

Susan Bates Oral History

San Francisco Conservatory of Music Library & Archives

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50 Oak Street
San Francisco, CA 94102

Interview conducted September 3, 2015
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.

Susan Bates Interview

This interview was conducted at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music on Thursday, September 3, 2015 by Tessa Updike.

Tessa Updike

Tessa Updike is the archivist for the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, where she has established the school's historical collections, oral history project, and historical sound preservation project. 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, the GLBT Historical Society, and the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley.

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Photo by Kingmond Young

Susan Bates, violist and champion of chamber music education holds the 1992 award for "Excellence in Chamber Music Training" from Chamber Music America, and has instructed violists and chamber musicians in the Pre-College of San Francisco Conservatory of Music since 1982, guiding many in the art form of chamber music who are now pursuing careers as professionals as well as playing chamber music "for the love of it".

Ms. Bates' career includes the creation and direction of several chamber music education programs for highly talented musical youth: San Francisco Conservatory of Music Pre College Chamber Music Program (1983-2000), California Summer Music (1996-2000), and Lake Tahoe Music Festival Academy with the Miró Quartet (2000-2006). In 2008, Ms. Bates founded the award-winning chamber music training program for advanced pre college string players and pianists Young Chamber Musicians (2008-present) that resides at Kohl Mansion, Burlingame and works in collaboration with the Peninsula's premier presenting series, Music at Kohl Mansion.

Susan Bates is a founding member of the New Age String Quartet that worked under the tutelage of the Paganini Quartet. She was for seven years instructor at San Jose State University serving as violist of the faculty ensemble, the San Jose String Quartet. The Quartet worked closely with composer Lou Harrison, giving the premier of his *Quartet Set* (1978). Ms. Bates also recorded Mr. Harrison's *Threnody for Carlos Chavez* (1979) for Solo Viola with Gamelan Sekar Kembar for CRI. In 2010, Susan Bates retired from the viola section of the San Francisco Ballet Orchestra after 34 years. Ms. Bates currently serves on the Boards of Directors of San Francisco Friends of Chamber Music and the California Music Center (Irving M. Klein Competition). She is the 2013 recipient of the Tom Heimberg Viola Advocate Award from the Northern California Viola Society.

September 3, 2015

UPDIKE Could you tell us a little about where you grew up?

BATES I was born in Santa Clara, California, I'm a local girl. I grew up studying violin in the public schools and went on and switched to viola in graduate school, then went on to study with Albert Gillis with the Paganini Quartet – that was my entrée into the professional world of music and chamber music.

UPDIKE And what were your parents' occupations?

BATES Very modest. My mother was a secretary. She worked full-time, which was unusual in those days. My father was an iron worker. My uncle was a professional musician, and there was a lot of music on my father's side of the family. So I think there were some genes there that contributed to their interest in having me play an instrument.

UPDIKE What did your uncle play?

BATES He was a trumpet player, James Urbani. He lived in Stockton and was the president of the Stockton local AFM – the American Federation of Musicians. A great mentor to me.

UPDIKE Do you remember your very first music teacher?

BATES Wow ... I don't remember the very first one, because I took a class in school – they had school music then. Shortly thereafter, I guess I showed some aptitude for the violin and I studied with Rosemary DeBenedetti in the San Jose area, and went on to do some work at San Jose State with Gibson Walters and Albert Gillis of the Paganini Quartet.

UPDIKE Did you go to her home for your music lessons?

BATES I did, it was a common thing then.

UPDIKE And how did you choose to switch over to the viola?

BATES As I said, it didn't come until graduate school. It's a typical story – I wanted to play in the best string quartet that they had there, and I seemed at the time to be a likely candidate – I was flexible and so on. In the end, the viola was a large instrument for me, and I had to adapt my technique more than I thought I would to actually play the viola, but I was fortunate and got some good training and some good help. I had to adjust my left hand position a

great deal just to make the stretches possible. So maybe I wasn't a likely candidate at the end, but I was willing, and I think for viola you have to love the role that you play in the string quartet, and you have to love the sound. Those two were important things to me, so I guess it was a fit.

UPDIKE What were some of the early quartets that you played with?

BATES In graduate school we actually started (my colleagues and I) a quartet that I wound up playing for seven years. We started in grad school, and went on into a semi-professional career. We were the early Kronos Quartet, we called ourselves the New Age Quartet. This was 1960-something. We played primarily contemporary music, so we played Lutostawski's 1965 *String Quartet* when it first came out and there were no parts – the Pols were very popular at the time and we did a lot of that aleatory music. We did a number of things that had tape with the string quartet ... visuals with the string quartet – something by Ken Gaburo and a new work by William Mullen. It was an interesting age, and an interesting time. Albert Gillis, who was our mentor from the Paganini Quartet, thought that we might find a niche if we did just contemporary [music], which was kind of unusual at that time – at least in the area that I was familiar with.

UPDIKE And where did you play, primarily?

BATES Primarily here in California. We did a lot of school concerts up and down – we did a couple of tours. We went on a tour through Texas, because our mentor used to be on the faculty at the University of Texas – he started the Texas String Project. So he had a lot of connections there and we played on the San Antonio Series, we played at the University of Texas. I think before we arrived in Texas we went to Colorado and played at the university there. So we had a couple of tours – we did a lot in Southern California. We did a couple of competitions – we didn't get too far but at that time the Alice Ehlers ... I think we won a prize there. We did what used to be called the Carmel Competition, which was run at that time by what is now Chamber Music Monterey Bay. And we got some prize from the Coleman Competition – so we made it that far before we all split and did other things.

UPDIKE That's wonderful. How did you first hear of the Conservatory?

BATES Renie Sharp knew my husband's music – my late husband, he was a composer from the University of Michigan, David S. Bates. He wrote a piece called *Gestures and Interludes for Solo Cello*. Somehow or other she knew about this piece – that part is missing in my memory, I don't remember how Renie found the piece, but she liked it very much. At that time she was traveling a great deal with Margaret Rowell. Margaret was lecturing and Renie would play, illustrating cello techniques and so on. She traveled with her extensively, and she liked to use the *Gestures and Interludes* piece – now that I'm thinking about it, I think it won a

little prize from the California Cello Club, that's how she found it. So after my husband passed away in '74 I moved back to the Bay Area, where my parents were, and was beginning to play. I played a season in the San Jose Symphony – the bicentennial season, '76. If you're going to play one season, that was the one to do! We met – we played some chamber music or something, and she said, "You know, I'd like to introduce you to May Kurka, the director of the Preparatory. Would you like to teach?" I said, "Yes I would." By that time I was already playing in the San Francisco Ballet orchestra as a sub, and then later as a tenured member. I was there for 34 years, so I was already coming into the city, and teaching was an important thing that I wanted to do. So in 1980 we had a meeting with Mrs. Kurka, and the interesting thing about it was that Mrs. Kurka and I shared an unusual life experience – not together, but separately. She too had married someone who was a composer and her husband had died. As a 27, 28 year old widow, she took me under her wing. She just felt, "Here's somebody that maybe I can help, and who I should support, and whose life story I kind of understand." So she said, "Come and teach some viola," and that's how it started.

UPDIKE Was that your first teaching experience?

BATES No, I had done chamber coaching through the graduate quartet, I taught at Fresno State as a grad assistant, I assisted in all kinds of academic musical classes – that is for instance correlation of the arts type classes. I had some experience teaching violin and some viola, but also some classwork as a grad assistant. So I didn't feel like it was a stretch.

UPDIKE What was your impression when you joined in 1980?

BATES It was a small friendly place, but at the same time the mentors that I quickly began to work with – those who were teaching cello and violin, in particular Zaven Melikian and Izzy Tinkleman, and Renie and Carol Rice and so on – they had an extremely high expectation for students. This was after all a conservatory level – and even the Pre-college at that time. That's what struck me the most – this was serious business. They had two juries a year in those days, so kids had to be ready to perform, and they gave regular recitals and they took the whole course load without calling it a comprehensive course load, as we do now. They took theory, they played in recitals, they took lessons, and soon thereafter chamber music as well – that was just a given for all of them. So those were my initial impressions from my previous experience that had been a little more relaxed – this was important, serious business.

UPDIKE And could you describe the building a little bit?

BATES Oh, sure. The center of attention was Hellman Hall. Considering how many people were hanging around college and Prep, we were there a lot. Saturdays were really reserved for the Pre-college – I was able to get my chamber ensembles in there quite often to get

the sense of what a hall was really like. At least that felt like a center to me. I spent a lot of time in the Prep office, obviously. I started out just doing Saturday coaching, and then over the years (having been here now 34 years) my duties increased. In the '90s I was directing Summer Music West as well as running the Prep chamber music program. So then I had a little desk in the Prep Department, and that was a second home.

UPDIKE I'm going to ask you to share some memories about former colleagues. They can be stories about them, or just impressions of them – first impressions and how relationships evolved over the years. Why don't we start with Renie Sharp?

BATES As I mentioned, I knew Renie a bit before I started at the Conservatory. I remember she thought that maybe a good entrée for me back into the Bay Area was to join a performance club in Palo Alto, so she said, "Play Schubert *Arpeggione Sonata* for the audition," – you had to audition for the Fortnightly Club. I said, "Well, who should I get to play piano? Can you recommend someone?" She said, "I'll play for you." So it was a beautiful accompaniment. She knew the piece, of course, and I could do whatever I wanted with the piece. We didn't even rehearse, we just went in and did it. Even though I didn't really remain active with it because I moved to San Francisco so soon afterwards, that was my first impression of Renie. And of course all of her wonderful students. We worked closely together over the years in many, many situations, culminating with the creation of California Summer Music in 1995. I remained there on the faculty and as program director, I guess they called me, until 2000.

UPDIKE And did you know Margaret Rowell?

BATES I did a bit. Mostly at first through the entrée of my husband's work. A wonderful woman – sometimes it's hard to separate, since she's been gone so long – hard to separate my experience directly with her and the vast reputation that she left with all of the succeeding students, some of whom were my colleagues. So all of that sort of mushed together in my mind, but there is no doubt in my mind that she was more than a mentor to Renny Sharp, and also a great friend and cellist, and left a humongous legacy for any cellist who grew up in California in those years.

UPDIKE And do you have any memories that you'd like to share of Milton Salkind?

BATES Yes, and some of that bleeds over into May [Kurka]. May and Milton were a great team. Milton was for me an easy, easy guy to work with – he just told you what he needed from you, and he expected you to do it. There was not too much conversation – if he had opinions he would let you know. But he was a very supportive person. He had a special way with faculty, with donors, with students. I remember after he retired we would have meetings

occasionally in his apartment on Broadway. Just his presence made everyone feel like we were OK and we were going in the right direction. I don't know how he had that power, but he was most influential and made everyone feel quite relaxed – at least that was my impression. And the partnership he had with May bled over into the Pre-college. She had complete confidence that he had her back all the time, and that whatever she was going to be doing in the way she led the Preparatory was the way to go.

UPDIKE And could you talk a little bit about May as a person?

BATES May was a marvelous person. She became a personal friend, a mentor, and I watched and learned a great deal from being in the office and seeing how she dealt with parents, how she supported them. I found out the things that made her frustrated, but I always understand her philosophy. She was a very hands-on director, she heard every single recital, every single audition. I know about the string department mostly – in those days Zaven Melikian was the string department head, and they worked very closely. I was privy to some meetings after auditions – Who should the students study with? Would it be you, or some other violin teacher in the school? – There was a lot of that. I saw how she worked with parents – she invited me in several situations where I think she knew that parents were going to be upset and she wanted me just to be a mouse in the corner to see how she might deal with it, or to offer any input. I was always introduced to them, but later on, looking back on it I thought, “I wonder why she invited me to that meeting?!” I never asked her about it, but later I thought that maybe it was because it was a learning experience, and she thought that someday I might have to be in a situation like that and I would need to know how she felt it should be handled.

UPDIKE Is there anything that you'd like to share about Isadore Tinkleman?

BATES Yes, I knew him – not well, but I think the most interesting things were the kibitzing that happened during juries between Mr. Melikian and Mr. Tinkleman! That was a shock. Sometimes Mrs. Kurka had to say, “Gentlemen, let's refrain from this kind of talking – at least until the child leaves the room.” They were wonderfully active, and had friendly arguments about how music ought to be taught, what a fingering or bowing in a certain piece ought to be – the usual kinds of things. He was just a dedicated guy. I think I remember him the most through his students – none more than Pat Burnham, a great colleague and friend of mine who had been his student and was very close to him, and helped him with all of his students. She had her own students, but also was an assistant and a helper to him in the days when he needed it so much. And of course I remember the closeness between he and Bobby Mann, that was evident when Bobby Mann would come at least once a year and would always spend some time with Izzy. The quality of his students was high.

UPDIKE And Zaven Melikian?

BATES Well, Zaven's still a great friend of mine. I was afraid of him for so many years, but being the coordinator and director of the Prep chamber music program, I worked really closely with the major teachers whose students were under my direction. They had a lot of say in what pieces students played in chamber music. They had a lot of confidence in me, I think, but I started out as being quite young when I did this, and sort of worked my way into it. But Zaven, Renny, and Mack [McCray] and so on – these people were great forces and built what the Conservatory is today – and of course Bonnie [Hampton]. Anyone who's been here for a long time made their mark. But I worked with them very closely in Prep chamber music. I think you could say that Zaven was very crusty on the outside, but quite a teddy bear on the inside. I really, really appreciated the detail that he spent with each student – I watched and learned how they all dealt with their students and I think it really influenced how I work with students now, and my expectations for my students.

UPDIKE And would you like to say something about Tim Bach?

BATES Of course, Tim Bach's a longtime colleague in many different projects. But the first time I met Tim – I didn't remember this until just now. We were hired, I think in Stanford, in a pickup group – I think it was the year I played principal in San Jose Symphony – we did *Dumbarton Oaks* together, and I think he played cello. I think that's the first time I met Tim Bach. I don't remember who was conducting, or anything about it, but I do remember that.

Of course we'll probably get to the Prep chamber music program eventually, but maybe this is a good time to tell this story. The way Prep chamber music began ... there had always been chamber music ensembles, as I understand it, before I arrived in '81. People that I met later, like Julie Nishamura, who was a Prep student (a pianist, years ago) told me that there were groups, and of course I work closely with the cellist Eric Gaenslen now, who was a Prep student of Rennie's many years ago, but before my time. However, it happened that we had in Hellman Hall a faculty meeting in the beginning of my first year. I was just there as a novice teacher, and wasn't saying anything. Mrs. Kurka came out – I can still see her on the stage – with literally both of her hands filled with little pieces of paper. She said, "Could anybody help me with this? It seems like everyone wants to play chamber music and they're wondering why we don't have an organized chamber music program." I raised my hand quite quickly, because I had already been doing about three years-worth of coaching during the summer at adult chamber music workshops. In brief, those are places where adults who are doctors, lawyers – whatever their passion is – don't play music for a living but do it as a passion during their off times. Those workshops are still going today all over the United States and abroad, but they were very popular then.

One of my colleagues at San Jose State said, “Why don’t you come and coach at one in San Diego?” There were 125 people who coach and piece, and fellow players changed daily, so we called it “The Board.” You had to know these people and you had to mix them up in different groups, and that was an organizational skill that you needed to have in order to work there. So I had been doing it for several years, and that’s how I was able to raise my hand quickly. I said, “I know how to organize this.” She said, “Really? Come and talk to me.” So it went from there. But being so young, and she didn’t know me well yet, she decided that definitely Tim ought to help me out, and that’s the next time that Tim and I started working closely together. We work to this day in Pre-college chamber music. It was only cut off a little bit when he was elected interim dean for several years, and then he was too busy. But by that time we had done it for several years and I was able to prove myself to Mrs. Kurka that I could do this, and I had a lot of great faculty – Machiko Kobialka, Doris Fukawa (who’s still around with us) – we were all coaching and teaching and working together.

Several years ago I gave Joanie [Gordon] the old cards that I had from Prep chamber music that listed all of these people, because I know that she said there weren’t as many records as she hoped there were. So I gave her 200 cards, something like that, and I can still see Tim’s writing on them. Those were cards that told us who the child was, where they lived, who they studied with, when their solfège class was, and all the pieces that they studied with us in Prep chamber music – who their coach was – this was kind of the organizational card that I had learned to use with the adult chamber music workshops in San Diego.

UPDIKE That’s wonderful.

BATES So that’s how we got to that. We made a board, and we slipped these cards in and out of slots and so on. Now we just do it on the computer, but it made a physical record of all of this. I can pull up Daniel Ching’s card – Daniel Ching being now the famous first violinist of the Miró String Quartet, and I can tell you who he played with, who coached him, and what he played in in the Prep chamber music. So there’s quite a bit of history there, and Tim and I did that together for so many years. And of course we helped Renie start California Summer Music in 1995, and coached together there and here. And again, I hope this year we might do something together in Pre-college.

UPDIKE Wonderful. Let’s go back and go over a few more people, then we’ll go back to chamber music.

BATES Sure.

UPDIKE Do you remember Marcella DeCray?

BATES I do, of course. Mostly, however, not here at the Conservatory, but rather with our job at the San Francisco Ballet. Marcella was the principal harpist at the San Francisco Ballet from the moment the orchestra was an official orchestra with a collective bargaining agreement and everything – that was I think 1976, and I started subbing with them in '77. So she was already there. What can you say about Marcella? A real character – a fantastic harpist. I think that was the first time that I'd ever actually sat in front of a harp in the pit – it was a huge sound, Marcella really played and because there are so many famous harp solos in ballet literature – *Nutcracker* and *Sleeping Beauty* and whatnot – she had them all memorized. I just really liked her. Our next experience, again, was not here, but that was with the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players – we went down to L.A. on an anniversary of a Schoenberg year with Jean-Louis [LeRoux] conducting, and played *Pierrot Lunaire* – Roy Malan and I, it's written in one part for violin and viola but he didn't want to do the viola part so I did it, and Marcella and I put that together and went down and played in the Schoenberg Hall. I remember being a little shy about that and she said, "You can do this." I said, "OK, let's do it." She was just a great person, I knew she and Malcom quite well. I thought that it was wonderful to have her memorial service here. My last memory of her here was when the school opened and we had to don caps and gowns and go through a ceremony here – she couldn't keep her cap on, so we had to find some bobby pins to keep it on for her. But Marcella was wonderful.

UPDIKE Paul Hersh?

BATES Yes, of course, I just saw Paul in the Xerox room. As director of the Prep chamber music program, we instigated master classes, and of course we culled from all of the collegiate faculty. Paul's were always wonderful classes. He helped myself and a few of my students find some nice violas. His coaching is always extremely clear and extremely honest, I always enjoyed that very much.

UPDIKE And Mack McCray?

BATES Mack and I are special friends. We were on the Music House board together, I had him coaching so many of my chamber ensembles in and outside of the Conservatory. He's a great friend, certainly someone that you can go to and sound out an idea, express a frustration, and get some good guidance and advice. I've also served for a number of years on his Zephyr board.

UPDIKE Bonnie Hampton?

BATES I find lately that there are several times when I'm asked to quote about a subject – something that Bonnie said to me comes to mind. It's interesting, one of my favorites is after a master class that she did for chamber music. She said to me, "You're so lucky, you get to

hear them the first time they play a Beethoven trio.” I thought, “Oh, I didn’t think of it that way!” The other quote of Bonnie’s that I remember to this day is something she said to one of my groups at a master class, and that is to remember that musicians learn on stage, that we learn by performing, and we learn with an audience watching us, and that you must get comfortable and do that as much as possible – learn through performance. I’ve used that – summarizing it, paraphrasing it, in various ways in things that I’ve written and things that I’ve said over the years. It meant a lot to me to hear that, and of course she’s right, but it was something that stuck out for me. She was always really great, and especially the year that she was president of Chamber Music America – a very long time ago. That was the only time we ever had a national conference in San Francisco, and it was a wonderful conference.

UPDIKE And do you remember Nathan Schwartz?

BATES Definitely. Yes, I remember them coming and doing trio concerts, and the kids being in the audience. I didn’t ever work with him directly, but I remember his introductions to pieces and the Francesco Trio.

UPDIKE Is there anything you’d like to say about David Abel?

BATES I didn’t know him as well – it was early, early years, and I was a young, shy, quiet person that I’m not now. But I remember being at concerts and mostly just going to his recitals. I never visited his coaching at all, I probably should have done that, but mostly in concert and performance is how I remember his excellent playing.

UPDIKE Yaada Weber?

BATES I’ve worked together with Yaada for all these years. The most dedicated flute educator I’ve ever known. She was always so easy to work with – she would say to me, “Please could we have a flute quartet this year?” She was so sweet about it. In her very, very quiet, relaxed way, she actually got quite a bit of great flute playing out of her quartets. Those are some of the best things, and the all woodwind ensemble coaching that she did was extraordinarily good. And I think she’s ageless and timeless.

UPDIKE And Doris Fukawa?

BATES Well Doris and I have been changing jobs for a while. Doris is a go-getter, she’s the original multi-tasker. She could do many, many, many things at the same time and do them very well. I’m proud of her for taking over from her mentor Anne Crowden, who I knew very well and who was a summer coach here at the Conservatory when I first started in the ‘80s. It’s very hard to take over from one of your mentors, and keep something going with the spirit of

that person when they're not there anymore. She's done an extraordinary job with that, and she's been a wonderful asset and feature here from several years before I came, definitely.

UPDIKE John McCarthy?

BATES Of course. John was teaching musicianship and so on, and my son, who's now 42, was in one of his classes. And of course I've been here long enough to go through his whole tenure as director. I think he even came in and coached in Prep chamber music some. It was a delightful association with he and Annamarie, of course.

UPDIKE And is there anything that you'd like to say about Pat Berkowitz?

BATES Pat Berkowitz somehow or other liked me; she took me under her wing when I took over for Summer Music West in particular. Running a chamber music program in a Conservatory was one thing, but running an independent program where you have to deal with finances and PR and all of that – brochure printing and all of that sort of thing, I was often in her office. She always had a warm welcome for me, and I learned in later years that she lived next door to a woman named Francis Varnhagen, who I worked with closely at the San Francisco Friends of Chamber Music, and so occasionally after her retirement from the Conservatory I was able to see her every once and a while. We found each other on the street and could say hello, and I've seen her at concerts and so on.

UPDIKE Is there anyone else – any colleagues on the faculty or staff from those early years, or from today, who you'd like to talk about a little?

BATES Ian.

UPDIKE Ian Swensen?

BATES Yes, I remember when Ian arrived and when his wife Judy worked for me in Prep chamber music and taught classes. Ian is just such a light. I loved his master classes for Prep chamber music, they were volatile in a good way. We've remained close as colleagues – I don't see him much outside the school, but when I needed a coach for something that was going on outside, or whatever project I was busy doing, Ian was the one I thought of first. I've watched him come from being a young teacher to a seasoned teacher, and I know him in the context of his work in Sacramento with another great colleague of mine, Andy Luchansky, who has been here on and off, both in the college and in the Pre-college, who's a very close friend of mine in the Sun Quartet. I certainly don't want to forget Ian, and of course, again, in the context of those that I was closest to and hired to do Prep chamber music master classes was Mark Sokol. I got to know Mark really well doing that, and have some funny stories that I related to Ian when they

did the memorial service. It was a remarkable thing, Ian came over to me and said, “Mark thought highly of your work,” and I was just devastated. I thought, “Wow, I didn’t even have any idea.” But it was a nice thing to hear, and something I won’t forget.

You mentioned Scott Cmiel. Scott has been a longtime colleague – still a colleague, and lives up the hill from me. We have, on occasion, walked down to Irving Street and had breakfast and had a chat, and maybe we’ll do it again. We keep talking about it, but get too busy. But certainly what he’s done for creating guitar chamber music here – my goodness, he is guitar chamber music here, for Pre-college and his studio is legendary. I admire him very much.

Colin Murdoch was an extraordinary president. I first got to know him because Amy Schwartz, who was a Music House resident and a Pre-college student of Zaven Melikian’s, was coming here from her home in the East Coast, in the Carolinas, and she didn’t know what high school she was going to. I remember meeting in the very small area where my desk was in the Prep office with Colin, and he was talking to me about what her curriculum ought to be, what her chamber music stuff ought to be ... he worked very closely with her father, Charles Schwartz, who had been occasionally here as an interim dean, so he had a personal interest in how well she did at Music House and here in the Prep. I remember starting my relationship with him with that. Another great memory was one day after many, many, many, many *Nutcrackers* I found he and his daughter on the street – they had just been to the performance and that was fun to see him off campus. And then through the move of course, seeing all the things that he created here – too numerous to mention, but he was always a kind mentor to me and I appreciated his work here and what he did for the Conservatory very much.

UPDIKE Let’s go back to the early 1980s. Could you talk a little bit about the beginnings of Summer Music West?

BATES You know, I don’t know enough about the actual beginning. Doris I think was the first director – it may have been someone else. But somewhere in there, in the ‘90s ... I think I was director for three years, and those were the years preceding 1995. Doris came to me – she was still subbing with the Symphony and she’d taken on a lot of things – and was I interested in directing Summer Music West? I thought, “Can I do this? ... OK.” So we sat down and we talked about it – she went through the job description and we talked to Mrs. Kurka and so on, and I said, “Yeah! I’ll take it on.” So I added that to my directorship. It was a fun job and I love working with the kids in the summer, but I couldn’t have done it without Laura Reynolds.

There was a reason why we called her Radar Reynolds, and I was reminding her of that today. As the Radar character on M.A.S.H., she actually answered your questions before you asked the question. She just was really on top of it, and she still is. She was a carry-over administrative assistant and made it pretty easy for me. I could just ask her. At that time we had composition,

we had piano duo, we had chamber music, we had sort of a vocal theater component – it was more operatic than vocal theater. I must be leaving something out, but maybe not. There were a lot of components to it, and quite a few faculty who are still around. It was a lot of fun, it was primarily two weeks when I was doing it, but one year – Laura and I were just talking about it today – the last year I was there in '94 we turned it into what we called ACMI, which was the Advanced Chamber Music Intensive. We actually had students who were there for three weeks. Because we didn't have boarding here, we boarded them with my friends – everybody else's friends – at the Music House, and so on. I believe we had four to six groups of young people. We served a lunch every day in the foyer in front of Hellman Hall. We had an assistant – Music House was kind of the center of after school activities for this, but it was a real boarding program for one year, it was really fun.

UPDIKE And could you talk about the Music House – how that started?

BATES Yes. So there was a student group called the Adelante Trio. It was a piano trio that had many, many ramifications. The Adelante Trio went on for numbers of years, but it always had one pianist, and that was Merritt Schader. Her mother Robin Schader – they had moved from Northern California from doing this horrible commute every Saturday – numbers of hours. I think it was a six hour drive, maybe more, from the top of California to get to the Conservatory to make sure that Merritt had the right education. She studied with both Erna [Gublabyan] and Mack [McCray]. They were living off campus together – this was Robin Schader's youngest daughter, her others had gone off to college, and she thought, "Well, we'll just move to San Francisco – it will be easier than commuting every week." I think they did that when Merritt was in the eighth grade. By the time Merritt was a sophomore, Robin identified a home on the corner of 20th and Pacheco – one block up the hill, south, from the Conservatory.

She bought the place, and started this project called the Music House. Officially, I think it was called the Music Arts House, and right away boarded special students who had been accepted to the Pre-college and who lived far away – their parents could not be with them. I think they had a pretty full house during the first or second year, which was eight. They had a big room for the girls with bunks, and for the boys – there were always more girls than boys. Amy Schwartz Moretti, Julia Ogrydziak lived there, An Lin Barden, Merritt ... all kinds of names, half of whom I'll probably forget. But it was a home away from home, and a very special place where students – children, after all – who had this precocious talent could find other friends and mentors and adults in a homey kind of atmosphere – who would take care of them but also encourage them – and where they found friends. So often I hear from young people, because I continue to teach chamber music in various locations, that their friends at school don't understand them. They don't understand their extreme interest in classical music, and they don't feel like they have that many friends, and they find them here at the Conservatory. Well, Music House was just another

level – pumped up another level – where students actually lived together and could talk about it 24 hours a day – could talk about Bach’s pieces, and Beethoven’s this and that.

Also, the way Robin set it up was quite extraordinary. She’s a very imaginative person, and she set up an environment that solved many issues for these interesting and unusual young people. And those were by inviting people to dinner all the time – interesting adults from various walks of life – artists, non-artists. If you went to dinner at the Music House there was always somebody interesting sitting at the table to talk to these young people. Sometimes it was strategically planned, like Victor Borge came through town and he was at the Music House. Sometimes it was just someone that she met in the community who was a lawyer or someone in arts administration, or a visual artist, and we could compare notes about the differences and the like things between performing arts and visual arts. There are just so many that I can’t even begin, but the influences from the outside were vast.

The other thing that was wonderful about the Music House – not just for the people who lived there and for the people who visited there, but for a short period of time the ten-plus or twelve-plus years it was in existence, it was a place of community for faculty. You could talk down the hill to the Music House and get a lemon bar, sit down – Tim and I did it often, talking about what we were going to do with Prep chamber music, this or that. People would, when they had a break, just walk down and say hi. It was the only house that was actually someone’s dwelling that you didn’t knock on the door – you just walked straight through and said “Hi, it’s me!” Because space was at a premium in the old building, the students that lived at Music House, who were the Adelante Trio, actually rehearsed there and freed up a room on Saturday morning for chamber music for another group to use, because they were already there, and that meant that I got my cardio vascular training running up and down the hill. But sometimes I would save my time and coach them on Friday night.

The last thing I want to say about it is that it became a mecca for those that did not live there, but for whom Saturday classes were the norm. They would come on Friday night sometimes, and do an overnight stay either in a bed or sleeping bag or whatever – have dinner, play chamber music for fun on Friday night, get up early on Saturday morning, go to their classes – come back, get their stuff, go home. So it gave it a larger community kind of a feel, and some years ago Daniel Ching (Miró Quartet), and Ethan Filner (Cypress Quartet), and others had a little Music House reunion before the building was sold. Everybody showed up who knew about it, and played chamber music and talked about it and looked at old pictures and that kind of thing. It was just a marvelous project. We also found in our studies that there are similar projects – for instance, Crossroads School. When Colburn School started down south, I went to visit Crossroads School and ran into someone who had a sort of a Music House of her own in a similar kind of project for students who wanted to come to study with the teachers at the Conservatory, but who did not live nearby and for whom the commute was too much and needed a place to live. Robin and then

later a woman named Susan Jacobson, who was the parent and a registered nurse – she began to be the director of Music House and a mentor there as the years went on.

UPDIKE It sounds like a really wonderful environment.

BATES It was a wonderful environment, yes, for many facets of all of us.

UPDIKE And how long did that last?

BATES I knew you were going to ask me that question. I'd like to go back and ask so I can give the years of exactly when it started and exactly when it finished, because I don't think in my memory it's exactly right. But we did have a wonderful board with Mack and I, and Melissa Campbell who was a parent, and then we had some other people on the board from afar. It was a nonprofit organization.

UPDIKE Let's talk a little bit more about chamber music in Pre-college. Are there some early young ensembles that you remember that you'd like to talk about? Some of the first groups maybe that you put together?

BATES Sure. I remember one of the first piano trios was Eileen Moon, Karen Shinozaki, a wonderful violinist who's in the Bay Area does a lot of playing still here, and Peter Miamoto, who the last I heard was in London. I can see them on the stage of Hellman Hall, and hear them playing in my ear. Also, a couple of years ago here in Pre-college I had a student, Leah Bogard, and she turns out to be the daughter of a Pre-college student that I had in those early years. I think sometimes you remember the beginning quite vividly, I don't remember exactly how many groups, but I think in the morning we had eight, and then maybe another eight in the string ensemble in the afternoon, and that's kind of the model we kept for a really long time, because of what the space was.

Of course the Adelante Trio – Tim started the Adelante Trio, he was the primary coach of that group from the beginning, and someone named Liza Zurlinden was in that group ... Reynard Rott and Merritt, and then as I say, it was an evolving group. The next violinist I believe was Daniel Ching, and I have pictures to prove that. He played with Reynard for a while, and Merritt, and then Reynard graduated and he graduated, and Amy Schwartz Moretti and Kathleen Balfe played. So one would graduate and we'd inset another one and so on, but as long as Merritt was around that group stayed together and they won several prizes. They won the Carmel Competition, and they won something at Kohl Mansion. They performed widely – they went down to L.A. and did some things and were just a wonderful group. Mack coached them, Paul coached them, and so on. That was a group that was a mentor group to younger groups, and they

were in master class a lot. But there were many, many, many, many groups, and wonderful people that I can remember.

Ethan Filner joined the Adelante Trio when he was a senior in high school. Ethan is now the director of the current Pre-college chamber music program, just this year. A student of mine who went off to Indiana, and then went to London to study and he wound up at NEC at the end I think, and then came back to the Bay Area. He's now the violist of the Cypress Quartet. So he joined them, and I think the girls pushed him pretty hard that year, and suddenly he decided mid-year, "I think I want to major in music," which surprised me because he was a person who was very, very social and was into everything – he was on student counsel in his school and he was doing many, many things and I didn't get the message from him that he was definitely going to music school. But I think being in that group of high powered young ladies – also Caroline Campbell was another one who's a well-known violinist in the L.A. area now. So those were marvelous things, and we did a lot of concerts together.

I just found pictures the other day when Midwest Young Artists, which is a pre-college youth orchestra and training program in the Winnetka, Chicago area – I used to go there in the summer and teach and Allan Dennis said to me, "Can we come and do an exchange concert?" So we set up this exchange concert, it was called Adelante Trio and Friends. It was a long concert, but he brought a sextet of strings, including his daughter who's now the principal violist of the L.A. Phil, and the Adelante Trio. Plus Ethan and Caroline did a mixture of repertoire, and Robin and I invited the world, but we didn't really get much RSVP-wise. We really had no idea, and suddenly about half an hour before the concert people started to come in droves to Hellman Hall, and we filled the place. She said to me, "Do you know any of these people?" I said, "Not so many," – this was before the internet, before Facebook. I said, "Do you?" She said, "Some." We didn't know how the word got out, but we had a wonderful crowd, that was one of the more memorable Pre-college Pre chamber music experiences that I can remember.

So the feature of it – you asked me on your hand-out sheet, "How was it taught?" We started out with 90 minutes, and then it went to two hours and we did kind of a team coaching. One coach could do two groups, where the group had an hour of coaching and then an hour of group rehearsal on their own, and it was reversed for another group. So we were able to really take on a lot of groups with not a huge number of coaches. And of course we had floating piano coaches who were partners to string coaches, so kids got a lot of time from us. And then we gradually added the master classes that became a feature. We used to do nighttime performances, we made it a big deal. I remember a couple of young men who wouldn't miss their performance with Prep chamber music but they came in a tuxedo because they had a prom that night. So I promised that I'd put them onto the program first. They even brought their date, and I think they came in a limo, it was really funny. I remember Shawn Yu, he said, "Mrs. Bates, I'm not going to miss my Prep chamber music performance, but could I be first so I can go to my prom?" So that was

really a funny, memorable thing. And then there was the time that Reynard Wrote forgot his dress shoes, and Tim Bach had to give him his shoes. And so Tim had to walk around the school in high tops that day for a while, that was funny – things like that I remember that I didn't plan on saying, but I remember now that I'm thinking about it. I remember Mrs. Kurka saying to me, "I love all of your ideas," because I just had a lot of ideas about how we could form this program and make it better every year. She said, "Let's just talk about them in advance, and let me know before you do something." So gradually the model that I'm proud of – basically what we do now, is still intact and we use it. It's a model of coaching and master classes and performances.

UPDIKE That's wonderful. Could you talk a little bit about your own teaching style and maybe how it's evolved over the years?

BATES I've taught viola here, and it's interesting when Joan Gordon asked us a few years ago when she became director if we would write a little two lines about our coaching style, I thought, "My goodness, what am I going to say?" I think that obviously being a viola teacher is rather different than being a violin teacher, even in a conservatory environment. Violists come to viola later than violinists do – they're often switchers from violin. So there's always a period of technical correction. The number one, top thing, is to make students comfortable on this larger instrument, and then as I mentioned early on in this interview, to make them aware of the fact that you must love the sound to play viola, and that you must understand your role. That the solo literature is not vast, and not primarily 20th century, but a lot of it's in the 20th century, and that much of what you do is done in string quartet and other chamber music, and that's where some of your greatest parts are to be found, and that for a violist chamber music is very important – for all string players it is, but certainly violists. So I try to give them technical security, to introduce them to the role of this unusual instrument in a way, and push them down the road with a sampling of contrasting repertoire that makes it possible for them to go on in music if they want to, or just continue to be interested in music and play chamber music through whatever life that they pursue.

I think being here has influenced what has become the focus of my teaching career, which I've continued on past the orchestra – I was a violist in the San Francisco Ballet orchestra for 34 years, and I retired in the 2010 time period and decided that I would just do teaching, and didn't think I would be this busy but it's become another career. But I've always taught, and I think what I've learned in all my time here is how to focus a musical life; how to help people find the right classes to take, what pieces to study – and highly influenced by what I learned from my mentors here and the importance – it has become the focus of my life. I started five chamber music programs – two of them here, one I just directed and I did another one when I started here – and I started three others. So I think I didn't know I was going to learn that here, but looking back over the 34 years, it's what I learned here that has focused my life as an educator.

UPDIKE Do you remember any chamber music pieces that the students in Prep performed that were written by the collegiate students? Are there any memorable performances or collaborations that you can remember between your students, and students in Prep? Maybe from the Kris Getz competition?

BATES I remember that there were many. I don't remember all of them individually, but particularly Summer Music West comes to my mind because I was in charge of that and was a faculty member on that staff for a long time. Because we had a distinct time-defined composition program within Summer Music West and probably because my husband was a composer and I played in that string quartet that did nothing but contemporary music, I think that I always tried to take care of that in a special way. We had a lot of crossover between the composers putting together little pieces, and having the summer chamber music groups having a piece thrown at them at the last minute, and having to do it

There is one student that I would like to mention, who of all the many students in composition and piano that have been around here – but it's one who I've kept up with and have a special connection to, and that's Anthony Cheung. Anthony's father came to me when he was ten years old when I was running Summer Music West, and he said, "My son's a composer and I want to enroll him in Summer Music West." I said, "Mr. Chung, he's a little bit young." He said, "No, but I think there's something special, and he's a very nice pianist too." I don't remember who he studied piano with, but it wasn't, I don't think, a Conservatory teacher. So I said, "Come back next year." So he came back when he was eleven – "Mrs. Bates, my son Anthony is eleven and I want him to take the composition program." We started looking at the stuff he had written, and it was rather extraordinary, but eleven's a little older than ten. So I accepted him in the program, and I think Peter Louis was the instructor at that time. Peter loved stuff that he saw, and I put another student who should be mentioned who I still know very well – it was a student of Milton's, a precocious pianist who came from China, from Shanghai, and that's Michael Tan. Michael Tan is still close to the Conservatory – last December he gave a master class for our students here, and he's living in China now. But Mike was here for quite a long time, and went to Juilliard, and came back to the Bay Area. ... I lost my train of thought.

UPDIKE You were talking about the eleven year old composer.

BATES That's right. So I put Mike together as his mentor. I said, "Watch this kid, he's the youngest one in the class, if he needs any help let me know." He didn't need any help, but it was a wonderful duo and they still know each other. Years go down the road, and I hear about Anthony – he's writing something for the Philharmonic and he went to Harvard. I remember him asking me to turn pages at his senior recital and playing some of his original compositions and so on – just seeing things here and there over these many years. And suddenly I'm reading the archives newsletter of the American Academy in Rome – my husband was a

fellow at the American Academy in Rome in 1974, and there's Anthony Cheung's name on the website, and I thought, "My goodness!" I tried the Harvard address, and he answered me. I said, "I can't believe you're in Rome right now. I want to make a trip, I want to get on an airplane and come and visit you!" My son and I were planning a 40th anniversary visit to the American Academy, at the time that Anthony was there, so all of these pieces came together. Anthony reconnected me with people, after 40 years, who seemed to remember when we were there 40 years ago – my son was 2 at the time. So he helped us liaison that all out. Now he's teaching at the University of Chicago – he's teaching theory and he's a composer there, and I think still writing that piece for the New York Philharmonic – it might have had a memorable performance by now, I don't exactly know. But recently one of my students graduated and is going to the University of Chicago and I said, "Look up Anthony Cheung please when you're there." So it's an important thing to remember – people say, "Gee, you've had so many students," – well, you get old enough, they all graduate, they get work, and they actually write back to you every once and a while, and there are so many of them that I remember that I still have a connection to.

That composer/performer liaison was really important, and I do acknowledge the importance of the Kris Getz scholarship – especially the work that Meikui [Matsushima] has done with Kris Getz and the Young People's annual concert that she had so often here. But I don't technically remember absolutely everybody's composition. There are actually two other things that I wanted to mention that related to Prep chamber music groups, and things that were spontaneous but really remarkable. When everyone in the Adelante Trio graduated, one cellist was left, and she was so sad. This was Kathleen Balfe, who is now playing in Granada, Spain. But she's another one who was a Music House girl, and also I think she was in Prep chamber music. She started out in the seventh or eighth grade, she was there longer than almost anyone, and so she joined forces with Jory Fankuchen, who is a well-known musician in the area now, and who was a college student here, and Stephanie Fong, who I believe got a viola degree here, and Michelle Maruyama, who is also, again, in the freelance scene here in the Bay Area. And they formed a string quartet. Everything was going quite well, and so my friend in Chicago said, "We visited you, would you like to visit us?" So he said Rostislav Dubinsky, at Indiana, the famous violinist of the Borodin Quartet, then after he defected went to Indiana University, was going to give a master class. I said, "We've got to go, this is important." So we scraped all of our pennies together, and we took a trip to Chicago. Unfortunately, Mr. Dubinsky wasn't able to make it all the way to Chicago, and we were all rather disappointed, but Allan Dennis's wife drove us all the way to Indiana and they got a four hour coaching from Dubinsky. This was another memorable moment in Prep chamber music. There were so many things that happened there.

Another remarkable group that didn't play together but there are three sisters – the Lee Trio, which is a well-known professional piano trio now and travel all over the world. Melinda and Angela and Lisa were all Pre-college students. Although they didn't play as sisters during the Pre-college era, they certainly made their mark in the Bay Area and elsewhere now. I just saw

Melinda at Tanglewood, she was teaching at Tanglewood this summer. I mentioned Ethan Filner and the Cypress Quartet, and there's one more person I think that I should mention who's at the top of my list and someone that I knew very well who became a Pre-college student and graduate of high school here was a violinist student of Zaven Melikian's named Roman Goronok. Roman was a Russian emigre from the Cleveland area. He was with Mr. Melikian in the summertime and went on to decide that he wanted to finish his high school years here, and he lived with us actually, so I got to know him really well. This was in the '96, '97 time period. He did a lot of different chamber groups, and played in the San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra, and is now a well-heeled violin dealer – works out of London and travels all over the world selling high-end string instruments. Fortunately, since he's a traveler, he comes and visits us quite often, and we go to see Mr. Melikian. But those are three other names of groups or individuals that I wanted to mention.

UPDIKE Could you talk a little bit about the Conservatory's move from Ortega Street to Oak Street?

BATES Well, I think considering what a difficult task that was, from my point of view we did it well. It was certainly not easy, and I wasn't in on very much. I was just on the outside of it, but it took a couple of years to get used to, with all the extra floors. I think we gained so much – not just space, but stature, and closeness to the community. I remember when I was still working at the Opera House I would teach here and just walk over there – I felt like it had all sort of come together in a very good way. We lost a little bit in terms of just being able to find people. Prep chamber music sort of depended on we would all get together at quarter to ten every Saturday morning and talk about where we were with each group – we had to find ways to meet at different times to do that, so we lost some of that. But I think in general it's all for the good, and I've always been very proud to be a teacher here. I can't think of anything else I could say about it from my end – we got used to it all, and have persevered, and thrived, I think.

UPDIKE I know we've talked about this throughout the interview, but could you say just a little bit about how the chamber music program for Prep is different today than it was when you started? Maybe some of the major evolutions or changes that happened throughout the years.

BATES I think they go hand in hand with the upsurge in the importance in chamber music in general within our community – our world classical music community. When I think about the early years when I was a student and the places I went in the summer – they primarily were orchestrally oriented. If you got some chamber music education it was “also” – “in addition to” – now when you look at summer programs or academic year programs at institutions or any conservatory, chamber music is really important. It's not only important as a teaching tool, but it's considered to be a fundamental skill, an ensemble skill different from

orchestra that one can't learn anyplace but there. I always like to say it's the perfect recipe – you have to be a great soloist, and you also have to be able to work with other people. So as a training tool there's just in my opinion nothing to compare with it. And thus it has been recognized nationally and internationally, and it's trickled down into the pre-college level, where it's really important for pre-college students – especially strings and piano – for them to be involved in and introduced to the great master works, and to the skills because if they're going on in college they're going to be competing with students who have these skills already. They will definitely be at the advantage if they already have strong ensemble skills, and already know and understand how to work with somebody in a string quartet or a piano trio. If they understand their role they will go farther. And so we've just built it, and it's not surprising to me that it's a core part of the curriculum now as we go into this new phase of the Pre-college and its curriculum changes – it's absolutely not a surprise to me that it's part of the core curriculum. Everyone has to be in a chamber ensemble.

UPDIKE And could you talk just a little bit about your hopes for the future of chamber music at the Conservatory?

BATES I'll be absolutely honest. My fondest wish is that we have as much interaction with performances by college students and college faculty, and the Pre-college students as we possibly can. I think that's the dimension that's yet to be built. It's been kindled, but it hasn't actually been built yet so that students in Pre-college have the opportunity on Saturday to attend a concert of their teacher or a group from the collegiate faculty that's going to be playing on Thursday night – they might repeat one part of that performance on Saturday for all the students here. It's beginning to happen. Practically speaking is what's most difficult about it – everybody wants it to happen but it's very difficult. There are just not enough hours in the day, and practically speaking it just doesn't always happen – but I see the day when maybe we could find a way to make that happen.

UPDIKE Is there anything else that you think you might want to talk about today?

BATES I don't think so, I think I've talked and talked. I apologize if I've left anyone out! I think I've probably given you as much as I've got. It's been very pleasant, you've made it very, very easy. Thank you.

UPDIKE Thank you so much for doing this.

BATES Of course. It's an honor and a pleasure.

Addendum:

I wanted to add information about other distinctive moments while I was directing Prep chamber music. I started in 1981 and I left the direction in 2000 when Doris Fukawa took over. I think I already related the Adelante Trio and Friends concert, which was a big one, but I wanted to say the Prep chamber music applied and was distinguished by Chamber Music America in 1992 we received the Gruber Award through my direction. It was a little bit of money that I think we used for projects related to Prep chamber music throughout that year, but it was kind of a large application – we had to list how many concerts we gave, and had to supply audio and programs. It was quite an application, but we did it and were honored, and from it I was able to make a visit to Oberlin the succeeding year, and all of the people that had won awards – all of the directors of Pre-college chamber music programs who won awards – were there in attendance. It was a whole two days of conferencing and sharing ideas. I don't think Chamber Music America ever did it again, it was probably rather expensive, but I really appreciated it and I met people from all over the nation who had Pre-college chamber music programs. It was a delightful experience, and many of those people I visited again, although many of them didn't come out here it was a great experience.

I talked a little bit about going to Indiana University with a group – I'm sure Doris spoke about Fischhoff. We've taken a number of groups to the junior division Fischhoff competition in South Bend, Indiana, and there was one other additional thing at another Chamber Music America conference where Robin Shader and I went – we were asked to be on a panel talking about how to motivate adolescents to study chamber music. I don't think you have to talk about that anymore, because it's such a given, but in those days not everybody enrolled automatically in chamber music, they didn't understand maybe that it was important. May and I talked about it on occasion, and I don't remember the year but somewhere in my tenure where we had family day we had a symposium on why you should study chamber music. I invited teachers when they had a break in their regular Prep day – I remember Zaven came in and talked about playing chamber music when he was in France, and I remember what Machiko Kobiialka said (who has been a fine chamber music coach all of these years) – how she talked about her experiences early on in chamber music. It was delightful because among the faculty we don't usually share how we came to chamber music, but on that occasion.... All the parents stayed and walked in and out and listened to different people speak about why chamber music education was so important. By golly, by the next year we had an increase in the number of people who enrolled in the chamber music program. I wanted to make sure to remember those occasions for this.