fried, should have taken. Arthur became – he had a very capable wife, she was a professional of some kind. She was a very strong person. She really was his backbone. Late in his career he came to the Opera House press room, and he was upset about the seat he had been assigned, or something like that. He just had a tantrum. It was so out of place and unprofessional ... it was sort of indicating that his personal life or personality issues were intruding into his public life, his professional life. Soon after that he retired. He had the independent wealth to continue on living.

There were other colleagues. There was a wonderful, sweet guy named Clifford Gessler at the Oakland Tribune. He retired very shortly after I came into the Chronicle. His successor – they hired a man named Charles Shere. I really don't know what musical background Charles had. I'm not sure – he had a strong background. He considered himself a composer, but the few things I've heard of his were scatter-shot pieces that I don't think reflected any talent or quality at all. He was connected with Mills College. He connected with the Tape Music Center people, who went over there from San Francisco and set up modern music laboratories there. He was connected there, and that's a whole other story – the Mills College scene. He reviewed for the Oakland Tribune, for maybe seven, eight, or nine years – quite a number of years. He became tired of reviewing standard compositions – the Beethoven symphonies, the standard concertos and everything else. In my view, that reflected on him, because he really wanted to just review new music and unusual and different things. So he was a different kind of a music critic. He was succeeded by Paul Hertelendy, who had gone to Cal and gotten a PhD in, I think, electrical engineering. Paul played organ, but he didn't have an organist career, he used it to play in the Newman Hall Chapel at Cal. But he did have a musical background, and was a very smart man. He was a very different personality, and was for many years on the Tribune. Then he went to the San Jose Mercury News, and was down there for ten or fifteen years, and then finally retired. He was a person of independent means, and could retire. He lives in a large home that you could call a mansion in Piedmont, and has a little website and keeps himself active.

There's one other, and that was Alan Rich. Alan Rich was a graduate student at Cal when I started there, and then he went to KPFA and was the program director there for quite a number of years. In fact, I forgot to mention that Charles Shere had served also as a program director at KPFA. Alan Rich did that for a number of years, and was really very good at it. Alan Rich was an extremely knowledgeable person who knew what he was talking and writing about. Alan went from here directly to the New York Herald Tribune, where he worked under Virgil Thompson as a music critic there. Maybe after Virgil retired he did that too, and then the Herald Tribune folded and he went to Newsday and was a critic there. Eventually he came out to the Los

Angeles Express and was the music critic there until he died. I had Alan write a few things for San Francisco Classical Voice. He's the most engaging person, the most engaging writer. Like Heuwell Tircuit, he had a real bite, so that he could snap at someone's heels pretty neatly. Like Virgil Thompson ... there was a freedom in what he did that was both engaging and, I suppose, for some people infuriating. But he made his mark, and it was quite a mark that he did make. Alan died several years ago.

Now, there's a question here about radio stations. It was very interesting, because in the '50s and the '60s, there were a number of classical music stations here. KRE in Berkeley, KEAR, which eventually became a religious station, KSFR, which was a very fine classical music station, and KPFA did a lot of classical music all the time. There may have been another station that I can't think of. So there was a lot of classical music on the air. And gradually, just as newspapers are petering out today, so gradually these stations died and were converted. KRE died first – it changed its call letters, I don't know what it is now, and became a different kind of station. KEAR, as I indicated, first became a religious station ... and some of these were all-night stations. KEAR was an all-night station I think. KSFR lasted pretty much the longest. It was down in the financial district, and I remember when the newspapers were on strike in the '70s, being hired by KSFR to do reviews on the air, as I did for the KQED Newsroom on the Air, which happened during the newspaper strike. The Newsroom in the Air, which KQED set up, initiated the idea of the newsroom format for almost every television station in the country, where you would have an anchor and two or three associates sitting next to that anchor, discussing and sharing and so forth. That all came out of the Newsroom in the Air at KQED that was done by Bill German, the editor of the Chronicle and his colleagues. I would go in there and give a two or three minute review when it was appropriate. So that was a tremendous influence on the classical music scene. Their fading out was a sad thing that happened. KQED very early on decided that they didn't want to play music – period. It became a policy, and it embittered me. I was really offended by that.

Occasionally they'll do on the television – not on radio – they would do a masterpiece theater, or live from Lincoln Center, and an occasional show that was done live in New York and then broadcast over PBS stations, but that was only the television, and only occasionally – ballet or opera – occasionally a concert, now, Tuesday night broadcasts of the San Francisco Symphony's concert of the previous week. So I've always sort of been disaffected about KQED because it's a policy I couldn't agree with. It's the role of the radio station to change. There is this one classical music station now, KDFC, which was a commercial station owned by a group in Utah for a long time. It was rather successful, had a big audience, and then it was bought by USC, so KUSC runs KDFC. It's a listener-supported station now. Although they don't do NPR broadcasts, it's not an NPR station, but it is a music station that has its own policy and programming. So that's what's left. I think it's made an effect, but the rest of the performance world on radio and recording has changed too, because of people relating to You Tube and getting away from their own CDs and

having it on their various hand-held devices. They've been weaned away from it by the disappearance of the stations, and it's been replaced by these electronic substitutes, which ... that's another whole subject, about what the upshot of that will be.

JAMASON Well, I noticed that even this week, I think Joyce DiDonato is doing a live streaming recital from Carnegie Hall, and the Berlin Philharmonic's streaming concerts have been enormously successful. Bob, if I could ask you a general question – we all talk about, as you've characterized it – the decline of newspapers and readership. I'm not a journalist ... I've read and thought a lot about it – I'd be very curious to know your thoughts about simply – why? With the access of newspapers on the internet, why still do we talk about a decline of newspapers? Do you mean a decline of readership, of the amount of readers? A decline of just access to the general public?

COMMANDAY No, newspapers have just lost their advertising, which was their prime income. The papers got thinner and thinner and they released more and more of their staff – so their staff got smaller and smaller, and their space that's available gets less, and that in turn loses readership, because the people are less dependent upon it and are instead turning to the internet and radio and television for their news source. The whole electronic revolution has changed everything. It's changed the way I think people think, because of the multi-tasking that goes on, and the fact that people are focused on little hand-held devices and are not reading regular magazines, newspapers and books when they're commuting or in their free time, they'll just pick up a hand-held device and read it for a few minutes and do something else – turn on the radio and have that going – put a thing in their ear and have that going. I really think this affects the way people's minds work.

JAMASON Do you think it affects the way audiences are? When say, people come to listen to an opera?

COMMANDAY I have no doubt. I think it's fundamental. I think it's also affecting the way music is being composed. When I'm reading the reviews of the new music that appears in New York City, and what it consists of and how it seems to be put together, I think this is a consequence of the electronic revolution. The musical minds are working differently. Obviously the violinists and the pianists and the people that are going through the traditional classical training to get where they are – they're the same people. Their minds are working the same way. A Beethoven sonata is a Beethoven sonata, and nothing's going to change that. But I think that a lot of musicians that specialize in contemporary music and have gotten away from the classical experience, or what you could call it – in a very general sense, the classical experience – their minds are working differently. Certainly the composers are. The concept of what composing is has changed, and that's because the minds are working differently.

JAMASON In what way has the concept of composing changed?

COMMANDAY It isn't a question of sitting down and getting a musical idea and developing it on paper, and writing it out. It becomes more of associating sonorities, instead of a musical idea in the conventional sense of it being a rhythmical or melodic and rhythmic melody of theme, or a twelve-tone row or whatever it happens to be, it's more like a conjunction of sonorities that becomes the musical idea. That's a whole different way of thinking, and I think it stems from the fact that the minds are following electronic processes and are working differently. It's an approach that I call "What if? Why not."

JAMASON Speaking of new music, we'd be very curious to know some of the more exciting developments that you remember, and that were stimulating to you in the 1960s and '70s – as far as new music from the Bay Area – Bay Area composers.

COMMANDAY The first really strong thing that happened here was in the early 1950s when a group of composers formed what was called a Composers Forum. This was an association of composers from Mills College, from Cal, from Stanford, and eventually from Davis – although Davis was just beginning to develop musically then. This group of a dozen composers would plan performances – organize the performances and do the functions of what we now see being done by the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players or Earplay, or Composers Inc. They were a little self-created presenting group – nonprofit. They would put on two or three ... no more than three programs a year. They would program not only their own music, but occasionally a work by a composer they admired from afar. That was the major acknowledgement, or performance of, contemporary music, and it was very exciting.

JAMASON Was it well-received by the general audiences?

COMMANDAY Well, the audiences were small, you know. There weren't the venues ... that was another problem, the venue problem. They'd play in the Green Room of the Veterans' building, which is not an ideal circumstance, or different venues that weren't so suitable. Herbst Theater was not then available, and it probably would have been too large. It hadn't been renovated yet, and it probably would have been too large for the kind of audiences that they would get. Mills College would have that sort of thing – this was before things changed at Mills College. But that was the fundament of the new music area here. There were wonderful things, because Roger Sessions was teaching at Cal – Darius Milhaud was teaching at Mills. Both of them had exceptional students working for them. Some would work with both of them. They went on to do great things. Leon Kirchner and Andrew Imbrie at Cal – Imbrie came out to Cal as an instructor but also he had been working with Roger Sessions at Princeton earlier, and so he was much influenced by him. Leon Kirchner came out, and was teaching at Mills College. And so they developed a body of composers here – two or three at San Francisco State University –

Wayne Peterson was the one was the most lasting composer there, he's still working, although he's very old now and doesn't have a lot of energy. He won a Pulitzer, and did very well down the line. Later on in the game – the San Francisco Symphony was very selective, and occasional about doing new music. Monteux did a couple things. Enrique Jordá, who had the Symphony after Monteux for two contracts – he would do some new music. Josef Krips, who succeeded Jordá, did more new music than he was credited for. He would occasionally do a work by Andrew Imbrie, or by Kirke Mechem, or others of the local composers, and that was fine. Then after Josef Krips came Edo de Waart, and Edo de Waart was – at the same time they hired Peter Pastreich to be the Executive Director of the San Francisco Symphony. He was very shrewd. He and Edo had this series they started – the New and Unusual Music series in which the Symphony would present chamber music, contemporary music programs periodically. First they hired John Adams to be the director of it, and he would choose the music that went into it. It was very well done. At one point they had Aaron Copland in charge of it, and that was fine. It hadn't a great attendance, but it was a proper gesture. Subsequent to that effort, the Symphony for a while would have a composer in residence, and that composer would have a concert in Old First Church of chamber music, and then the Symphony would play some of his works. I remember Henri Dutilleux was here as a composer in residence – Charles Wuorinen was a composer in residence – so they did good things. The criticism I have had of Michael Tilson Thomas' programming in his whole tenure was the fact that he ignores twentieth-century American music almost exclusively – with the exception of Aaron Copland, Lou Harrison and I guess you'd still call John Adams a twentieth-century composer. That was it – no Walter Piston, no Roger Sessions, no Darius Milhaud – none of the whole repertoire of the twentieth-century. And then he's very selective and exclusive and not broad in his selection of the occasional contemporary composers that he does do – and they're not many. I think he gets credit for more adventurous programming than is actually the case. His programming tends to be, I think, very conventional. That doesn't criticize his quality as a conductor, but as a music director, that's something else.

Now, you're asking about the spirit of San Francisco in the 1960s, well of course rock music began to develop during this coincidentally with the whole Free Speech Movement and the Vietnam War and all of that, and so it began to crowd jazz out of the picture and become dominant, particularly for the younger audience. It has become the fundamental popular music of the culture today, so that jazz is really a kind of little chamber music thing over in a corner for people who have that special affection for it. There were composers early in the electronic music era, although it wasn't the computer generated thing, it was done with synthesizers – it was called the Tape Music Center because initially it was done with tape machines, and manipulating the music through tape activities. Eventually synthesizers ... the Moog synthesizer and other synthesizers – that became a method of expression and a means of composing. Pauline Oliveros, Ramon Sender and Morton Subotnick were those composers you mentioned. Morton Subotnick, I think, was the best musician of that three. Pauline Oliveros – I don't know how fundamentally strong a musician she was/is. And I haven't heard from Ramon Sender, if he's still alive, in

years. Morton Subotnick was very active. He moved from Mills College down south, to the Ear Unit at Cal Arts, near Valencia, and was active there. Once he moved out of the area, very little of his music was played here. It's clear that local composers tend to dominate a locality. It's a far reaching contemporary music group that will program far afield. Occasionally a university will bring in a major figure – Luigi Dallapiccola was brought to Cal for a year, and that was a nice influence. Ligeti was brought to Stanford for a year. But Stanford did not have a big tradition of composition instruction the way Cal did. They also brought Kodály for a period, and I got to meet him and his young wife, and that was certainly interesting. What lasting impact it had on the scene in Palo Alto, I have no idea.

JAMASON What did you consider your role as a music critic in championing new music? Did you make special efforts to write a good deal about it?

COMMANDAY Oh, yeah. No question. I felt that we were the only voice they had, and if we didn't do it, who would? And so we did the best we could, without making nuisances of ourselves or losing our own readership. Yes, that was a big responsibility. As I mentioned in passing earlier, when I founded San Francisco Classical Voice, a principal initiating idea was the thought that these contemporary music ensembles needed a voice. I was thinking of them ahead of everybody else, because they were the only ones who were being ignored in the press! I innocently thought that since composers always complained about the quality of criticism, and the fact that music critics weren't schooled to understand the music appropriately – I always thought that they would be the first to feel that they should themselves be able to be critics. So I thought that when we got SFCV going, that we could engage composers to cover contemporary music. I was greatly disappointed, because for all of their talk, A – they didn't want to go out on a limb, they didn't want to criticize their colleagues or the players that might not want to play their music. They took a whole unprofessional attitude – a selfish and narrow attitude towards the challenge. It was very difficult. The fundamental idea of San Francisco Classical Voice was that all the reviewers had to be musicians. I felt I could make a writer of a musician – I couldn't make a musician of a writer. It was fortunate because my name was, by then, so well-known in the area that when I would call up a musician, he would treat it with some appropriate respect, and knew that I was serious and that what I was suggesting that he do was something that I felt he could do – or she could do. So that was the basic premise of SFCV, and secondly, that musicians would review their specialties. So that keyboard players would review keyboard artists, and vocalists would review vocal artists, and so forth.

JAMASON I'm curious, though – as you mentioned with the composers – was it ever a problem with other people, or a concern that – “Wow, I'm reviewing somebody that essentially is a colleague of mine.” Was that never discussed, or problematic?

COMMANDAY This happened only on an individual basis. That is, some individuals would take this point of view and not choose to do it at all. But by and large, they responded. At one point I had seventy. Of course, I didn't use them all. There was always a select ten or fifteen that were the better writers and the more accurate reviewers. So I would take the seventy as a large corpus and draw on it. It worked out pretty well, with the exception of the fact that it was hard to get contemporary music composers to review contemporary music. That was a disappointment.

JAMASON Has that changed in recent years?

COMMANDAY No, not at all. I think there are fewer composers that are writing with a pencil and music stand now. I don't know what the current crowd has in terms of their ability to understand Schoenberg or Dallapiccola, or Krenek, or whoever else – in the past, much less colleagues who are still writing music with a pen and pencil.

JAMASON If we can go back to some new music issues. You were speaking of Krips and then of Michael Tilson Thomas, but I'm wondering if you can speak to new music activities at the Symphony under Seiji Ozawa?

COMMANDAY I was very disappointed in Seiji's response in that way, because he had a big reputation for new music in Japan. He was really a tiger in Japan and did a lot of stuff. I knew Seiji personally – Heuwell Tircuit knew him very well – so he was somebody we could talk to. I think programming of symphony orchestras is highly influenced by the marketing crowd at the symphony, and the executive director, who's worried about the budget and ticket sales. I don't know what the interactions were when Seiji was the music director ... in certain ways, Seiji disappointed me. He didn't, I think, fulfill what I was expecting him to as a conductor. I had a different attitude, or understanding, of him. Seiji had photographic memory, and he would get up at three or four o'clock in the morning and photograph the scores in his mind before breakfast. But then if you tried to talk about music with him, it was very difficult. I began to get the feeling that he knew his scores better than anyone, but he didn't study them. He didn't analyze them the way a musician who didn't have photographic memory would have done automatically. I remember once sitting on a plane with him when the Symphony went to Europe. I tried and tried to talk music with him, and it was not easy. So I don't know ... he was not strong in the nineteenth-century Romantic – Beethoven, Brahms, tradition. He was a splendid conductor, of course, but I don't think he had the success here that his reputation and his talent deserved. That was the impression I had. There wasn't the electricity that later became associated with – Michael Tilson Thomas, let's say – who in that sense became much more popular with the audience than Seiji. There was one experience I had which should go on the record, because it was so exceptional and extraordinary. That is – during Josef Krips' regime, or tenure – when he started out I tended to be rather critical of some of his conducting and interpretations. Gradually,

in the course of the years, I became more and more interested, and more and more favorably inclined, and I responded to it. There were certain things that he could do that were absolutely splendid. We became in this period so we could talk, and became friends. When the newspapers were on strike, as I mentioned earlier, I would do little new stories about music, or reviews, on the KQED's Newsroom of the Air on television. At that point I got a tip that Seiji Ozawa was going to be hired to succeed Josef Krips. So I went to Josef Krips and spoke to him about it, and to my shock it turns out that I was the person that let him know that his contact was not going to be renewed.

JAMASON Oh, goodness.

COMMANDAY I'll never forget it. It was so upsetting and sad a moment. It turns out that both Krips and Ozawa were being managed by Ronald Wilford, the president of Columbia Artists – who was managing both men. He had been negotiating with Phil Boone, the president of the San Francisco Symphony, for six months behind his other client's back – for Seiji behind Krips' back. I've never forgotten this as a case of the most egregious kind of commercial operations possible. It was a terrible shock to this man who didn't deserve that kind of treatment. During the Krips' regime, there were a lot of musicians in the orchestra who complained about him, for various reasons. He was assigned to improve the orchestra, which had gone to hell under Jordá. He was instructed when he came – “You've got to shake this orchestra up!” And so he did. One of the things that was there, was the concertmaster – a man named Jacob Krachmalnick. Jake was a magnificent concertmaster. He had been concertmaster for the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, and the Philadelphia Orchestra, and I don't know what else. And he came here, and was a top-flight concertmaster. But he was a truck driver – actually his father really was a truck driver. He came from Philadelphia, and he talked like a truck driver. I don't say he was mean-spirited, but his attitude was mean. So Krips in a sense recruited him to help shake up the orchestra, and for Krachmalnick that meant informing on his colleagues. And so he'd say that this horn player is doing this and this, and this clarinet is not doing that, and he criticized the other string players behind him, and as you can imagine, this alienated the players both from Krips and Krachmalnick. At some point, Phil Boone, who was the president of the association – but he was a micromanager (the actual manager of the orchestra, or the executive director, as we would call him today, was Joseph Scafidi, who had been some thirty or forty years with the orchestra – a very nice, decent person). Phil Boone was really running things. He was negotiating – that in itself was not unusual – that he was negotiating with Ozawa's manager. But when it became clear that the orchestra morale was very poor and something had to happen, they instituted changes. They brought Stuart Canin in to sit next to Krachmalnick. The minute I saw that, I knew that they were going to move Krachmalnick out, as part of a deal with the orchestra. They smoothed the orchestra's feeling out, and they did move Krachmalnick out. I had another kind of an emotional experience; several months after Krachmalnick was moved out, he had an eye infection, or problem, that put him in the hospital. I went to see him in the hospital, which

was unusual because he spoke like a truck driver about music critics. He had said some pretty nasty things, but that didn't bother me. So I showed up in his hospital room, which kind of surprised him, and I think touched him. And then he said, "You know, I didn't understand. I was told to help clean up the orchestra ..." He didn't have enough empathy with his colleagues to understand how this kind of thing should be done without bruising feelings and everything else. It was sad.

There was one other extraordinary experience in terms of anecdotes that happened to me. There was this period of several years when Calvin Simmons, a young black conductor, who had grown up here in San Francisco, and had become a very fine pianist, and was with the San Francisco Boys' Chorus as their pianist, and then he became a favorite of Kurt Adler's, and Kurt used him at the Opera, and he actually conducted – I remember a performance of Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* and he did a wonderful job with it. He became a conductor of the Oakland Orchestra, and he did it very well. The crowd of people in Oakland that came to him, especially the African-American community – they gravitated to him. There was a charisma about him that was palpable. He really wasn't so great in orchestra training, because he wasn't an orchestra musician. It wasn't that he really knew how to make an orchestra play in the way the great orchestras do. But it worked, and he was very good. So, I'm sitting at my desk one day, on a Sunday about one o'clock in the afternoon writing a review. A man came in from the city room saying, did I know anything about Calvin Simmons being in an accident? I said, no, but I'll call the publicity woman at the Oakland Symphony and find out. So I did, and the Oakland Symphony woman said, "Well, he's up at Lake so-and-so with Richard Rodzinski." Richard Rodzinski is the son of Arthur Rodzinski – he's the man who became the director of the Cliburn Piano Competition, and did that for a career, ultimately. But at the point he was working for Kurt Adler in the artistic administration of the San Francisco Opera. So she said, "Oh, he's visiting Richard Rodzinski up in such-and-such a lake in upstate New York." OK, so either she gave me Richard's phone number, or I got it somehow, and I called up to find out ... oh, I forgot the most important part of the story! When the man from the city room came in to ask me if I'd heard that Calvin Simmons was in an accident, he said that some woman had called up and asked about that, and that's why he came in to ask. When I called Richard, he was still in shock because Calvin Simmons had just drowned.

JAMASON Oh boy, that's terrible.

COMMANDAY Now, the spooky thing is – who was that woman? How did that happen? This happened at a little lake in upstate New York, and here this woman in California calls to ask the Chronicle about Calvin being in an accident. For me, that was the strangest single thing that happened to me in my whole career.

JAMASON There was never any explanation?

COMMANDAY No, of course not. Nor was there any explanation of how he drowned, as far as that goes. He was alone in a canoe. Then there was a funeral for him at Grace Cathedral. There were two funerals at Grace Cathedral that I'll never forget. One was Calvin Simmons, which was packed and a very moving thing. The other was Herb Caen's funeral at Grace Cathedral. Those are major things that you'll never forget.

JAMASON Bob, I'm wondering if you can talk about new opera productions at the San Francisco Opera over the decades – works that stand out to you, works that have gotten some legs. I don't mean new productions of old operas, but new compositions – works written for the opera.

COMMANDAY Right, right. That's a tough one to talk about without going back and looking it up. I might talk to you about it later, when I've had a chance to really parse over the list, so to speak. The new opera I remember the most, because it was associated with Andrew Imbrie, was his *Angle of Repose*. I knew Wally Stegner personally, although Wally didn't do the libretto – he didn't want to do the libretto, another man was hired to do the job, but it was his story. I knew Andrew Imbrie's music so well, I didn't mention this in our discussion, but I had been in Arlington Hall in Virginia during the war with Andrew Imbrie, doing the Japanese translating thing. That's where we became friends, in 1944. So I had known him from 1944, and when I was teaching at the University of Illinois and wanted another job (I haven't gotten into that whole history) it was Andrew who had been an instructor at Cal and told me about the opening at Cal. So when I came out here for the audition, I stayed with Andrew, and we resumed our friendship. From that time – 1950 – 'til the day he died ... his death was something I had to deal with directly ... in any case, I knew his music so well, his voice and his personality, I think I understand his music, I hear it I think differently than a lot of people do because Andrew was a very independent and centralized person. He was not emotional – he had a good sense of humor but he was not an outgoing and humorous and emotional person by any means. It all came out in his music in a way that I heard. His real emotional insides comes out in the musical impulse, and I hear it. That's particular to my experience with it. I did that first opera of his, *Three Against Christmas*, and it was a very easy, natural thing for me to do. The new opera, *Three Against Christmas*, I could really hear it and know it, so it spoke clearly to me. I will say this – I've written this – if there had been supertitles at that time, that opera, *The Angle of Repose*, would still be on the boards, it would have had revivals. The story was so penetrating, and the relationships of the characters on the stage, and the musical expression of them were so vivid. If more people heard more of the text, that opera would have caught on. As it was, that opera got a better response than an opera in that type of style by other composers would have gotten elsewhere. So I've always regretted the fact that it was never given a second chance, although I think it was successful at the time. There were good reviews of it, and there was a lot of good talk about it. Again, if there had been supertitles, it would have been revived.

JAMASON What's your general feeling today about the success of opera companies – San Francisco Opera, or other major opera companies – in presenting new operas? Balancing that with the necessity of ticket sales and bringing out the old favorites? How do you think, in the United States for instance, we're doing as far as the presentation of new works?

COMMANDAY The United States' productions of new operas tend to be – if I put quotes around the word – “conventional” in the sense that they are not as vivid and far out as the productions of new operas in Europe. I think there's a concern or worry about presenting a new opera that the visual element has to be more immediate and direct than would be the case in Europe, where they are freer and financial stresses are different because of government sponsorship. I'm not an expert in the sense that there have been a lot of new operas performed in the United States that I never got to see, so I have a limited experience with it. More than, I suppose, a lot of people – but I suppose in terms of the total picture, a limited experience. There's a kind of a ... I'm trying to find the right word ... a kind of a double standard that the general directors of opera companies have when it comes to deciding on a new opera. On the one hand, they're so concerned about not putting off the audience with something that's really new and striking, and maybe dissonant. So it takes a certain amount of courage to choose operas that are challenging. There have been successful operas here that were challenging that really worked. Once, Kurt Adler did Gunther Schuller's *Visitation*, and he also did *Il prigioniero* by Dallapiccola, in a double bill with a Schoenberg one act, *Erwartung*, a mono-drama with a woman who is wandering through the forest. You don't know whether her husband has died or whether she killed him. These were successful. Unfortunately he did once a triple bill involving one act of Milhaud's *Christopher Columbus*. But he made the mistake of doing a triple bill and it was too much. I don't know – it happened so long ago that I can't tell you if the Milhaud would have stood up better if it had been set out differently. So there are mistakes in production like doing a triple bill like that. There are several major contemporary operas that I never saw, that I can't speak about. I only heard about them. But I know the Berg operas – the *Wozzeck* and the *Lulu* have always been great successes. Never challenged. We've never done *Moses und Aron* here, and I'm not sure – I've only heard it, I've never seen it – I'm not sure it would really work for an audience. I'm sure it would be a great experience, but I'm not sure as a theatrical evening it would work. It's a puzzling matter. There have been a lot of operas that have been done, like *Susannah*, the Carlisle Floyd, a lot of a very easy musical style that have a very open libretto. A couple worked – they did Dello Joio the year before I became a critic. Dello Joio's *Blood Moon*, and that was a flop. But not because the music was that hard. What I would need to do is to go over a list and parse it out, rather than rely on my memory.

JAMASON What are your feelings about the new trend around the country, and even more recently, here, of doing works like *Showboat* and other works that were at one time works associated with the Broadway Theater – doing these types of works in opera houses?

COMMANDAY I'm not opposed to it. Some of my colleagues are, and I hear people complaining about it. As long as you're not putting it on as something to substitute an opera – you're putting on a show and using the opera house facility to put on a show. There's nothing wrong with that. The *Porgy and Bess* sometimes works better for me than others. I saw the first production of it, and so I've been with it for a long time. But it does last. So I have no objections – I'll go along with it if it's done well. I avoided the *Showboat* that was done here recently because the reports I heard of it made me feel I wouldn't enjoy it, the way it was done. But that wasn't because it was done, it was because it sounded like it wasn't working, and I didn't want to spend the time.

JAMASON I think that myself and everybody listening to this will be extremely jealous of you for hearing the original production of *Porgy and Bess*. I know it was a long time ago, but are there highlights of it – I know you were a teenager – but is there anything in particular about that performance that you can remember?

COMMANDAY Oh yeah, the great duet. *Bess, You Is My Woman Now*, and all those major pieces – they stuck with me. They got glued to my soul. Every time I'd hear it subsequently, it'd be like a reiteration of this experience, even though it was different singers. The interesting thing about it is, I don't think the music from *Porgy and Bess* is affected that much by subsequent performers, that it changes its impact on you. As it might be for other operas, or other works. When you hear *Bess, You Is My Woman Now*, or *Summertime*, they have the same impact on you every single time. Of course, sometimes more with this singer or with that, but not really differently. There are other great experiences that stayed with me forever, I was recalling when I mentioned something earlier, hearing Fritz Kreisler. That was transformative, and other greats – Elman, and all of these people. I was very fortunate, I grew up in a great era, in a location and to parents that would take me to these things, or encourage my going. So it was special. I went to Arturo Toscanini playing with the NBC Symphony in Studio 8H and that kind of thing. I knew some of the musicians, I studied with the first flute of the NBC Symphony at that time. When I remember, as a young person listening to recordings on the radio – I could identify orchestras by the sound of certain instrumentalists. That is less possible today, because there is a more standardized, basic approach to most wind instruments than there was back then, when you could really hear different styles. I'm not saying it's better or worse, it's just different, it's changed.

JAMASON Do you feel that way about soloists in general of other instruments? For instance, you mentioned Kreisler and Elman – all of course had such a distinct, marvelous individualistic sound – again, I'm overwhelmed with envy that you heard these masters in person – how do you feel about the contemporary scene now, say, with violin playing? I'm not asking you to judge any particular violinist – but you do feel that they still have the individual voice that these other masters had?

COMMANDAY I do. A very clear instance of that is what happened with the cello. When I was a young person, the cello was not the major solo instrument that it became. Emanuel Feuermann who had too short a career, was the first solo cellist that really made an impact on us. Then Gregor Piatigorsky, and Casals, of course. So it was Casals and Feuermann, and then Piatigorsky. Gradually, it began developing this succession of cellists that came along, so now we have a plethora of wonderful cellists. It's strange how that happened. There was a time once when I met Eugene Ormandy, and he complained about not being able to find solo violinists of the caliber that he really would like. I'm trying to think of when that would have been – I suppose it was in the '70s. That surprised me. Also, Seiji Ozawa, when he was choosing soloists – I faced him down with this because he was so restrictive in his choice of cello soloists. There were so many really first rate ones out, and I felt he just wasn't aware of what was out there, and I think that's part of a music director's responsibility – of course. It was something.

JAMASON One last question of something you spoke of earlier. I was just curious – when working as a music critic, you said not only from readers would you sometimes get a letter – but performers.

COMMANDAY First of all, I was always surprised by how few letters we got, by anybody! Almost never from a performer. I only had a handful – three or four times – so few that I can recall every instance, where a performer confronted me and argued with me. They were so few that I thought it was kind of funny. Grace Bumbry came – she's a mezzo-soprano, but she sang Lady Macbeth in Verdi's *Macbeth*. I wrote a review of it that was wholly favorable of her, except that her madness scene – she came down a long stairway across the back of the set – and I said it looked like she was drunk, or inebriated, or something like that. She called me up – she was furious. Which was ridiculous, but on the other hand that same artist could be a very classy person in other respects. Another time a soprano was singing the *Queen of the Night* here – the aria with the triplets in it, and she sang them unevenly, so I criticized it. She called me up and I said, "Well, how does a triplet go? Is it *da, da da da, da da da, da da da*? How do you do a triplet?" She didn't have very much to say. Then I had another funny experience – this was really funny. When Edo de Waart came here as a guest conductor, after his tenure here, he made the mistake of doing three things from *Der Rosenkavalier* with three singers – a young mezzo-soprano to sing Octavian and a little soprano to sing Sophie, and another OK soprano to sing the Marschallin. They did that great, great final trio, and they did a couple of other things. First of all, when we have had such great artists do *Der Rosenkavalier* in this city – Lotte Lehmann, Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, this one and that one and the other one – to come in with Mary, Francis and Josephine doing it is kind of silly – not smart. The Marschallin and the Octavian were OK, but the girl that did Sophie was a little Texas soprano who came out in this orange dress that was so out of keeping with this little virginal Sophie, who was supposed to be a fourteen or fifteen or sixteen year old virgin, it was pretty funny. I made the remark that it was more appropriate for

Adele in *Fledermaus*, than Sophie. Well, the next day I got a phone call from this girl. She said, “That was a lovely review that you wrote about me ... kiss my ass.” Well, for some reason, I don’t know why, I recorded it over the phone. I wanted Edo to hear a piece that I thought he might be interested in doing, so I put that on a tape and I also put this phone conversation from this girl. Let’s say it was a Wednesday performance that I reviewed on Friday – she was also going to sing Saturday and Sunday. Well, she went back to Davies Hall the next day and told everybody she had done something very stupid. It came out with her – and ... did I tell George Perle’s wife? She was the composer in residence at the time. But anyway, it went all over the place. So that was amusing. But really, basically, professional artists are professional about it. If they don’t like the way you review them, they just lump it.

JAMASON That’s what performers are always told. Never, ever contact a music critic.

COMMANDAY It’s a lose/lose thing to do.

JAMASON Exactly.

COMMANDAY Even if the music critic is the sort that can take it in the best possible way, it’s still a lose/lose proposition. But I didn’t have much of this – very little.

JAMASON Well Bob, I think this might be a good place to pause, and I look forward to one more session to talk about things more recent – the last twenty years, basically. So Tessa will edit out this stuff and organize it. Thank you.

COMMANDAY My pleasure.

Thursday, January 5, 2015

[Robert and Corey look at a list of names for Robert to comment on.]

COMMANDAY Albert Elkus was a real gentleman of the old school. I think beloved so generally that it was touching. And his wife Elizabeth – British – was a delightful, charming lady. They were of the gracious center of the music department [University of California, Berkeley] for a long time. Of course, he worked at the Conservatory. I had no connection with his work at the Conservatory whatsoever, I only knew him at Cal. One thing about him that was well-known – he had a stammer. And so he would lecture and it would be this, “B-b-b-Beethoven,” kind of thing. Occasionally he did some musical arrangements, but I don’t know anything about any research he did ... I don’t think he did any research. But he was a beloved person, and deservedly so. He set a tone for the style at the music department at Cal. It didn’t last after him, but he was a sweet man.

JAMASON Could you describe what that tone was, or what the atmosphere was like?

COMMANDAY Gentility. And graciousness. I remember one very funny anecdote. Alfred Hertz, the conductor of the San Francisco Symphony, earlier, was kind of a ... not wild, but kind of a flamboyant, colorful man. And he was married to a very colorful woman. I think they were both unfaithful. I looked into the archives at the music department library to find that Mrs. Hertz had kept typewritten copies of all the letters she had sent her lovers. The story was that when Albert Elkus received this material, he was so shocked, because he was really a Victorian. It was very amusing. Typical.

Micky Salkind ... I go back with Peggy and Micky Salkind to 1948 when we were in Juilliard together. Milton and I studied with the same teacher – Irwin Freundlich – as I think I mentioned earlier. We got to know each other very well. They were engaged then, they weren’t yet married. I came out here first, in 1950, and then they came a year or so after and became associated with the Conservatory. My predecessor, Al Frankenstein, is the one that put the idea in their head of being a four-hand piano team. The repertoire was neglected, and that’s what they of course did, famously. Micky wasn’t a real solo performer. I don’t recall his doing solo recitals. He performed almost always with Peggy. I remember once referring to them as “Prima and Secundo,” and cracked up somebody with that. I suspect she was a very good teacher, but I had no connection with her teaching work. Milton ... he was a soft person, a very gentle and soft person, and maybe that was good for the Conservatory at that time. I don’t remember details of things that happened at the Conservatory while he was the director, other than the famous renovation of the quarters at 19th and Ortega. That was his achievement. I don’t know to what extent Milton started the push to come downtown, or whether that was entirely Colin Murdoch’s

doing. It may have already been in the works when Milton was still in charge, but we never discussed it, it was all done at the Board level.

Margaret Rowell ... I've always said that she was the best music teacher that I've ever had any contact with. She was the mother of all the cellists here. She was married to a professor at Cal, and she lived in the Berkeley Hills, and was simply just a great teacher. My son studied with her, my wife studied with her, and so many cellists I know did. Around her was formed the California Cello Club, and they would have cello bashes ... hundreds of cellists at a time. Whenever a famous cellist would come to town, Rostropovich or Yo-Yo Ma – they'd make a pilgrimage to Margaret's house. Her teaching was so holistic. She had a way of getting the body balanced for the cellist that was very special. I remember my son studying with her, he was maybe fifteen at the time. He'd be practicing and I'd take him to the lesson, and she'd never have a clock on. So the lesson might last two hours, and I'd pick him up and he'd walk out saying, "She's wonderful, and I'm going to go home and practice right away." On top of a two-hour lesson. That's the kind of a teacher she was. I think at that time, in the '50s and '60s, Berkeley was a cello center because of Margaret Rowell.

The Grillers I knew, but not personally. Colin Hampton was the one I knew best; I knew the others casually and by recognition, but not personally. My wife's brother-in-law's brother studied with Jack O'Brien along with Don Weilerstein, they were both together in Berkeley – at Berkeley High School – and they were sort of competition, they both studied with him. And then Austin Reller, who was my wife's brother-in-law's brother, went into New York and earned three different PhDs, and that's a whole other story.

Adolph Baller I knew and admired and liked and chatted with, but I can't say enough about him personally to add anything to it.

Ernst Bacon was an interesting situation, because I think he was at Syracuse as a career – on the faculty of Syracuse University. His sister Madi Bacon was a music teacher and conductor, and was the founding conductor of the San Francisco Boys Chorus. Madi lived as a bachelor in the Berkeley Hills, very near Margaret Rowell, as a matter of fact. It was a curious relationship, because she admired and worshipped her brother, Ernst, and when he died, he didn't leave her anything. It was kind of shocking. Ernst Bacon was not a composer whose work I admired particularly. I thought it was a little precious and not very stimulating music. I gave a few critical reviews of his music, for which he never forgave me. But he was a very independent man with a strong ego. That was the impression I took away from him.

Andrew Imbrie was really my oldest friend out here. We were together in the war in Japanese work, and that's where we became acquainted. We did a musical together, and so we were associated as friends from 1945 'til his death a couple of years ago. He was certainly ... I don't

think my closest friend because we didn't confide much in each other, but he was a brilliant man and a stunning musician. To this day, I don't understand why more of his music isn't taken up and played, because I think it's some of the finest music that was written in the twentieth century. He had been out here studying with Roger Sessions, who had been his teacher at Princeton. And then he got on the faculty at Cal. When it was clear to me that I was going to leave the University of Illinois, he's the one that signaled to me that there was a position open at Cal. So it was in fact his instigation that brought me to California, for which I am forever in his dept. We saw each other constantly. I knew a lot of his music, and I had the privilege of conducting some of it, including the first of his two operas, an opera called *Three Against Christmas*, which the chancellor at Berkeley commissioned me to produce and conduct, which I did in 1964. It's a beautiful little one-act opera, and again, I don't understand why it has never been taken up again. Now, the other opera, *Angle of Repose*, that Andrew wrote to a libretto based on Wallace Stegner's book, that is a stunning opera and it was successful. The audience really appreciated it. The response was good, the reviews were excellent, and I believe that if there had been supertitles at that time, that that opera would have continued. Even with opera in English – especially if it's a contemporary score – supertitles are really important. It was a beautiful libretto and a stunning opera. One of the disappointments – not a personal disappointment, but one of the professional disappointments I have is that Andrew Imbrie's music has not been picked up and sufficiently played. His string quartets, his symphonies, his concertos, and certainly that opera. He was a very private person, but his privacy with his emotional self was not verbally expressed – you didn't get to know his inside, but it all came out in his music and I heard it. That is, I knew him so well that I could hear the emotional, personal impulse that was generating his music. I guess that's one of the reasons why I have such a strong attachment to it. His widow and we are still very close, his son is our godson, so we see them regularly and always will.

Conrad Susa I first got to know through his best work, his opera *Transformations*, which I saw ... I think its premiere was in the Carmel Valley actually, in a barn theater. And then we saw it when Spring Opera Theater did it. I think it's a gem. This opera he did for the San Francisco Opera wasn't that successful. It had a great cast and it was well supported, but it wasn't that successful. Conrad and I met, we talked, and were cordial. I think we liked each other, but I didn't have much contact with him except for 'very occasional running into' kind of contact. His good friend David Conte on the faculty is the one who knew him best, I think, and they're still celebrating Conrad.

Elly Armer I've known for a long time. I have a feeling I know her well without knowing her well. That is to say, we have a very cordial, happy relationship, but we haven't socialized particularly. She's a very nice person and a good teacher. I can't say more about that.

John Adams I've known since he was John Adams. He was at Harvard I think when my son was there ... there were two John Adams in music at Harvard – one who taught harmony, and the composer John Adams. I've known John for a long time. I think we get along very well, and I think he respects me. I certainly respect him. I'm not a deep admirer of his style and his music. I respect it and I accept it and I'm gratified to hear it, but I don't place him at the pinnacle that the musical culture here seems to, as a composer. That's just a personal opinion. His style is not that stimulating to me, largely because it is not as harmonically adventurous and active as I like to hear in music. It is imaginative in its way.

Mack McCray and I go back a long time because he also studied with Irwin Freundlich, and so we've known each other for a long time. Again, not intimately, the way I know Elly Armer and other people on the faculty ... Paul Hersh, and others. We have a very friendly, cordial relationship, and I admire him greatly. He has a splendid sense of humor, and what is not appreciated is that Mack McCray is a very good writer. He gave me some samples of some expository writing that he did and I kept it. He's a very good writer and I think he could do more with it. Maybe someday I'm going to have to talk to Mack about that, because there's a lot more to him than piano playing.

Paul Hersh – again, we go back a long time, a long way, when he was with the Lenox String Quartet when I knew him really as a violist more than as a pianist. So that goes back to ... oh, my goodness ... '75 ... '72? That's how long I've known him. After I founded San Francisco Classical Voice, Paul Hersh was one of the people I invited to be one of our early writers. He was very good at it. A little bit self-conscious. His wife Melody was very helpful, she's a very bright lady and very literate. So the two of them helped a great deal in those early days, but he didn't stay with it long. Many of the performers whom I cozened into become writers, they were a little self-conscious about it – evaluating the work of their contemporaries and their peers. But I like Paul, and I see him from time to time, and it's as if we had seen each other last week. It's a very easy, happy relationship I think.

Bonnie Hampton we go back with a long time, because Bonnie was of course married to Colin Hampton of the Griller String Quartet. We knew her from back then. She was a Margaret Rowell product, and an excellent, excellent teacher. In her way, a verbally vivacious person whose personality just comes bubbling out. I think it's that personality that comes into her playing, because she's an outgoing player, and very successful at it in chamber music and solo recital. I think more in chamber music. Her marriage to Nate Schwartz – for me it was a delight because the pair of them are so differently suited to each other, it was a great match. When I first knew Nate Schwartz, he was a bachelor and a graduate student at Cal. I think he was studying with Bernhard Abramowitsch. Before that he had actually studied with Cortot, which I thought was kind of amazing because I thought of Cortot as somebody from another century. When I first knew Nate, he was the biggest bobber and weaver I've ever seen at the piano. When he'd be

playing the piano he'd be bobbing up and down and around the way Rudolf Serkin used to do early in Serkin's career. It's like his head would almost touch the front of the piano, and just bob around. Well something miraculous happened. He took a course, I don't know if it was Feldenkrais, or the other balance and posture course ...

JAMASON Was it Alexander Technique?

COMMANDAY Alexander Technique. One of the two. All of a sudden, boom! He sat there quietly, playing as if this had never happened before. It was a total change in his personality. I was very, very fond of Nate Schwartz. He was one of the dearest people I ever met in that area. Sweet, generous, humorous, and a really great person. When he towards the end of his life became ill with ... I don't really know what it was that eventually took him off ... they discovered – Bonnie and he discovered that there was some kind of a faith healer in Nevada City where we have a second home. They went up there and this person did something with them that suspended the medical problem, apparently, for a period of time, not very long. I don't know what it was or how it happened. It seemed to be helpful, but of course it didn't last and he died. I remember their last recitals together and of course the trios – the Francesco Trio that they played in was just splendid, it was remarkable. You couldn't have done better than those two, and then they had a good violinist with them. He is, again, one of my most fondly remembered colleagues of all. If I had to list ten, he was one of them.

We come to Stuart Canin. Stuart Canin and I ... when I was teaching at the University of Illinois in 1948, Stuart Canin had just won the Paganini Competition ... he was twenty-something. He was brought out to the University of Illinois to play the Bruch *Violin Concerto*, but accompanied by the Illinois Concert Band in a band arrangement of the Bruch *Violin Concerto*. I'll never forget it. I've kidded Stuart Canin about this ever since ... the dean there made a remark about the performance – he said, "It was like a violin in a field of corn." I just cherish that memory of Stuart. Then I never saw Stuart again, until all of a sudden, when the San Francisco Symphony was having its troubles and the orchestra was angry at Joseph Krips, and Joseph Krips was trying his best to shape up the orchestra that had gone down so badly under Jordá, and Jacob Krachmalnick was the concertmaster. He was being very rough on other players in the orchestra. He was instructed by Krips to help shape up the orchestra, and Jake Krachmalnick would report to Krips that the horn was doing this, and the backstand this was doing that, and the men in the orchestra were very angry. Well next thing, all of a sudden, Stuart Canin appears sitting next to Jake Krachmalnick, and I said, "That's it. They're getting rid of Jake and Stuart's going to be the next concertmaster." And that's exactly what happened. So then Stuart was the concertmaster, and fortunately Stuart got along wonderfully with Seji Ozawa. Seji loved Stuart and in later years, after Stuart left the orchestra, Seji would bring Stuart to Japan to be a guest concertmaster with him in various orchestras he had. They had a good relationship. But Seji's successor, Edo de Waart – something about Stuart made Edo self-conscious and uneasy. Edo is a very self-

conscious and not entirely secure person. In fact, he made no bones about getting counseling. He was married a number of times, that was legendary too. Something about Stuart made Edo unhappy – unsatisfied – and they didn't get on. Stuart left, or was let go, and they hired another concertmaster who had been the assistant concertmaster of the Cleveland Symphony Orchestra. He was the orchestra concertmaster for many years afterward, and not successfully. I was very critical of Stuart's successor. Stuart is a magnificent violinist and musician, and we've remained very good friends ever since. He had a second career down in L.A. playing studios and the opera in L.A., and had a pleasant career. Now he's moved back up and he's retired, and we see each other periodically. I'm very fond of Stuart. His sons are very successful. One son is a doctor and has become a very successful novelist. They're good people.

So that's for the list of people we're addressing here.

JAMASON We had a series of questions here. If you have any recollections or anything you'd like to share about Conservatory related events. If you do, wonderful – if you don't, of course we understand.

COMMANDAY The funny thing about Hellman Hall – Milton invited my colleague from the Examiner, Alexander Fried, to come out and look at the plans for the renovation of 19th and Ortega. The architect ... I forget his name, from a very famous San Francisco firm, laid out the plans. I took one look at the auditorium that he was planning and said, "You can't do that." What happened was that originally they were using a large classroom as the auditorium – it was just a large classroom. Like a classroom, the entrance was right next to the stage. So when the architect designed the new auditorium, he just repeated that. So he had the audience coming in at a door right next to the front of the stage. I said, "You can't do that, people have to leave early, they come late, they can't walk in front of the thing." So they had to flip the whole design of that first floor to turn it around. I was kind of shocked that Milton didn't see it, because he's a performer, he knew. But there it is. So that was my memory of that. But I thought it was a successful hall, I thought the acoustics ... it was convenient and successful, and I enjoyed attending things there. It worked out very well. I heard some of the Chamber Music West performances, but to tell you the honest truth, to try to single out performances that I've heard over a thirty-year period, and with my ten thousand bylines ... people ask me, "What were your best performances?" I can't remember any of that. I'd have to go over all those bylines, and recall. And I'm sure I could recall it, I just can't do it out of my head anymore. I went to a couple of the Sing It Yourself Messiahs, and they were a very pleasant experience. I was all in favor of it. In fact, I urged the Lamplighters to do sing-along Pinafores.

JAMASON That's a great idea.

COMMANDAY Yeah, and it took them a long time before they did it. I don't know why, because everybody knows that stuff. I'm all for that. They've always been successful. I think I went to two of them. The opening of Davies Hall, it was one of these interesting experiences that was really memorable. I was involved naturally in observing and commenting on the fundraising and all the run-up to it. That was interesting, but not particularly stimulating or fascinating. But what happened was, in the summer before – it was supposed to open in the fall – and in the summer before there was a construction worker or production strike where materials were held up, so they couldn't finish the hall in time for the opening in the fall. The lobby floors were not marbled, the stairs were not marbled, there was some rough cement. And worst of all, they didn't have time to tune the hall – that is, to do acoustical tests and adjust the reflectors in the ceiling and so forth for optimal tuning. That turned out to be very unfortunate. It happened that the time Davies Hall opened coincided with a performance of the *Ring of the Nibelungen* at the Opera. We had a Music Critic's Association meeting to coincide with these two events, because they were major events. So the acoustician for Davies Symphony Hall was asked, or was invited, to address the music critics – there were a couple of hundred of us – in advance. Instead of getting up there and saying, "Gentlemen, the hall is not complete, it hasn't been tested, so there will be deficiencies," and laying it right out – he behaved as if the thing was all ready to go! He took no opportunity to get himself off the hook and give the hall an honest presentation to the music critics. So obviously what happened was the music critics went in there and heard it, and it was far from satisfactory, and of course there were very critical reviews of the acoustics of an unfinished hall. It was very unfortunate. I can't understand what ever got into his head, except pride. So what happened was that I wrote a very critical review of Davies Hall when it opened. Well, Trader Vic's Victor Bergeron, who owned the Trader Vic's restaurant chain, was so angry at my negative criticism of Davies Hall that he bought an ad in the San Francisco Chronicle attacking me for my review. I loved it, it was so funny. Of course, I wasn't wrong and it was obvious this was the case. To me, it was very amusing. As is known ... I think it was ten years later, my dear departed friend Leonard Kingsley, who was the vice president of the Symphony at the time, was put in charge of the acoustical renovation of Davies Hall, and he hired one of the best acousticians we have, Larry Kirkegaard, who redid the Hall and did some architectural changes as well as cosmetic and device changes. It improved the Hall very significantly, so that was the story of Davies Symphony Hall.

From a sociological, community point of view, the construction and the availability of Davies Hall – enabling the Symphony and the Opera orchestras to split – was the absolute best thing that could have happened. Acoustics in the Opera House, I think I commented earlier, were very unsatisfactory for a symphony orchestra, so when they got into Davies Hall it helped the orchestra improve itself significantly. And ten years later, it helped a lot. Obviously the public has taken to it, and I think from an audience attendance point of view, it's one of the more successful symphony orchestras, and I think Davies Hall had a lot to do with it. There are a number of things connected with the creating of it. One was Louise Davies, of course, who gave

the primary money, but then the lady after whom they named the dining lounge, Phyllis Wattis – originally she had set aside the money to build a little theater on what is now called the Lake Louise parking lot ... there was to be a theater there and she was to have paid for it. Samuel Stewart, who was the former president of the Bank of America, was in charge of fundraising for Davies Hall. They were short, and he convinced Phyllis Wattis to release that money to help put it over the top and finish it, and they did. That's how it happened, and that's why Lake Louise is still a parking lot. Ever since, I've urged the Symphony and the Opera to build a theater there, right into Zellerbach rehearsal hall, but they didn't do it. So that was – again, it made a great change because musicians in the orchestra had the opportunity to decide whether they wanted to go with the Opera or with the Symphony – they made their minds up. And apparently for many of them it seems to be an easy decision. The ones who wanted just to go with the Opera, or the ones who wanted to stay with the Symphony. It worked out perfectly. The orchestra has been on a constant internal improvement in terms of performing and the quality of the sections. I think the two most improved sections of the orchestra were the violas and the basses. Violas in particular. Individuals they've had in that orchestra – flutes and oboes and so forth, have been really first rate players.

Now, the Music Marathons ... I don't think I attended any music marathons, that was not in my religion. Not even to cover it as a news event, I didn't do it.

Now talking about Edo de Waart. Edo was a very interesting man, because, as I mentioned earlier, his insecurities – and, as well known, he was an oboe player, I think he played with Rotterdam. He became a conductor. Interestingly, he did a great deal in new music. Peter Pastreich came in then and both of them together created this activity called New and Unusual Music, in which they would give independent, contemporary music performances of chamber sized things. John Adams was the new music advisor. In those days, they were halcyon days for the orchestra because Michael Steinberg was the music advisor and commentator, and John Adams was the new music advisor. You couldn't have gotten two better equipped, qualified people for those two jobs. So it was really an ideal set of circumstances. Michael Steinberg fought very hard for the programming, and used to say that it was a battle between the marketing people and the programming person. I'm sure he did a lot of good. But Edo was adventurous, he did a lot of new music, and very well. The interesting thing about Edo was that he could conduct very well, and he did some very fine performances, no question. And I credited him with those. And then sometimes he didn't, and I discredited him for that. He took it badly, even though I think I was very even-handed with him and may very well have given him as many positive, complementary reviews as otherwise ... and yet, he'd just look at one review cross-eyed, and he'd get angry. So when he left here and went elsewhere, he brooded about this and commented to the press about how badly he was treated. He wasn't treated badly at all ... not at all. I can prove it by dragging up my reviews, if I wanted to take the trouble. Again, it's a personality thing, it had to do with his personal sense of security, or insecurity. As I said, he went off to

Minneapolis and gave interviews to the press about being psychoanalyzed or counseled ... come on! Keep your underwear out of the newspaper, you know? It was really strange. But I liked him, he was a nice person. He was a good guy, and I have good feelings about him. He's had a career that's bounced around all over the place since, and that's probably what he earns.

About Terry McEwen. The transition from Kurt Herbert Adler was a very different and unusual kind of thing. Kurt was never allowed to conduct until the great wizard, who was the president of the opera for a long time, died. And then Kurt would go into the pit and conduct. He was not a great conductor, he was a competent conductor. He could do certain things very well. But his temperament was so rubicund ... so florid ... that I was really concerned that he might just pass out. So every year I would go to lunch with the president of the Opera, and I would say, "Look – it takes three or four years to find a successor for a general director. One of these days, Kurt is going to drop dead in that opera pit, and you're going to be in trouble. You should have a standing committee to keep an eye out around the field to see what's available so you don't get cut short." Every year I would go through this routine with each sitting president, and they never did. Finally, I forget if it was Tom Tilton, or one of the later ones, went to Kurt and said, "We've got to start thinking about your successor," finally. So then naturally Kurt took charge – he wasn't going to have a search committee, he was going to do it himself, because he knew more than anybody about everything. So it was very funny. I talked about it with Kurt, and said, "What about Lotfi Mansouri?" And he said, "The trouble with Lotfi is that he can't say 'No'!" Of course he was right, but he dismissed Lotfi as a possibility. So then he's the one who picked Terry McEwen. As was well-known, Terry McEwen was this record director at London Records who had helped make Joan Sutherland, and this one and that one and Pavarotti and such. So he had this big reputation as an executive. But, temperamentally, he was totally unsuited for it. First of all, it was well-known that he would go out to these long parties, 'til three, four, or five in the morning, and not show up for work until noon. Number two, he was almost insulting to the fundraisers – to the people who gave money. He was a very arrogant person. His arrogance, which was rooted in his personality, really kicked back on him. I remember once he told this funny story – again, one spring we had a Music Critics Association meeting and we were meeting out at the Legion of Honor and invited Terence to speak to the musicians. Terence told a story to them that he had told my wife and me at dinner once – that he had been in Vienna, seated with three or four European opera general directors, and one of them said something disparaging about opera in San Francisco – pah! So Terence said, "I got up and threw a glass of water in his face and said, 'Now, if you go there and see my opera and still say that, you can throw water in my face'." Imagine! Bragging about doing a thing like that, and saying it to a crowd of journalists. It was just incredibly arrogant, and that was his failing. He did some wonderful things. A few outstanding achievements, and he was certainly an improvement over Lotfi's successor, Rosenberg. He didn't make major mistakes in production, he did some things better than others. But it was his style, his personality, his ego, that really did him in. His

lifestyle was another thing, but of course this is San Francisco, and that's life. And so those are my memories ... I got along with him.

Herbert Blomstedt. Very interesting. The reverse happened to me with Blomstedt than happened to me with Krips. When Josef Krips came, I was initially very critical with certain aspects of his interpreting and his conducting. The more I got to know his work, the more I appreciated it and grew greatly respectful of him. With Blomstedt, the reverse happened. When he started, I was very impressed and supportive, and positive about his work. The more it went on, I realized what the problem was. It was an intellectual problem. Herbert Blomstedt is an intellectual, there's no question about it. He's the only person I've ever know who's read the complete works of Kierkegaard. He played violin, piano, and organ. He's a very thorough Scandinavian musician. But what I finally decided, my final evaluation of him, is that he has the performance in his head, and it doesn't necessarily relate to what's happening. He's conducting the performance in his head, and he's not really communicating it directly to the musicians. It's particularly true when he does choral works, he has no connection to the chorus whatsoever. I think it's internal, and it can be very effective – very clean, precise, appropriate – but not thrilling and you never have a sense that he's interacting with the players. That the horn player is starting to do something with a solo, and he gives that guy the room to do it. So it's this kind of ... it's not as serious as it was with Erich Leinsdorf, who really kept a tight thread to every player's head, it wasn't that serious. But there was still an immediacy of the performance that was missing. The interesting thing is that ever since he's retired, they bring him back, and all he ever does is his old numbers. The Nielsen symphonies, this one and that one ... he just keeps repeating the same things. He needs the security of absolute knowledge of the score, which I'm sure he has. But he doesn't reach me anymore.

About Michael Tilson Thomas ... did I say the story about Josef Krips and Seji Ozawa, the transition? Did I discuss that?

JAMASON Yes.

COMMANDAY OK, that's fine. About Michael Tilson Thomas, and Lotfi, my goodness. Michael is an extraordinary conductor. Initially, particularly, earlier in his career here, than more recently. He did a lot of physical showboating ... I look away, I don't need to see someone thrust his arm at the trumpet players who are going to do something obvious, or things like that, I just ignore it. But I don't think that necessarily disturbed the interpretation, or who it distracted I don't care. I have a fundamental concern about Michael, and it hasn't changed for a long time – in fact it hasn't changed, period. From a programming point of view he's been a big disappointment to me. For some reason or other, Anthony Tommasini from the New York Times thinks he's God's gift to programming, but he's not. His programming is so conventional that I find it tedious. He totally ignores the American twentieth century. Samuel Barber, William

Schuman, Roger Sessions, Darius Milhaud – anyone you can name, he doesn't touch them. The only twentieth century composers he conducts are Lou Harrison, Aaron Copland, Leonard Bernstein of course, and I guess you'd call John Adams twentieth century too, I don't know where he would fit. It's like he has a blind side, and doesn't like that music. It's our whole tradition, and it's a great tradition. Even Roy Harris's *Third Symphony*, which is not great but an important work, we don't hear any of that. So that disturbs me very much. I don't know how much of it has to do with marketing, and with budgets and selling audiences. I can't believe that if Michael Tilson Thomas were to do Roy Harris's *Third Symphony* or Bill Schuman's *Second Symphony* or what, that people would stay away. Of course they wouldn't stay away, that's perfectly available music and it's not off-putting either. So I just don't understand where he's coming from and what this is. There are a lot of things that I think are repeated tediously. I think the Mahler thing has been overdone terribly. But it's what gets to him. Well, my attitude is this – if you don't want to do it, get your guest conductor to do it. If he doesn't want William Schuman or Howard Hanson or whoever, then let somebody else do it. So then he brings in the wonderful conductor from St. Louis, and what does he do? *Carmina Burana*. That to me is the major disappointment with Michael Tilson Thomas. As a conductor, he knows what he's doing, he's fine. He can be a very exciting conductor.

About Lotfi Mansouri. Lotfi was an interesting guy, as I said that anecdote with Kurt Adler about him – he can't say no. Well, Lotfi had some blind sides. He would do certain productions ... what was the composer ... I'll think of it in a minute, he brought in ... Certain blindsides administratively. He had a marketing director, Thomas J. Gulick, who was the most disliked man in the administration. Nobody liked him, and Lotfi supported him to the end. None of the press liked him, nobody liked him, and he just kept him in there. And then after he left he went to Honolulu and the orchestra folded under him. So Lotfi had certain blindsides. He certainly could direct certain things very well. He was especially good in the romantic works and he was an amusing, lively person. I would say ... anybody who would have succeeded Kurt Adler would have had an impossible task to match what happened under Adler; for all of Kurt's mannerisms and micromanaging. I would say that Lotfi was a very competent director, and of the successors until Gockley, he was certainly a more successful general director than either people on either side – Terry McEwen or Pamela Rosenberg, who was the worst thing that ever happened to the San Francisco Opera.

Colin Murdoch was a very even tempered, pleasing person, who obviously was very successful dealing with the Board and doing the administrative things that led to the creation of this building. I never saw him as an educator. I had many discussions with him about curriculum matters and I really wasn't satisfied with his responses to these discussions about curriculum matters. In terms of his own administration, he did hire and keep people on staff who I didn't think were that effective. So I have a mixed feeling about Colin. Obviously, the bottom line was what he accomplished here, with the creation of this building and bringing the Conservatory

downtown. To me, that will be his monument, that would certainly be something ... anybody who would do a thing like that was certainly memorable.

Now about Classical Voice. I retired from the Chronicle in '93, and between '93 and 1998 the decline in the newspapers and their coverage was so serious that something had to be done. It's my firm conviction that a major reason for the greatness of the musical life in the San Francisco area had to do with journalism. In the 1850s, right after the Gold Rush, there were a hundred and thirty newspapers and journals in San Francisco, and they covered the arts. And all through the nineteenth century they supported, reviewed, covered the arts. They pushed and pushed and pushed and there was always that coverage. In the census of 1880, San Francisco ranked third after Pittsburg and New York in the percentage of subscribers to newspapers. Ahead of Chicago, ahead of Cincinnati, ahead of Boston.

JAMASON Wow.

COMMANDAY Really! And when I arrived in 1950, there were four major papers in the city and they all had reviewers. Every town had a paper that had a reviewer. San Mateo, Palo Alto, Richmond, Berkeley, Oakland, all around. Somewhere in the middle of the 1980s, Andrew Porter, the music critic then for the New Yorker magazine, came out here to teach at Berkeley for a semester. Naturally, he went to the performances that were here and covered them. He went in the press rooms, and he said that there's a bigger music press here than in London. And that's what was happening in the 1980s. This is an important reason – the support that the newspapers gave the arts, and in particular music – for the flourishing of music, and certainly dance. A number of years ago the Music Critics Association met and voted San Francisco as the second most active classical music scene in the country. Ahead of Chicago, ahead of Boston, ahead of Philadelphia. It's an amazing thing. But now, all of a sudden, it's stopped. Today – in fact for the last ten years – there are only four full-time music critics on the whole West Coast. Orange County, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Jose. Forget about Portland, forget about Seattle – they don't have music critics. So one morning I got up and said to my wife, "I have an idea." And it was Classical Voice. Originally I thought it would be all pro-bono. I particularly was thinking contemporary music, because contemporary composers always were not sufficiently reviewed, and they were neglected by the paper when the paper was reviewing at all. So I thought the composers were the most qualified people to review contemporary music, and they would do it. Well, obviously it wasn't going to be pro-bono. My wife recommended three days later that I go to Gordon Getty. Five years earlier Gordon had asked me to his house. He was interested in financing a national journal that would collect music criticisms from all over the country and reprint them. It had been tried a couple of times, and it didn't work, and I reported to him that it was not feasible for all kinds of reasons. Remembering that, I wrote a one-page proposal based on what I had learned: when you want to give a proposal to somebody, put it on one page – not more than one page. I handed it to him and three days later his secretary called

me and said he would finance it, and told me how much he would give – and it was just the amount I needed to start. He’s been the angel of it ever since. So then, the principles were very clear. I can make writers out of musicians, I can’t make musicians out of writers – so I’m going to get musicians to write these reviews and I’ll train them how to write, and that’s what I did. Happily, because of my career at the Chronicle when I would call up musicians, they trusted me. Those who agreed to do it, did. I had a massive stable of about seventy, of whom I drew usually about thirty. There were never more than that many people writing, but there was a master list and we did it. So for eight years my wife and I did this alone. We’d stay up until three or four o’clock on a Monday to get it out on Tuesday. We did this for eight years, and then finally it became time to retire, and I did. They hired another person who didn’t turn out to be successful, and it went on. Now it’s stabilized. It has a readership of about 70,000 every week. It’s doing all right. The Board needs to be enlarged, and the fundraising needs to be developed. It’s still a nonprofit ... there’s advertising, and happily there is an income from advertising and the budget is respectable, but it still needs more work. I’m on the Board, I only write very occasionally for it. So I’m satisfied that it’s doing its job.

JAMASON It’s a wonderful thing. You mentioned before, answering another question about the concern that musicians who were writers had ... when you had this first stable of seventy writers who were primarily musicians, were there concerns about those same people essentially reviewing colleagues?

COMMANDAY Sure.

JAMASON Would people sort of self – say, “Well, I know these people, I play with them, or I don’t ...?”

COMMANDAY There was some of that, but not too much. When I became a critic I had been a performer here for many years, and I was now reviewing the people that I had worked with, and it was never a problem. I think it’s reflected in your style and your attitude, and the reader – whether he’s one of the performing musicians or a member of the audience – can sense what your point of view is, and if you have a good point of view and if you’re really talking about the music and getting into it. I suppose one of my disappointments is that the composers in particular were reluctant to do it, because they’d be criticizing musicians who would be playing their music, or they’d be criticizing colleagues. The composers were the ones that were most uptight about it, and that was too bad because I felt they were the most qualified. But hey, that’s the way that goes. Basically, I think musicians understood the principle of reviewing, that you’re not criticizing with a capital K, you’re responding to an experience. It seemed to work all right.

JAMASON Oh, it’s wonderful.

COMMANDAY Now, let's see here. About Pamela Rosenberg. Well, this is an interesting case for me personally. It turns out that a Hollywood composer happens to live and work in Oakland. He's a very well-known and very well regarded Hollywood composer. His wife was a childhood friend of Pamela Rosenberg in Los Angeles. She and her father took Pamela to her first opera when San Francisco Opera was playing in L.A. and introduced her to the thing. Then Pamela came to Cal and majored in history, and got involved in opera. Almost all her previous experience in opera was overseas. When it came time to hire her, there were three members – the chairman of the Board, the president of the Board, and the former president of the Board, Bill Goddard. Bill Goddard was against her. Franklin "Pitch" Johnson, the chairman, was for her and so was Reid W. Dennis, and they pushed her through. Pamela Rosenberg's central problem was that she is a very shy person who is not comfortable in the presence of more than two people at a time. To sit with her at dinner, it's pleasant. It's delightful, she's a lovely, nice person to be with. More than one person and she's tied up. Press conferences with her were a disaster. Same with fundraising, for a similar reason – that's the administrative part of it. The creative part of it – her background in opera production was in Europe, in Germany particularly – in Frankfurt and then later in Stuttgart. What has uncomplimentarily been called Eurotrash – very uptight, modernized productions with very extreme ideas. Well, I once asked her at a press conference – "Ms. Rosenberg," I said, "If you saw a producer come here to do an opera, and you saw that he was doing something that wasn't going to work, what would you do?" She said, "Nothing." She would do nothing. It was kind of like poetic license, that he could do whatever he pleased! I was shocked, because who protects the composer? Who protects the audience? Who protects the cast? If not the general director, if something like that was to go on. I was shocked, and I've never gotten over that response from her. The second thing is – this is an example of some of the things that she did. She wanted to do a new production of *The Barber of Seville*. So her producer built a sixty-ton house. It was so bulky and heavy that they had to reconstruct the stage machinery under the stage. And then, for rehearsal purposes, she had a duplicate built to put over in Zellerbach rehearsal hall, for the rehearsals. Talk about wild extravagances, and overdoing ... never mind the decision to do the Messiaen. That was a gamble. I didn't admire the project. I saw it twice ... but that's another question, that's a matter of taste and judgment. But she did a performance of *Alcina* by Handel that was so bad that while the major arias were being sung, there were other people on the stage doing distracting things. There were lovers making love in the corner while this poor woman is trying to sing a Handel aria. People were walking out. That was a terrible thing. That was a case where an intelligent general director would see something happen and say, "Hey, you can't do that." And then Pitch Johnson, the chairman, and the president – after her contract was not renewed, they kept her on as an advisor or something ... paying her for the next couple of years, it was unbelievable. Then the most amusing thing happened, which was she was hired by the Berlin Philharmonic who thought that because she was running an American company she could raise money. And that's the one thing she wasn't able to do! The whole thing was a very unfortunate experience. The president got along with her, but it was a disaster.

David Gockley ... I'm very fond of David, I think he's done very, very well. For memories of him ... I think his humor, his flexibility, his foresight and his deep experience have all paid off tremendously. That the company still has fundraising problems is a function of the community, not of his efforts. Because, as has become clear, the giving generation has gotten old. I don't know whether the younger, newer, richer people that are coming along out of Silicon Valley and Google and all of those places, whether they're going to step up to the plate. There's a kind of a cultural aristocracy here that's sustained this community, and sustained this Conservatory. Whether the millennials are going to step up to the plate is the big challenge. I'm sorry he's retiring, but he's been pretty long in the tooth in this job, and been at it a long time. I admire what he's done.

About the change of the school, the moving of the Conservatory. There's no question that it's changed the character of the school. But as far as I'm concerned, my personal jury is still out in terms of the curricular changes ... whether there are fundamental changes in the educational structure. David Stull talks about things, and I don't know to what extent there have been the curricular changes that I would like to see in a Conservatory.

JAMASON Could you talk a little about what those changes are that you'd like to see?

COMMANDAY I would like to see a greater stress on academic learning, on writing and listening other than performing and theory and the typical upfront Conservatory courses. I would like to see it become, in the deeper sense of the word, more academic. More intellectually demanding. Because that's where great art comes from, that's the fundamental of great art. So until that kind of change happens, it will just be another Conservatory. There's another thing about conservatories – and this is universal, we're talking about all the conservatories in this country – treat their faculty as contract workers. Unless faculty are respected personally and professionally and for their intellects, they're not going to contribute in the way that it needs to be. They need to have an intellectual stake in the outcome, and there's no conservatory in this country that accomplishes that. Certainly not Juilliard. And not Curtis. I don't know how it was at Eastman when my friend Bob Freeman was running it, I just don't know about that.

JAMASON I wonder if we could jump down – since we're on this subject – to this last question here, as far as advice you'd give to a young musician or music student today – a conservatory student or somebody coming up. I know it's a big question, but it would be very interesting to hear your thoughts on that.

COMMANDAY That's a difficult one. I'd say the most important thing that a musician student or a young musician can do, is to expand his musical experience into as many different areas in the classical music field as he can. So that if he's a pianist, he listens to Lieder. If he's a

violinist, he listens to opera. Because the cross musical information that comes from related fields are more important. Somebody was telling me the other day – a very famous piano teacher who has been teaching for forty years at Curtis and Juilliard – he was talking about these piano students who had never listened to Lieder, no idea what that’s about. So that would be one thing that comes to mind. Another thing I believe in, as I said earlier; I think they should learn to deepen their listening by writing about it. By writing their responses to the music – not their emotional response, their understanding of the structure and design and the internal process of the music they’re listening to. Because being compelled to put it into words will make it more important for them to increase the amount of listening and not the hearing. Those are two things that I would feel.

Now, the last questions. The personal highlights of 60 years of music in the Bay Area ... I can’t ... Rubinstein, Heifetz, Toscanini ... and opera performances, there are certain opera performances that will always remain with me. I remember for example when there was going to be a *Tristan and Isolde*, and Birgit Nilsson was the Isolde. For some reason or other, whoever the Tristan was supposed to be, he was sick or couldn’t make it, so they brought in Wolfgang Windgassen, who was very long in the tooth then. Well, the two of them together just did a magical performance. They inspired each other. Then there was the *Die Frau ohne Schatten* that was done here with Karl Böhm. That was a wonderful, unforgettable thing. And then there was the funniest *Turandot* – I dubbed the “Cab-Pav” *Turandot* of Caballe and Pavarotti. That was a special one. But there were these things, and someday ... I don’t know if I’ll ever have a chance to go over my bylines because one set is here, and another set is at Cal, and who can go over that many things? But it’s an accumulative experience. I feel like I was blessed, I was so fortunate to have those thirty years at the Chronicle because A) they were the golden years of the Chronicle, and they were golden years in the city, and to be a part of that was just a blessing. And it’s the totality of it that I can just look back on and smile.

JAMASON I can imagine.

COMMANDAY The key events ... the key people.... There’s no question that Kurt Adler certainly has to be a major person. And now Michael Tilson Thomas has become that. Joseph Krips turned the orchestra around, and he was a key person. And there were individuals ... I’d like to talk about Agnes Albert for a minute. Agnes Albert was the vice president of the Symphony forever, and the chairman of its music committee forever. She was a musician, she was a pianist, but she stopped performing pretty well on. She lived a long time out on Lyon Street. She was independently wealthy, and was really a major force in the Symphony, even during its poorer years, because she helped finance its educational arm, and was more important than anyone else in the educational outreach of the Symphony. Agnes was a very special person, and I’d say she had to be one of the greats.

I mentioned Leonard Kingsley, who was a vice president for a long time. The changes in the presidencies of the Symphony was interesting. After J.D. Zellerbach ... J.D. Zellerbach was the president of the Symphony for too long. He was the one who chose Jordá over George Solti, Leonard Bernstein, William Steinberg and others, and then insisted on renewing Jordá's contract when it was clear that it shouldn't have been done. His protégé was an advertising man in town named Philip Boone. And Philip Boone then succeeded him. Phil was a micromanager in the sense that he did too much managing ... he was the president, but he interfered in the management of the Symphony too much. Joseph Scafidi, who had been with the Symphony thirty, forty years and was the actual manager, I think that Phil Boone really overrode him. Phil Boone was the one who was negotiating with Ronald Wilford for Ozawa to succeed Krips behind Krips' back. But he was very ambitious. His successor, Brayton Wilbur, was a very fair, decent president. And thereafter they've had good presidents. But those men had an influence – some of it disproportionate. I think the Opera presidents, with the exception of these men that hired Pamela Rosenberg, I think they did a pretty good job. But the hiring of Rosenberg was a big mistake – but that's another question. So those were some of the key people, aside from some of the great artists that have developed here. One of the things that is not sufficiently celebrated is the number of artists who began their careers here. We've talked about Isaac Stern and Yehudi Menuhin, and those are obvious ones, but the number of divas who started their careers – that Kurt Alder discovered – Leonie Rysanek, Leontyne Price, we never get credit for introducing. I am going to, very soon, write a series of articles about the great opera stars who began their careers in San Francisco. Tom Hampson ...

JAMASON Will you go all the way back to the Tetrzzini generation?

COMMANDAY Oh, yeah.

JAMASON Wonderful, I look forward to reading that. Finally, we're wondering if you can speak on two things – I know you're very passionate about education and the schools, and any general thoughts you might have about things you might hope for for the future of our major organizations – the Opera, the Symphony, the Conservatory, in the future.

COMMANDAY About school education – that's always been a big, big thing with me. In 1948 to '50 at the University of Illinois, part of my role was to visit the high schools in Illinois. I was deeply impressed by the level of music education in the Midwest, particularly in Illinois. So when I came out to the Bay Area, I saw a different level, and realized the discrepancy. In the 1950s it was pretty good, and there was a fair amount of it. The decline started in the late '50s and just continued down to the point where it's untenable. Unfortunately, I'm not just blaming this on the boards of education – it's a cultural thing. It has to do with what's been happening to American culture, which is reflected in the educational process. I'm sure in other aspects of school education the same criticisms can be laid. Different emphasis being placed. So I'm very

discouraged by the state of music education in the schools. Orchestras, and even opera companies, have made efforts to outreach and to create educational programs. Unfortunately, most of us are concerned with playing music at the kids, not getting the kids to make their own music. I think sending a handful of musicians into an elementary school – “This is a bassoon, this is a clarinet...” So what? If you don’t get the kids themselves with the Kodály, or the Orff method – in some way get them involved – it’s not going to happen. So I’m very discouraged, but it’s a discouragement that has to do with the passive nature of culture today and the fact that it’s mostly about entertainment. I don’t know how that can be turned around, to tell you the truth. So I’m not very sanguine about what’s going on, and I don’t know what it would take to turn the culture around, because the direction it’s been going like a juggernaut in the direction of entertainment ... video games and what have you ... to the point where I haven’t got much use for it.

JAMASON Given that cultural shift, how do you see the future of the Symphony and the Opera, etc.? In that kind of context?

COMMANDAY Well, I think if classical music – whether it’s opera or symphony or whatever – if it can sustain a generative interest in the way performances are programmed and given to involve the audience – to engage the audience – rather than entertain the audience – it has to do with, I suppose you could call it the aggressiveness of the performance or the positiveness of the performance and the point of view of the producers. That’s the trick, that’s what has to be done. The engagement of the audience so they are listening, not just hearing, so that they are intellectually involved as well as superficially hearing something that sounds pretty. You do get, when you go to a really exciting and stimulating performance, you do get a sense that the audience has got it, that they get it. But it’s never a universal thing in an audience, so it’s a question of what percentage of that audience you’re reaching. I guess this is maybe one of the reasons why I think the stress on say – Mahler – is in the long run unhealthy, because I think that to depend on music that goes to extremes of expression – I’m talking about dissonance, and aggressive range of dynamic and color – if you’re depending on that to reach an audience ... if you can get that with Beethoven or Brahms symphony, then you’ve accomplished something more and something deeper, I think. It’s a constant challenge. That’s both the beauty and the terror of it. I know that for me, at my age now, what happens to me is different because when I am listening to a piece of music that has engaged me, whether it’s on the radio or in a concert or on a CD, I reach into it and kind of memorize it. I don’t know how much of it is because of the quality of that performance, or how much of it is because of my need to get into that piece. So that for the next two days I hear it. I’m so selective about it now that it’s a very deliberate act on my part. But again, it’s not necessarily because that particular performance is that outstanding, it’s my need that gets it into me. I’m happy about that, because I don’t have to sit back and say, “Well, this is only a fair performance.” I hear the piece. I’m not worried about whether it’s Toscanini or whoever. Sure, if it’s a great performance, I’ll get that.

JAMASON That's beautiful. Well Bob, it's been such a pleasure and an honor to speak with you. Before we conclude, are there any other lingering thoughts that you'd like to share?

COMMANDAY I don't know. I've talked so much, I feel like I've kind of exhausted my soul. Sure, one could always embellish and go into greater details. The more one thinks about it, the more one remembers of this or that or the other thing.

JAMASON Well, it's been really fascinating for me personally, and myself and the Conservatory and the archive here, we just appreciate it so much. So thank you very much, indeed.

COMMANDAY Thank you.