Warren Jones 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 June 8 and 9, 2014
Tessa Updike, Interviewer

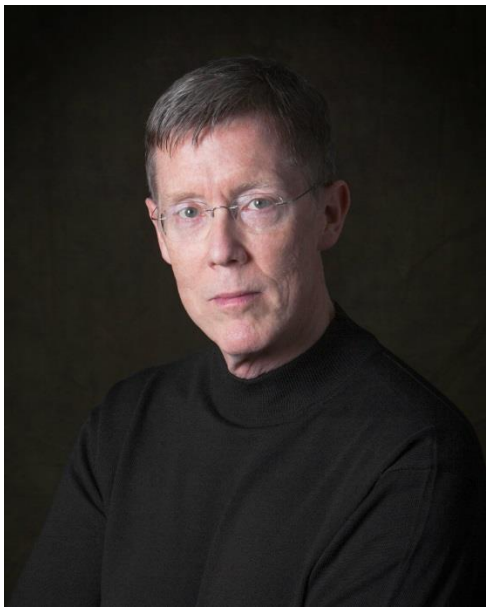
San Francisco Conservatory of Music Library & Archives Oral History Project

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.

Warren Jones Interview
This interview was conducted in two sessions at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music on Sunday, June 8 and Monday, June 9, 2014 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.



Warren Jones

Warren Jones, who was named as "Collaborative Pianist of the Year" for 2010 by the publication Musical America, performs with many of today's best-known artists: Stephanie Blythe, Christine Brewer, Anthony Dean Griffey, Bo Skovhus, Eric Owens, John Relyea, and Richard "Yongjae" O'Neill—and is Principal Pianist for the exciting California-based chamber music group Camerata Pacifica. In the past he has partnered such great performers as Marilyn Horne, Håkan Hagegård, Kathleen Battle, Samuel Ramey, Barbara Bonney, Carol Vaness, Judith Blegen, Salvatore Licitra, Tatiana Troyanos, James Morris, and Martti Talvela. He is a member of the faculty of Manhattan School of Music as well as the Music Academy of the West, and received the "Achievement Award" for 2011 from the Music Teachers National Association of America, their highest honor. He has been an invited guest at the White House to perform for state dinners in honor of the leaders of Canada, Russia, and Italy; and three times he has been the invited guest of the Justices of the United States Supreme Court for musical afternoons in the East Conference Room at the Court. A graduate of New England Conservatory, he currently serves on the Board of Visitors for that institution; he earned his graduate degree from San Francisco Conservatory of Music, and has been honored with the Doctor of Music degree from that school. His discography contains 29 recordings on every major label—and his newest musical ventures include conducting, having led sold-out critically-acclaimed performances of Mascagni's L'amico Fritz, Rossini's Il barbiere di Siviglia, and Mozart's Die Zauberfloete in recent summers. In December 2014 he will lead the world premiere of a new operatic version of A Christmas Carol, starring Anthony Dean Griffey, music by Iain Bell and libretto by Simon Callow, at the Houston Grand Opera. For more information please visit his website, www.warrenjones.com.

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Sunday, June 8, 2014

UPDIKE This is Tessa Updike, and we're at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. It's June 8th, 2014, and I am with Warren Jones doing an interview for the Conservatory's Oral History Project. So, Warren, could you start out by telling us about your early history – where and when you were born.

JONES I was born in downtown Washington, DC, about ten blocks from the White House, on December 11, 1951.

UPDIKE And can you tell me about your parents?

JONES My parents were David E. Jones, who was born in North Carolina, and my mother was Kathleen Wright Jones, who was born in Virginia. They were both living in Washington; they had both moved there after the Depression and were working there. They met each other, and I was the third of their children.

UPDIKE What were their occupations?

JONES At the time I was born my mother had been a telephone operator for the telephone company – she was not working at the time though, because my two sisters already had been born. And my father was working for the mass transit company called Capital Transit – he was a dispatcher.

UPDIKE Did you grow up in a musical household?

JONES It was not musical in the normal sense, I don't think. My mother was, by her appraisal, not very musical. Later in life I discovered that she probably was musical, but that she had just not ever cultivated it. But no one will ever know about that because she never had the opportunity. My father had a very good voice and sang in church, but he was never trained musically. He didn't read music, but he did sing very well, he had a nice voice – an attractive voice. They were both from farm backgrounds, so I was raised close to that background. I wasn't raised on a farm, but I was around farms all the time; a lot of being in the outdoors and stuff like that. There were a lot of people – my father's side of the family is very large – he was one of fifteen. I have over a hundred first cousins on his side of the family – I stopped counting in 1957, when I got my hundredth first cousin. My mother was an only child, so her family is quite a bit smaller; she's not from a prolific family at all.

UPDIKE Was there a piano in your house when you were growing up?

JONES There was not a piano in the house while I was growing up, although my parents – because neither of them had had any kind of cultural education, being from farms during the Depression – they were both very well determined that all three of us should have some musical background. Well, I shouldn't say musical – that we would have some kind of cultural, artistic training. My older sister started taking piano lessons, then my middle sister started taking piano, and I followed suit. All three of us played in the high school band, we were active musically and we sang.

When I was growing up, from the time I was seven until I was fourteen, we performed as a pretty well-known gospel trio, called the Gospelettes. It was a very valuable performing experience for me because I was regularly (about once a week or at the least every other week) in front of several thousand people performing. We were the warm-up group for fairly large gospel singings in the South. We only performed in North Carolina, where we were living at the time. We didn't travel across the United States or anything like that, but we were very well-known and a lot of people paid a good deal of attention to us. It was an amazing education for me, not only musically but culturally, to be in those surroundings. I credit, frankly, a lot of my performing personality to that. I played the piano in public for the first time when I was five. I started studying piano when I was five, and I played a concert that year. I was very interested in everything my sisters were doing, because in those days we didn't have any kind of kindergarten or anything like that; you just went to first grade. I would always trap my sisters after school and make them show me what they had learned at school, because I wanted to know what they were learning. I did the same with their piano lessons – although I couldn't read anything, I learned quickly how to read music. So I was reading staff and music notation before I was reading words.

UPDIKE And did you enjoy performing, as a child?

JONES Oh, from the very beginning. I loved being on stage, from even when I was five. My first two performances were disasters.

UPDIKE In what way?

JONES Well, my first performance, when I was five years old – the climax of the piece was meant to be a glissando down the keys. Now think about how big a five-year old's hands are (and I was a fairly small five-year-old, in spite of my size now). My teacher had not told me that I would do the glissando on the nail of my thumb, I just sort of did that – but in public, my thumb got caught on the side of one of the white keys, and it slit my thumb – about a one inch slit – and it just started pumping blood out all over the keys. It was very messy. I didn't stop, I just went right on going, I kept playing right to the end. The piano was a mess when I got done, there was blood everywhere because it was literally just spurting out every time my heart

beat. My second time was when I had just turned six, and in that performance I got to use the pedals for the first time. I was playing in an old country school on an upright piano (one of those tall upright pianos) and they had put some flowers on the top of the piano in a vase. In order to reach the pedals (my feet didn't reach the floor) I would have to scoot my butt out to the edge of the piano bench and sort of jab at the pedals to get my foot on them. When I jabbed at the pedals the first time, I didn't get to the pedals, I just kicked the piano. It swayed back away from me, and when it came back toward me the flowers just came right over and dumped this huge amount of water on me, and flowers – the vase smashed on the floor – again, a huge mess. I was just covered in water, there was a large amount of water in the vase. I was six years old, I was covered in water – flowers everywhere all over the keys (these cut flowers) and the vase was on the floor in pieces. Again, I kept on going, I never stopped. I only stopped one time in my life, and I can tell you about that later – I only stopped in public one time. But I didn't stop then – my teacher said that you never stopped in public, so I just never did – it didn't even cross my mind to do that.

UPDIKE Oh, my goodness. Do you remember who your first piano teacher was?

JONES Oh, very well – I saw her a few months ago. She's actually the only teacher I had in my life that is still alive. It's sort of weird that my very first teacher is the one that's still living – everyone else is not with us anymore. I've had very few teachers in my life, I think – compared to some people. But I still am in touch with my first piano teacher. If I play a concert anywhere in North Carolina, South Carolina or Virginia she will always be at the concert, she's always there. She is very supportive, to this day. She was a very courageous lady, because believe me, when I was five years old, and six, I was a total handful. My mother took me around to several different piano teachers and no one would take me on.

UPDIKE Why is that?

JONES Because of the way I was as a person. As a small child I was just out of control. But she agreed to teach me, and she did. She taught me until she couldn't teach me anymore, and she told me that. She said, "I've taught you everything that I know to teach you, and I think you need to go to this other teacher." She arranged for me to play with this second lady that I studied with, who turned out to be my teacher through high school, and was really the person who – to this day I credit her as the person who taught me how to play the piano. Without any doubt. The other teachers I've had have refined all that stuff and helped me out with different things – what I'm doing, how to listen, my finger strength, stuff like that. This lady who got me in the fifth grade through high school is the lady that taught me to play the piano.

UPDIKE When did you move to North Carolina?

JONES I believe we must have moved to North Carolina just at the end of when I was four, because most of five I was in North Carolina.

UPDIKE And what town were you in?

JONES We were living near the town of High Point. We weren't living in High Point, but we were near it.

UPDIKE What kind of music did you listen to as a child? What did you like to listen to when you were growing up?

JONES I didn't listen to music. We didn't have a record player. We eventually – when I was in junior high school we got a little 45 record player; I don't know if you know what that is or not. We had some records, like some Elvis Presley records, and things like that, that we listened to. But I didn't listen to classical music at all. When I went away to college, to the New England Conservatory, where I went to undergrad, my piano teacher from high school gave me her old stereo, which was my very first ever record player to own, which I took away to college with me. It was quite an old machine, with these old speakers; it weighed a ton. The first record that I bought – and I'm proud to say that I just got another copy of it on CD – was the Robert Shaw recording of *B Minor Mass* of Bach. It's the first classical music that I ever heard on a record player, and it remains to this day – I would say it still remains my favorite piece of classical music. It is head and shoulders above anything else I know in any medium anywhere. Mr. Bach composed it all in the four parts of that Mass that he wrote, and everybody else is just saying it again in different ways, as far as I'm concerned. It's astounding music. It was the very first thing I bought, and I remember there was one lady on it named Florence Kopleff, who was the mezzo – the counter alto – singing on it, whose voice was just so beguiling to me. She was just unbelievable. I played a concert in Atlanta at Emery University several months ago with an American soprano named Barbara Bonney, and this little lady came up to me after the concert and she stuck out her hand and said that she was Florence Kopleff, and that she wanted to say hello. Well, I was practically on the floor in front of her because to actually see the person standing there that I had listened to – she was one of the first classical singers whose voice actually got to me. I've listened to it now, and it still gets to me. I was so enthralled to meet her, and I've met most of the people who were on the record, but it remains one of my favorite recordings, and absolutely my favorite music.

UPDIKE So, how did you decide to go to the New England Conservatory of Music?

JONES Well, I applied at four different schools for undergrad – I applied to Juilliard and Curtis and New England and Cincinnati. Juilliard and Curtis were the two live auditions that I did, the other two auditions were done on tape. And it's very telling that I was

accepted at the two tape auditions and flatly – out of hand, no questions asked – rejected soundly, straight out – at Juilliard and Curtis. But New England and Cincinnati both accepted me, and they both offered me scholarships. My family had very little money – no money to send me to college at all. In fact, it was the only time I had ever heard my parents argue – about whether I should be allowed to go to college to study or not, because my father was intent on me going into the Army and then paying for college with the GI support. My mother was absolutely opposed to that happening – that was not going to happen, as far as she was concerned. So New England and Cincinnati both offered me money, and I – as some of my students do today, in my own teaching – I was in touch with New England and I said, "Is it possible to give me a little more money?" They said it was, and so they upped their offer slightly. I did not call Cincinnati and ask for more money and play them off against each other, I just took the expanded offer from New England and went to school there, and started studying with the man that I went through college there with.

UPDIKE At what point did you realize that you wanted to be a pianist?

JONES I've never thought about doing anything else. I know what I would have done if I did something else, but I never seriously thought about it because I was playing the piano. I was always very conceited and stuck up. For example, in high school and junior high school, any time I entered a contest, I never, ever lost. I don't care what the contest was, what the prize was, I never lost. I actually began to get a little bit spooked about that, because I would walk in (and I was very self-confident), if I walked into a room I could see my colleagues in the waiting room – I could see their faces drop because they knew I was going to win, and I knew I was going to win. I was like, "Give me the money. Just give it to me – we don't need to do anything, just give me the money, because I know I'm going to get the money soon anyway, just give it to me." People would just practically give up if I walked in. Well, I started to get a little bit weirded out about that, and I asked my teacher, who was the most amazing lady – she remains one of the most amazing people I've ever known – I asked her, "What's going to happen when I lose? Because I will lose sometime, I'm confident about the fact that sometime, someplace, someone will beat me." And she said, "Warren, if you go to the contest and do your best, you will win. You will be a winner." Now, I didn't understand what that meant back then. I thought she was just affirming the fact that I was the very best one, and I was never going to be beaten. Now I understand what she meant, because she was telling me that all I could do was do my best, and see what happens. I will win if I do my best. It's when I don't do my best that I'm going to lose. Whether I actually lose the prize or not, I should always do my best. That's how I encourage my students today – I don't encourage my students to be perfect, I encourage them to be excellent all the time. Be the best they can be on any given day. Some days that's not going to be good, but it will still be the best that you can do that day, and then you'll be satisfied and go home happy. Whether you won the prize or not, you'll be happy.

UPDIKE Were these competitions in North Carolina, or all around the South? Did you travel to some?

JONES Oh I did, yeah. The one that I traveled to was the first one that I eventually lost, which was when I was in college already. It was not a pleasant experience for me, but I did know that I did my best that day, and I didn't feel bad about it. If I told you about this, we would run out of recording room. It was a saga – an incredible travel saga. I had never traveled by myself and I was traveling by myself to Alabama and it was a big mess. I arrived there so tired ... it was a three-part contest of a theory test that you had to take, a sight-reading and sight-singing test, and those counted as twenty-five percent of the total score, and then the prepared performance was the other fifty percent. It was sort of graded like a beauty pageant in that way, things were weighted. I was way far ahead after the test and the sight-reading and sight-singing, but I played so badly in the prepared thing that I didn't even get in the top four of thirteen.

UPDIKE What did you play?

JONES Oh, I don't remember – Beethoven Third and a bunch of other prepared things. A Barber *Nocturne* and Chopin *Polonaise* and stuff like that. I played as well as I could, but I was exhausted and I couldn't do it. It didn't work out that day.

UPDIKE So were you eighteen years old when you moved to Boston?

JONES I was seventeen.

UPDIKE What was it like living in Boston after being in North Carolina?

JONES Boston was pretty weird. It was like being on a different planet, practically. First off, my accent – I don't maintain my accent, but I've never tried to lose it, because I find that it is, generally speaking, an advantage. A lot of people in Boston couldn't understand what I was saying. My accent was very thick, and they could not understand me – and I sometimes couldn't understand them. It was like – did I come to another planet, or what? But the musical experience at the Conservatory in Boston was – I can't imagine having a better educational experience than I had there. My freshman year was pretty much a mess, but that had to do with the political atmosphere in Boston at the time. That was in the height of the Vietnam War, the place was just one long demonstration against the war. Constant upheaval – nothing could happen easily. Everything was a mess. Every day was a mess. The school was almost broke, we never knew when we went on a vacation (if we went, like, for Christmas) if we came back if the school would be open. The New England Conservatory had no money at the time – none. Mr. Schuller, who was the president, was not private about that. He had his hand out everywhere to get money, and he very bravely kept the doors of the school open. Now the school

is thriving and has a lot of resources, but when I was there it was difficult. It was in a very difficult neighborhood, the Boston Strangler was working right down the street and had killed someone just down the street before I arrived there. It was a very dangerous neighborhood. It's a very upscale neighborhood now, where the New England Conservatory is – very upscale, very gentrified and everything. But in those days, believe me, you took your life in your hands walking down the street. And there were a lot of people – eccentrics – that I have never dreamed of that I was in school with. But the faculty that I was exposed to, everyone was quite incredible, I learned a great deal from every one of them about so many things.

My piano teacher was Jacob Maxin; he recently died, a couple years ago. He was a very quirky man. I've always thought that at the time I've gotten to a particular teacher, that they were the perfect teacher at that time, and he was the perfect teacher for me at that time. First off, he was incredibly patient with me. I was not an easy student to deal with. He said things endlessly in different ways – different methods, different pictures, different similes, difference examples – anything to get something through. And eventually things would get through to my brain. It was quite rewarding to be there with him. He gave me everything I needed, and I was very glad at the end of four years to come out here. I didn't come immediately to San Francisco, but when I did decide to go back to school to come up here – Mr. Salkind, when I encountered him, he was perfect for me. Absolutely the perfect teacher for me at the time.

UPDIKE Who were some of your other teachers at the New England Conservatory? Or did you work primarily with Mr. Maxin?

JONES Mr. Maxin was my only piano teacher. There wasn't any of this – send people around to different teachers. Nobody went across studios, nobody thought about doing that in those days. Everybody does that now, but nobody did that then. The other people that were really very important to me when I was there – I don't know if I can name all of them or not – the choral director, Lorna Cooke DeVaron, was a very large influence on me. She was a very strong woman who believed very strongly that if you can't sing it, you can't play it. The Conservatory chorus was a very well-known performing organization at that point. We had annual tours – the first time I came to California was on a Conservatory chorus tour that we paid for with the proceeds from our recordings. We did commercial recordings for RCA, and with the Boston Symphony, and then with Deutsche Grammophon. We had these annual tours. We had a tour in Europe one time, we had a tour in the upper Midwest, we took a tour to California, we did a tour to Washington, D.C., and that whole area. So we were very well traveled. We did not go to Asia, but at that point it was not yet fashionable to go to Asia. But we were in Europe one time for a month. We paid for all of that ourselves – I don't mean personally, but the chorus income from its recordings paid for all of those trips, for all of our travel and housing and everything. We didn't pay for anything to go on the trip, we just – the chorus went on a trip. She was a very strong willed lady who was one of the most intuitive musicians I've ever seen. Her abilities were

quite astonishing with the chorus. Very strong willed, oh my God. She wrote the book on strong women, she really did. I've seen other strong women, but she was just overtly strong. A lot of women that I know are strong in a passive way; they stand quietly while things are raging around them and they persevere. She was active, she was out there fighting her fight every day of her life; she was an amazing example.

Likewise, the woman that I studied Italian with, Anna Yona – it's difficult for me to talk about her, because she was so influential on me in my time at New England Conservatory. She was a human being, the likes of whom I've met very few. The way she taught Italian was so human. She was an incredible teacher, she really was. And I got the chance to study Schenker Theory with a man who had studied with Schenker. He was one of only two people alive who had studied with Schenker. His name was Ernst Oster. I get very aggravated now when some of my students bring in something and say it's some kind of Schenker analysis, because having studied with someone who studied with Schenker, and to see what the analysis was by Oster's words – Schenker analysis in Oster's class was entirely a performance exercise. I don't know if you know Schenker Theory, or what it's about it, but it was entirely about understanding and illuminating and enlightening one's performance. It was not some kind of cerebral exercise that people did as a game to try to figure out how this works and how that works – it was all tied to, "How do I play the piano? How do I play the trumpet? How do I sing? How do I do this, and what does this mean in terms of a good and illuminated performance?" He was there once a week teaching us, it was quite amazing. He believed that music had died a quick death at Brahms. Music existed for him between Bach and Brahms, and that was it. It didn't exist before Bach, that was some kind of primordial soup. And after Brahms it became some kind of a mess that was not to be listened to. It was quite something. And also, I have to say that my German teacher (I know – my two language teachers, you might think it's sort of strange for a pianist to think that) but my German teacher was also an amazing lady, for the same reasons as Yona, my Italian teacher. It's because of her humanity and the way that she taught the language. I learned a great deal from her, just being around her.

UPDIKE What was it like traveling on tour with other students and teachers when you were in college?

JONES Well, I have to say I was pretty naïve. I didn't know anything about anything, and I was just walking around (as we say in the South) fat, dumb and happy all the time. To see all those places, and go to places that I never imagined I would go to. We flew to San Francisco to begin that trip, from Boston to San Francisco. We got off the plane and into this bus, and they brought us down to this hotel on Union Square where we were staying. This guy from New Jersey. He stood there on the street at Union Square and looked around. He looked at me straight on and said, "You know, I don't trust air I can't see." I looked around and I realized, "You can't see the air here – what's wrong with this?" Because you know in the East at that time

there was pollution and fog everywhere – you were just living in soup. Here it was like, "Oh my God! I can't see the air!" It was amazing. So it was things like that, you know. We had a really good time. I've always enjoyed traveling like that. I still travel a lot, and I've always enjoyed it.

UPDIKE Where did you go in San Francisco when you were here the first time on tour? Did you come to the Conservatory at all?

JONES No, we came here and we did several concerts – run outs from San Francisco. We gave a concert for example in Oroville, and we were in Sacramento State and traveled up to Chico and a lot of different places like that. Oroville was amazing – have you ever been to Oroville?

UPDIKE I haven't been there.

JONES It has, to this day, the world's largest natural filled dam. It's a mile across at the top, and a mile thick at the bottom. A dam that's a mile thick at the bottom. It holds this huge reservoir up in northern California. For me to see that – I was aghast to see this huge dam and to think about what that was. I'd never seen anything like that before, and I was totally fascinated 'cause I love buildings, I love the different kinds of buildings. Anything that's constructed like that, I'm fascinated.

UPDIKE So what year was it when you graduated from the New England Conservatory?

JONES I graduated from there in 1973.

UPDIKE And how did your parents feel about you going to school at a Conservatory?

JONES I don't think it made any difference to them. Neither one of them had been to college, so they didn't know any different about it. I do know my father – to his dying day, I don't believe that he ever thought I did an honest day's work, because he was involved in manual labor. After he was a dispatcher at Capital Transit, when we moved to North Carolina, he opened a very successful service station and sold unbelievable amounts of gas, and did car repair and stuff like that. I worked there at the service station sometimes. That's the kind of work he did; he worked with his hands in the same way that he had worked on the farm when he was a kid. Manual labor was something that you did – well, I didn't do manual labor. I did for him – but to make money, I didn't do manual labor. And so I don't think that he ever thought I was honestly working. Well, when I was a senior at New England, I won the concerto contest and was slated to play Mozart *D Minor Concerto* with the Boston Pops with [Arthur] Fiedler conducting. That

was the graduation weekend and they came up to see my performance at the Pops (which was on Friday night, and then the graduation was on Sunday afternoon). When my father saw me walk out on the stage to play that concerto (from my mother's account) he was sort of wide-eyed at the fact that there were twenty-five hundred people in the hall who were all cheering for me. It was the first time, I think, that he thought there was maybe something to this. That maybe I could play the piano and do something with it other than just play for my own amusement. So that was an important moment for him, to see that. It's probably why with my own students today, I very much want their parents to come around and see them play, and to see that they are doing things. I am very much about my students having a job, I really am. And most of them have jobs, because I push very hard for them to get employment – get a job, pay taxes, and pay off their student loans and stuff like that. And most of them do. Having their parents know that they are gainfully employed – most of them doing what they went to college for – is a great thing.

UPDIKE Did you encounter any new music when you were at the Conservatory in Boston?

JONES I didn't play new music, as a pianist. We sang a great deal of new music in the chorus, which was my main outlet for learning complex things like that. There was a very active composition department at that time, and subsequent to my graduation there, probably fifteen years after I graduated, I sponsored a prize for a new piano piece which was advertised at the school. I put certain parameters on it – it needed to be ten minutes long, in a single movement, blah blah blah. I was awarded a prize for a piece which I played in public several times in the following year after that. I've always said – I know that my career, such as it is, has been basically dealing with what I refer to as commercially successful music. That is the great body of chamber music, or at the beginning, for sure, of vocal music that you can fill the opera house with. More recently I have played more new music, but for most of the time when I got out of college, I didn't have very much to do with it at all. It's just not been where it is, because you don't fill up large venues regularly with brand new music, you just don't. Also, it's difficult to get famous, well-known singers to sing it. It takes a large investment of their time – there are several reasons why that's the case – but that's where I am about that.

UPDIKE What did you do right after graduation from the New England Conservatory? You said you didn't come straight to San Francisco.

JONES No, I took a job. I was approached by an artist manager in New York City, who said a classic line which I've heard a gazillion times in my life now – he heard me play in Boston and said that he wanted to put me under management and that I should come to New York City and live. At the same time I was offered a job teaching at a women's college outside Boston – it was called Newton College. I readily accepted the teaching job, and basically told the manager to go fly a kite – that I could see through that pretty easily and it was going to be a thing

where I paid him a retainer and would live in some hovel someplace. I had a chance to have a good job at a very well respected women's school, and I took the job. Of course he just read me out about how I was worthless and this, that and the other thing – that I was stupid and was passing up a great opportunity and blah blah blah. I said, "That may be all true, but I'm taking the job teaching and that's it."

So I spent a year teaching at Newton College, which was my first teaching job. I was younger than several of my students. I resigned the job in February of the first year that I was there because I felt, "You know, I can do this when I'm eighty." That's literally what I thought. "I can do this when I'm eighty, but right now I need to do something else." And so I put in my resignation – I taught the rest of the year, I had twelve students. I learned a great deal that year, I had one blind student and it was one of the most fascinating things for me to do, to work with a blind student and to investigate her world. I had never been in a situation where I had to think that way. I had another student who was fascinating because as a young child she had lost her fifth finger on her right hand in a car accident – it had been cut off. Her other fingers worked perfectly, but she played the piano with nine fingers. And so I had to find music for her to study that she could play with nine fingers. You know, you can reach with your fourth finger as far as you can reach with your fifth finger. The reach was no problem, to play octaves and things like that, but some passages are difficult when you only have four fingers. So that was interesting for me too, to have to deal with an obstacle to playing to piano, and to figure out as a twenty-one-year-old what to tell these people about what they're doing. With the blind lady, for example, I assigned her a piece of late Liszt – are you a pianist by any chance?

UPDIKE I used to play but I haven't for a long time.

JONES I don't know if you know a piece of late Liszt called *Nuages gris – Gray Clouds?* It's towards the end of Liszt's life, it's very strange music and very beautiful, not very complicated. This woman learned everything by Braille, and if you've ever seen a Braille score of piano music, it is frightfully big. It makes you have a new appreciation for the complexity of modern notation and all the stuff that we know through notation. Anyway, she got the score for this piece and learned it, and came back to her lesson and played it. I said to her, "Ann, you've studied the notes and the rhythms very well. Now, we have to talk about this – the name of the piece is *Gray Clouds*, and we have to find a way for you to bring that to it." She broke in on me, and said, "Warren, I don't know what gray clouds are." I was just sitting there with her and about a hundred things went through my brain all of a sudden. What is she seeing? What is on the other side of her face? I had never thought about that. What's going on back there? I know if I shut my eyes, I still have the perception of light, and I know that if I open my eyes there's going to be something there. The idea that, if I open my eyes – what would be there? I was just sort of flabbergasted by that remark of hers. I sat there and I asked her if she liked cotton candy. She said she loved cotton candy. I said, "Well, can you imagine eating cotton candy that doesn't have

any taste?" She said, "I can imagine that." I said, "Well, that's sort of gray clouds. It's gray, it's nothing – it's something, it's gray. That's what gray is. Gray is just medium – it's not hot, it's not cold, it's not spicy, it's not sweet, it's just gray." Her lessons were always something like that, so I learned a huge amount from her that year. But I did leave, determined that I would come to California.

I can tell you about how I came to the Conservatory. One of my best friends at New England when I was there had come out here to study with Paul Hersh, because they had just established that year the graduate program at the Conservatory, that was the first grad class. My friend's name was Dennis Giauque. I was very much friends with Dennis, we hung out a great deal when he was in Boston, and he was really enjoying his time here. So I thought, "Well, I'm going to do something entirely new." I was sick of the winters in Boston, and all that cold and the snow. Uck! I thought, "Well, let's go to California." I made an audition here at the Conservatory – actually, it was on Ortega Street at the time – and I also prepared an audition for USC, to study down there. Here I was auditioning for just regular piano, for a grad degree – a Master's in piano performance. But at USC I did audition for collaborative piano (or, they called it accompanying at the time), with Gwendolyn Kodolfsky and Brooks Smith. So I played the audition here, and apparently I played a very good audition. They were very interested in me, and wanted to talk to me about coming here. I said, "I have to tell you that I'm scheduled to play an audition in Los Angeles, but I want to do that before I talk to you about anything serious here because I'm scheduled to do that, and I want to go do that." They said, "Fine."

So I went to Los Angeles and played this audition for Kodolfsky and Smith. When I was done with the audition, Ms. Kodolfsky asked if I would come and teach her class that afternoon. I thought that was just part of the audition, and I said, "Sure, just tell me what time to be there." So I went and taught the second hour of her class. When the class was over with, she said to me that if I wanted to come to USC and study with her that she would do whatever was necessary to get me there. She would arrange any scholarship, any kind of detail, she would fix it if I wanted to come to her school. But, she said, "If you have the possibility to go to the Conservatory and teach, and be a coach there," (which is what they were offering me here) she said, "I would definitely take that." She said, "You will have the chance there to grow more than you will have the chance here. Here, I feel like the school may hold you back just from doing the stuff that you have to do. From the way that you describe the opportunity you have in San Francisco, that sounds like something where you will actually grow every day, and I would take that if I were you. But if you want to come here, I'll arrange for you to come." I thanked her very much for the advice, and I went back to San Francisco and accepted to come to the Conservatory. Actually, I think if I remember correctly, I accepted to come here before I left town on that trip. We worked out the details and stuff like that. I didn't pay any tuition here, they paid for everything. And I came back at the appointed hour in September – I drove my little car across the United States and started studying here.

UPDIKE What year was that?

JONES That would have been 1974.

UPDIKE What was the atmosphere like at the Conservatory in 1974? What was the character of the school?

JONES That's difficult to say. It was entirely different than the New England Conservatory, partly because San Francisco was so different from Boston. The atmosphere of the city was way different from Boston. It's hardly possible to describe the atmosphere of the city at that time. It was so open – there seemed to be no rules against anything. It was open door everything – and I mean everything. The school itself, the physical facility of the school, was not very good. But they did the best they could in the space that they had. It was typical of what I think now – in the same way that the church is not the building, the church is the people – the school is not the building, the school is the faculty and the students, and their relationship to each other. And again, I felt like I had extraordinary experiences with the faculty here, just extraordinary. Not always positive, but extraordinary.

My biggest influence while I was here was Milton Salkind, who was the president at the time, he was my piano teacher. My work with Maxin in Boston had been very much about my fingers and about pedaling and texture and voicing and learning all kinds of things like that. Not about the mechanics of playing, but just about how to highlight certain things. Milton, when I got to him, emphasized for me a different way to hear music. Again, it was hardly ever about the mechanics of playing the piano, I felt like I had music lessons. I trust you understand the difference – he made me hear things in a different way. He made me hear my playing in a different way – he made me hear other peoples' playing in a different way – he made me listen to music in a different way. It was quite eye-opening and ear-opening, probably more.

I played occasionally for Peggy Salkind. Peggy taught me one of the best life lessons that I've ever learned. I don't remember what it was about, frankly, I just remember her telling me on the telephone, "Warren, never, ever be afraid to say no. You know when to say no, so do not be afraid. Say no, if that's the thing to say." That's a very big lesson to learn. I still quote that to my own students, and to people that ask me for advice, I tell them that all the time. We have to take advantage of the opportunities that come around, but we also have to know inside us when to say no, and to be courageous about that sometimes, and say no, about whatever it is in life that you are doing.

Another big influence on me when I was there – and again, for the same reason as the language ladies at the New England Conservatory – was the head of the voice department, a woman

named Lenoir Hosack. She was sort of a short, overweight lady who – I don't think in retrospect that she taught voice all that well, although her students were always singing. However, what she taught well was music. She had a certain spirit about music making that was right up there, as far as I'm concerned, with other people that I've encountered in my life. She had a practical can-do attitude about making music and about doing stuff that I always enjoyed very much. It was important for me to be around her a lot.

Other people that I think about here – I know in your questions you asked me about Wyatt Insko. I don't remember so much about Mr. Insko's teaching, per se, but what I remember about him was his huge curiosity about a large amount of stuff. And his ability to show us how to find out things in the library. Before I took that bibliography class with him, nobody had taken me to the library and shown me how to use the library. Not just how to find the book, but how to navigate my way around the library. That was very valuable for me, it really was. It was partly because his sense of curiosity was absolutely contagious, to make you want to go and find stuff, and figure out how to solve a problem in the library – how to find the information and get the stuff that you needed. All of that in a way is becoming less useful because of the internet, but using the internet in a similar way is eye-opening. But rooting around in the library is very fascinating stuff, it's amazing what you can find.

UPDIKE Could you describe the library on Ortega Street?

JONES Well, it was on the top floor on the west side of the building. It was very small – very small, I mean small. But they had a fair number of books, and there was some inter-library loaning and stuff like that. The books that they had were all for me interesting. You could get around in the library but it was painfully small. The whole building was sort of bursting at the seams, there was so much stuff there that just couldn't all fit into the building. They eventually moved into this one.

UPDIKE So you came to the Conservatory in 1974 – did you come before Hellman Hall was built?

JONES Yes, because it was built …

UPDIKE I think it was built in '76.

JONES Yeah – see, I was only in school here for a year, and then I was taken on (after several times of saying no), I was taken on at the Opera House to work. And so I left school in the middle, after one year, and worked at the Opera House. When I got the word that I would be working at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, which was in 1977, I went back to the Conservatory, because I had a good deal of work done for the degree, and I only had to finish

certain things. They allowed me to come back – I had just sort of taken a leave of absence to work at the opera house, because I was working there full time. So I came back to the school, and finished the things that I needed to finish, and got the degree. I think the date on my degree is 1977 or something. I got it that spring.

UPDIKE How much more time did you have left to finish your degree?

JONES I did it in about half a year. It was fairly simple, I had done almost all the classroom stuff in the first year. I had some stray elective credits that I had to pick up, and I did for example an independent study in French, about French poetry, which was very illuminating for me. I had to do a couple more recitals. I remember I played one of my recitals in Hellman Hall. The first recital I played was in Temple Emanu-El, over on Quintara and Twenty-Second [Street] – or something like that. But the last recital I played was in Hellman Hall, I thought it was a very interesting program. I played the small *A Minor* Schubert sonata, and then there was a pause, and then I played a piece by Richard Strauss called *Enoch Arden*, I don't know if you know that piece or not, and Hosack narrated it. We did it uncut, the piece takes about an hour and twenty minutes. We did it with the pauses in the piece, so the recital had two pauses in it instead of one large intermission. I loved playing that piece, I would love to play it again. I have not yet, I've talked around to find someone to do it with, I haven't yet found someone who wants to – although I might be on to that. It's an astonishing poem by Tennyson, it's a melodrama. I love the story, the story is hair-raisingly good, and she read it beautifully.

UPDIKE So when you were at the Conservatory for your first year, what was your daily life like as a student? Did you live near the campus – or near the school?

JONES When I first came to San Francisco I took an apartment down in the Mission district, which was a mistake; I left that apartment after a month and moved into a room in the third story of a house in the Richmond district – at Balboa and maybe Twelfth – with a White Russian lady, if you know that expression. In the Russian revolution there were White Russians and Red Russians. The Red Russians were the communists, and the White Russians were the people who were loyalists to the Czar. Her family had been very much loyal to the Czar, and as a result they had been chased out of Russia and she had lived for a period in China, and then immigrated to San Francisco. She was a very charming lady – Mrs. Beasley – and I lived in her house for about a year and a half – in the top floor of the house. That was pretty fascinating, for many different reasons. Then I moved out and got an apartment on Twin Peaks, where I lived with a friend of mine – Mark Ackerman – for one year, who was also a grad student at the Conservatory. He left, and then I had the apartment to myself. He went to take a job in Texas, which he recently retired from, actually. He was an oboist. So I was not near to the school, but I had a car and I would just drive over, park the car, do my stuff and go home. I was always making money doing odd sorts of jobs – playing the piano, and stuff like that. I was

supporting myself. I think it's to my credit in a certain way – I never asked my parents for money after I went off to college. I made the money myself, and between my own earnings and scholarships I was able to do that. They sent me a little bit of money at one time to help pay for the tuition at New England one year, which I paid them back for. So I was able to live here and do stuff.

UPDIKE Did you see a lot of performances in San Francisco when you lived here in the '70s?

JONES Not so much. I was distracted. I was like the little nun playing the piano, and coming to this city … I had never experienced any kind of sexual energy like this city had, none ever. I in fairly short order had like three girlfriends and a couple of boyfriends … everybody was sleeping with everybody, that was what you did, you just slept around with everybody. And so that's what I did. So I was a little bit distracted for a good deal of the time. But occasionally I would go and see operas, or concerts, or stuff like that. Davies Hall was not here – this whole area looked entirely different. The Symphony was the Opera orchestra, and the Ballet orchestra – so the same orchestra did everything, the way the Vienna Philharmonic still does in Vienna – in San Francisco in those days it was the same arrangement. After I left here and went to New York is when they split the orchestra up and had the San Francisco Symphony, and the Opera orchestra, and the Ballet orchestra, and all the different orchestras – that was not that way when I was here. So there was not this huge amount of performances that there are here, now. It was really very much concentrated at the Opera House year-round. You had Ballet season, Opera season, Symphony season – that type of thing.

UPDIKE Do you remember any other students – I know you mentioned Mark Ackerman, who you shared an apartment with. Do you remember any other students from that time? Did you know Robin Sutherland when he was here?

JONES I did. I didn't have so much to do with Robin. I don't know why that is – Robin was working already by the time I came here. He was doing some sub work, and was probably almost taken on at the Symphony, because he was the Symphony pianist for many years, I think. I never was around him that much. And I don't remember many of the singers that I was here with. I remember some of the pianists – I think you mentioned in your questions Rob Losby, who I remember from being here at that time. He's now working for Steinway in New York. There was a baritone who I was very close to named Richard Poppino who lives now in Portland, Oregon, I think. Let's see – I was very good friends with a bass named Greg Salazar, who taught me a very fundamental lesson one day about my health. He wanted to go to the beach, and I'm not a beach person, but he wanted to go and I was going to go. But when the day came to go to the beach – for a good deal of my life at that point, from the time that I was six until I want to say my early thirties, I suffered from severe headaches. Just debilitating

headaches, where I would have to lie down in a room with no light – the shades drawn – no light, no nothing, no sound, and just lie there for a day or two at a time while my head hurt. I had one of those headaches that day. He was this surfer dude type guy, and he said, "Hey man, let's go to the beach." I said, "Well Greg, I can't go, my head is hurting." He said, "What do you mean your head is hurting?" I said, "Well, I've got a really bad headache." And he said to me, "Well, hope you enjoy it!" Which infuriated me at the time, but then I started thinking about it, and I thought, "Huh. I wonder if I should try enjoying the headache. Because right now I'm suffering from the headache, but I'm suffering, so why shouldn't I enjoy it?" And my head started to feel better, and the headache went away. I thought, "Maybe he's onto something there." I was furious when he said it, but a few hours later I was thinking, "Maybe it's the right thing to do."

UPDIKE Did you go to the beach?

JONES No, he had gone to the beach, this was several hours later when my headache finally abated. My headaches actually, after that point, became very infrequent, and now I never have headaches anymore. But that line – "Well, I hope you enjoy it!" That was a big lesson for me. I also remember a man named Bill Banovetz, who was also an oboist, who was here. He was a very interesting personality too, very good friends with Mark, and thereby good friends with me. And a soprano named Michele McBride, who studied with Miss Hosack, and who eventually was married to a man I know who still lives in the East Bay – Michele now lives in New York, they've been divorced for a long time – but he remains a delightful person that I was very grateful to meet because of knowing her. But I don't remember a whole lot of people.

I do remember other faculty members. I had a very interesting time with another one of the voice teachers named Leopold Simoneau – I don't know if you know his name or not.

UPDIKE I do know his name, but I've never heard anything about him.

JONES He was a very fascinating man. To this today, as far as I'm concerned as an adult, his is the best recording of the Duparc songs. He was a light lyric tenor, who was faultlessly elegant in everything he did. He had a very successful performance at the Metropolitan one night as Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni* and walked out of the Opera House and canceled everything that he had to do – and stopped singing. He just stopped. Because, he said, he had had such a good time that night – he was probably fifty or so – and was looking around himself and seeing his colleagues age out, and he said he never, ever wanted to have that feeling that he was getting too old. He had had a particularly good performance of *Don Giovanni* that night at the Metropolitan, and just quit. Cold turkey, canceled everything and stopped singing in public. When I came here, he had started teaching at the Conservatory. Again, not a good voice teacher, but an impeccable stylist about music, and a fountain of information about how to be professional and what to do, and stuff like that. It was very interesting to be around him.

UPDIKE Did you participate in any festivals, programs or events that the Conservatory had in those years? Chamber Music West – that actually started the year that you left.

JONES Yeah, that started after I was gone.

UPDIKE Were there any music marathons, or did you participate in the Community Service project or the outreach programs?

JONES We did some things like that, where we would go to nursing homes, and things like that, and play and perform. I did things like that, yeah. But I don't remember participating – maybe I did, but I don't remember participating in any festivals, or things like that. I do remember doing community outreach, and things like that. Being around that.

UPDIKE So you went to nursing homes?

JONES We did, we would go wherever they sent us and perform some music – some songs or piano music or something like that. We never made a big thing out of it, we were just there to give some music to these people who couldn't get out to hear it in any other way. I've done that a lot in my life, so that wasn't a stretch for me at all. Partly from doing this gospel music when I was a kid, I mean, we were singing in all kinds of venues for all kind of different people, and just doing that kind of stuff. It was very valuable for me, but it's not particularly special as a memory.

UPDIKE And what kind of work were you doing for the Opera, when you left the Conservatory to work for them?

JONES I was on the music staff, as the assistant conductor. In those days they didn't have training programs in the young artist programs and stuff like that – they just took you on. Mr. Adler must have heard me play at one point. Before I went on full-time at the Opera House I had been asked to sort of curate and perform in a thing called Brown Bag Opera, which was a program from the Opera House that brought lunchtime performances to venues all over the city. They would take a little upright piano and plop it down in the middle of someplace, and declare that this was going to be a performance. I would be responsible for putting the program together, rehearsing the program, and performing the program. Again, that was a very valuable performing experience for me, to do that. I learned to perform under just about any circumstance – just play the piano. Just shut up and play the piano. Mr. Adler heard me at one of those, and turned around – I heard him, this was a very loud discussion – "Who is that person playing the piano?" The person said that it was Warren Jones, and he was screaming – he went nuclear

straight off and said, "Why isn't he working at the Opera House?" They were like, "Well … well, we just haven't had the chance…." And he said, "Well, hire him!" He was screaming at the person that I had to be taken on at the Opera House, and so I was taken on at the Opera House. In the first rehearsal that he heard me, we were out at Stern Grove for a Merola performance of *Carmen*. I was very overweight in those days, and I didn't have much money. The only clothes that I had to wear that fit were bib overalls. Do you know what those are? Like farmer overalls. And it was very hot that day, it was in the summertime, and I had on a big old straw hat, that was, you know, this wide [gestures]. So I'm sitting there playing the third act of *Carmen*, and here comes Mr. Adler. I had no idea that he would be there – I'm just sitting there in my bibs, and my big straw hat, playing *Carmen*. He walked up and said [in accent] "Young man, you play the piano very well." I said, "Oh, well thank you Mr. Adler. I have to apologize for the way I'm dressed …" Before I could say anything else, he said, "Well, considering how you talk, it sort of fits." I said, "Oh, well, okay." So that was that. But I always had a very good relationship with Mr. Adler, I liked him very much. I know he didn't always hit other people well, but one thing that I learned from him (or I learned in doing the job with him), he would constantly ask for the music staff's advice. It was interesting for me – I was by far the youngest person on the staff – I was like, twenty-two or twenty-three or something. He would ask our advice, and I would patiently sit there and watch my colleagues all try to figure out what they thought he wanted to hear, and then they would say that. I would just tell him what I thought, secure in the knowledge that he ran the Opera House, and he was going to make the decision, and I couldn't take it personally. I would give him my opinion, and he would make up his mind. If he didn't take my advice, fine – it was his Opera House, it wasn't my Opera House – so, don't get upset. And I learned to do that, to just give my unvarnished opinion when he asked for it, and otherwise, just do my job. I think he always appreciated that. A lot of times he took my opinion seriously in making the decision, because he knew that I was telling him the truth as I saw it, instead of just trying to make something up. Again, to this day, I do that. If people ask what I think, I tell them what I think. Because a lot of times they're paying me for my opinion. I tell them what I think, and they make their decision, and that's fine.

UPDIKE It's always best to be honest.

JONES Yeah, and I had the same experience at the Metropolitan. When Levine would ask my opinion about something, I would just say, "This is what I think." And he would make up his mind. It was fine, he was running the Opera House, and I was not. That was a valuable thing for me, to get out of that … but that's how I've been.

UPDIKE Could you describe how you think the Conservatory has changed today, from when you were first here in the '70s?

JONES You know, I read that question … I can't really discuss that because I'm not around the school enough to know. In a certain way I wish I had more to do with the school, but so far that hasn't worked out. I mean, I contribute money and stuff like that, but I'm not asked to come here and give classes or anything like that. I don't know what the school is. And for sure, I don't know what it's like as a student, I don't have any idea about that. I don't think I'll ever know what that is. Even if I came here to teach, or give classes, or whatever – one's perception of the school is different than if you are in the trenches – in the army – as a sophomore, trying to figure out the school.

UPDIKE What have your interactions been with the Conservatory since you left? I think someone had told me you came for a Fanfare Luncheon, and you were given an honorary doctorate in 2010.

JONES I was, yeah. I gave the commencement speech that year. Giving the commencement address that day was very interesting, because when I was in high school, I was on the debate team, and I was never one to write out things. I would just stand up and speak extemporaneously about stuff. But for the commencement speech, I thought, "This is the very first time I've been asked to do this, and I need to think about this." It was pretty funny, because I was sitting there on the stage, and the first thing that happened was a lady passed out on the stage – do you know about that?

UPDIKE I didn't know about that.

JONES I was sitting there, listening to this woman who represented the undergrads talk. And out of the side of my glasses (I don't have perfect peripheral vision, but I'm trained to look out the side of my glasses so I know what's going on) and I saw someone start to walk towards me, and start to stagger. She literally fell right there beside me, and was just passed out on the floor in the middle of the speech. Everyone was like, "Oh, my God! Ahh! What to do!" No one was doing anything! I thought, "Okay, well first we need to get people away from her and get her arranged, and call an ambulance or something." It turned out she was dehydrated and overheated. But anyway, when it finally proceeded – slowly, one by one, the speakers (there were about four speakers before me) had very patiently said everything that I wanted to say. I was sitting there going, "Well … okay, I'll throw that part of the speech out …" Eventually I wound up getting up and speaking extemporaneously. I just got up and started talking. I regarded it as a fairly important job. I remember commencement speeches that I heard, both my junior year at the New England Conservatory, and my senior year. The junior year was one of the most hateful speeches I can imagine, and the senior – when I graduated – was one of the best speeches I can imagine. Having heard both of them, I was quite serious about this. I talked about being excellent, and told them how important it was. I've been surprised in the years since then (it's been like three years or something) I'm surprised by how many people have come up to me and

told me that they remember what I said. I don't really remember what I said, but I remember the gist of it, so I was pleased that I was able to phonate and say something when the time came, so that was good.

UPDIKE I have kind of a broad question here, so I'll ask it and maybe we can go into some more specifics. What are some of the more memorable performances that you've done after leaving the Conservatory? I know that there are hundreds and hundreds and hundreds. I guess first – where did you go right after the Conservatory? You went to the Met?

JONES I did. I went to the Metropolitan Opera in New York, and I worked there for six years full-time, and then I was four more years doing selected operas – not working there full-time. So I was a total of ten years in the Metropolitan Opera, which were an education unlike anything you can imagine. The Opera House here [San Francisco] in those days had prepared me in a certain way to be at the Metropolitan, but nothing could really prepare you for that kind of corporate music making, where you work in a music factory and there is going to be a show at night no matter what happens. The machine is not going to stop. The machine is working and the machine is going to produce a performance that night, at whatever cost it is – human or financial or whatever – there will be a show in the evening. In a certain way that is reassuring, but there's a great deal of pressure involved, because you have to know that something is going to happen at night. So every day there is pressure on you to get something out that night, and that's unlike this place. When we would do every night here, when I worked in San Francisco, that was always the end of the season when everything had been rehearsed. Then you just played it out – like the last ten days or so, every night was a performance. We only performed like four nights a week here, and the other nights were dark for rehearsals, because the only rehearsal space was on the stage, where you could viably rehearse with the orchestra. These days it's different because they can rehearse things in different locations, it's not like in Zellerbach. But being at the Metropolitan in that situation was very much eye-opening. The pressures involved in it were severe, but I learned a great deal. A great deal. When I went there, the first year (in that first season) I had to learn nineteen operas.

UPDIKE My gosh.

JONES We were expected to know everything in the repertoire, and there were twenty-five operas in the repertoire, and I only knew six of them. So I had to learn nineteen new operas for that season. Well, that was an impossibility. I did the best I could, I was swimming constantly, musically, upstream – believe me. But quickly I got onto about a hundred and twenty-five operas that I could rehearse without too much anxiety. That was what the workload was. They could call me and say, "You're going to play *Rigoletto's* third act tomorrow," and I'd say, "Fine," and just go do it. So that was quite something. A lot of people, when they go in the opera house, their piano playing goes to hell. I was determined that mine was not going to go to

hell. I've always been fascinated about all the other stuff that goes on in an opera house. Past the music making, it's the most inclusive art form – there's every kind of fine art going on there, all at the same time in this humongous team effort to put something on. I'm fascinated by the music, probably most of all, but all of the staging and the diction and the language and the technical work – how this and that happens and what you have to do – unionize, to coordinate the breaks – it's this unending amount of stuff to know. I was curious about all of that. So I would spend every rehearsal learning as much about all that stuff as I could. Learning about – "Why do they have to do this?" And – "What's that about?" I would openly ask questions about things. And likewise, learning about how to play the piano. If I had to repeat a passage, I didn't just repeat it because I had to, I actively was practicing the passage when I repeated it, and trying to get it better in my hands.

At a certain point I was offered to play some concerts, and I wanted to play them, and I started asking out of the Opera House. Eventually I had a meeting with Levine over dinner, where I told him that I really wanted to play more in public than I was, and I felt like I was playing well enough that I should be heard someplace other than the C level stage at the Metropolitan. I pointed out to him that he had had a similar experience with Szell, who was working for the Cleveland Orchestra, which I knew was true, and Szell had let him go – had let him work his way out of being an assistant at Cleveland, and eventually Levine got himself that career. I wanted the same kind of thing, where I could slowly work myself – do less and less at the Opera House and do more concerts. I said, "I don't have any complaint about how you have treated me, because I enjoy working here. This is a gas, we're putting on stuff, and I'm delighted to be in the middle of it, but there are other things in life that I want to do." And he understood entirely, and was entirely supportive about it.

So I started working my way out of the Opera House and doing more concerts, and traveling a great deal. It was sometimes a little bit hairy. There were a lot of different strange things that happened. Like, going out of the 96th Street subway stop one time – I had a chamber music concert in Texas that I was going to play, in like … I'm going to say five days. I was walking along a wall, and I did not see this thing that was protruding from the wall, and when I went past it I hit my forearm right below the elbow – this ring was there to put a chain across the exit, if you wanted to close the exit – and I literally just whacked it full speed right there. My arm was just about paralyzed for three days or so. I called the people in San Antonio and said, "I don't know if I'm going to play this concert tonight. You need to find someone else who knows this music in case I can't be there." But at the same time we were doing *Flying Dutchman* at the Opera House. *Flying Dutchman* is a pretty formidable play, and I played the piano at that rehearsal with my left hand, because I couldn't use my right hand to play, and I just figured out how to play the opera with one hand, and I got through fine. It was a big lesson for me about exactly how little I can play and still be viable in the rehearsal.

In my first season there (I was playing *Fidelio*), there was a disagreement – a very vocal disagreement between the cover conductor and the chorus master that morning before the rehearsal. The chorus master was really mad about the outcome of that argument, because it didn't go the way he wanted it to. He was just itching for a fight at every turn that day. You could tell he was just unbelievably mad – this man had a volcanic temper. At the end of the rehearsal, he turned around (first he chewed out the entire chorus on stage in front of everybody – the whole company was on stage) and then he turned to me and said, without any provocation at all, he said, "And Mr. Jones," he said this in front of everybody – everybody was there – he said, "And Mr. Jones, if you care to continue to double those octaves in that first act trio, and sound like the whore house pianist that you are, you just go right ahead!" I said, "Ummm … thank you for your opinion." I was distraught at having been called a whore house pianist in front of everybody at the Metropolitan Opera. I had several friends who still lived here in San Francisco – in those days we had to pay long-distance, because long-distance was still long-distance. My phone bill was through the roof, because I just wanted to cut my wrists and slit my throat and drink poison and everything like that! I was calling everyone and saying, "What am I going to do?! What am I going to do?!" But I lived through it, it was all right. And I got even eventually, so it was okay. It was all right. But that's where I was after I left here. And playing more and more concerts in sort of wacky places. In Japan, I played at this Buddhist temple on a mountaintop for a bunch of Buddhist nuns with Kiri Te Kanawa, for a concert that was taped for Japan Airlines and was played for the next year on Japan Airlines. It was the most beautiful place you can imagine – this monastery with beautiful trees and mountains all around it – they had a Steinway and we played a concert with all of these monks sitting there. It was quite something, it was quite amazing to do things like that. There have been a lot of concerts like that that are memorable to me.

UPDIKE Who are some of the other musicians who you worked with when you were at the Metropolitan?

JONES Well, just about everybody that came through there that was famous, I was around. I worked a good deal with Luciano Pavarotti, and he was fascinating to work with on a one-to-one basis, as well as in a rehearsal, which I did a fair amount of with him. But I also would go to his apartment sometimes and work with him one-on-one, and that was enlightening. He never worked more than sixty minutes at a time, and he didn't work less than sixty minutes. The clock was the clock, and he worked for one hour, not more and not less. In the hour he had one requirement about his work, and that was that he wanted to walk away from that hour's work with some positive result. He did not care how big or how little it was, he wanted a positive result out of every hour that he worked. He was never satisfied to walk away negative from something, he wanted positive – that could mean that he learned one phrase well, it could mean that he solved one high note well, it could mean that he learned an act, that he solved a duet or something like that. I was always impressed by that, because he didn't read music so he relied

very much on his ear, and on the person who was teaching him, to teach it to him correctly. Believe me, if he learned it incorrectly, it was going to be incorrect for the rest of his life, because he did not change things. So it was a big responsibility to teach him something, because you knew that you were teaching what the world was going to hear for the rest of his life, because he just couldn't change it. That was the kind of personality he was. So I was around him a good deal, and baritones like Cornell MacNeil, I don't know if you know his name or not, who just had the largest baritone voice you can imagine. He stopped me in a *Rigoletto* rehearsal one time, he just put out his hand and said, "Son! Son!" I stopped and looked at him – he said, "There's no baritone here that can sing that tempo, now just slow down a little bit." I said, "Okay, Mr. MacNeil, no problem, I'll play it slower!"

I was around Beverly Sills a fair amount when she was singing. A lot of different people – there's a pretty long list – I can't think of them all. Anyone that was there, I was playing for them, just about. The person I was not around, interestingly enough, was Mr. Domingo. I don't know if it was because I played a good deal for Luciano, or what that was about, but there seemed to be some kind of dichotomy – I was never asked into rehearsals with Mr. Domingo, which I didn't understand. I don't think that those two men had a particularly bad feeling for each other, it's just that I was sort of segregated on that account. In the same way, I played a good deal both here in San Francisco and in New York for Carol Vaness, but I was never asked for rehearsals for Ashley Putnam, who was another soprano who was singing basically the same repertoire as Carol, and is now a colleague of mine at Manhattan School. But I was never in rehearsal with her. And this is a very gifted soprano who had a very illustrious career, and I never was around her for a single rehearsal, and I don't know why that is. But that's just how it worked. But I was around Marilyn Horne a great deal, and I still am because we're colleagues down in Santa Barbara at the Music Academy. I don't know, just a bunch of people. Paul Plishka and Martti Talvela. One of the most important people that I met at the Metropolitan, and did a great many concerts and recordings with was Håkan Hagegård, this Swedish baritone – I played a great deal of concerts for him. He was very important to me in my professional life – his whole means of what he was performing, and his whole ethos about what was important to him, was a big deal for me – a very big deal for me. And he just sang beautifully, from beginning to end. He was one of these people who didn't have any barriers in his singing – he just opened his mouth and it came out. He was a delight, always, on stage, to be with – to just play the piano, and he would sing beautifully.

UPDIKE When we left off yesterday, we were talking about some of the performers that you've worked with over the years. I guess my next question would be – today, how much choice do you have in the choice of repertoire that you play, and with the artists that you work with? I know that you have a very busy, full calendar. Are there things that you turn down? Are there artists that you seek out to work with?

JONES I do not accept things. Mostly that's because I either cannot do it – I enjoy learning music and meeting people and stuff like that, but sometimes I just can't do things because I'm busy already. The things that I do … I have input about what I'm going to play. I sort of always have, which I like. I don't perform with people that I don't like, but that's just because either I don't want to, or they don't ask me. If people don't get along, there's no reason to not get along in public. I've done concerts with some people – we did a few concerts, and it was not optimum, and everyone just sort of said, "Thank you." And that was that. It's for me not any big deal – some people just get along better than others do.

The chamber music that I play – I'm in this group down in Santa Barbara called Camerata Pacifica, and the programming for that is decided by the man who runs the group, Adrian Spence, he's the founder of the group. He ultimately decides that, but he is very flexible and very willing to accede to any considerations that any of us have about the repertoire. He is very vigorous about commissioning new works and playing new works. There's one composer in particular – I told him I would never play any of that man's music again because I don't find that it's good piano music and I'm not interested in spending my time learning it. There are a lot of people that want to play concerts that would gladly learn that music to play the gig, but I'm not one of them, so I don't play his music anymore. But that's about how it is. Most of the recitals that I do with singers, to this day (or with instrumentalists) I have a pretty good hand in helping to select the repertoire. There's a huge amount of repertoire out there, and it's fairly easy, given what people are good at – what people want to do, what people can do, what the audience likes – even putting all of those filters on it, you still have a huge body of repertoire to perform that's available. So it's not ever a problem.

UPDIKE So I guess you might already feel like you have this opportunity, but I wanted to ask – if you had unlimited funding and any venue in the world, and any performer to work with, and any repertoire that you wanted to choose, what would you do?

JONES Oh, I can't answer that question, I don't have any idea. I'd have to think about that, I can't answer it off the top of my head. I don't tend to think about things like that. I don't sit around idly daydreaming about things that I'd like to do, because I'm too busy doing the stuff that I'm doing. I wouldn't know how to answer that.

UPDIKE A couple of years ago you received an award, which was for the best collaborative pianist of the year?

JONES It was for Collaborative Pianist of the Year in 2010.

UPDIKE Collaborative Pianist of the Year. Could you talk about being a collaborative pianist? The type of relationship that you have with the performers that you work with?

JONES Sure. First thing you should know about the award that I got for that year – that year seemed to be the year that I got several awards, I don't know why, it just seemed to happen that way – Musical America is a publication based in New York City, which is published all over the world, either in print or online. Each year they devise five categories and give out awards. There's not a Collaborative Pianist of the Year every year. They've only actually give that award twice in the history of giving the awards. They gave it one time I think in 1998 to Martin Katz. And then they've given it to me, and those are the only two that they've ever given it to. So they don't do that yearly. They will do things like – they may have Instrumentalist of the Year, or Singer or the Year, or Conductor of the Year. The one thing they always have is a category called Musician of the Year – which is like an overarching thing – that they give every year. The other ones they give – like violinist of the year – they figure out a category and award something. Let's see, now my brain is fried – what was the second part of the question?

UPDIKE To talk about the relationship of the pianist with the performer.

JONES Well … I'll talk about it in my terms, which I suppose is what you want to hear. When I was an undergrad in college, I tried to prepare myself for three possible career paths that I saw in front of me. As far as I could tell, these were my three possible career paths. They were: solo piano, teaching, or being a collaborative musician. The solo piano sort of evaporated toward the end of my junior year in college, because I became aware of the fact that I was spending an inordinate amount of time by myself practicing, and I didn't like that. I didn't like being by myself making music. I wasn't getting any input from anybody else in the music making, and so my battery was just running and discharging energy, and I wasn't getting pumped up from anybody else. I missed that interaction that you have making music with other people. I didn't quit studying solo piano, but I sort of pushed that to the side and thought about teaching. I thought, "Well, I probably don't know enough right now to teach." I was only twenty. There are some people who try teaching at twenty, and I'm not convinced there's anything to teach at twenty, really. The only one that was left, just by process of elimination, was making music with people, which I'd always enjoyed doing. It's not that it's in third place, it just happened to be the one that didn't fall away. I was very glad to be doing that.

The thing I like about making music with other people is exactly that question of having a musical conversation with people, and feeling their energy on stage. And so I sort of embarked on doing that seriously, and I've always been rewarded by that. But I do what I tell my students to do, which is to do as many different kinds of music as you can. Because playing solo music is the only way to develop one's personality. When we make music together, it's necessary to bring my personality to the table in that transaction, and put my personality and my ideas, and my thoughts and practices with somebody else's to see what happens. If I don't have my own, then there's no musical transaction in a certain way. So it's important to play solo music, as far as I'm concerned, and I always have my students playing constantly – at least one solo piece – so they keep their personality in some place in their music making. They have a corner where their personality is paramount, and is the thing that drives things. All the other kinds of music making that we do – like chamber music, if we're playing quintets or trios or sextets or playing in an orchestra, anything like that – everything informs all the other stuff. That includes conducting.

I learned so much playing chamber music that I bring to conducting. Each time that I conduct, I learn more about doing all the other stuff. Everything is working together to do that. The relationship that I have with other people, when I'm making music with them, is very difficult to explain. That's not an easy nut to crack. It's like in D.H. Lawrence – have you read *Women in Love*? Do you remember the description of the more discussed love affair in that book, which is of the author and the woman he's in love with? He describes their love for each other as "Two planets circling each other." It's not like one of the planets is primary and one is secondary, but rather that they each have their own orbit, and their orbit is around each other. So it's all sort of happening at the same time, and that's the kind of attitude I like to have about making music with other people. I come with my ideas, they come with their ideas. It's one of the reasons why, for example, I don't coach people – singers or instrumentalists – I don't coach people on music that I'm going to perform with them. Because coaching, or teaching, sets up a hierarchy that is very difficult to get past. Where one person knows, and the other person doesn't know. Because playing with somebody requires you to be an equal with them, and you come with the ideas. The best way that I try to prepare for any kind of rehearsal with other people is to learn and explore all the possibilities that I can see; and know the possibilities, and then go to the rehearsal. Frequently, what I thought was all the possibilities is a few of the possibilities. Because someone else comes to the rehearsal with some other possibility that I have to put into my record and then balance how that works. Likewise, I may give them a possibility they hadn't thought about. Frequently, the end result is something that neither one of us had thought about initially, if everyone's working together. All that's sort of predicated on people having respect for one another and being open and accepting in the rehearsal process, which is what's required, frankly. Because if someone is not open and accepting of the rehearsal process, I'm not interested in playing with them. I'm not interested in making music with those people, I'm just not. So that's the best I can tell you about how that works.

UPDIKE You told me yesterday that there was one time in your life when you stopped during a public performance?

JONES Yes, the only time I've only stopped so far … I'm sixty-two now, I've played in public for like fifty-seven years, and I've only stopped once. That was during a concert at the University of Florida in Gainesville. It was a recital with Kiri Te Kanawa, the soprano from New Zealand. I was playing this tour of concerts with her by memory, which I used to do … I do less and less now … I don't go out in concert and play by memory unless I am one hundred percent certain of it. The fact is that I'm getting older and older, and my memory is just not what it was. It's still good sometimes, but back then I played a lot of things by memory. I was playing these particular concerts by memory, and one of the things we were doing were the Rachmaninoff *Vocalise*, which she sang beautifully. I have several different ways of memorizing things, depending on what's being memorized. The Rachmaninoff *Vocalise*, because it doesn't have a recognizable structure like ABA or variations or sonata form or whatever … it's basically a through-composed beautiful piece of music that begins here, and goes there, and then ends there. The best way I can describe the way I memorized that piece is what I call string method, which is like a string of events where one thing leads to another, which leads to another and another and then you're at the end.

So, in this concert in Gainesville, I had played many concerts with Kiri and done a lot of operas with her. She had a spectacular voice, it was an unbelievable sound, on a daily basis – that's just how she sang. But in this concert, I started the Rachmaninoff, and she started singing, and the third phrase that she sang took on a sound in her voice that I had never heard before. It was the most beguiling … it was like this magical sound that was just ringing my body. I cannot describe to you what that felt like; I was just entirely bewitched by what I was hearing. I just couldn't play, I literally couldn't play. I had no idea where I was, I didn't know anything about the music. I wouldn't know what note to play next, I was just totally taken by this sound. I put my hands in my lap. She is fairly well-known for not having a good memory, which I think is unfair, she has an excellent memory. But she's stopped in public before, because she forgot something, for whatever reason. So I stopped playing … she kept on singing for a little bit, and then I wasn't playing, so she turned around and I just looked at her. There were three-thousand people in the auditorium. I looked at her and I said, "I cannot play, it's too beautiful." She looked at me with a slightly quizzical look, and I said, "I can't play." And we both started laughing. I'm sure the three-thousand people were wondering, "What the hell are they laughing about, because the thing just fell apart?" But we were both laughing, and I couldn't remember anything about the piece. We had to skip it, I couldn't go on to play it. It's funny, we walked off the stage when we came off after that group – it was a whole group of songs – when we came off she said, "I'm glad to know that you're bloody human, finally – that you actually make mistakes." And we went on to do the rest of the concert. It was really some moment.

UPDIKE Could you tell me what the first time was when you conducted a piece, or an ensemble? Do you remember?

JONES The very first time was when I was in high school. It was the high school band. I had a lot of fun. We had an arrangement for high school concert band of the theme from a movie called *The Apartment*, which had won the Academy Award in 1960. It was a very popular melody, and my band director at that time let me conduct it in a performance. It was a lot of fun. The melody is very beautiful, if you heard it you would probably recognize it. It's played with Muzak today, but back then it was a very popular song. But that was my first time to conduct that way. I did not catch the bug to conduct – I didn't have to conduct the next day or anything like that.

UPDIKE But you've had a lot of conducting experience in your life?

JONES I haven't had a lot of it, no. You know, an amount … but I wouldn't call it a lot. I've kept my conducting professionally to those situations where – first off, where it was something that I really wanted to do, and something that I had time to do and time to rehearse, and that I felt like had some kind of a reasonable expectation of being successful. I can't imagine being a young conductor who just runs from one orchestra to the next – to the next – to the next – to the next, with two or three rehearsals and you grind out a program and then you go to the next one, have two or three rehearsals, and grind out a program…. I cannot imagine that kind of treadmill existence, I don't have any interest in doing that. My next conducting is going to be this November and December in Houston, and then next summer I'm going to come back here and conduct again – but it's not something that I'm burning up about doing. I enjoy it when I do it, so that's good. It's another part of music making, as far as I'm concerned.

UPDIKE Are there some memorable conductors that you've worked with over the years as a performer that you'd like to talk about?

JONES Yes. Of course, probably the person that I've had the most experience with is James Levine at the Metropolitan. When I was working there he was in his heyday, and could do anything he wanted to do. It was quite wonderful to be around him. I did a lot of music preparation for him. It was very uncanny, I don't ever recall disagreeing with him about something. It's just that we seemed for whatever reason to look at music the same way. It was a wonderful sensation to prepare to do a set of rehearsals for him, because he usually did not come to piano rehearsals at all, and I would be by myself or with one colleague. We would prepare the piece and then hand it over to him to conduct with the orchestra. It was always a wonderful experience to know that the work that we did was now going to get better because of his abilities. That was quite something, to do that. There were a lot of other conductors that I played for and

worked as an assistant to, while I was at the Metropolitan, like [Nicola] Rescigno, who was a conductor who conducted [Maria] Callas a lot. He had an unbelievable wealth of experience … he didn't have a very good stick technique or anything, but he very deeply felt the music and how the music was supposed to go, and showed that. Working with some people like the Italian conductor Nello Santi, who is still alive today and conducting … pretty amazing Italian conductor. Or Giuseppe Patanè, who again – he just had all of that Italian music under his hand like nobody's business.

I did have one fascinating meeting one time with Bernstein in his apartment in New York, where I went in with a young tenor who was auditioning for him. I was with him for about an hour and a half. That was a very memorable afternoon, probably for many wrong reasons. What could have happened that afternoon musically didn't, because of a lot of sexual innuendo that was going on in the room between Bernstein and the tenor. I really made every effort to stay as far in the wallpaper as I could, and was just watching, but he was a fascinating person to watch, even in that circumstance. I also had occasional interactions in Salzburg, when I was working in the festival there, with Karajan, who was very kind to me. I did not know that everybody that worked in Salzburg in the days that I worked there, everybody had to go past Karajan. I had been hired without going past Karajan, because Levine had wanted me to come. We had one particular rehearsal, where I was running the rehearsal myself – I was playing and conducting the rehearsal of *Magic Flute*. Everyone was very well mannered that night. This was the final piano rehearsal of the opera, before the general rehearsal with the orchestra. We only had one rehearsal with the orchestra, and then they were going to put it on. Everyone was incredibly well mannered that night, and singing really beautifully. I thought, "Well, this has been a really good rehearsal." And then I turned around, and who was sitting in the back row, but Mr. Karajan, who had been watching the whole rehearsal and apparently had come in to see me run the rehearsal, to see what I was doing. He didn't say anything to me, I just saw him in the back – but someone told me he had been there the entire time. And that's why everyone was so well behaved, probably, because he was running the festival. But the next day I had an invitation to come to his office. There was a young bass from the country of Georgia, [Paata] Burchuladze, and we did some work with him. I was there occasionally to work with him. He was the most charming man, he really was. A very gentle sort of person. It was amazing to be around him in that situation. I never did an opera with him or anything like that, I just was with him in his office playing while he was coaching and conducting.

UPDIKE Who are some of the composers that you've worked closely with over the years?

JONES Composers I've worked closely with? Not too many. I'm doing this new opera this year, and I anticipate working with Iain Bell, who is a young British composer. I have the score already for the opera, and I'm learning it and writing to him occasionally about things

that I'm wondering about, and stuff like that. Probably the most sustained work that I ever did with a composer was here in San Francisco when I prepared the premiere performances of Andrew Imbrie's opera, *Angle of Repose,* which was probably in 1976. It was pretty much a sprawling work with a very large orchestra. It is a story of one part of the California gold rush and how things work out in life, and that's what *Angle of Repose* is about – about the angle at which things fall to and find their resting spot, like in a landslide for example. Things keep moving, and then at a certain point everything is sort of satisfied and it sits there. That's what I think the title is about, anyway. Because it was about many different characters – it was a large cast. He was there for a lot of the rehearsals, we were working together. That was very fascinating.

UPDIKE Could you tell me about some of the more – I know you've done a lot of recordings and recording sessions in your life – but are there some more memorable recordings or recording session that you'd like to talk about?

JONES Well, let's see. My first one – because it has to do with the Conservatory here. I was asked by Decca (in those days, Decca was a big recording label) – I had made one recording of *Schöne Müllerin* of Schubert for Albany Records, I think it was. Then I was asked for a recording with Samuel Ramey, the very famous American bass, to do a recording of Copland and Ives. This was going to be done in England, in St. James Hall. It was mostly repertoire that we had been doing on a tour, and they had heard us perform and wanted to lay it down on a disk. There were two songs on the disk that are by any standards unplayable. One is called *Charlie Rutlage,* and the other is *The Circus Band*. They're unplayable because there are simply too many notes in the piano part for two hands to do. And so I called Milton, and I said, "Milton, I have a small problem here. I'm going to go to London and record this music. I don't know this record producer – what if I get in there and he gets sticky about wanting to hear these particular notes, when the ones I'm playing are the other ones and I can't reach those notes?" There was a pause, and Milton said, "Well, Warren, probably he's not going to do that. Because he'll be amazed that you can play all the notes that you're playing, so don't worry about it too much." He said, "If he wants it done another way, you can do it another way, but I wouldn't worry about it too much." And he was entirely right. The man never even questioned the notes I was playing, because I was already playing so many of them that he probably couldn't tell that I wasn't playing all of them. In both the songs – because both the songs had similar problems on the last page. Ives wrote a commentary about those pieces where he made the point that when Beethoven wrote the *Ninth Symphony*, the orchestra said it couldn't be played, that it was too difficult. And now every community orchestra plays the *Ninth Symphony*. But in his day, it was unplayable, according to the musicians. And Ives makes a comment in an essay writing about these types of songs – he said, "Just because people can't play it," (and he admitted that people can't play it), "Just because people can't play it, doesn't mean that I shouldn't write it. It's what I

want to write down, and so you take your choice, and play what you can play." And so that's what I did. That was a fascinating thing.

Probably one of my most memorable single days of recording (I've done something like thirty recordings) was actually up in Marin County at the Skywalker Ranch. It was a recording for EMI with the soprano who used to sing here at the San Francisco Opera named Ruth Ann Swenson. We were engaged by EMI to do a disk of her singing. On the third day of the recording – most singers can sing for a few hours a day, and then they'll get tired. But Ruth Ann sang so beautifully and so easily, and she knew exactly how she was singing and was totally on top of her technique. That one particular day, from the time we started until the time we finished, we had ten hours of recorded sound. I don't mean that we were working ten hours – we had ten hours of recorded sound. And she was still singing beautifully at the end of the day. The producer actually called it off – he said, "I cannot listen to any more music. My brain is fried and I cannot hear any more, we have to stop." And she came back the next day and put down four more hours of music. To this day, it's maybe my favorite disk that I've recorded because she sings so beautifully and I love Ruth Ann for her personality and her humanity. She just sang so beautifully on it, and I love listening to it to this day. It's an amazing thing.

UPDIKE Could you talk briefly about what a typical recording session is like for a professional musician?

JONES Well, it's different now than it used to be. By about the second or third recording that I did, I got on to the concept that the recording was a great deal about the producer and the engineer. It was not so much about me, or about the singer or the instrumentalist. Because what we had to do was to give them as high quality information – which is what we're giving them, digital information – we have to give them high quality digital information, which they will arrange. The possibilities for editing are unbelievable. For example, my recording of the Harbison's *Mirabai Songs*, which still (and I'm surprised by this) to this day is still the only piano recording of those songs. They're very important songs that Harbison composed, on a very important subject. He wrote them in two versions – for a small instrumental ensemble of about ten or twelve people, and then he also wrote a version for piano. The instrumental version has been recorded I think probably two or three times by different groups, but I still have the only piano recording of those songs. That's pretty amazing, because they're fairly standard repertoire at this point for young or advanced singers. When we recorded the songs, the first song the soprano wanted to leave until last. Needless to say, that was the hardest one. By the time we got there, at the end of four days of doing this recording (it was a recording of all women poets and men composers, that was the theme of the disk and was paid for by some foundation that had an interest in that literary concept) I was so tired by the time we got to that first song that I could not play two bars in a row together right. It wasn't happening. I just about gave up, and started literally playing very short passages and they hooked it all together and it sounds beautiful. But I

can tell you (I've played that piece in public a lot, and I've played it well in public) but in that recording session I never played it – not the way it sounds. But it was put together and that's what it is. They can do amazing things.

Anyway, I got onto the idea that what I'm doing is giving them as high quality information as I can. Even this past January when I recorded more Harbison (this was with the group here in California) for me, recording for me is having really souped up, jacked up, concentration – so I can just continue to play well hour after hour. Starting wherever they want to start, however they want to put it together, and giving them good information so they can have a good performance. And you have to learn how to do that. A lot of people go into recording sessions and feel a moral obligation to play from the front to the back, and then if they miss something two-thirds of the way through, well – they start at the front and go to the back again. And then they miss something else, and they think, "Well, it's not organic." And I think, "Well, it's not organic, but a good engineer will make it organic." Some people object to that, but that's just how life is. That's how it's done. That's the best I can tell you about that.

Oh, I can think of one other funny story. I recorded one thing in the Châtelet Theater in Paris – this was again with Ramey – this was for Sony – where the second half of the disk was more popular songs like Cole Porter and Gershwin – that type of song – where basically I had a lead sheet and I just sort of made it up. I would play whatever I wanted to play. Well, that was okay, as long as we were recording it straight ahead. But when we started to make patches, I had no idea what I'd played because it wasn't written down, it was literally just improvising. The producer said, "How am I supposed to do that?" I looked at him and said, "Look, they hired me to play the piano. They hired you to do that. I'm sorry, but that's your job. I'm doing the best I can, and you're going to have to put it together." And he did. And it sounds fine, everything's in place. But he was having a cow about it because I was literally making it up while they were recording it, and he didn't have anything to go on, he sort of had to feel his way around in the dark. It was sort of funny.

UPDIKE Could you talk a little bit about how you balance the roles of being a performer and being a teacher? How long have you been at the Manhattan School?

JONES I don't have any idea. I don't know how many years I've been there because I don't count things like that. I'm fairly sure it's been more than twenty years, but I wouldn't put my bank account on a bet about that. But I would say it's somewhere on the fat side of twenty.

The balance is very important for me, because if I go too long just performing, I go really crazy. And if I go too long just teaching, I get really crazy. For me, the two balance each other so well because my performing reminds me that we are all human beings and we all make mistakes, and

that getting up and performing in front of people is not always the easiest thing that people do. I love doing it, but it takes a certain type of personality to be able to do that. My continuing to do it constantly reminds me of that. So that when I go back to teach, I'm moderated a little bit, I'm not too demanding or too picky, because people have to work things out on their own. That's really what the balance is about for me. It's very important for me to do both, it really is. I'm certain that as I get older, I will play less and less. I already play less than I used to. But still, there's nothing like being out in front of people to remind one about that aspect of performing and what it means.

I can tell you that it also sort of informs my whole attitude that I really emphasize with my students, which is that perfection is really not something that you need to look for. I tell them that, "The day that I play a perfect performance, I will really expect for the bus to hit me, and I'll leave. That will be the last day of my life, probably." Because there's always something more to do, there's something else to figure out, something else to fix, whatever. But it goes back to that thing that my teacher said to me when I was in high school – I try to be excellent every time, and be as excellent as I can be. Don't worry about being perfect, be excellent. Because being excellent is really way good. And sometimes your excellent is not what it may be other times, but you have to give the most excellent thing you can do and see what happens. Again, I'm reminded of that all the time when I perform. Okay, so I miss notes – people miss notes. I miss some kind of breath that someone took, or some phrase that someone wanted to play a certain way – okay, fine, that's over with and the sun is going to come up tomorrow, and it's all going to be all right. So don't be too crazy. But that's what that's about.

UPDIKE Could you talk a little bit about your experiences with Santa Barbara's Music Academy of the West? Is that every summer?

JONES It is. That, I can tell you I've been there (because they pay attention to that); this will be my twenty-second summer there. That has been a very important thing for me. I'm not quite sure how I got into it, frankly. But I know I was hired by a man who – between the time that he asked me to come there and the time that I went there, which was later the same year – he was no longer the president because he had retired. So I was one of the last people that he hired, and when I got there, there was a new president – someone I had never met before. But I've always just gotten on well down there. Santa Barbara is a very interesting place to be. There's a huge amount of wealth there, and it is not the type of wealth that's ostentatious at all – it's quiet money and there's a great deal of it. The people are incredibly generous of their support for the Music Academy. It is wonderfully well funded by a lot of philanthropic people who live in the community, who simply want to give part of their earnings that they've had back to the community by supporting that institution. It's a great place to work, it always has been. I enjoy being there, so it's good. We have a new president, and the campus has recently been refurbished, almost entirely. We have one more renovation to do on the oldest building on the

campus, and that will be done over the next two or three years, and then the campus will have been refurbished entirely. We have a new concert hall built on the footprint of the old one. We have a new education center full of practice rooms, and a new library, a new media center, a huge amount of stuff. It's all because these people from central Europe, who were intent on escaping Hitler, and who came to California (you know that period) they all got together and made what they thought was a little school down there. And it's blossomed into this pretty major league festival and school. It's much harder to get in to study with me there than it is to get into study at Manhattan School. Partly because the Music Academy is all scholarship, so everything is paid. If you are accepted, it's entirely paid. It's also more difficult because the time commitment for the applicants is only eight weeks, as opposed to like, two years. So a lot of people will gladly commit to audition for something for an eight week period that's going to be free, as opposed to a two year period where they're probably going to have to have sustained living expenses that they're going to have to pay and stuff like that. So getting into it is not easy. And I always have a good class. I'm going there the day after tomorrow for the summer. I'm looking forward to it because I know I have a really good class of people coming to study with me. I'm looking forward to it very much – it's six really good pianists. It's going to be a lot of fun.

UPDIKE I know you've already talked a little bit about your teaching style and your students in general, but could you talk a little bit about what you think are the greatest challenges for music students who are graduating today, and maybe how the job market and the profession differs from when you were graduating from school?

JONES Well, I could talk to you about that, but I'm not sure it would be useful. Just in the sense that I didn't know anything when I graduated from school – nothing. I think the kids today that are graduating from school know a lot more about it than I did, but there's a lot more to know. I suppose that would be called a conundrum, in the sense that you know a bunch of stuff, but how much more is there to know? See, I didn't know much at all, but there was still a lot to know. And now they know a lot, and there's still a lot to know about what they're doing. So I'm not sure about – relative to where I was as opposed to where they are.

I think one of the biggest things that has changed about it is I feel like it is a little bit driven by the internet, in the sense that there used to be a fairly well-defined way of rising to the top of whatever you were doing – which was either that you won contests, or you got some kind of agent or sponsor behind you who was willing to spend some dollars to support you and promote you – and stuff like that. It was not black and white, but it was fairly well defined. Partly, for example, by the fact that there was (in every town that you went to play a concert) there was a newspaper critic. And you got sort of a stamp of approval, or disapproval, from various critics. Sometimes the disapproval was worth more than the approval because of the relative standing of the critic, and you could use those words of support or praise to sell yourself to other places. The

internet has led to this incredibly large amount of chatter about everything. It's uncontrolled, unregulated, unedited chatter about any subject that you want – take your pick. And people are, in a certain way – performing artists – are drowning in that chatter, because how is one to know what is better or worse, as an audience member? How are you to know about that? That's a very practical difficulty. It used to be, for example, if you had a good review from the New York Times for a concert in New York, you were set with your publicity. Even the New York Times employs so few critics now that a lot of times major concerts happen and they go unmentioned in the newspaper, or in The New Yorker, or New York Magazine, or any of those magazines that used to have regular music critics. It's all sort of drowning in this chatter, and I'm not quite sure how it's going to work itself out.

There's also the problem of recording these days, because piracy is so rampant that it's impossible to make any kind of commercially viable recording unless you are already so ungodly rich that you can just pour your own money into it. Again, that's sort of strange, it really is, that that happens that way. I have never made a lot of money off recordings, I've always just taken a flat buyout fee. I've only had one royalty agreement in my life, that was some twenty-some years ago, and I've still not gotten back to equal on that – it was an advance against royalties. The amount of the advance – I get regular statements from these people with pennies that go up against the fee I was given against the recording – and I'm still nowhere near earning anything for it. It just gets worse and worse. Then there's the whole issue how we are going to – people don't have CDs anymore – they don't buy CDs, they buy everything streaming. So everything is virtual, I suppose you could call it, and so there's nothing to hang a profit on, and on that account nothing is being generated, so it's all just sort of sitting there. People that would have gotten ahead by making and marketing a recording and gotten their artistry marketed in that way, are just drowning in it. I really believe that's a significant factor in what's going on in professional music making today. Sort of what it's leading to, I think, is a resurgence of locally staffed and funded concerts, where people know each other through friends or something like that, and you put on local concerts that are very high quality. The problem is – how are you going to make a living doing that? It's more like it's done for fun. Because again, you can't generate enough income to pay the bills out of that type of arrangement, and that's a problem. That's a severe problem. It seems like individual things like symphony orchestras and opera houses and large ensembles seem to be okay, although they are also in trouble at this point, if you believe the managements, and so that's a difficulty. But for individual artists, it is hellaciously difficult. I don't know what the solution is, I don't have any idea. I feel amazed that I can even recognize part of the problem, because I don't think what I've described to you is by means all of the problem. I don't have any idea what the solution would be – none at all.

UPDIKE What advice do you give to your students as they're graduating these days?

JONES Well, I have the luck that the subject I'm teaching is a skill that's still in demand. So that's good. If I was teaching solo pianists, I don't know what I would say, because that is just one hair-raising way of trying to make a living, at this point. But the thing that I teach is commercially viable still, because there are jobs in opera houses and all different kinds of places like that that utilize, industrially, that skill. No one's figured out yet how to replace it with something else. They may, but I probably won't be teaching by then. We'll see. I emphasize to my students the importance of having (I don't see any other way to put it) commercially viable skills. Not to have your heads in the clouds about things, but rather to concentrate on practical applications of things.

I know when I was a visiting scholar (I had some kind of title, I don't know what it was) at Florida State University about three years ago, I was on the campus for one week. I was teaching in the morning, and then there would be a lunch break and then I'd teach some more in the afternoon and in the evening. They have several big dining halls in the school, so I would go around and visit these dining halls to see what they had for lunch. They had really good food at very cheap prices – it was all subsidized by the state (it was a state university) and I would sit there and eat and look at these thousands of people – this is an immense university, it's like fifty thousand people. I'd see these herds of people come in with these mountains of books and plop them down on the table and go get their food and start studying while they are eating. Or they'd have their computer and they'd be on their computer trying to find information about something. So I went back to my little class one of these afternoons, and I said, "Do you realize that you are basically in a trade school? This is what, when I was in high school, we would have called vocational tech. While you are learning facts and figures about what you are doing, what you are learning is skills, the same way that a mechanic learns skills, or a weatherman learns skills about observation." We are teaching skill sets to people that have to be creative and have to make it work, but it's basically vocational training and hopefully it will remain viable – I don't know if it will or not, but hopefully it will. I don't think there's much way to replace live music, if people actually get to hear it. If – that's a big if. I don't know how I got off on that huge train of thought. May I make one other observation on that?

UPDIKE Please.

JONES I talked to you yesterday about my piano teacher in high school, who I said was the lady who taught be how to play the piano. I would love to tell you just a little bit about her, and in that way, about Milton [Salkind]. Mrs. Gayle – I went to her when I was in the fifth grade, I think, and studied with her through high school – this woman was probably about seventy when I got to her. She had had polio as a child, so she could not walk. She had severe scoliosis – do you know what that is? It's a severe curvature of the spine, right? And really severe rheumatoid arthritis; so that her fingers were bent in shapes that you can't imagine. There was no treatment for that in those days. Her index finger on her right hand – the nail joint was

bent at a ninety-degree angle. It would come out here and literally it was that way [indicates with finger] it was so deformed by the disease. She could play the piano only for herself, but in the six or seven years that I studied with her, she never one time played the piano for me. Never, ever. She sat across the room in her chair that she could get into from her wheelchair, and told me how to play. Everything that I ever heard anybody do – playing – I was playing. I never heard anybody else play the piano. It forced me, in a certain way, to teach myself to play. She was an amazing teacher, in the sense that she knew how to guide me to discover, in my way, what I needed to know. In a certain way, that's what I tell my students today, "You are your best teacher. You just have to keep open and aware of what you're doing."

And when I got to Milton for grad school here, he was in a certain way the same thing. He may have just touched the piano occasionally, but basically he would tell me what he heard and tell me what he would like to hear, and it was my business to figure out how to do that. I always enjoyed very much that aspect of his teaching, because he was not about turning out little Milton Salkinds. He was about all of his students – and they all did, whoever studied with him – having their own personality, their own approach, their own viewpoint, and learning how to express that in their own way. I always admired him for that very much when I was a student here. It was interesting for me because she was my second teacher, and then Milton was basically my teacher (I still go and play for people now, but he was my last teacher every week) – he was the same type of teacher – not for the same reasons but that's how he ended up teaching. I liked that very much. He was about his students having their own thing.

UPDIKE That's really wonderful. Warren, is there anything else that you think you'd like to talk about before we end the interview?

JONES No, not really. You have been really good, and you ask such good questions. I've been interviewed sometimes were I've been thinking, "Where did they think that up? Where did that come from?" And your questions are all so good, and so easy to answer, and they allow me to speak like that, so that's great. Thank you for asking me to do this.

UPDIKE Well, thank you so much for doing it, I really, really appreciate it.