# Robin Sutherland 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 January 29 and February 29, 2016
Tessa Updike, 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 through the past century.

**Robin Sutherland Interview**
This interview was conducted at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music on January 29 and February 29, 2016 in the Conservatory's archives by Tessa Updike.

**Tessa Updike**
Tessa Updike is the archivist for the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. Tessa holds a B.A. in visual arts and has her Masters in Library and Information Science with a concentration in Archives Management from Simmons College in Boston. Previously she has worked for the Harvard University Botany Libraries and Archives and the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley.

# Robin Sutherland

The American pianist, Robin Sutherland, studied with Rosina Lhevinne at the Juilliard School and with Paul Hersh at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. While still an undergraduate, he was appointed principal pianist of the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra (SFS) by Seiji Ozawa. The recipient of numerous awards, Sutherland was selected at 17 to be sole participant from the USA at the International Bach Festival, held at Lincoln Center. He was a finalist in the International Bach Competition in Washington DC and has performed all of J.S. Bach's keyboard works.

An avid chamber musician, Robin Sutherland is co-director of the Telluride Players and a regular performer at the Bay Chamber Concerts in Rockport, Maine. Many composers have dedicated works to him, and among the world premieres in which he has participated was that of John Adams's *Grand Pianola Music*, with members of the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra.

A frequent soloist with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, Robin Sutherland has been featured in Leonard Bernstein's *Age of Anxiety* with Michael Tilson Thomas conducting, in San Francisco and on tour, and last May he was featured in Martin's *Petite Symphonie* concertante. In 1996, his recording of J.S. Bach's Goldberg Variations (BWV 988) was released on the d'Note label.

## January 29, 2016

**UPDIKE** It is January 29, 2016. This is Tessa Updike in the Conservatory's archives with Robin Sutherland, and we're doing an interview for the Conservatory's Oral History Project. So Robin, could you start out by telling us a little bit about your early history? Where and when you were born?

**SUTHERLAND** It was a dark and stormy night. Actually no … it was stormy all right, but it was morning. It was a cold, stormy morning, March 5, 1951 in Denver, at St. Joseph's hospital. I don't remember the weather that day, but I do remember weather on subsequent birthdays, and it was always crappy in Colorado in the first week of March. Most of my birthdays after I got old enough to handle a snow shovel were spent doing just that – shoveling snow on my birthday. Finally, when I was fourteen or fifteen, they said, "What do you want for your birthday?" I said, "Not to shovel snow today." Believe it or not, they fell for it.

**UPDIKE** You got your wish.

**SUTHERLAND** That's true, I did. That's actually one reason I ultimately ended up in San Francisco – was to escape snow.

**UPDIKE** What did your parents do?

**SUTHERLAND** I was born in Denver, but the identity of my natural parents is unknown to me. I was adopted at the age of ten days by a very, very nice couple from Greeley, Colorado, which is a university town approximately fifty miles to the north of Denver. Actually, Greeley is the midpoint between Denver and Cheyenne [Wyoming] – the two state capitals. My mother, as was the case with most mothers in those days, was a homemaker. That is, I think, a fairly rare full-time occupation these days, people don't seem to do that anymore. My father was in the dry-cleaning and linen supply business; sort of a big fish in a small pond. The size of Greeley's pond those days was about 25,000 people. Currently it is at 100,000, and completely changed from what I remember. My father briefly was on the city council – he was one of Greeley's first citizens (Mayor Pro Tem) a very successful businessman – but the accent was always on the small pond. Greeley in those days … in my family, if you didn't know somebody, you certainly knew of them. That was the story. Three years later my younger sister came along under the same circumstances; also adopted. A different set of parents, but it was just us four growing up, and a succession of dogs.

**UPDIKE** Were your parents musical at all?

**SUTHERLAND** They were not. Greeley was the site of what in earliest Colorado history was known as the State Normal School. It was where you went to college if you wanted to learn how to be a teacher. Then it morphed into the Colorado State College of Education in the early 20th century, and morphed further into Colorado State College, which was what it was when I went there. Currently it is the University of Northern Colorado, and it's quite a big school, but still extremely highly thought of in terms of its educational outlook and its programs. And it had a spectacular music department, for whatever reason … little Greeley Colorado. So, there I was at the age of three, enrolled in day-school. It was called Kepner Hall, which makes it sort of sound like Downton Abbey. So I'm at Kepner Hall, on the campus of the University. Next door to Kepner Hall is Frasier Hall, which is the music building. Like all three-year-olds we had play time and nap time. There was a whole flotilla of trikes outside in the yard, so when it was time for recess most everybody went out and hit the trikes, and the slides and swings. I (and this was all told to me, I have no memory of this) would stay inside at the piano, which was an old upright against one wall of this great room. It seemed great to me at the age of three … if I were to go back now and look at it, maybe not so huge as that. But it was a big room. It had a dance bar on one end, and one wall was completely mirrored. So I thought, "This is where people learn to dance." But I would stay inside and I would pick at intervals on the piano. I wouldn't bang, they said – I would pick out consonant intervals.

This was noticed one day by the buxom woman who served us juice and cookies, and put out the little blankies for naps. Again, I don't remember this, but it was made clear to me later. This woman was not just a buxom woman babysitting three-year-olds; she was in fact the dean of elementary education at the University. This was what she was doing, and that mirrored wall was one-way; behind it were her students – her elementary education majors – watching the buxom lady, Dr. Bernardi (subsequently Dr. Alberta Reitze and Betty Lowry; tremendous educators in their own right) work with three-year-olds. We were being watched … that kind of creeps me out in retrospect. But what did she do? Dr. Lowry picks up the phone and calls next door to Frasier Hall to a woman named Rita Hutcherson, who was head of the piano department at the University. She said, "You need to come over and sit behind my mirrored wall and watch this kid." Absolutely unbeknownst to me – I did what I would always do, I stayed inside. Also there were huge fish tanks; I would watch fish and poke quietly at the piano. She observed me, and thus it was that one week before my fourth birthday I was enrolled in the University as her piano student. That developed into the first real musical relationship of my life.

I remained with Dr. Hutcherson from that week until I left Colorado for Juilliard. She was a single woman. I became her son, and my parents were only too happy to let this happen. They provided everything that she said I needed. "This boy needs a better piano … he needs to go to Denver to listen to the Denver Symphony." So all of this was arranged, and I did it, and Rita Hutcherson and I became inseparable over those years. I, for instance, have known how to read

music as long, if not longer, than I've known how to read printed words. This all happened very, very early on, and I must have sponged everything up.

Rita Hutcherson was … I still to this day don't know how she ended up in Greeley. She was one of Yale University's early female graduates in the doctoral program. She took classes with Paul Hindemith. She studied briefly with Dame Myra Hess. She had all this music cred. A female doctor of music in the mid '50s – very rare – and there she is, head of the piano department. It was just one of those incredibly good, fortunate things. All those ducks were lined up for me – the unwitting three-year-old – that's what I walked into. From then on, if I needed to be absent for a little elementary school piano competition or something, it was fine because the head of the piano department would just pick up the phone and say, "I'm sorry, we need him. I'm really sorry about spelling, or penmanship, but that will have to wait for a while." So I had that edge too – I never had to miss anything. The piano and my music always came first, and my surrogate mother saw to that. My parents were not absentee parents by any means, but they honestly didn't know what to make of me. My story (and it remains my story to this day) is that I do what I do extremely well, and that's all I do. I have no aptitude for … I'm lousy at sports … I can screw in a light bulb, I can put gas in my car. If anything more than that goes wrong with my car, I'm absolutely helpless. That's been the story my whole life – it was all in support of the piano, and what I did. And I proved my pianistic worth early, apparently, and sort of stuck with it.

**UPDIKE** So Rita Hutcherson was your only piano teacher throughout that time.

**SUTHERLAND** I teach now, and I see people at the age of fifteen who are veterans of – depending on how much their parents move around – they have many piano teachers under their belt. In fact, that's the norm. But not for me, and my parents; obviously we weren't a military family, we were in Greeley Colorado. The tombstones have my parents' names on them in Greeley, Colorado, as do the generation before that. It was a nice, 'Beaver Cleaver' kind of life, without so much comedy or drama, maybe. Just a normal kid in the Midwest. I missed out on a lot of things by not growing up in New York City, or having a father who was a university professor, but I had Rita Hutcherson, so I was always involved with that. Looking back, I don't think I would change anything. It was great.

**UPDIKE** Could you describe her appearance?

**SUTHERLAND** Rita Hutcherson was a very short woman, which in those days seemed tall to me, but very quickly I eclipsed her in height. For most of our relationship I towered over her. I'm 6'4'' and change, and I achieved that height pretty early; gangly and gawky. But she compensated for her lack of height by this tremendous up-done hair, which was beautiful. She would let me examine it. If she wanted to augment it, she would have what she referred to as her 'chignon' – which was just a hairpiece, but that made her even taller still. You look at photos of

her – who she most resembled was the British comedian Beatrice Lillie; Lady Peel. The physical resemblance was very strong, but you see all this hair piled up! She never wore hats. She had small hands, but I remember that I would ride her hands in lessons, I would piggyback and she had what I later learned was something to be prized very highly, and that is a flawless knuckle bridge with very straight – your fingers can be curved, but her fingers were naturally straight, sort of like mine tend to be now. Her fifth finger was as if it were made out of redwood; hard as rock and straight as a steel beam. Perfect.

The scope of our hands was hugely different, I have a gigantic hand, she did not – but I remember piggybacking with her, and feeling her thumb go under for the scales. I'm thinking now if that would be actionable in a court of law. It was a pretty touchy/feely kind of thing. She would always come up behind me and grab my shoulders – down with shoulders, out with the tension. It was a very hands-on, physical approach; one that I have sort of adopted unwittingly in my teaching. But these days you can't do that, it possibly could be misconstrued. It was also the most direct way of communication, to be grabbed by the shoulder-blades from the rear. A brilliant teacher, we lost her in 2008, in her one hundredth year; six weeks shy of her one hundred and first birthday. A good, solid woman from southern Missouri – Webster Groves, Missouri. Went to Europe, went to Yale, and somehow ended up in Greeley. The best thing that ever happened to me.

**UPDIKE** Did you have your lessons with her at the college, or at her house?

**SUTHERLAND** Both. Frasier Hall, studio 155 was my second home for most of my growing up. My lessons never went on a clock, except when they had to at the school. But once we got to her home – often she would fix me dinner. The only thing that would interrupt it I think was Tuesdays from 6-6:30, that was Perry Mason on the TV, and everything had to stop for Raymond Burr and Perry Mason. So I saw a lot of courtroom dramas, but the lessons would go on into the night, and she would drive me home. If I wasn't at home there was never so much question of, "Where is Robin?" That's where I was.

**UPDIKE** What kind of music did you like to listen to when you were at home by yourself? Did you listen to piano music, or did you like popular music? Did you hear things on the radio?

**SUTHERLAND** The first recording that I can ever remember being in our house (this was a super, super long time ago) was Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra, and the disk was *The Glorious Sounds of Christmas*, with Christmas carols conveniently arranged for full orchestra by Eugene Ormandy with the Temple University Choir. That record got played into oblivion. A couple years ago my sister located it on CD, and that was in the stocking that year. We put it on, and it was as if not a week had gone by between that day and when I was five and

six years old. There were other recordings, but that's the one that made the biggest impression on me – *The Glorious Sounds of Christmas*. The *Manfred Overture* of Robert Schumann was one that just fascinated me. The fifth *Brandenburg Concerto* of Sebastian Bach on the harpsichord – that was something. Then I decided that I wanted to learn to play the harpsichord, because I loved the sound. The way to do that was to go into the sideboard in the dining room, and get all the knives out – all the flatware knives – and put them on the strings of the grand piano. It sounded dreadful, and as it turns out it was really bad for both the piano and the knives. My mother was not happy because they bounce around on the strings. But it sort of gave that tinkly kind of sound.

And then in 1960 the University acquired its first harpsichord – a big double manual Sabathil harpsichord out of Vancouver. A beautiful instrument, very big and steel-framed. Not historically accurate – Corey Jamason [SFCM harpsichord faculty] would have a stroke, he would never play it. But there it was, and a succession of harpsichordists came on the University concert series, and so for a while I was completely fascinated by the instrument that sounded like the record but without the aid of kitchen knives on the strings. It was just perfect. I ended up being something of a harpsichordist – we've recorded *Brandenburg no. 5* several times with the Symphony, and it's me there. I remember having that dream that it would be the most amazing thing … that cadenza … and little did I know, that would be one of the things I'd end up with. What was the question? I got lost with the kitchen knives.

**UPDIKE** What you liked listening to.

**SUTHERLAND** Pretty much aurally, auditorily, I was an omnivore. Everything interested me – including, of course, rock and roll; a huge rock and roll fan. I'm talking to you on the day after the death of Paul Kantner, which is a gigantic blow to me – the founder of Jefferson Airplane. When I was fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen years old, me and four other guys – doctors, lawyers, mayors, businessmen – we were sort of the well-off kids, but we had a garage band, and we were good! In fact, I defy you to find a better mimicking of *Eight Miles High* by The Byrds, for instance – that was one of our specialties. I remember it very clearly; we were no better than The Byrds, but certainly no worse. It was tough in a university town because when you wanted to make money in those days, 60 or a 100 dollars was unheard of. We each pocketed 20 dollars – that was unheard of. Those were all of the fraternities on campus – the Sigma Chi's were the real partiers. We'd run an extension cord out into some farmer's field and they'd have keggers. I'm sure that still happens, but it was very hard to get employment in Greeley, Colorado, because we weren't old enough to go into any of these places where rock and roll bands played. So it disbanded, but I'm not one of these people who go, "Eww, ick, rock and roll." No, no, no – bring it on, the more the merrier. And then that expanded over the years to include all sorts of non-traditional music. Not everything is a Beethoven piano sonata, and I think that's something for which we should be very grateful. The horizon was broad, and I did my best to make it broader.

**UPDIKE** Do you remember the very first time you performed in public?

**SUTHERLAND** Yes, I do.

**UPDIKE** Could you describe it?

**SUTHERLAND** It was in room 63 of Frasier Hall, which was sort of this quasi-auditorium. It had tiers built into the floor, and I finally figured out that those were risers for the University band – which, by the way, was a cracker-jack band run by a guy named Buddy Baker; jazz trombonists will recognize that name. But it was in there, and it was for one of Rita's collegiate classes. Pre-college as we know it in this institution didn't exist, at least not in Greeley; it was just Rita's young kids. It was probably one of those "take attendance at the door" things. And if I were in one of her collegiate classes I would have done anything in my power to get out of that sort of thing. I played the Chopin *Prelude in A major*, which takes about twelve seconds to play [sings part of it]. I did very well; I played it from memory, and I got a hollowed out bust of Mozart – and the bust was full of jelly beans! That was my little prize from Rita. It explains my love of jelly beans to this day, and my love of Mozart, maybe.

**UPDIKE** How old were you?

**SUTHERLAND** Five? Early. Things moved early, and they moved quick. I have reams of mimeographed – "From the Studio of Rita Hutcherson" – one of whom Ellen Chang, who is a piano teacher of considerable note in Saratoga, down the peninsula, and we are still very close to today – there are our names. As we grew older, our names got more and more towards the bottom because our pieces – the hard stuff – came last. The fast, loud, fancy hard stuff came last. We graduated to the bottom of the list, and then other people would play the little Chopin *A Prelude*. We watched that go over the years, and I presume in piano studios it still goes like that. But mimeographed … I remember the smell as they came off the drum, and they were slightly damp with purplish ink on white paper. I think somewhere in my sister's house in Greeley, Colorado, might still be that hollowed out bust of Mozart.

**UPDIKE** Did your sister take music lessons?

**SUTHERLAND** Yes, she studied with Rita, too, but it was a case of – my sister had other strengths. I remember seventh, eighth, ninth grade, she was a very, very decent flutist. But she had other strengths. Her calling was with the nursing profession, and so she gradually went that way. Kepner Hall, if you kept with it, turned into University High when you weren't three anymore. That was called Bishop-Lehr Hall – that was the high school, where the nerdy university kids, the dorks, went. But we had great athletics – not me, certainly, but my sister was

head cheerleader, and they still talk about her, some of the routines that she was able to do. And she was a tremendous gymnast. All the things that I secretly wished that I could do, but couldn't.

**UPDIKE** Could you talk a little bit – before we get to college –

**SUTHERLAND** But see, we've never left college! I was a college student at the age of three. I was enrolled in the University. Administratively, it had to be. So I was never her private student. In a sense, I have no concept of life not being in college.

**UPDIKE** Are there any teachers from your grade school or high school who you'd like to mention? Not even necessarily in music, but anyone who you remember who you'd like to say something about.

**SUTHERLAND** For eight years I was a student of Dr. Don Garlick on the cello. When I was in fourth grade I thought it would be fun to have another instrument, and cello was always my favorite. I would say that I could be admitted to the San Francisco Conservatory of Music as a cellist – or at least in the days when I was admitted. I was decently proficient – I worked hard at it. Dr. Garlick's son Carl was my best friend growing up, and we are best friends to this day. I am the godfather to Carl's oldest daughter, who bears my name – so that's a friendship that really gelled, and Carl and I got up to all kinds of mischief. His daddy worked at Frasier Hall, just down the hall from Rita, and I practically lived at Frasier Hall. There were huge pine trees on the grounds, so we would climb to the very top and drop pine cones on people, and hide from people – we thought it was very cool to hide. "Ooooh, they can't see us, but we can see them!" We were complete idiots. And then we started doing things like stopping up the men's restroom with toilet paper, and flushing it eight millions times – and the water would come out into the hall. But we couldn't really get in trouble because of his daddy, and my teacher. So we pranked a lot of people – the poor people must have hated us.

Then there was Dwight Nofziger, who was the teacher of the chorus at University High; but again, he was head of the voice department at the University. Again – he wasn't the juice and cookie guy, but he was also the big cheese chorally at the University, and we did little productions of musicals and stuff. I was of course always the pianist, because I could do things quickly and play fancy piano parts. Who needed an orchestra as long as I was around? So I have a tiny bit of musical theater – but always from the orchestra pit, always from the keyboard, which is where I shined.

Foreign language teachers – Dr. Paul LaBorne – German and Latin. Latin was an elective in the curriculum in my seventh, eighth, ninth, tenth grades. And Spanish – George Taylor, a remarkable Spanish teacher. Spanish in the curriculum in those days was not an elective, due to

the demographic of where I lived it was required; which came in handy later in life, with the arrival of some people who are primarily Spanish speakers.

Thelma Butler – my sixth grade teacher who was very big on things like penmanship. Did you ever take penmanship?

**UPDIKE** I must have.

**SUTHERLAND** Well, I can tell you they don't anymore. The art of putting something on paper and making it legible and readable (and in some cases even beautiful to look at) that's a dead thing. But Thelma Butler had gone to Greeley High with my mother, so I was kind of always one of her pets, and I loved what she taught. She taught everything. Teachers have always played a huge, huge role in my life. They are the single most valuable component of any youth – certainly of mine. I wrote a string quartet for Mrs. Butler – dear God, what it must have sounded like! But I remember borrowing my mother's fountain pen and inking the score for her, and presenting it to her. Who knows what became of my string quartet? It was probably dreadful. But these people are all gone now – in some cases, long gone. But Butler Field is still …

**UPDIKE** Is it named after her?

**SUTHERLAND** After her son, Butch Butler, who was killed in automobile accident, which is very common in farming communities. But Mrs. Butler's husband, Dr. Pete Butler, was the University head of physical education. So all my chums were all in reality masquerading as heads of departments at the University. That was the educational situation in Greeley, Colorado – the University town.

Mrs. Miller, my seventh grade homeroom teacher … I don't know these people's stories. Where did Mrs. Miller come from? How old might Mrs. Miller have been? Older than us, of course, but she always seemed kind of young. She had a way of presenting things in a very exciting way; at least exciting to me. I remember in seventh grade I had to stand up in front of the class and give a report on Herbert Hoover. I remember my girlfriend Laurie, right across the aisle – she picked Thomas Edison. All of a sudden, Herbert Hoover, (who was of course one of the great nightmares in American political history) was fascinating to me in seventh grade. To this very day, I would give anything not to wake up every tenth of August and have my first thought seriously be, "Today is Herbert Hoover's birthday." August tenth. I haven't thought about Herbert Hoover sideways in decades, but that's one of those annoying little things that will never, ever go away, as long as I live. August tenth – happy birthday, Herbert Hoover.

School fascinated me. I was always very good – straight A's – I loved it. I did my best, and boy – I wouldn't trade school for anything. This of course is all going to culminate with SFCM, when I finally got here. But school was always an incredibly potent, vital force in my life.

**UPDIKE** I know you could probably talk about Rita forever, but is there anything more that you'd like to say about her here? She was your teacher for so long, and obviously piano has been your life since then. Could you talk a little bit about her teaching style, and how she inspired you to keep it going over so many years? I'm sure it was a love that was deep inside of you, but she must have propelled that forward quite a bit.

**SUTHERLAND** There was an organization (and still is) called MTNA – Music Teachers' National Association – this was a country-wide web of piano teachers. They would have competitions starting at the lowliest level – citywide competitions. These were – how well you played a piece – they would throw a theory exam at you. If you were nine-years-old they would throw one theory exam at you, and you would have to do something from memory and you were judged by big fancy people, even as far away as the University of Colorado in Boulder. Big stuff! If you won that and were good enough you would go to State. This still happens. The statewide organization is CSMTA – California State Music Teachers Association – and that's nothing more than the California branch of this organization. Year after year you would compete, and you could hear what Billy from Boulder was playing, and who did he study with, and what was Billy up to? You would see these kids once a year, and if the gods were in your favor you would win State, and that meant a little plaque and the opportunity to go to District.

MTNA is broken down into districts, and Colorado was what was known as the West Central District. Of course I won State, and then I went to District. District that year was in Des Moines, Iowa. I was thirteen, and of course I went with Rita. It was really the first trip outside of Colorado that I remember taking. We went and we stayed at the Savery Hotel in Des Moines, which was a lot like the old Fairmont building. I hope it's still there. I have a lot of colleagues at the Symphony in Iowa, and I should ask if it's still there. Anyway, it was about four or five days, and you had to suffer through more theory, and you suffered through more performances and more adjudications, and now you were judged by people from maybe Northwestern University – it just got bigger and bigger, and actually, scarier. I remember being really nervous. I lost the District competition, but I lost it to a guy in Rita Hutcherson's studio; my rival – Val Underwood. Val is somewhere in California, he's still a musician. He runs a music festival on the Big Island in Hawai'i. We're kind of always on the verge of getting back together – I went to Juilliard, Val went to Manhattan. But we were best friends, and arch rivals at the same time. He won the District that year, and I said, "You son of a bitch, I'll show you!"

So the next year of course I took it, and that was the chance for you go to MTNA National. It's no more kids winning, and it's getting tougher and tougher. Finally, in my senior year, 1969, the

National finals were in the Cincinnati Conservatory. That year it got tougher, and the theory exams were killer. You had to play a movement from a concerto with second piano accompaniment. I played the first movement of Beethoven's *Third Concerto* with Rita Hutcherson, as always, at the second piano. The jury was out there, and I remember the chairman of the jury was Thomas Richner. He was a Mozart specialist, who was for many years organist at the Mother Church in Boston – Christian Science. He wasn't a Christian Scientist, but he was their organist, and he was the chairman of the jury. I won, and my prize was to play the Beethoven *Third Piano Concerto* with an orchestra! I had played with the University orchestra at Greeley often, but this was something altogether new. Max Rudolf was the conductor. They probably gave me one rehearsal – I don't remember. But we played it, and it was good. The orchestra at the University of Bowling Green, which was near enough to Cincinnati … it wasn't the Chicago Symphony – that would have been nice. That meant that in theory that year I was the best high school pianist in the United States.

**UPDIKE** And that was your senior year?

**SUTHERLAND** If Val hadn't won that year, I might have pulled it off, possibly earlier than my senior year. But we'll never know, because he won. He won fair and square, he outplayed me. A Schumann concerto … brilliant … I can still hear it. The son of a bitch.

Meanwhile, Rita could see the day coming when I wasn't going to be in Greeley anymore. This was all kind of traumatic for us both, in different ways. J.S. Bach was always my favorite; this was no longer harpsichord too much, this was Bach on the piano. She said, "We need to get you with Rosalyn Tureck" who was the reigning priestess. Wanda Landowska had died in 1959; she was the woman who repopularized J.S. Bach in this country.

**UPDIKE** On the harpsichord?

**SUTHERLAND** On the harpsichord, but in general she got people thinking about him again – she retrained the spotlight. Here's this guy, J.S. Bach – what do we know about him? Well, it turns out we didn't know that much at all about him. At one point in his life he was virtually forgotten. She said, "You're going to make an audition tape for Rosalyn Tureck." I said, "OK." It turns out there was this organization called the International Bach Society, and guess who was the chairman of IBS? Conveniently enough, the chairman and music director was Rosalyn Tureck. Here we are, back to competing again. You make a tape of Bach, and you sent it in. The "I" in IBS was International, so Miss Tureck would accept tapes from people all over the world – as many as I think ten different countries. If you won this competition with your little cassette tape (which was pretty big stuff in those days) you would go to New York City and you would get to spend a month playing in a public master class situation with Rosalyn Tureck for an audience that was, let's just say, 'glittering' in the international music world. I remember in my

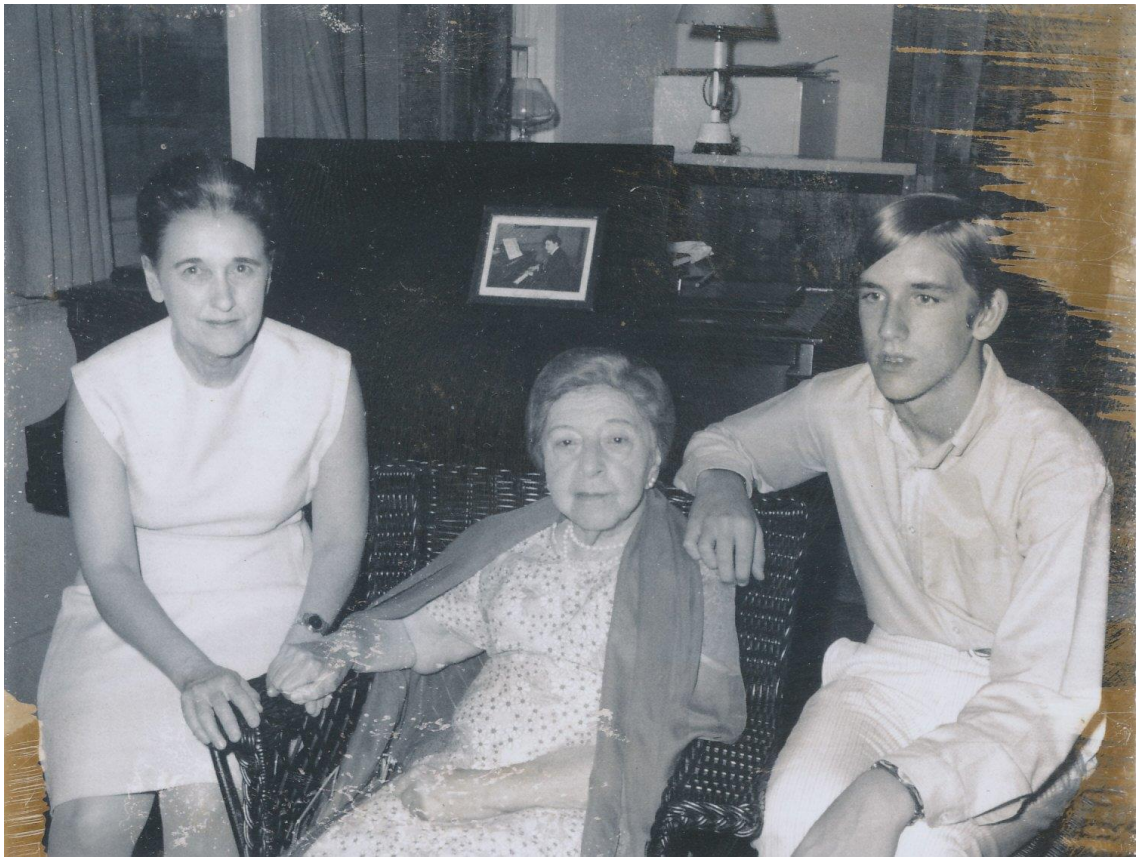
audience was Tossy Spivakovsky, Pina Carmirelli – tremendous, tremendous musicians. Anyway, I won! At the age of seventeen, I represented the United States that year at the International Bach Society. A guy named Theo Nederpelt that I think I was maybe more fond of than I should have been in extra-musical ways – he represented the Netherlands. Some girl named Marilyn represented Canada … we all ended up living together in New York City and playing for Ms. Tureck. That was the first prize. Later on I would say that the second prize was two months of studying with Rosalyn Tureck, and the third prize was three months. But it was the month of July, 1968, and it was at the Vivian Beaumont Library, which was that wonderful little building which is the forgotten building in Lincoln Center (due west of the where the Juilliard School now stands – on 66th and Amsterdam Avenue). A beautiful little thing with a reflecting pond, with the building that would become Juilliard looming to the east. There we spent our month of July, and what she assigned me were the *Preludes and Fugues*. We all had to show up, and you never knew … some nights you wouldn't play … some nights it would be nothing but you. Rosalyn Tureck … she's gone, bless her soul … crazy woman. Read any biography of her … she was crazy, but also a brilliant, brilliant genius.

**UPDIKE** Crazy in what way?

**SUTHERLAND** I think there was a New Yorker profile written of her by one of her former students. "Yikes" crazy – irascible, unpleasant most of the time – affected. She was American. She would say things like, "This rhythmic 'figur'." Affecting. Glenn Gould said he had only one pianistic influence in his life, and that was Rosalyn Tureck. Of course Glenn Gould was crazy too, in his way.

**UPDIKE** But what a great experience, to be in New York City.

**SUTHERLAND** Oh, I know! And Rosalyn Tureck – drop that name anywhere to this day. So here I am, a little seventeen-year-old, but you can see that Rita was already paving that way. She also said, "You need to make a tape for Rosina Lhevinne, before the old girl goes." She was then ninety – can you believe it? Born in 1880 – before Stravinsky and Bartók – and she outlived them both by miles, she died at ninety-six in 1976. Like all Juilliard faculty members, the whole school decamped west to Aspen. Look at the two faculties – you won't find much differentiation between the two institutions. So I sent a tape to New York, and I said, "I already live in Colorado. How handy wouldn't it be? You'd already be here, I would hardly have to do anything at all – I could just show up on your door, and this is how I play." It was probably a brash thing to say, but what the hell? I'm seventeen, she's ninety. Very soon thereafter I got a note from her assistant, Martin Canin, whose brother (unbeknownst to me then) would be my first concertmaster of the San Francisco Symphony, Stuart Canin. He was very nice, he said, "When Madame Lhevinne accepts you into her class, as I'm sure she will, these are the dates of the Aspen Festival, and you should be there."



*Rita Hutcherson, Rosina Lhevinne and Robin Sutherland, 1969, in Aspen.*
*Courtesy of Robin Sutherland.*

Unknowingly, this was my introduction to the great, glorious world of the Russian School of piano playing, of which she and her husband were exemplars. Her husband Josef took the gold medal at the Moscow Conservatory in 1892. Together in his class, also with a gold medal, was Sergei Rachmaninoff. These are the titanic players known to the world. This is, "Farewell, Greeley Colorado." This is hardball, this is the big leagues – varsity. [Alexander] Scriabin took the gold medal in 1893, he was a little too young that year. Madame Lhevinne took the gold medal in 1898, the year of her marriage to Josef Lhevinne; the first woman to be awarded the medal from the Moscow Conservatory. That is about as good as it gets.

**UPDIKE** That's amazing.

**SUTHERLAND** I said the "J" word – it had to come up sooner or later with my continuing education. But I'm there at Aspen, and she's there for the nine week term. She has a cute, cute little house on the corner of 5th and Smuggler in Aspen, with the piano and not much else – it was just her and her maid Sarah. They came out every year for forever – Aspen was founded in 1949. All this stuff still goes on, to this day. This would have been her 20th summer in Aspen.

No matter where she was, Rosina Lhevinne was an old vet. How could she not be? But she said to me (and no one will ever corroborate this – I think most of the people involved are no longer with us) but there was then a back door to Juilliard, and I had found it. She said, "Now dear, when we leave here and we go back to New York…" She said, "Yes, you will be a member of my class in New York." So that obviated the whole audition procedure, because what she said at Juilliard absolutely went. Her word was unassailable, and what she wanted, she got. As it turned out, when I got into that class that fall, were Horacio Gutiérrez, Garrick Ohlsson … it was what I call the last great living class. School started – Peter Mennin was the president – and the day we walked into school was the day Juilliard turned the key in the door at Lincoln Center. Autumn, 1969. Very much like the day we moved from Ortega into this place. So I know the feeling very well of going from 'whatever' into a relative palace. Remarkable stuff. But that was the beginning of my Juilliard career. It ended up not lasting terribly long, because she became ill. She was a very sickly child, no one expected her to live – she shocked everybody when she took the gold medal. This was the year after Brahms died – to put it in some sort of historical focus. No one expected her to have this grand life, and to be the teacher of Van Cliburn. She confounded everybody. But in that year she was very, very sick. I said to myself, "Something's got to be done here." And so I withdrew from Juilliard. I didn't like the school – never. I was there for one reason and one reason only, and that was for her. All of my teachers, (isn't this odd) until I got here all of my teachers were very, very high-powered women. I learned virtually everything that I know from high-powered women – it's great, great stuff. Then along comes Paul Hersh.

So I left, and I took some time off, and thought, "What the hell am I doing now?" So I took maybe a year off, and a couple of things happened in the course of that year. I ended up living in a cave on the north shore of O'ahu with my friend Carl.

**UPDIKE** I would love to hear about that. But first – you had your nine weeks with Rosina Lhevinne in Aspen, and I know she was ill, but you had some time with her and you followed her to New York. Could you talk a little bit about her as a teacher, and as a person? I know she was a big name and everybody knew her, but what was it specifically about her that made you want to be with her?

**SUTHERLAND** She didn't like the school any better than I did. I didn't like it as an institution – she didn't like the new building. Forever it was at 120 Claremont Avenue in Morningside Heights – Grant's Tomb, Riverside Avenue, Columbia University – what we used to call Upstate Manhattan. I never had a lesson with her in the new building; her lessons were always at her apartment, which was at 185 Claremont – accidentally, more or less right across the street from Juilliard. She didn't like the school. I said, "Why don't you like this? It has fancy carpet, and brass…." She had studio 525, which was on the top floor corner overlooking Lincoln Square – the fountain in front of the Met – she had the choice real estate, but she would never go

there. She went twice a year for photo opportunities, and all the students had to perch to show what a Lhevinne master class would look like – well, it's not what they looked like at all – but for the benefit of the PR people at Lincoln Center. I said, "Why don't you like the school?" She said [in accent] "You know dear, I cannot open window." They were big squares of thick glass – just panes of glass glued to the building. What she liked to do, because she also had the cool studio on Claremont Avenue – she liked to open her windows to Riverside Park. The tweeting of the birds … the little traffic noise … she liked that. She had a phalanx of assistants: Martin Canin, Howard Aibel, Olegna Fuschi, Gladys Stein – these were former students of hers, and she would sort of farm them out – "Next week your lesson will be with Gladys Stein … or Olegna Fuschi." I was the only one who was not assigned to an assistant. I saw nobody but her, and we were actually very, very close.

I learned that I do older women really well. I know how they work, I know what they expect of me, and I can be there for them. With Lhevinne, it was walks on Claremont Avenue. And by walk, I mean … a two block walk would take about three hours. Up one block, cross the street (which took a week) and then down the other side and back to her apartment. She would say, "You know dear, I need wing." And that meant for me to [gestures] extend my arm. But I was twice her height, so I had to do this a lot [bends down]. It must have looked very silly, but I was walking Rosina Lhevinne; an international musical treasure was entrusted to my care. That was a good class, and those people all went off to their chosen careers. She of course was a career maker – again, with the phone – "Enter this competition … enter the Chopin competition this year…." [winks] To Van Cliburn she said, "You know dear, you should enter the Tchaikovsky Competition," and we all know what happened with that.

So anyway, she and I were very close. We would have dinner … one unforgettable night (the night of July 20, 1969) the tumult had died down, all the students and assistants had left for the day. It was she and I in the house next door to hers, because she had no television. The lady next door was gone too, but said, "Come over." Rosina Lhevinne and I, in the dark room in front of the TV, watched the moon landing. That had nothing to do with playing the piano, but I looked over at her, and she was watching … I thought, "Jesus Christ, what is she thinking?" This woman who was taken to her earliest piano lessons by horse-drawn sleigh in Moscow, who was married the year after Brahms' death, and here we are watching Neil Armstrong. I'll never forget it – July 20, 1969 – just she and me. I could probably write a small little book about that – "Rosie on the Moon." Her English started out bad, and never really got very good. If her wig needed dressing (and I knew all of these things because I was happy to help her) – she said her wig dresser was on Lexicon Avenue … she meant Lexington. If you would finally get something right, what she meant was "Lo and behold" – it was always "Below" and "Hold" – little things, funny things.

Even at that age she was a firm believer of the "Move over darling" school of piano teaching. This is how we used to do it the year I won the gold medal, and she was in perfect form well into her later years. In fact, her recording of the Chopin *E minor Concerto* at the age of eighty-six with the New York Philharmonic and Leonard Bernstein – phone downstairs to Paul Hersh and ask him what kind of piano she was playing at the age of eight-six. I had dinner with him and Melanie the other night, and he brought it up – he said, "God! That woman could play." No kidding. But, you had a problem with Schumann *Carnaval*, or something … amazing. And we were very, very close. And who knew that she would sort of rebound? She had all kinds of things wrong with her that we didn't really speak of. I just thought, "This woman is ninety-one years old. This has been awesome, I am so grateful." She got better – after, of course, I had withdrawn from school. And I was doing nothing, but I heard that she got better and had returned, so I phoned her and I said, "At least let me meet you and Sarah on the plane to Denver, and I will drive you to Aspen myself." This was after I left, and we had another very nice summer, although I was no longer in her brood. She was very sorry to see me go, but I said, "I can't make this investment right now," and there was absolutely no other person that I had any interest in the Juilliard piano faculty. In those days read like a who's who – Sasha Gorodmitzsky and Adele Marcus. I had seen them work at Aspen, and wasn't interested. And she went on to live for six more years – not super productively, but not lying fallow either. So I misgauged that, I should have had a little bit more faith in her. Who knows then what would have happened?

**UPDIKE** At least you had the time that you did.

**SUTHERLAND** The year I took off – I went back to Colorado and took a degree at a little junior college in the mountains which I loved – Colorado Mountain College, an Associate of Arts degree. Then I took six months and went with Carl to Hawai'i.

**UPDIKE** And this was Carl Garlick?

**SUTHERLAND** Carl Garlick. One of which months we ended up living in a cave at Waimea.

**UPDIKE** How did that happen?

**SUTHERLAND** It was just something that we decided that we wanted to do. We were complete hippies, we had not very much money and we panhandled a lot. My parents of course were just beside themselves. What was I doing with my life? How could this even have happened? But that year was very important to me, because it made me rethink a lot of what I had thought was important. Garrick [Ohlsson] was winning the Chopin Competition, and that was supposedly what I was supposed to be doing too. She could have fixed it, and would have, happily, for me – paved that way. She couldn't play piano for me, but it was in the course of that

year that I thought – "You know what? Recalibrate." I didn't lose my drive, but I completely turned away from where I thought I was going.

**UPDIKE** Did you turn away from music completely?

**SUTHERLAND** Not completely. I remember one year – Carl and I would panhandle for money. He had his guitar – of course, you always had to have your guitar everywhere. I remember – I can admit it now, it's not something I'm proud of, although it was great sport then – we would walk into a little corner market or something in Honolulu, and he would have his guitar case, and we'd have spent the day at the beach. Only, there wouldn't be a guitar in it, there would be an empty case and we figured out you could unlatch the lid and keep it shut just with your pinky finger, and allow the lid to open up enough … you'd walk in a back alley where the TV dinners were, and just slip a couple of them in, and close it. And then buy a Milky Way and say, "Thank you so much! See you tomorrow." We did stuff like that. Many people would say it was the rock-bottom part of my life, but I don't look at it that way. I look at it as a period of time when I decided that other things were important, and I lost a lot of drive. At Juilliard, an old-time conservatory, there was one prize. For the Lhevinne's, the prize was the gold medal. You got that, and then you left the school, and you were internationally famous for the rest of your life. Juilliard didn't have a gold medal, but if you had the blessing of Rosina Lhevinne you could go on and you were set. Look at Van Cliburn … look at Garrick, he has an enviable career … but that's what he wants. At some point I just decided I didn't want that anymore; I wanted something else. When it came time to get back into the only thing I could do, which was play piano (although I do live quite well in a cave on the beach – that's not too tough and I'm very good at it – the trick is to keep the insects from dropping on you at night, some of them cling to the tops of caves).

**UPDIKE** How big was the cave?

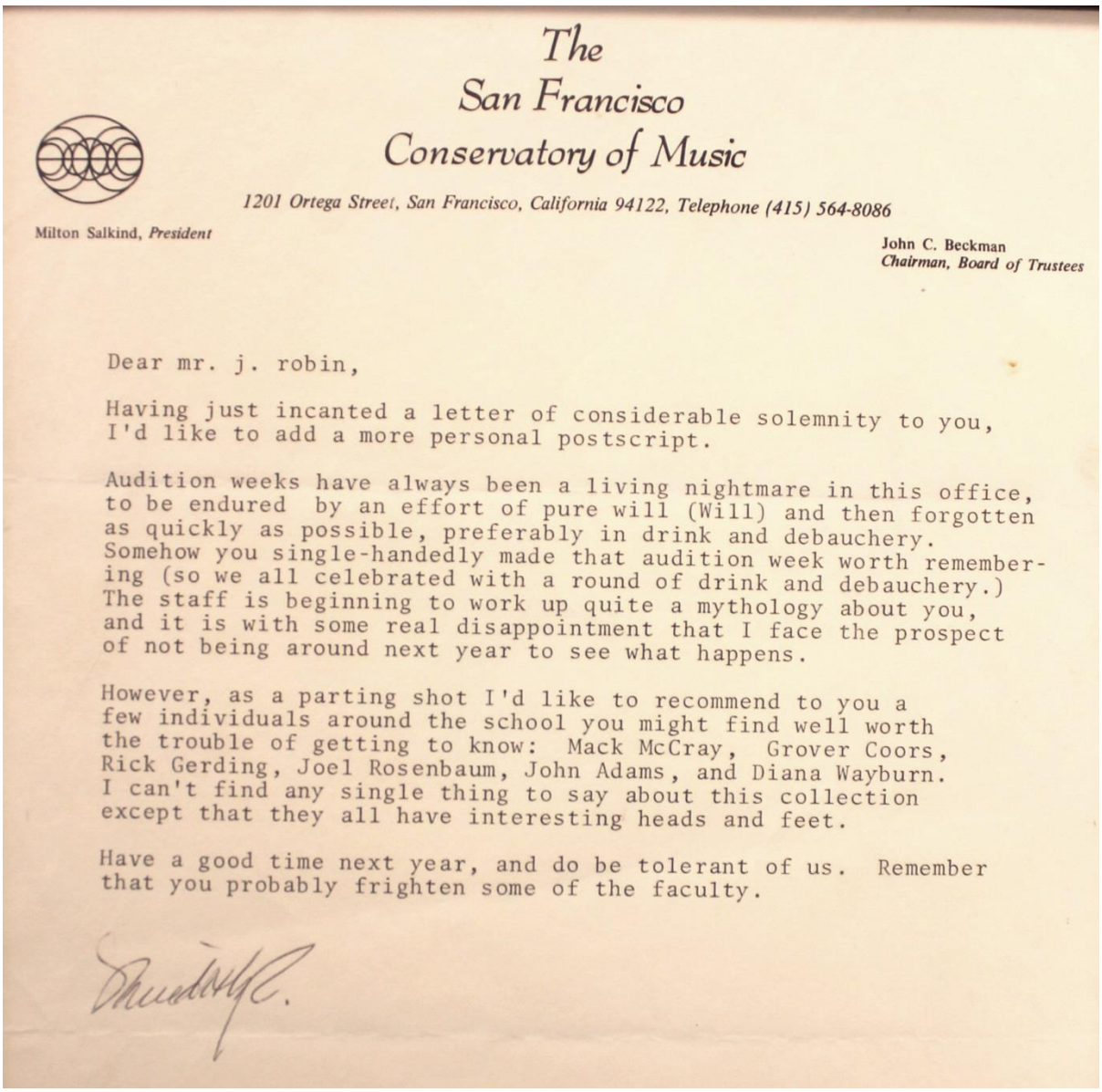
**SUTHERLAND** You had to get down and crawl in a small opening, and then it got bigger. We had candles, and it had a big boulder in front of it. It's still there, I could take you to it in five minutes. You're on the beach looking upland, and you see a bunch of random rocks, not really suspecting that one of them conceals this cave. It was super fun. It came time – finally it was, "Let's get serious, folks." I said to myself, "I play music. That's all I can do, I need to keep going and at least a degree out of this one way or another." Out loud I said to myself, "Where can I go that's as far away from New York City as possible?" Bingo. I had heard of the Conservatory just tangentially. I knew it was here, and I loved San Francisco – the tiny little bit that I knew of it.

**UPDIKE** How did you first reach out to the Conservatory? Did you send in an audition tape?

**SUTHERLAND** I think I wrote somebody a letter. Milton [Salkind] was newly president, I never knew Robin Laufer. It said, "Hi, this is me – this is what I have done, and I'm ready to start pursuing that again." An audition was set up for June of 1972. I had just gotten my Associate of Arts degree from Glenwood Springs, from the Colorado Mountain College, and I remember I had to retake a final exam in theater because it conflicted with the Conservatory audition date. I remember they assigned me a date, and I came out alone and stayed at the Sunset Motel on Taraval and 19th … it may still be there … and walked down 19th to my audition. It was the most amazing thing. I fell in love with the Conservatory the instant I laid eyes on it. Juilliard was in many ways kind of terrifying – the administration didn't care about you one way or the other – more so if you were a Lhevinne student, but even then that's not good, that's favoritism. Suicides at Juilliard … the pressure … I just thought, "OK, we can do this … but do we want to do this?" The answer was no.

I showed up. My jury consisted of Milton and Peggy Salkind, Mack McCray, Paul Hersh, Danny Kobialka – he was there in sort of a chamber music advisory capacity because I had expressed an interest in chamber music. He was here and then he morphed into my principal second violinist at the Symphony for quite a long time. It was in Milton's office, and people sat around on the floor. Peggy Salkind listened to me on the floor. I liked it, I liked what I saw a lot, and I thought, "I'm going to make this work." So I played a little, and they said, "That's fine. You want to play chamber music?" I remember Paul Hersh saying, "And so you shall." This is Paul Hersh without a gray hair on his head, in his thirties (he's now seventy-five). A young buck Paul Hersh – his son Stefan was maybe seven, eight years old – another universe and another lifetime ago. But I just thought, "This is the polar opposite …" I never really took a Juilliard audition, but people have told me that – you're here, there's a table, and there's a bunch of very stern looking people. Who needs that? Rosie told me some stories about when she would sit on juries, and which faculty members would pay attention, and who would write snarky comments. Alexander Siloti, the first cousin of Rachmaninoff, would start doodling, says Lhevinne. He would write "Soll heiraten" which is German for "Should marry" and he would pass it to Lhevinne and think it was the funniest thing ever. They were tough. Sasha Barantschik told me about his audition … he went to Saint Petersburg or Moscow. He was alone in a room. A bare lightbulb hanging from the ceiling would go on – that was your signal to begin playing. You played until the lightbulb went off. Can you imagine?

And here's Peggy Salkind sitting on the floor. Milton had a nice office – if any room could have been said to be nice, it was his office. He had a sofa, and room for a desk. It looked out on the courtyard, and there was an oriental carpet on the floor. Stuff like that would happen all the time, it had nothing to do with the learning experience being cheapened or anything, that's just the way we did it.



The
San Francisco
Conservatory of Music

1201 Ortega Street, San Francisco, California 94122, Telephone (415) 564-8086

Milton Salkind, *President*

John C. Beckman
*Chairman, Board of Trustees*

Dear mr. j. robin,

Having just incanted a letter of considerable solemnity to you, I'd like to add a more personal postscript.

Audition weeks have always been a living nightmare in this office, to be endured by an effort of pure will (Will) and then forgotten as quickly as possible, preferably in drink and debauchery. Somehow you single-handedly made that audition week worth remembering (so we all celebrated with a round of drink and debauchery.) The staff is beginning to work up quite a mythology about you, and it is with some real disappointment that I face the prospect of not being around next year to see what happens.

However, as a parting shot I'd like to recommend to you a few individuals around the school you might find well worth the trouble of getting to know: Mack McCray, Grover Coors, Rick Gerding, Joel Rosenbaum, John Adams, and Diana Wayburn. I can't find any single thing to say about this collection except that they all have interesting heads and feet.

Have a good time next year, and do be tolerant of us. Remember that you probably frighten some of the faculty.

*Letter sent to Robin Sutherland from Meredith Robinson, after having been admitted to the Conservatory. Courtesy of Robin Sutherland.*

[BREAK]

**UPDIKE** You talked a little bit about your impression of the school when you came for your audition, but could you describe the building when you came in as a student? What was it like, and what was the character of the building?

**SUTHERLAND** I didn't really take any notice at first of how woefully inadequate the building really was. You have to picture a place pre-Hellman Hall. You go in the front door, and there's a little anteroom where the receptionist's window was – not bigger than this office. In the

grand stairway (it really wasn't that grand) hung Ruth Asawa's coat-hanger on acid. Asawa was a genius. It wouldn't surprise me if they were coat-hangers. And then it's like you're entering a letter E – the first thing you see is a cross – a center hall, one paralleling 19th Avenue, and one paralleling 20th. At the end of the center E was the so-called "recital hall." It fit twenty-five people…. You start thinking about it, and you think, "Wait … there have to be performances." It didn't occur to me at first, and then I figured out that 90 percent of what Milton Salkind did was stay on the phone finding venues for events to happen. I honestly don't know how we did it. The library was on the top floor – it was a belfry … even attic is stretching it. It was on the 20th Street wing of the E, and it had little circular dormer windows that you could look in and see Viola Hagopian at work. There was the card catalog, and I had to bend like this [gestures] because the ceiling came down [slanted]. There were some stacks … dear God … how an accreditation was managed…. Somehow it was – the Western States Alliance gave us the green light – but Jesus … how?

On the 19th Avenue wing on the top was the mysterious Alden Jenks's modern music laboratory, and a percussion room. There were some classrooms … Milton's office, Dick Howe's (the dean) office … the business office was on 19th Avenue at the end of the E – first floor. Along the spine of the building were just some rooms. All the practice rooms had little sinks in them, they were very cute. The so-called recital hall, I was led to believe, was the operatory – the surgery. I remember a couple of performances in there, student recitals where the obligatory dozen people would show up. Maybe you could have seated as many as fifty in there, but I don't think a penny more. There was an elevated stage on the west end, and that's where the piano was. You couldn't really move the one decent piano – you just had to push it back and use the curtain to cover it up if you didn't need it. I'm class of '75, who didn't know Hellman Hall. When Hellman came, that changed everything! A 350 seat hall … nobody could believe. My senior recital had to take place at the Century Club, which is a private luncheon club for wealthy, fancy ladies on the corner of Franklin and Sutter. It was very well attended, but it never could have been otherwise. And my graduation occurred at the Hamlin School on Broadway, which is an all-girls school. Somebody said to me, "Robin, I finally figured out your problem. You graduated from Hamlin!"

That's what Mickey [Salkind] did (not many people called him Mickey, that was his nickname). I almost played my graduating recital at Filoli, which was in Woodside off Canada Road – the magnificent estate of Lurline Matson Roth (Matson Shipping): a tremendous Georgian, red brick, with beautiful gardens. I almost got to have my senior recital there. All of these people were friends with Milton – he knew everybody. But that's what he was doing. You've seen pictures of the living room on Sacramento Street [the Conservatory's first location] – Ortega Street wasn't that much better. But in '56 when they acquired that property, and Ava Jean [Brumbaum] was chair of the trustees (so I actually kind of know about this) that was the best that they could do. Agnes Albert said, "That was the best we could do at the time." And I'm glad they did it! But the school was very small – a student body well under 200 at the time of my audition – 150 kids,

maybe. But somehow we made it work. Paul Hersh was on the spine of the building (the 20th Street side) – the last door before you left the building, on your right – that was Paul Hersh's studio. Little Claire James had her little closet studio with a hideous white piano with frescos painted on it and gold … it was like the roof of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel … that was her piano. Then we had crazy people like Beatrice Beauregard … [Lenoir] Hosack had a voice studio somewhere. I don't recall people doubling up, though they would have had to. And then we could start talking about practice rooms. It was laughable, really. I had my own instrument. And there was no place for students to live.

**UPDIKE** Where did you live?

**SUTHERLAND** I got lucky. First, my piano had not been shipped out from Colorado, but I lived for a month in a boarding house on 29th and Lincoln, which was as close as I could find to the school, and there was an old shitty piano there that I could practice on, that was ultra-creepy. Then I found a place on Nob Hill – less than a block away from Jess and Ben Shenson (but I didn't know them then). It was a little tiny studio, but I do remember the rent was $195 a month. And then came the fateful year of 1973, when Lillian Hodghead died [SFCM co-founder], and all of a sudden the school found itself the not so proud owner of a Mill Valley cottage with a small acreage. What to do with it? Well, the school elected to do nothing with it, and it sat there. I call it an estate, but it wasn't really – it had four acres, that wasn't bad for Mill Valley. The upper portion was a huge apple orchard, and it began to die – it was not being cared for. It was steep; it was on the flanks of Mount Tam in Blithedale Canyon. The path was at the bottom, and the whole thing went up, and there was the house. Even further up was the apple orchard, and then in this gulley was a grove of redwood trees – I don't mean saplings – big redwood trees. They're still there.

What may not still be there (and I get so depressed now that they've scrapped the house and it's a McMansion) – the redwood trees had plaques on them. "This redwood in memory of Ernest Bloch … This redwood in memory of Harold Bauer …" this was where the girls [Ada Clement and Lillian Hodghead] took all of their guests. I found a photograph of Harold Bauer washing dishes in the kitchen! Can you imagine Harold Bauer doing such a thing? And yet, there he was. A big stone fireplace – rounded river rocks – beautiful. It was a redwood cottage, and it was the residence of choice. I said, "I need to live there." Jeff Kahane is my best pal – I said, "We'll live there." We both had cars. In those days the bridge toll was 50 cents. You could get from it to the Conservatory (which is essentially Highway 1) in under 30 minutes. You could just sail across the bridge, throw your two quarters in the bucket. It was good, that way. We brought it back; we watered, we did things, and gradually it became livable. I don't know what happened after Lillian's death, but you got the idea that the remains had been cleared out, the door locked, and that's where it came to a stop. So when we first laid eyes on the place, it was their furniture, their dishes. I remember those green dishes with the brown borders – everybody had them – just the

everyday stuff. But Jeff and I didn't own a fork or a spoon, so this was perfect! Sort of a ready-made house. It did have a washer and a drier, that was gravy. But the shower was a tin … there was a proper bathroom downstairs with two little redwood bedrooms; you got the feeling that those might have been an afterthought. But upstairs, the shower was tin-sided and old. There was a beautiful sunroom with redwood lathe, and cabinetry … that's where we found, one day (snooping around) the Bloch death mask, which we immediately turned over to the librarian, Viola Hagopian, because there was no archivist in those days. The manuscript to the Bloch *Concerto Grosso*, and other items … just interesting Conservatory items … we felt like we were in charge of this legacy. It was a great year – '73, '74 – it was a wonderful year for both of us in many ways.

**UPDIKE** And you first met Jeff at the Conservatory?

**SUTHERLAND** He graduated early from Beverly Hills High, where his classmates included Carrie Fisher, Carol Burnett's kids … Jeff was an L.A. … his daddy was a shrink, Murray Kahane, he lived on Rexford Drive in Beverly Hills. Quite different than the upbringing that I had. But he was just sixteen when he entered the school, and we were instantaneous friends. For a while the school had an agreement with Lone Mountain College – "Please house some of our kids in some of your dorms" – so the first local residence that I remember Jeff having was in a Lone Mountain dorm. Everything was band-aids in those days, of one description or another. But then the trustees said, "We have to sell this place." I begged them not to, I really did.

Mickey was great – the first day I came to school, some pianist had gotten sick and I ended up being the pianist for the flutist Alain Marion, who was having a master class. Because I was close with Ransom Wilson I knew the flute chamber literature pretty extensively. So the first thing I'm doing is being the pianist for the Alain Marion master class, and that was kind of a big deal. Mickey said, "Stop by my office before you go in" – the class was in the recital hall. So I went in, and sitting in his office at his desk were two people that meeting them changed my life completely, in such a good way. One was Dan Koshland, and one was Ruth Haas Lilienthal. They had just dropped in because Mickey knew everybody. They were just making a social call. But these were forbearers of families who still run my organizations – Jewish philanthropists. I had no idea at the time – the name Koshland and Haas Lilienthal meant nothing to me. But of course, you know who they are. They were cousins. I think Ruth Haas Lilienthal was the sister of Walter Haas, which makes her the great-aunt of John Goldman. Probably also through the Koshlands, because Ruth Hellman (as in Ruth and Marco Hellman Hall) was born a Koshland, and that's Nancy Bechtle's mother. They thought nothing of marrying first cousins because they were so ostracized by the local money. So they had their own golf course, the Olympic, which is now of course the nicest golf course. They did what they could to stay alive, and it meant intermarriage. So now everybody – Lilienthals, Hellmans, Koshlands, Haases, Sterns … it's all

essentially one family. They all came from Bavaria in 1858, and got here in time for the Gold Rush. And they didn't become miners – they were the smart ones, they became the merchants to the miners. It didn't hurt the day that Levi Strauss invented rivets and denim. So bang on, here I am meeting Ruth Haas Lilienthal and Dan Koshland, who was chairman of Levi Strauss. Mickey didn't say that that day; if I had known that, I would have been – woooahh! It was a fertile time for a good young pianist to be in school, and such good times we had. SFCM filled every fantasy that I could possibly ever have had.

But anyway, we lost the house, so I had to go find another one, and Jeff went somewhere else. But the house was bought by Jorma Kaukonen for $55,000. That just seems like insanity today. Four acres in Blithedale Canyon? Millions … millions of dollars … if they had only listened to little me. That shows you what straits the school was in. They needed the money. Ava Jean has said that those were lean times. I don't think anybody was making any money here, to speak of. They were doing it just for love. Why would somebody like Paul Hersh end up here? They too saw something, maybe the same thing that I saw. Because Paul had a great career with the Lenox Quartet as violist, and yet they ended up here, and four and a half decades later, he's still here. One of the great teachers ever. I don't know how I stumble onto these good teachers. I picked Bernhard Abramowitsch. I looked in the catalog, and do you know why I picked Abramowitsch? He was first one the list. I didn't know a single name on that list. Of course now they're all super awesome friends, but I didn't know anybody. When I got here, they said, "No, we're going to put you with Paul Hersh." I went, "Whatev's! Fine." As it turns out, that was probably the nicest thing that anybody ever did.

**UPDIKE** Could you describe your first impression of Paul?

**SUTHERLAND** Remember when I said something about chamber music, and he said, "And so you shall" – can you hear him saying that? Paul has a flair for the drama, and I thought, "I like this guy." We had a chamber music rehearsal, he was coaching me, and somebody said, "I should be going…" and he shook out his wristwatch and said, "Time hath no dominion here." Which, for all I know, is a line from Shakespeare – I don't know. "Time hath no dominion here." I thought, "Damn, I like him." And the better I got to know him, the more of a polymath he revealed himself to be. You don't want to play chess against him – make him on your team, but not on the other. Chinese poetry … what do you want to talk about today?

My lessons with Paul Hersh … to call them unstructured would probably be right. The first piece we worked extensively on – we did a lot of late Beethoven sonatas, and the first one he threw at me was *Opus 101*, the A major. Probably the most bizarre of the Beethoven sonatas, and we stayed on that thing for maybe six months; a bar at a time. Paul is not devoid of opinions on subjects, and he would say, "This piece interests me. It's in A major, right? Three sharps, there it is, A major, *Opus 101*." He said, "Count the number of bars before we get the slightest whiff of

A major." And sure enough, it opens on the dominant – it's an E major chord, and it just meanders, and it's many, many measures later that finally it arrives in the key (as he would say it) "as advertised." You're more worried about … fourth finger, does it go on C sharp here…? But he was right away Mr. Big Picture. Just like me talking to you, we'd stray off the reservation very, very easily and end up talking about – you name it, whatever. So there wasn't that huge drive – "Oh my God! You have the Naumburg Competition in six weeks!" There was none of that, which was kind of a blessing for both him and me. We were just there to talk – we laughed together, we played together, and we taught each other. That I think would be a good thing to chisel in stone above my relationship with Paul Hersh. A lot of laughing.

My piano was finally delivered from Colorado and forced up the path to Casa de Hodghead … it was this stone path that had occasionally a redwood railing, or maybe not, and there was a cliff down to the bottom of Ernest Bloch Redwood Grove. They were pushing this Chickering grand up, these piano movers from Burlingame – Jacobsen Transfer, and I've used them from that to this. My pianos don't move often but when they do, I know who to call. We got it up there, so he would come over and I was playing *Goldberg Variations* in those days, and we would have lessons in front of the fire at my house. We both lived in Mill Valley at opposite ends of town, but he would come up there and we would just sit for hours and talk. One variation I would play, we'd get involved in the details, and the next he would say, "That's wonderful, I have nothing to say about that." So you never knew what was coming, but he always kept you on your toes. I would imagine he does so to this day. Always kind, never a Juilliard sort of unkindness, although he came from that matrix himself at Yale. Accept no substitutes, and time hath no dominion here. That's Paul Hersh.

**UPDIKE** When was the first time you met Agnes Albert?

**SUTHERLAND** I met Agnes Albert formally when the Symphony was in Paris, which was our first stop on the huge tour in May and June of '73. It was my first trip out of the United States. We flew nonstop, which didn't happen that often, but it was World Airways, and it took a long time. My seatmate the entire way was Robert Commanday, whom we had taken along because that's how you get good reviews. Maybe he would have given us good reviews anyhow, but we were treating him to a lot of stuff in Europe. And the reviews, as I recall, were good. Agnes threw a party for the orchestra. God, there are so few people left alive who remember this now, this is scary to me. It was at the American Embassy on the Avenue Gabriel, near the Arc de Triomphe. I first formally met her as she descended the grand stairway into the reception area. The woman I was with said, "She's a Tobin." I go, "Great! … What is that?" The Tobin family came over from Ireland; they were hard-scrabble miners, and a couple of the brothers, Richard and Robert, did very well, and they founded a law firm called (oddly enough) Tobin & Tobin. They became attorneys for the bank that they also founded, which was the Hibernia Bank. That was the source of the maternal side – her mother was Celia Tobin Clark – the legendary peninsula granddame. Now that her aunt has died we know all about the Clark side of her family, but nobody knew anything about that then. So the Tobins were the local connection, and here was Agnes. She threw a hell of a party. The Embassy is beyond fabulous – if you ever go into government service you want to be in the diplomatic corps, and you want one of the big countries, like the UK, or Paris, or Berlin. We've been to all of these places, but that's really living. We had a party in Luxembourg when James Hormel was the ambassador there. It's a nice way to go. But that's when I first met Agnes; that was in 1973. I was a new student, and I don't know how she sort of picked me out, but we became friends, and the next thing I knew I was sitting by her at the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Legion of Honor. November 11th – Armistice Day – 1974, in the great hall. A bunch of Mrs. Spreckels' descendants were then still alive – Rosecranses and people – and it was a huge, huge celebration, and Agnes took me as her date. Talk about lucking out. Then she acquired a country property on the Little Mesa in Bolinas, and installed me as the summer caretaker; even to the point of renting a little upright piano and having it rolled up the hill so that I could practice while I watched her house.

**UPDIKE** That's amazing.

**SUTHERLAND** We were best of friends.

**UPDIKE** Could you maybe give a little portrait of what she was like? Her character and personality.

**SUTHERLAND** Agnes was … where to begin?

**UPDIKE** Could you start by describing what she looked like?

**SUTHERLAND** She was slight of build … birdlike is the word I would use. She was adventurous; there was really nothing that Agnes wouldn't do – or try. She was crazy that way. She was born in 1908, so when I met her she was sixty-four/sixty-five. There's this blackberry patch in Bolinas that's sort of almost rappeling down the cliff … her first house in Bolinas was the lighthouse, off Duxbury Reef.

**UPDIKE** She lived in the lighthouse?

**SUTHERLAND** That was her country house. She would have lovely lunches. She invited Kahane and me once, and it was just a lovely little crisp salad on the deck outside, and she opened a bottle of Les Amours, which was her favorite crisp white wine. We didn't do stuff like that…. But there were blackberries! [Imitates Agnes] "Oh, I love blackberries! We must go get some blackberries!" So we sort of jimmied our way down this cliff … really! The only reason she gave up the lighthouse was the United States Geologic Survey (the USGS boys) came to her and said, "We would not be doing our duty if we failed to inform you that this cliff is eroding at an alarming rate." If you go up there this minute, the lighthouse is still there – it has not tumbled off. But if you can picture those cliffs that are very common along that stretch of the coast to Point Reyes, it could go at any time. She said, "Well, let's find someplace else." So she found a house a little bit on the south side of the Little Mesa that was on the west, not far away – a little cottage.

In 1941 she was part of an expedition that rafted down the Colorado River. She is the third documented white woman to have made that trip. They filmed it, and she said to me, "I know why I'm on this trip: because I can afford the film crew." It was some sort of famous expedition, and the film was all decaying. I talked her into converting it to some sort of more usual format. But one of the boats that was in her expedition hangs in one of the buildings in the Smithsonian Institution, to this day. If you look at these films, she's there with her fisherman's hat, and she was 33, so she was really agile and running around. She wasn't the leader of the expedition, but she was there to record it. I can see her saying, "Yes, I'll pay for this – but I'm going along!"

**UPDIKE** That's amazing.

**SUTHERLAND** She was tremendous. Right up to the end of her life, which is the case with all Bay Area philanthropic families of that era, she had the best interests of her groups at heart. The Conservatory, the Symphony. When I was new here and met all the sort of big people on our board in those days, imagine my surprise to go to work at the San Francisco Symphony and to

find them to be virtually the same faces: interlocking directorates. So in a way, I almost didn't need an introduction at the Symphony because I came prepackaged from Ortega Street, which turned out to save a lot of time.

**UPDIKE** Could you talk a little about Jimmy Schwabacher?

**SUTHERLAND** I didn't know him that well. He was the scion of a San Francisco philanthropic family, and he was possessed of an extraordinary tenor voice – he really was good. You probably have heard him.

**UPDIKE** We have a recording in the archives of him singing and giving a lecture.

**SUTHERLAND** And Agnes was a pianist. She knew what she was talking about. I shared a bill with her once on a school concert, I think at Lowell High, we each played a movement of the *Emperor Concerto* of Beethoven, and I thought that was pretty cool – that was in 1976. Agnes was an incredibly good pianist, and she played all the string quartet literature with all of the string quartets that her mother subsidized – the Pro Arte Quartet, for instance, is one of them. Her great-aunt subsidized the Paganini Quartet in New York City, to the point of buying the matched set of Stradivarius instruments that the Paganini still plays – they're at the Library of Congress now. I guess people like that still exist, but I don't know where they are anymore, and we don't live that kind of life that they thrived in and commanded seemingly effortlessly – brilliantly. But Aggie was at home with that crowd, and she would hang out with anybody. She wasn't put off by – "Oh … not quite our sort dear." No, none of that – ever. She would sit on her laurels for an evening, and then always out of her mouth was, "What's next?" An inquisitive, brilliant woman.

Jimmy Schwabacher I didn't know so well. He, of course, was all about the Opera, which was not my crowd. But Jimmy lived a very, very elegant … his house at 2786 Broadway … a narrow house just west of Divisadero, on the north side of course, appeared to be two stories tall but the hill is so precipitous that you go in and you're actually entering at the top of his house, and it would fall before it. It was a six story home, and it had an indoor swimming pool. Some remarkable antics took place in that house. Hurling oneself (and I might have done it once or twice myself) – it was surrounded by balconies on various floors and you would heave yourself into the pool, quite dramatically. It suited me down to the ground. A couple of people would do that – never Jimmy. He would be down two stories in his salon.

**UPDIKE** Could you talk a little bit about Ava Jean Brumbaum?

**SUTHERLAND** Ava Jean Pischel, in those days. My boarding school in Colorado was the Colorado Rocky Mountain School, in a little town called Carbondale. It was 30 miles down the

Roaring Fork River from Aspen, to situate it in your mind. It was a town of about 8,000 people, but it had this extraordinary boarding school. Among my fellow students were the daughter of Walter Cronkite, the son of Mortimer Adler … we had a Pulitzer. One of my dorm mates was David Wyler, whose father was the legendary film direction William Wyler. He turned out to have this big affair with Bette Davis when they were filming her Oscar winning *Jezebel*. I didn't know any of this at the time; this is the sort of stuff you sponge up later. But David Wyler was there – his sister Melanie Wyler, who I'm going to see when the Symphony goes to New York – his other sister Judith Wyler Sheldon is president of the San Francisco Silent Film Society, and she was responsible for the Symphony's getting in bed with playing scores to silent films. Charlie Chaplin's *City Lights* was the first one.

One of my other dorm-mates was this character named Peter Pischel. Peter was wonderful, and one of the reasons was because there weren't a whole lot of gay boys at the Colorado Rocky Mountain School – or at least, there might have been some Jimmy Schwabacher equivalents about whom we knew nothing. Nothing ever happened with Peter Pischel and me, except one day (and in those days I had never been to San Francisco) he said very obliquely, almost, "You know, if you ever come to San Francisco, my family is active in the arts." I said, "OK," not having any idea that Ava Jean and Harold Pischel were his parents. Oh, my God. When I got here and put two and two together … Harold was twenty-five years older than Ava Jean. Ava Jean is now ninety-three, or ninety-four, so Harold is long gone – a sweet guy, but very straight laced – a three piece suit at breakfast. Peter's older brother Cap Pischel was also gay. They are both dead of AIDS now, as is daughter Ava – who succumbed literally in seconds to an asthma attack. So of her four children, the only one left is Tom. I think I would have to say that Ava Jean is the strongest woman – maybe the strongest person – that I've ever met, to survive the deaths of 75 percent of your children. How does one do that? I don't know.

**UPDIKE** And two husbands.

**SUTHERLAND** And two husbands. The first one was not much of a shock, because of the huge age spread. Harold Pischel was a member of the Dohrmann family – mercantile people who came over from Germany in the 19th century. She lived at number 15 Sixth Avenue, that marvelous block between Lake and the Presidio proper – right across the street from William Coblentz, who was chair of the Regents of Cal, or something. It was a nice neighborhood, and she became instrumental when Milton had the idea for Chamber Music West – she had enough space in her house, she said, "I will house some of your people." One of those relationships that was born then was with Peter Oundjian, who has gone on to be the first violinist of the Tokyo String Quartet. Now he no longer plays fiddle and is a big Canadian conductor. To this day, Peter and I regard Ava Jean kind of maternally, and I remain very close with her.

She sponsors some scholarships, and she would always say to me, "I have these scholarships, but I never know who gets them!" I think that's a little 'whoops' that may subsequently have been taken care of, but I subsequently identified the three scholarship winners, and took them up to Nicasio, where she now lives on a gentleman's ranch in West Marin county. She made lunch for us, and we all played a little something for her. She said, "That was one of the best days I ever had in my life," and she thanked me for that. It worked out super well. Since then I've taken David Stull up there to meet and chat over lunch. She's way more important to the school than she allows, or thinks of. When the school moved from Sacramento Street to Ortega, Ava Jean was chair of the trustees, and running the show, such as it was, in 1956. And she's still here! She's the Symphony's longest serving life governor. She's been on the board of the Symphony for sixty-seven years. She – together with a handful of other people who ultimately became presidents of the Symphony – Philip Boone and Larry Metcalf – founded what grew into the Student Forum [an organization to make Symphony tickets available to U.C. Berkeley students]. Ava Jean's a Cal girl, not to be confused with our Stanford people (we have those too) – she's not one of those, she's a Berkeley girl. In fact, born and raised in Berkeley – her maiden name was Ava Jean Barber. So they started that, and they've been intimately involved with the things that have subsequently become my life too – both Conservatory and Symphony – and I don't have enough nice things to say about her. Such a sweetheart.

Ava Jean is the last of that amazing group of powerhouse females … Phyllis Wattis, Agnes Albert, Ava Jean Pischel.

**UPDIKE** Do you want to talk a little bit about Phyllis Wattis?

**SUTHERLAND** Phyllis was not so much a presence when the school was on Ortega Street. I don't think the source of the Wattis money had been consolidated by then, that happened when they sold the six companies to General Electric. Overnight their wealth increased exponentially, then she became Mrs. S.F. Arts Patronage, with a vengeance. The Phyllis Wattis atrium here … there's a number of ongoing financial things that are funded in perpetuity for the Symphony. Guest artist funds, guest conductor funds, the Wattis room – so she turned into the soul of generosity when she was able to do it. I did not know about Phyllis Wattis really, she was not on my radar back at Ortega Street, but she certainly came on it in a big way.

**UPDIKE** Let's look at a couple of trustees from that time. I'm not sure how well you knew them, but did you know John Beckman?

**SUTHERLAND** I did know John Beckman. Not well. He was a gentleman farmer, and we just recently lost him. A gentleman, is what John Beckman was to me – the picture of it. Statuesque, he commanded a room. And then I lost track of him, but I guess that his tenure as

chairman of the school was for the time very effective and very helpful. This is what Milton always told me. John C. Beckman – a great guy.

**UPDIKE** Do you know the Shurtleffs?

**SUTHERLAND** Betty Shurtleff I know. When Bess Touma [former SFCM vice president of advancement] was here, we took a handful of students up to lunch; she's at the San Francisco Towers, the big tall one on Pine. Betty Shurtleff and her husband Eugene were very, very important people to the Conservatory – Milton always said so. The other one I think of in tandem with Betty Shurtleff is Emy Callaghan, who was just crazy. I loved her. She was a diamond in the rough. Lewis, her husband, I didn't know so well. But Emy came to everything – she was like Kris Getz now, or Pat Berkowitz – they're interested in everything. You've got to have the womenfolk, you just do. Say what you want, but every successful arts organization I know of in this city owes either its naissance or its ongoing maintenance to women. That's just the way it is. Rhoda Goldman – John Goldman's mother – these old people who came from money, they're all sort of Gold Rush families and they were imbued – it was like it was laser-beamed onto them at birth, this sense of philanthropic duty. Amazing! I'm not certain the degree to which we see that anymore, as the torches get passed, but for a long, long time there was never any question what they would support, or to where they would devote their energies.

**UPDIKE** Is there anything that you would like to say about Kris Getz?

**SUTHERLAND** I just have known her forever, and I wish I were able to come to more things as an auditor – as an audience member. I don't do a bad job considering I work nights, but 95 percent of the things that I come to, Kris is there too! She dates back to the Ava Jeans.

**UPDIKE** She was there in the '50s.

**SUTHERLAND** She was always interested, and contributory. Kris Getz is one of the last of that breed.

Do you want to talk about Debbie Reynolds? Speaking of Kris Getz puts me in mind of a woman named Peggy Merrifield, who among other things is a distant cousin of Ava Jean's through her husband. Peggy Merrifield is somehow a Dohrmann. When Jeff came to the Conservatory, and we were drawn to each other instantly, he came from Beverly Hills High. He was an early admission – a precocious little guy. I think he joined the Conservatory at the age of sixteen. It was like the movie star high school. One day, Carrie Fisher – for a very brief time in her life – thought that she wanted to make a record. She needed backup musicians. We had no idea what Carrie Fisher had in mind, and neither did she. But her mother, Debbie Reynolds, funded this whole expedition to New York. Jeff and I were staying at the Waldorf and going to performances

of Debbie Reynolds, who at that point in 1973 had Broadway absolutely by storm starring in the musical *Irene* at the Minskoff Theater, and we hung out with Debbie Reynolds. Maybe Jeff was used to that, but I certainly wasn't – although I became quite good at it very fast. Dinner at the Rainbow Room, waltzing through the lobby of the Waldorf Astoria – crazy things that you could get away with. I got into the Rainbow Room without a tie with Debbie – we were stopped at the maître d, and she just said, "Well, we'll go somewhere else," and all of a sudden we were in the Rainbow Room. That was quite something. The record never materialized with Carrie Fisher, but we had a great time. I'm glad that the bill at the Waldorf never came my way, because that would have been quite the shock.

We were there for a week. We would go have these planning sessions with Debbie and Carrie – while she sang in *Irene* she was living at Jerome Robbins' townhouse. All of a sudden this was very heady stuff. Nothing ever happened, but the friendship with Debbie Reynolds kind of remained, and then Jeff and I had this idea, which took us about ten seconds to sell Milton Salkind on: a very fancy benefit for the Conservatory – fancier than anything that had ever happened up to that time. Debbie Reynolds would be the star of the show. So off we set – we made all the arrangements. Peggy Merrifield was somewhat helpful, but Jeff and I did most of it. We seized on the Mark Hopkins as the venue, the ballroom, and it was a piss-elegant dinner. Everybody turned out for it. Debbie was … I don't know if you've ever seen her act, but she's wonderful; she's a marvelous vocalist, she's a killer impressionist, and she can work a room. She worked the Mark Hopkins ballroom that night, all in exchange for the Mark Hopkins putting her up in one of the suites in the top. I think that was it. That benefit, you could maybe look it up – we hauled in about $50,000. It was a lot of work, but it was a hell of a lot of fun. I think at that time, amounts of that size didn't come the school's way every day. When the trustees, against my advice, sold the Hodghead house, that sale was for $55,000. One evening with Debbie Reynolds almost matched.

Peggy Merrifield was kind of the mother hen of that project for the school, but did not get along with Debbie Reynolds. So Jeff and I were the buffers and keeping certain people at arm's length. But that was a very fun evening. Jeff and I of course played; we had our little four-hand shtick. But mostly the evening belonged to Debbie Reynolds. There was no reason on earth for her to … Debbie Reynolds plus the San Francisco Conservatory of Music equals what? But there it was, and it was enormously successful. I'm very proud of that. That was a nice thing to have done.

**UPDIKE** I had no idea that happened. Let's talk about a couple of faculty members from that time. We already talked about Paul Hersh and Milton Salkind. Did you know Adolph Baller?

**SUTHERLAND** Usiu was his nickname. He was a gentleman. He was not from around here. He presided over an outfit called the Alma Trio, and he was a hell of a musician. He liked

me a lot, and here again, I don't know why but he was very fond of me. I remember him in tears at my junior jury. He was sitting in the back row of the recital hall, I played something, and it just moved him greatly. He put his arm around my shoulder (which was hard to do, because he was half my height) and said, "My boy … my boy." So touching. I guess he was legendary, he was one of those, like Martial Singher … somehow we managed to land them. I think they were further along in their years, and I don't think he ever had a killer student load here. I thought about requesting him as a teacher when I came because not really any of the faculty had names that meant anything to me. Which didn't bother me in the slightest; it was just such a relief to get away from Juilliard. My first choice was Bernhard Abramowitsch, thanks to the alphabet, and my next choice was Adolph Baller. Neither of those happened. I think Milton talked me out of it, which didn't take a whole lot of talking, because really I was not dead set on anything. But I ended up with Paul Hersh, and that turned out to be a very happy situation – for me at least, if not him. But Adolph Baller – Usiu – was a dear, dear gentleman.

**UPDIKE** Did you work at all with Nathan Schwartz?

**SUTHERLAND** I never studied with Nate Schwartz, but he was right there with Bonnie [Hampton]. Nate was Mr. Affable. He really was. He was jovial. We were always sort of pals, and he was a tremendous pianist. They won the Naumburg, which is not chopped liver – not at all – then or now. I think he was a very quiet, but very real force here.

**UPDIKE** Were you involved at all in the jazz scene? Did you know John Handy when he was a teacher here?

**SUTHERLAND** I just knew him tangentially. Beulah Forbes was my closest conduit to that whole scene.

**UPDIKE** I've heard some fun stories about her. And we have some recordings of her playing – she was amazing.

**SUTHERLAND** She was really something. I'll just say one thing about her: she could out-swear a stevedore, and often did. If somehow you got a dirty joke passed on to you, you always knew the person you were next going to repeat that to would be Beulah – and half the time she had heard it already. More fun than a barrel of monkeys, and really good too. I loved it the day the honorary doctorate came her way, that was I thought fitting in every way, to make that gesture to her.

**UPDIKE** And did you know Laurette Goldberg?

**SUTHERLAND** I studied with Laurette Goldberg. I went to her one day with a proposition, because I was very interested to learn the *Fourth Partita* of Bach – the huge *D major Partita*. But I said, "I want to learn it on the piano, would you consider being my mentor/coach?" And she agreed to do it, so she expanded her load for me for one term and we worked on that. Crazy woman, Laurette Goldberg, absolutely crazy. Completely convicted of herself and her concept of the music, which is kind of cute because she was alive in Bach's time no more than I was. Her concept of ornamentation was very interesting, to say the least. I'm not quite sure where she derived it, but this was the way it went. And a lot of the time, in my judgment, she was correct. In fact, I still play one of the movements in her ornamentation, kind of in her memory, even though they might be wrong. But she presided over this rather arcane group in the East Bay called The Society for Historically Informed Performances. I even remember the address – 1000 the Alameda. So we would hang out there, and she had her covey of devotees. They surrounded her – little Goldbergers. But she was a wonderful teacher. She taught a Baroque class and introduced us to composers like Jean-Baptiste Lully – guys that are not totally above the radar for a lot of piano players, but she opened a nice wide door to that universe, and she was your tour guide. I loved her because she pronounced Portuguese properly, and her French was impeccable. But boy, talk about conviction. There was no discussion.

**UPDIKE** And did you know Andrew Imbrie?

**SUTHERLAND** Andy Imbrie? Of course. Never studied with him, but he was very influential at Berkeley, and probably dated back to Ernest Bloch and that whole crowd – Albert Elkus undoubtedly. Didn't really know him – the kindest, most polite man ever. And came to a lot of stuff. We did a couple of his pieces at the Symphony, which I did not especially care for, but that's certainly not Andy Imbrie's problem. He was part of the Berkeley angle that the school had going.

**UPDIKE** And did you know John Adams when he was here in the '70s?

**SUTHERLAND** Very well, but in those days he wasn't John Adams yet, which is how I like to wrap up that whole period of time in his life – he hadn't become John Adams. He was a very interesting teacher. Milton hired him, and his job prior to coming to the Conservatory was he was a forklift operator in the East Bay. That's fine on the surface, but who knew he had this incredible Harvard background, with Leon Kirchner and this really very, very solid New England – I think he was born in Worchester, Massachusetts, but grew up in New Hampshire. A patrician musical upbringing, but he was hunting for something else, and he had not yet found it when I first knew him. I'm very pleased to say that John's phenomenal early successes came hand in hand with the San Francisco Symphony when the orchestra took him aboard as the new music advisor. Almost on cue started to arrive these phenomenal pieces – *Harmoniun*, *Harmonielehre* – that put John Adams on the map. I have some of his music from the old days,

piano pieces called *Ragamarole*, dedicated to David Montgomery. They were just little piano pieces that he said I ought to learn, and I did. I haven't played them forever.

**UPDIKE** Did you play with the New Music Ensemble at the Conservatory?

**SUTHERLAND** No, I did not. I know that it was sort of presided over by Alden Jenks.

**UPDIKE** It was started by Howard Hersh, and then John Adams took it over for over a decade, and then Joan Gallegos stepped in.

**SUTHERLAND** John and I butted heads at first; in fact John gave me the only F I've ever received in my entire academic life in one of his new music classes. I went up to him one day and I said, "I think this class is absolutely bullshit." I forget why I thought that, but I really did feel strongly, and I told him so. The school was that sort of place, where you could just … or at least I thought you could say to somebody, "This is nonsense." What I was probably saying was that it just wasn't for me. So he gave me an F, and we're best pals now. I have the unique position of – some of his works have tremendous keyboard parts, some of the orchestra works – I won't say they were written for me, but they seem to fit me awfully well. So that whole thing is forgotten, and it did not impede my graduation. It wasn't an unfriendly thing. So we had some rocky shoals in our sailing, but it didn't last.

**UPDIKE** Is there anything that you'd like to say about Mack McCray from the '70s?

**SUTHERLAND** Mack was on my jury, and he was in those days – we were not the same age, but kind of. Mack was super young. He was on my list of names in my letter from Meredith Robinson. She said, "I don't have anything particular to say about these people except they have interesting heads and feet." John Adams, Mack McCray, Grover Coors, Diana Wayburn, Rick Gerding … many of them I sought out, and Meredith wasn't kidding. Interesting heads and feet. I never worked with Mack as a teacher/student kind of thing, but he's always been there. Later – 2014 – we joined up with Zephyr, finally, which is an outgrowth of something he and John Adams had sort of put together – a European sojourn for students. My friend Regan Tremblay, a pianist, went. I think Jenny Culp did too. It was called Sommer Musik Wochen – Summer Music Weeks. I remember hearing stories about that, and then Zephyr took hold. Finally I got to go see what Zephyr's all about. Tremendous stuff. Both Carlos [Ortega] and I had a wonderful time with that. But Mack was always just a pal.

**UPDIKE** Let's talk about some events and festivals at the Conservatory when you were here. I know that I've heard a recording of you playing a piece by Loren Rush, I think it was *Oh, Susanna* for some sort of new music workshop. Do you remember anything about that?

**SUTHERLAND** That was probably as close as I came to anything of new music. I remember being attracted to it because on the Symphony's first big tour in 1973, where I met Agnes, we took a piece of Loren Rush's called *The Cloud Messenger*. I don't know if it was a Symphony commission or not, but Seiji [Ozawa] took that with us, it was part of the tour repertoire. And I remembered his name, and thought, *Oh, Susanna* – why not? I don't remember anything about playing it though … did it go well?

**UPDIKE** It sounds nice.

**SUTHERLAND** It's a flight of fancy on *Oh, Susanna*. I liked his piece for the big orchestra, called *Cloud Messenger*, and so I probably even asked to play it. But I can't remember. I think there's an old reel to reel tape recording of Kahane and me doing the Brahms *Sonata for Two Pianos*, which we did as part of the grand opening of Hellman Hall. It stayed up in Alden Jenks' little cubbyhole, but when they moved out of Ortega Street somebody had the presence of mind to say, "Hey, do you want this?" I said, "I do," because I remember it being an incredible performance, so I gave it to Lolly Lewis, who wasn't involved with Hellman Hall in its early days, but did ultimately become the concert manager and the studio in back of Hellman Hall was her bailiwick. She's my producer for all of the stuff that I do, and I said, "Is there anything you can do with this, by way of maybe resuscitating it?" As far as I know she still has it. But I remember it was really good. I wouldn't mind hearing that again. I was graduated, and I think he probably was too. In reverse of me, Jeff went to Juilliard, which was the normal way to go. I uniquely sort of managed it backwards, out of necessity. But that was good, and I always gave Milton a hard time … "Thank you so much for waiting until I had gone before you opened Hellman Hall. That was so sweet of you." I don't know if you've ever seen blueprints of the building, but down the center hall in the old days was what we called the recital hall. It couldn't have sat more than three dozen people comfortably. But that's where the juries were, and that's where Usiu cried. They did sort of modernize the school – the Agnes Albert lounge was above that on the second floor – because Hellman was two stories. But it was below that where it used to be … it's gone now. But I gave Salkind such crap, because he really spent all his time finding places where Conservatory events could take place.

**UPDIKE** Well, he did that so you would come back.

**SUTHERLAND** Maybe. It worked. Jeff and I had some degree of notoriety. It wasn't any kind of formal thing … people called us Mutt and Jeff, or the Long and the Short of It. When we lived together we would spend a lot of time cobbling things together that we could play four-hands, or two pianos, so we made a little hay for a while doing that, so I guess it was natural they would ask us to come back for that. There were a ton of events to celebrate that there was finally someplace to play in the Conservatory. Can you imagine? Now, it's better. My one sadness is

that Milton did not live to see Oak Street. He knew it would happen, he was as certain that it would happen as the day is long, he just didn't know where. That was up to Colin [Murdoch]; that was Colin's big achievement, in my judgment. But it's sad about Mickey, because – oh, how he would have loved this.

**UPDIKE** Is there anything that you'd like to say about Chamber Music West? I know that you played for a couple of those performances, even though that started a little after you left.

**SUTHERLAND** I got as cozy with Chamber Music West as I felt that I could, not really being a member of the Conservatory community anymore. But I think that's one of the finest things that came out of Milton's tenure as president of the school. I remember going and having dinner at Ava Jean's house on 6th Avenue – potlucks for Chamber Music West. The performances … Peter Oundjian, of course … there were some big names, and Milton presided over that in a congenial and able direction. That was really his baby, and Bonnie Hampton of course was essential. But that was one of the things they waited to get rid of me before they really started exploring. But that's OK too – I had more of my share of having fun. I didn't get slighted in the fun department, not at all. But now … we always knew we could do it, and the older I get, we look back at Ortega Street, and I don't know how we managed. But we did, and we did a damn fine job of it. SFCM, man … I wear that badge proudly. It saved my life. It was a beacon, it was like Aggie's lighthouse, only built on a shore that wasn't crumbling. It turns out it was built on a very solid shore, and getting solider all the time.

**UPDIKE** Let's talk a little bit about the music scene in San Francisco when you were a student. Were there things that you did outside of the Conservatory before you started working for the Symphony?

**SUTHERLAND** No. I didn't really get involved … my transition between school and Symphony was not really a transition, it was an overlap. When I was appointed in '73, I had two more years to finish my degree. I look back on those two years, and I'm not 100 percent certain how I did it. You're young, and you just sort of do things, but two full-time things … and they weren't two blocks apart. None of this business of leaving Davies and five minutes later I can be talking to somebody here. It was hard. So no, I didn't really have that period in my life. It's the San Francisco Bay Area, for heaven's sake, so yes – there were things going on – but no, I was a busy boy. In fact, I got into trouble once with the Dean, Richard Howe, he called me on one day when the Symphony was causing me to maybe not be present at all of my academic chores. I got called out by the dean. And there again – his wife Aggie was my travel agent, we all lived in Marin County, we're all pals – so I wasn't really called out. But he said, "There's an attendance problem here." The Symphony and the interlocking directorates that I was speaking of – they saw what was happening, and they made allowances because you can't be in two places at once,

you really can't. So there was a sort of an understanding. But one day he called me in and said, "Look, you're missing Jon Bailey's class," and I said, "Dude, what are you training me for? Guess what? I'm already doing it." That was all I said, and that was the end of the matter. What is the mission here? What are we doing? I'm doing it already. It was an issue, and it was problematic … but I was never part of the broad, vast things that were going on.

**UPDIKE** Could you describe how you first came to play for the San Francisco Symphony?

**SUTHERLAND** You have to picture Ortega Street. You walked in the front door, and there was the receptionist, Julie Karres. My God, that's a chapter in itself right there. And then you came to this long cross-hall, which ran the length of the building – 19th to 20th Avenue. The student mailboxes were there, and everything else too, because there was no place to put anything. I was reading a letter in the fall of 1972 – a brand new student. A letter had come from my mother, and I remember because it was the letter that informed me of the death of our childhood dog, a dog that my sister and I had grown up with. I'm sitting there, reading the letter, leaning with one foot up … and I am alone in the hall. I don't know what the hell time of day it was, but I'm the only person in the hall. Milton's office, the president's office, had the main door with the secretary and the dean, and then his office had a little secret escape door so you didn't have to go through all the offices; you could go right out into the hall. That door opened, and out came his head, and it looked up one side of the hall, and then the other. I was the only person he saw, and he said, "Come here." What had happened was, he had received some sort of panicked phone call from the Symphony – Mack McCray had fallen ill. He was engaged to do a performance of the Hindemith first *Kammermusik* with a little chamber orchestra. Leon Fleisher was on the podium in his role as conductor, and Mack was going to do this quite, quite demanding solo piano part – it's for solo piano and twelve instruments. It's a weird piece, it's got accordions and police sirens – it's a masterpiece. He said, "Do you have any idea about the Hindemith first *Kammermusik*?" I said, "Well, as a matter of fact, I do," because we had just examined it in some detail in one of Joan Gallegos's classes. Don't ask me how or why, but we had. I was conversant enough with the piece. He basically said, "How quickly can you get down to the Opera House?"

There was a rehearsal that afternoon with that piece and Fleisher, who was then, even as now, a great god for pianists. I was surprised to learn that he was conducting it. Poor Mack was ill, and so the Symphony in a panic called the Conservatory, and I was the one. The place was crawling with good pianists, but I was the only person in the hall, and Milton was able then to respond to the Symphony in ten minutes. But I went down, and I did it. I don't know that Leon remembers this, but it was a huge event in my life, and it went very well. I think there were a couple of performances. This was pre-Davies, there was a little series down at the theater in the Palace of Fine Arts, and I think that's where it took place. I remember my horrible embarrassment because

I didn't have a black suit. I had a brown suit … who needed a suit? I didn't need a suit to come to school. I had one for funerals, and here I am in my brown suit, sitting in front of the San Francisco Symphony in tuxedos, playing this. This was in the autumn of 1972. It went very well, and then the Symphony began to call the Conservatory more frequently. Things would come up – they needed a celesta player for Mahler's *Eighth Symphony*, and Milton sent me down. I had never played a celesta in my life, but I met Seiji Ozawa and a couple of other people. That was how this whole ridiculous thing got started. By the time May of '73 rolled around I was regular enough – the phone was ringing enough – that they said, "Come to Europe with us," which was awkward because the tour left in May. But that's back to the whole deal of, "Wink wink – can we take him? He'll figure it out when he gets back." We were gone for six weeks, and that's a tough time of year – that's end of year juries.

We took with us the *Fourth Symphony* of Charles Ives, with its gigantic solo piano part. Unbeknownst to me, that was my audition. We played it all through Europe – Florence, Brussels, Leningrad. One of the people who fought as a student to get one of the few available tickets for that performance was Semyon Bychkov, the conductor. I was telling him the story – "We were in Leningrad," and he said, "I was there." Isn't that amazing? By the time the six weeks were up, my job was fully formed. In fact, Seiji created the position for me of principal of keyboards – it had never existed. Again, we were big pals, he and I – still are. But that was the little innocent – reading about my dead dog from my mother, and two minutes later Milton's door bursts open. It has to do with being prepared, more or less, but also dumb luck. A concert pianist is what I was being trained for at Juilliard, and ultimately what I would have become if things had not taken the turn they did. For piano players in the Bay Area, there's one killer job, and it's mine. Every time I go to parties that are crawling with pianists, I keep my back to the wall. I'm pals with everybody, and I know everybody in town, but I also know that there are some of them who would like to see me dead in a ditch. But it's what I had built up – the job prior to my arrival didn't even exist. There was a lady in the second violins who was proficient enough on keyboard occasionally to jump the fence if something had to happen, but this Hindemith thing was clearly not within her capability. So that's the story. One of these days I will step down from that position, but there's no hurry. It's not a part-time job either. Some people say, "The Symphony works twenty-three hours a week." Basically we do – that's our time on stage rehearsing and performing – and the next question inevitably is, "What else do you do?" Some of my colleagues have big teaching loads here. I find that life is full enough with just that, for me. So that's how that happened … being prepared, and dumb luck … maybe not in equal proportions.

[BREAK]

**UPDIKE** When we left off, you just got your first appointment at the Symphony.

**SUTHERLAND** That was a very long tour. For international orchestra tours, a month and a half – it turns out that was huge! All my colleagues now moan … the upcoming one to Asia is three weeks, and the one in Europe last fall was three and a half weeks. I thought, "That's nothing! You have no idea. We did a whole tour of Europe, and then we went for three weeks to the Soviet Union." I wish we would have done it in reverse because it sort of ended on a sour note, but I was a novice.

**UPDIKE** Are there any stories that you could share from your first tour?

**SUTHERLAND** Well, there was a story with everything, from the minute the plane touched down. It was my first trip outside the confines of the United States, and everything was new – everything was a story. I wouldn't know where to begin. I remember that before I left Jeff said, "My folks are going to be in Paris." So I have a couple of photographs of me and Jeff's parents cavorting underneath the Arc de Triomphe, and that was interesting – so far from home, to see people that you actually knew. Murray and Laurie Kahane from Beverly Hills, California! Russia was … in those days the Cold War was very much on everybody's mind. Nixon was still president, with barely a year to go before resigning in disgrace. [Leonid] Brezhnev was in the driver's seat in the Soviet Union, and this whole tour was put together by the State Department in our country. It was basically an artistic trade. The Soviet Union would get us, and the United States would get quite a generous sampling of the impressionist art that hung in the Hermitage. I'd say an even trade … maybe the U.S. made out a tiny bit better on that deal. But that was the reason for coupling the Russian angle onto the Europe tour. It worked very well. We had State Department representatives come to the Symphony, and tell us what we could and could not do. No selling of blue jeans – that was the most prized item. Of course we were wearing them, like I'm wearing them to this day – thank you Rhoda Goldman for inventing designer jeans!

Europe was fabulous. All the capitals of Europe … and that was just sort of as you would read them in a textbook … and the theaters, and the museums, and the things that we did … "Oh yeah, I remember reading about that in tenth grade…." The British Museum … sure enough, there it is. But Russia – there had been no window since the war, and Russia was news to everybody. Agnes was on that trip … Ava Jean was on that trip. Pretty much everybody else … only two out of [the present] 105 were present on that tour aside from myself. We had a State Department representative with us every step of the way, and also a Russian escort. We would pull up in our bus to an airport for travel within the country, and they would get out to arrange the tickets (we traveled in a big bloc) and they would lock the bus. The Russians didn't like the idea of people wandering about at random. You didn't do that. We were quite certain – and we were told – that our rooms would be bugged, and I'm certain that they were.

We found a standard of living that was dismally low in comparison to what we had seen. We entered the country at Leningrad on a flight from Pisa. The minute we touched down in Russia it

was a different story, and even the so-called world travelers like Agnes had never been there. Everything was new. Everything was mostly unpleasant. Once we were inside the country, we took Aeroflot, which was the Russian National Airline; picture United Airlines being sponsored by the United States government, or something. The internal flights in Russia – from Leningrad to Moscow, or Moscow to Vilnius – were in these planes that were little better than crop-dusters. I remember looking out at the wheels, which did not retract, they were so bald you could see the white threads in the tire. Aeroflot has the most dismal safety record of any airline on earth – it's a miracle we came out. So you're in the country and you're scurrying about like little moles, and being watched constantly. You eat communally at a very long table, and you eat four meals a day whether or not you want them, and there's always something at midnight. It would always be plates of cucumbers soaked in vinegar. Big plates of cucumbers. This was the big state hotel in Moscow, and we were told that was the best that they had, what we were given. The Russian national beverage was a distillation of pear juice, slightly fermented – it comes in big green bottles and every table would have twelve of them. It was dreadful. But when we left the country from Moscow to Amsterdam, it was in Aeroflot's best plane – a gleaming jet – because it would be seen. Not only was it carrying the San Francisco Symphony, it would be seen. Very, very interesting dichotomy.

**UPDIKE** What were the audiences like?

**SUTHERLAND** Rapt to the point of delirium. The big event was in the great hall of the Conservatory in Moscow, and our guest soloist on the Dvořák *Concerto* was Rostropovich. It was his return concert to Russia, because he had been banned for his support of [Aleksandr] Solzhenitsyn, the writer. So they said, "To hell with you," and he was returning. Can you imagine? The Dvořák *Concerto*, Ozawa, and us … the ovation … you would have thought it were the second coming of Jesus Christ. It was pandemonium. The cool part about that was that prior to the concert there was a pianist rehearsal with me, Rostropovich, and Ozawa, in a little practice room in the Conservatory, just running over the piece. I thought, "Not bad for some kid who wasn't even holding the bachelor's degree yet."

**UPDIKE** That's incredible.

**SUTHERLAND** It was. There are all kinds of stories. One day they painted Agnes's room … we went out on a tour or something, we took a bus to wherever someone had decided we would go to see whatever someone had decided we would see, and we got back and her hotel room had been painted. Just a fresh coat of paint, for no apparent reason. It wasn't dry, and it was uninhabitable. So somebody had to find Agnes another hotel room. The hotel is huge beyond the imagining – but it was, "Oh no, that couldn't be done." They had to have a big conference. They saw nothing problematic about painting it – "She should be glad her room's painted." The way everything operated was unthinkable. There was a very sour looking matron

on every floor at the elevator stop, and to her you had to surrender your room key. Not at the front desk – it was the property of the woman on that floor. It was unbelievable. I remember in Leningrad in my room looking out over Pushkin Park, which was very nice, and there was a big statue of the poet, of course. There was a department store along one side, and there was one payphone attached to the side of the building. It was lunch hour, and I was just looking out the window, and I saw the line begin to collect for the phone. The line ended up with about 75 or 100 people, and it was their lunch hour, and maybe two or three people got a chance to make or place their call. This wasn't outside of the country, this was to someone else who might accidentally have a telephone – this was 1973. When the lunch hour ended, the vast majority of the people who didn't get the chance just dispersed, and that was the way life was. They would try again another day.

You go in the grocery stores, and there are four loaves of bread. That's what they had – that's what was available that day. If you don't get your bread, you come and try again another time. That was difficult to conceive of. Obviously it's not that way anymore, but I have not been back to Russia since that, nor do I have the remotest desire to go. It's so funny, because much of what I learned from Zimbalist, from Lhevinne, that's where they were from. But they were from Czarist Russia, and it was a different story then. I can see why people would hate the commies. Not only for what happened in the war – McCarthy was fresh, the House on American Activities Committee – routing out communists in the government. I could see why people would hate them, because there was nothing about life in that country to love, or even to admire. We went to the Hermitage where some of the paintings had come from. It's this huge palace, and the paintings are hung forty feet about you, and not lit. Somebody familiar with the situation said, "You're lucky you're here in June." I said, "Why?" They said, "The sun never goes down. There's no point coming to this museum in November, because there's no daylight." That was another bizarre thing – there was nothing but daylight. You could easily read a book at midnight unaided, because it's so far north. Everything was slightly twilight-zoney.

**UPDIKE** What an incredible experience at that age.

**SUTHERLAND** Nobody was banking on that. And Milton was along, the Conservatory was over there. So with Milton and Agnes and Ava Jean I was also able to go to some places. We went to some classes at the Conservatory to observe some of the great, legendary teachers who were still alive and working.

We go back to Europe so frequently. Long ago I lost count of how many times we've been to Europe, and close to that in Asia. But we go primarily to the same places, and the venues are familiar. We opened a new hall in Paris, the Philharmonie, and that was fun – that was new. And we went to a new city, Bucharest, where no one had ever been. This fall we're going to Seoul, where the orchestra has never been. But Beijing, yes – Shanghai, yes – Tokyo, God yes! They

are largely the same, but that tour of Russia was different from the second it began, and for three whole weeks everything was different, very bizarre, and not entirely pleasant. If it weren't for the Symphony, who knows what would have happened? But I've seen a good part of the world.

**UPDIKE** You've had quite an interesting life.

**SUTHERLAND** It hasn't been dull.

**UPDIKE** This question is kind of similar – this isn't necessarily about being on tour, but some of the highlights of your performances that stand out to you.

**SUTHERLAND** Well, the great stand out was the Rostropovich concert. Ironically, there is no keyboard part in the Dvořák *Concerto*, but I got to rehearse with those boys privately, and of course I was in the audience and witnessed the tumult that greeted that. I cannot describe to you – it was absolute pandemonium, and it went on for what seemed like hours.

I remember a performance of Stuart Canin in Japan in 1975 playing the *Serenade for Violin and Orchestra* by Bernstein. An unbelievably high level of playing. That was when the orchestra really first started to go from the major regional orchestra status – that's where the road really began to where we are now, which is one of the hot planetary bands. Seriously. We really are right now. I'm not going to speculate as to how long that can last, but right now we are at the top of our game. But I think back then it was starting, and Stuart was sensational. I believe he was a faculty member here.

MTT [Michael Tilson Thomas], before he was here, was the music director of the London Symphony, and had been for ten years. His farewell performances consisted of Leonard Bernstein's *Age of Anxiety* – the second symphony, which is his only piano concerto. *Symphony no. 2*. He asked me to come to London to be the soloist on that occasion. We did several performances in London and took it on tour to Vienna. That was Michael's farewell to that segment of his life, and that was very special. That piece ended up being very good to me over the years. The year prior to that Seiji had arranged a concert with the orchestra of La Scala in Milan, and he picked *The Age of Anxiety*, and he also had me do it. Performing in La Scala … it's this wedding cake theater that has tier upon gilded tier … it goes up what seems like ten stories, and you look out and it was wonderful. At the end, this one lone woman who was an institution at La Scala, came down and gave me a single red rose. They said she does that for everybody, but I thought it was very cool.

The best one was also in '95 with Michael [Tilson Thomas] at the Pacific Music Festival in Hiroshima. This was August 6, 1995 – the exact 50th anniversary of the dropping of the atomic bomb on that city. Everybody was in that audience, except the emperor. That was my quality

audience, and it becomes very eerie when you think that *The Age of Anxiety*, which Bernstein took from the poem by Auden of that name, was written because that event ushered in the atomic age. That was really the first and only time that atomic warfare had been utilized between countries. It freaked out W.H. Auden to the point that he wrote *The Age of Anxiety*. Lenny loved the poem so much that he created the *Second Symphony*, and that's what we did for the 50th anniversary – on that very day, 50 years later. Those are things that I wouldn't trade for all the tea in Japan or China. We could talk all night – there are standout performances in this building and Ortega Street. Sometimes things just come together the exact way you want them to, and they are as close to perfection as you could want.

**UPDIKE** Are there any from the Conservatory that you can think of now?

**SUTHERLAND** Tons! I'm a little prejudiced, but my alumni recital in 2013 was very special because the concept was just kind of gaining a foothold, and they asked me to do it. I thought, "What am I going to do? Am I going to go out and play the *Goldberg Variations*?" Then I thought, "No. I'm not going to play a note of solo piano. It's all going to be collaborative, and it's all going to be from friendships and things that have developed." The title of the recital was Forty Years On. That's what it was, it was what's happened to the school … to me, that was very special. We played pieces that are very dear to me. The Rachmaninoff *Suite for Two Pianos,* which is in four movements. I played the first piano, but I had a different colleague for each of the movements on the second piano. Everybody was connected in some fashion or other to the Conservatory – some new, some old. The Fauré *Piano Quartet* after intermission was my piano teacher Paul Hersh on viola, Ian Swensen on fiddle, Jenny Culp on cello. That probably was for me the most moving thing that I did. I've attended countless things. Also on that event I was privileged and honored to be able to give the West Coast premiere of the piece that I had commissioned from Nick Pavkovic – the suite for clarinet and piano called *Volante*, which is a magnificent piece, I'm very happy that it bears our names on the title page. And I was able to introduce Carlos Ortega to my peeps. There wasn't a seat to be had in Hume Hall, not a seat. That was really something, that would be a hard one to top. I was undone at the end of that night. The department had thrown a party before and after! That was the culmination of many, many, many special events. When you stage as many performing events as the school is fortunate enough to be able to do, a lot of them are going to really stand out. Some not, of course – the law of averages – but a lot of them are. That's just the tip of an iceberg that could go on forever.

**UPDIKE** Has your performance style changed over the years?

**SUTHERLAND** No. I was pretty fully formed when I got to the school, and yet somehow the school managed to save me. I was pointed on a career path that I wasn't 100 percent behind – the solo concert career, that's what Rosina Lhevinne was in the business of arranging. My classmate Garrick Ohlsson … Garrick and I were in the last great Lhevinne class, and he wanted

that life so bad he could taste it. I was never 100 percent sure that I did, and so it was a more or less fully formed pianist that came to Ortega Street that day, but really one who was missing a direction. Right away, from the minute of my audition where half the faculty were sitting on the floor – so different from Juilliard where they're behind a table and they're fifty feet away from you, and they don't speak. This school really saved me. But my performing style? No. I don't know when that congealed, but it's been modified, and I owe a great deal to Paul Hersh, because he thinks about things differently than I did. He's from a whole different school of training. Although he's a Yale boy, he studied with Leonard Shure, and Rita Hutcherson was a Yale girl, so I guess if there's a tradition to be perceived, that would be my tradition. But it was a real departure from where I'd been up to that point, mixed in with a wonderful Left Coast friendliness. There wasn't the cutthroat killer thing that I could see all too easily going on – in practice rooms, "Get out of my way!" That kind of thing. Breakdowns were common, suicides were not unheard of. Right away it was just like the sun was out, and things unfolded from that point.

**UPDIKE** Has your preference of the type of music that you play changed over the years?

**SUTHERLAND** Somewhat. I would credit Paul Hersh in many ways for a little bit of a transformation in the way that I look at late Beethoven piano sonatas now. There were lessons when not more than two measures would be covered.

When I was sort of brushing up *Goldberg Variations* with him, he once came to the house in Mill Valley for a lesson – the last ten variations – and he just sat there in the chair by the fireplace and I played for him. One variation would come, and he'd go, "That's fine." It was a first for me to think the way a real analyst would think about things. You open music, and there it is – they wrote it. He goes, "Well, why?" That's a huge question – why? To answer it, you first have to see what exactly is going on. Paul's very good with the music of Robert Schumann, with Peter Ostwald and the music and the madness of Robert Schumann. He's the guy who threw himself in the Rhine River, he was crazy, and yet not. Paul has made a real study of that. I wish he'd allow to be published a lot of his seemingly random thoughts – they're not random at all, they're extremely calculated and it's driven by a brilliant mind. Me ending up with him, that was super happy serendipity and felicity, and a bunch of things. That's why I say, somewhat. It's like the three blind men describing the elephant – they can only do it by feel. One's got the tusk, one's got the tail. They're all feeling the same thing, but they file completely different reports with the central office. One's like a rope – no it's not! But Paul would look at the elephant from the standpoint of all the blind men, and then he would convene a meeting of the blind men. I have nothing but admiration for him. So, that's my somewhat.

**UPDIKE** It's a good answer. Are there any stories you could share of composers who you've worked closely with over the years? Did the Symphony give concerts of living composers who collaborated with the process of performance? Or did you ever work personally with composers?

**SUTHERLAND** There have been a couple – for instance, the piece I commissioned from Nick Pavkovic for Carlos and me. Nick is an extraordinary pianist, so there's not that part to discuss. There were moments when – "Does this work…?" They were not frequent. Often times I probably had the wrong answer, but it's interesting to peer into that crucible of the creative process, which I lack utterly, as any of my composition teachers at Juilliard will tell you … "Your role is to realize what's put in front of you. You don't necessarily want to be running off creating things." I've tried, there were class exercises and stuff, but that parade passed me by. But it's very interesting to watch John Adams at work – or rather, watch him not at work. He has this place up in the wilds where he just disappears, and that's where that works for me – in the backwoods of Sonoma County. It's like Superman going to the fortress in the North Pole. And then he emerges, and bang! Something's there. Some composers, it's absolutely effortless. They say, "Does this work for you?" (That's a rare occasion.) I find the crucible of creativity – the opportunity to stare into it as it's coming to a boil, it's very interesting. I appreciate it on a very involved and yet detached level, because I don't completely understand it. I can tell you when something is badly written, or well written.

Working arm in arm with a composer has not really fallen to me in the sense that Brahms would work with Joseph Joachim – the great Berlin violinist. Brahms wrote a *Violin Concerto*, but without the input of Joachim, we don't really know what it would sound like, because apparently he changed a lot, and that relationship was open – Brahms left that door open, and he did that a lot. He thought at one point that his compositional career had come to an end, and then he met this clarinetist, who changed his life – Richard Mühlfeld. He had basically seven more years to live, but he was done. And Sibelius didn't write anything for the last forty years of his life, he just sort of did whatever they do in Finland – that faucet was turned off. But Brahms – meeting this clarinetist (I know a couple of things about meeting clarinetists, although I'm not a composer) right away came the two *Clarinet Sonatas*, the *Clarinet Trio*, the *Clarinet Quintet* – these are masterpieces of Western chamber music literature – all from this one person with whom he wasn't involved at all, in any way, except he was captivated by what this person could do. That would be, I think, wonderful, but my experience with composers is just one of silent admiration.

**UPDIKE** Are there any conductors that you'd like to talk about who you've worked with closely?

**SUTHERLAND** All of them. The nice thing about the San Francisco Symphony, I have been present for four extremely different music directors. But when they're not there, virtually any conductor in the world of any stature has come with us. By the nature of my position, I work very closely with them. If they need an accompanist, I am their private accompanist while they're here. Like me and Seiji and Rostropovich in that little room in the Conservatory in Moscow – if necessary I will do that, and I'm pretty good pals with most of these conductors. Next week, just a random example, Charles Dutoit comes back for his umpteenth engagement with us, and I look forward to the arrival of an old friend. There are conductors who you never want to see again as long as you live, but isn't that probably true of anything? For the most part I'm very fortunate, because I do get thrust in with them.

**UPDIKE** What are some things that you appreciate about certain conductors?

**SUTHERLAND** The difference in their approach to any given piece of music. Seiji Ozawa for instance (and I have seen him do this) can digest and memorize any piece of music, and conduct it without flaw from memory in a way that absolutely staggers my imagination. It stretches that to the limit – how is this possible? In that way Seiji and Michael Tilson Thomas are probably most closely related. Herbert Bomstedt achieves miraculous results, but he does so by dint of absolute ceaseless study. He's the monastic type, and when he's working, do not bother him. For ten years we learned that, and I'm sure for many more years his wife and his daughters learned that. "He's working, sorry, come back later." I've never seen anybody work so diligently, and the results – they're all barking up the same tree, but it's how they come by that. Very different approaches. The smart musician in time will sense how a conductor works, and that helps define the limits of what you feel you are able to try, or do. For instance, MTT – if there is a boundary right there, he'll say – "What if we put that boundary right there?" [mimics pushing it] And once you get that, you can do that yourself, and if he doesn't like it, he'll tell you – but a lot of the times he will. Blomstedt, however: if it is not on the printed page, it does not exist. I'm not saying I have more admiration for one particular approach over the other, but the spontaneous edgy approach appeals to my nature more, just because I can somehow relate to it better. The ends are often similar, it's the means that vary. If an edge gets pushed just right, Michael says that it's like we're a pack of young wolves – we just nestle up against each other and growl. Which is a wonderful way to put it. And I've seen it work often enough. You take that extra little step. "Can I do that? Can I get away with that? Will teacher yell at me if I do that?" But that's how boundaries get expanded, and I think with a few exceptions, boundaries are for experimenting with.

**UPDIKE** I know you've done many, many recordings. My first question would be – are there any really memorable recordings that you've participated in? But then also – how has the recording process changed over the last forty years?

**SUTHERLAND** In one way, as the process has become more sophisticated … a lot of stuff can be fixed now, and you're not the one that fixes it. There's a way, for instance, to adjust a tempo without adjusting the pitch. It used to be, the faster a record went the higher it got. But now you can sort of do that – I don't understand how that works! That has brought about one thing, which is, "That can be fixed." And the bar becomes a little bit lower. Now, is that a good thing? This is what the ceaseless march of advancing technology has given us. I don't know that that's a good thing. It used to be a take was analyzed. You would get into a recording booth and you would sit there with your fellows and your producer … "Did that work? Well, we'd better try that again." I guess it's also what your aim is in these things. Michael, for instance, our recordings with the Symphony – he always prefers to do them in front of a live audience. Why is that? He said that contributes a certain something that is not always easy to define. It's all about that edge. He said, "If you record in front of a house full of people, you're playing differently than if you're recording in a space – alone, with maybe one microphone." And I think he's right, the extraneous blessing of new technology is the extraneous noises can be handled, they can be expunged. But there's something about that edge – live music, there's nothing like it. That's why concert going is for me such a pleasure. Where is the edge going to be tonight? What's going to happen? You don't know.

Certain performers are so fantastic, you don't want to listen to them almost; after you get done with being scared to death that it could be so routinely perfect. There are few pianists capable of that – most of them are dead now. And sometimes you get a tail wind – I made a recording with my colleague, Roy Malan, of the Respighi *Violin Sonata*. We were in Old First Church with all of the Sacramento Street and Van Ness Avenue noise and everything, but it was just one of those uncanny moments when we released it as it was. We sat down and played it start to finish, cut out the applause at the end, and that's the way it went out, and it met both of our approvals. Those rare things that you can't really define. That happened once to my teacher and her husband – Rosina and Josef Lhevinne – recordings in the old days were extremely arduous, and the worst part was that you had to go to Camden, New Jersey, because that's where the Red Seal people where. Once you recovered from being in Camden, New Jersey, you had to schedule huge blocks of time to maybe get eight, ten minutes of something. They were somehow ahead of schedule one day and they just sat down for fun and played the Debussy piece called *Fêtes* – feasts, or parties. They sat down and did it once, and that is the recording that's on the Philips great pianists collection now [*Great Pianists of the 20th Century*]. This is extremely rare.

The recording that I was the most involved in in my life, that we really invested a lot of time in, is my recording of the *Goldberg Variations*, which has just been re-released with a new cover because the old one was aging a little. I put a cover of a mountain on it – a photograph of the mountain in the back of Lolly's [Lewis] and my boarding school, where I met Peter Pischel. It's a great shot that Lolly took, so that was reissued after twenty-five years. It's the thing probably that I'm singly most proud of. The contents of what is nauseatingly referred to as "the product"

has not changed. There was opportunity – we went to her studio on Mission Street and we really listened with a fine-toothed comb, and even after a quarter century – I've lived with that piece all my life, since I was twelve – if anything, I wanted to set that down, my testimony about that piece, and I'm fine with it. But that was interesting. We had the best available technology. You find a place, and you find the sweet spot in the place. In the case of the *Goldbergs*, they hung two very sophisticated microphones, and they found the sweet spot. It's a building that's so hideously ugly on the inside, but after considerable searching they found a place in Cunningham Chapel at the University of Notre Dame, Belmont. Here's the altar, here's the pews, right there at the cross (we took out a couple of pews) and right there on a linoleum floor … these are the guys who know about such things. About thirteen feet directly above the instrument there were two microphones, and it works. Sonically, it's exceptional in quality. We had to record it from one to four AM on a series of days to minimize flyovers from SFO, because Belmont is right on the approach to SFO. These guys, Mark Keller and Don Ososke, my producers in 1988, they thought of everything, and we had absolutely everything at our disposal. I had the piano of my dreams, and enough money – the guy who put up the money said, "Do this as long as it takes to do." Mike Kelly, an extraordinary gentleman who lives up in Sausalito. The label was called the d'Note – that was his label. He recorded various disks, but this one – we had everything at our disposal, and it comes out on two solid CDs. It's the longest solo piano piece in the repertoire, for all intents and purposes.

You think of *Goldberg Variations*, you think of Glenn Gould. Mine aren't like his in any respect. But every variation, the theme is 16 bars repeated, 16 bars repeated – there's nothing too much going on random. You take all the repeats and it clocks in at 88 minutes. And I was able to do that because Mike Kelly said, "Do this." Glenn Gould takes some repeats (some not, but he was confined by the technology of his age). 78 records – how long do they last? A few minutes. A Beethoven symphony on 78 is a box this thick [gestures] and you can hardly pick it up. Manhole covers, is what they looked like. Then came thin vinyl, then came 8 track tapes, God forbid, then CDs, then Blu-ray – all these things are just refining this process, but I had the best available stuff that I could get, and as a result I stand behind that recording 100 percent. When they first rolled off the press I gave a couple copies to the library in the Conservatory.

**UPDIKE** Our next question is to talk about what the life of a professional musician is like. And I'm interested to know if it's really what you imagined it would be like when you started.

**SUTHERLAND** I wasn't out of school yet, and it goes back to that directionless-ness that I talked about a little bit. My initial thought was, "Let's try this for a couple of years." I thought, "If anything comes of this, let's try it for a while." Well, something did come of it, and it wasn't long at all that it occurred to me that the killer job had just been handed to me. I didn't really have a lifestyle … but it quickly dawned on me that this was not at all a bad deal. I knew the life

of the professional musician that I didn't want, and this is huge, actually – the life I was being trained for in New York would lead to a concert career. I was never 100 percent thrilled by that because – look what they have to do. I could see down the road. Home lives are trouble for people who are constantly traveling. I'm kind of selfish, I like to know where my toothbrush is most of the time. Life in airports is not the thrill that it was when I was young. When we would go places that involved airplanes, we dressed up because it was a special thing to do. When you're on an airplane every week at least, and sometimes many times in a week, you accrue all these fabulous miles, and to get what? A free ticket on another airplane. Air travel over the decades has become an insult. I've been all over the world with Michael [Tilson Thomas]; once we had to leave the tour, just him and me and a handful of people had to leave early to go to Paris to meet Christian Tetzlaff for a rehearsal that wouldn't fit into the orchestra's contractual schedule. Me, Michael, and Christian Tetzlaff rehearsing the Mendelssohn *Concerto*. A special trip to the airport late at night, and you get patted down. At least in Europe they don't remove shoes, but all of that stuff, unless you fly privately, even first class is not exempt from all of this stuff. And Michael calls it "Getting Riced" in honor of Condoleezza Rice, under whose administration much of that was instituted. Picture that – is that an alluring prospect? No, it isn't. And yet that constitutes the majority of these people's so-called seemingly drama-filled lives. I don't see it that way at all. I'm not trying to deter anybody from that, but for me, that absolutely doesn't work.

Efrem Zimbalist (one of my musical godfathers) fled Russia and went to Berlin and became the violin sensation of the world overnight. His first tour to the United States he introduced the Glazunov *Concerto* to this country – he had a very healthy touring career before he retired to direct the Curtis Institute and sort of kept to himself. He had what he wanted when he wanted, and he had his pick of everything. But in those early days of the 20th century, it was trains. Your concert season may have included possibly twenty cities, twenty-five maybe, and then you had part of your year with your family, or you had that to yourself. There would be the obligatory Carnegie Halls, and then you would go to the Academy of Music in Philadelphia, and then you would find yourself in Kansas City. Rachmaninoff played in Oklahoma City – I know people who went to hear him there. People would often come to Denver, the nearest metropolis by me growing up – I heard tons of people there. But I asked Zimbalist when he was on the train (and you'd better be friends with your accompanist, because God, if you're not, life becomes long) "How many programs did you take on that tour?" He said, "One." He looked at me like I was out of my mind. One. You play in Carnegie Hall and the New York Times review comes out two days later, and they haven't read it in Pittsburgh. Everything was sort of new. Now you play something, and inside of ten minutes there's a review published on [San Francisco] Classical Voice or something. So life as a touring, so-called concert artist, was much better. It is not now, in my judgement. I wouldn't want that. I have a lovely life here in one of the most enchanting cities certainly in the United States, if not the world. How could I not be happy here? And I love

what I do. I don't love it so much that I would compromise it, and the people who do, sometimes I wonder if they really like it all that much themselves.

**UPDIKE** In your opinion, how has the Conservatory changed from when you were a student? How would you describe it today?

**SUTHERLAND** Well, look where we are. We're in your private archive office on the sixth floor of a building that can actually accommodate what it claims to do, which is to educate people and give performances. Again … I couldn't give a senior recital in the venue called my school – it wasn't possible. It hasn't been easy, but then I look at faded photographs of the 3400 block of Sacramento Street – God! These things, they progress along, but I've been here on the fringes of a ball – which is the title of one of my favorite piano pieces. The fringes of a ball – like the little match girl, staring and watching. First you're a part of it, and some people stay a part of it … I've never been far away, so my observations are fairly acute. The differences are obvious. Obviously the school is headed in the right direction. What I won't allow to happen is for the school ever to lose that little something that I sensed on the day that I walked in for my audition, and I went, "This is different. This is not how people do things elsewhere." That I do not want to see go by the wayside, ever. Because then we just become another … David Stull is all about – there are going to be things happening that aren't happening anywhere else. And he's probably going to be right, that vision is probably going to be fulfilled somehow. It already is. But we mustn't ever sacrifice that little something. You can attach whatever name you want to that, whatever it is, it's precious. I've said it before, I said it in public when we opened Joseph Hall – I was part of that group that was performing that night. I said, "This is spectacular. We dreamed about Joseph Hall on Ortega Street – and it's not even the queen bee of the performing spaces here." It's precious, I love it. I said to the assembled audience, "This is really a precious thing. Let us savor this, and let us not lose whatever this is." When I entered Juilliard, it was the day it opened its doors in Lincoln Center, so I know all about gleaming brass and carpets that have never been walked on. In a sense, coming to Oak Street was no huge deal for me, because I had seen that before. But my God … look at this! That's cool, but that's not the precious thing that I'm talking about. We all like nice things and we become out of sorts when we cannot have them – like a library, or a performing space that seated more than three dozen.

**UPDIKE** How has the musical culture of San Francisco changed since you were a student here?

**SUTHERLAND** Well, it's gone on to embrace a virtually infinite number of other facets. The Bay Area has always been on the slicing edge of whatever is available, anywhere in the United States – you can find here. In many cases, you find it here first. I'm edging a little bit out of musical culture … the beat poets, no accident. The Summer of Love, no accident. God, we just lost Paul Kantner, the founding member of Jefferson Airplane – that's huge. I think all of our

institutions should be draped in black crepe when something like that happens. But if anything – name me one thing about music that you couldn't go and hear live if you were willing to drive a few miles. It expands – it's exponential. There's always a new thing. We had a guy named Allaudin Mathieu on the music faculty here back in the '70s – a crazy guy, incredible. He was involved with the Sufi Choir … nobody knew what a Sufi choir was. We do now, but he was all about that then. Or discovering something incredibly old … we have enough educational institutions that that's possible.

We live in an incredibly vibrant, inquisitive center. I think for that reason it's also a political bubble – one couldn't exist without the other, liberal progressive thought and the inquiring mind. Handmaidens, really they are. And it's only gotten bigger, and you have to be more selective, or more embracing. What hasn't changed is that there are only 24 hours in the day in 2016, just as there were in 1972. We have 24 hours, how do we want to spend them?

Musical culture has changed, the Internet is here – that didn't change anything at all, heavens, no! That upended everyone's life completely. I was at Ortega Street – a computer? Nobody knew what it was. Colleen Katzowitz – the registrar – you filled out your student class thing, and she used computer cards! Some of them even had little air holes punched in them. And she said, "We might as well use them – they're scratch paper, and they have a little bit more body than a piece of paper, so they hold up good in the files." That was as close to computers as we had on Ortega Street. Fax machine? Forget it! None of that.

Julie Karres, the institution who sat at the receptionist's window (and who possibly should have been institutionalized – she was crazy but I loved no one more than Julie Karres) she taught me how to sit and work her lunch shift at the switchboard. The telephone number was 564-8086, which I understand it is no longer. She had a little headphone, and I was good at it! I was her lunch hour replacement a lot of days, because I had that free moment in my day. That was also the faculty lounge, consisting of two couches, and Scott Foglesong occupied that couch a lot. That was sort of the nerve center of the school, and it was very fun to sit there, and Julie of course had commentary on everything, running constantly. It was also the Xerox room, so between those two things, that was action central. You would pick up the little headset like Ernestine, and you would say, "Good morning, Conservatory." And you'd pull a trunk out – a cord – and you'd poke it into a hole. There weren't that many holes, maybe fifty, and you'd memorize them very quickly – there's Milton Salkind, the dean is over here, Colleen Katzowitz is here," that was communication.

So yeah, the musical culture has broadened, and if it didn't, something would be way wrong! I can't cite chapter and verse. The Symphony's approach to programming has broadened. We can perform stuff now that we would not have dreamed of doing. A – because it didn't exist, B – because no one would have tolerated it. That's why the *Rite of Spring* no longer causes riots,

which it did at its premiere. I know that because my teacher, Mrs. Lhevinne, was present at that performance in Paris. We must thank John Adams for pushing those incredible orchestral boundaries. That's how it's changed. It's changing right now. While I'm talking to you, something's happening out there that we hadn't heard of last week, but we will next. It's amazing – vibrancy, that's it. I guess in a way that hasn't changed, because this has always been vibrant. Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac – without vibrancy, what would have become of them? Nothing. This is the matrix that that thing needs to grow, and it's always been that way. Since this town was founded, very largely by accident.

**UPDIKE** We have one last question. What advice would give to young musicians today?

**SUTHERLAND** None. That's quoting James Freeman, who is a clarinetist from the class of '92 and went on to found Blue Bottle Coffee. He was this year's honoree at the Fanfare Luncheon at which I was pleased to be in attendance. David Stull asked him pretty much that very question. I will quote my friend James Freeman and say, "Take no advice." I will go a tiny bit further, and say there is nothing more welcome than advice requested. There is nothing more irksome than advice unrequested. Is that OK?

**UPDIKE** That's perfect.

**SUTHERLAND** Asking for help is something that I think we have problems with. It's very difficult. It's far more difficult than it seems like it would be. Unsolicited advice annoys the hell out of me. Give me a minute, and I might have figured that out. James Freeman is right – don't take advice, unless you ask for it. And even then, you don't have to take it!

**UPDIKE** Thank you so much for doing this.

**SUTHERLAND** This has been good, this has been a lot of fun.