

Alden Jenks Oral History

San Francisco Conservatory of Music Library & Archives

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

Interview conducted November 11, 12 and 18, 2013
MaryClare Bryztwa and Tessa Updike, Interviewers

San Francisco Conservatory of Music Library & Archives Oral History Project

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

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

Alden Jenks Interview

This interview was conducted at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music on Monday, November 11, Tuesday, November 12 and Monday, November 18, 2013 by MaryClare Bryztwa and Tessa Updike.

Mary Clare Brzytwa

Mary Clare Brzytwa is Assistant Dean for Professional Development and Academic Technology at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. Specializing in electronic music with a background in classical flute and improvisation, she has played festivals internationally and at home including Festival des Musiques Innovatrices, Gilles Peterson's World Wide Festival, La Siestes Electroniques Festival, Unlimited 21, and The San Francisco Electronic Music Festival. Formerly Director of Professional Development at Oberlin Conservatory and Producer at Radio Village Nomade, Mary Clare has worked on countless projects ranging from appearances on records by bands such as the Boredoms to creating sound design for award winning films. Mary Clare earned a BA in composition with an emphasis in electronic media from Mills College and an MFA as a Performer/Composer at California Institute of the Arts.

Tessa Updike

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Alden Jenks



Alden Jenks presides over the computers, synthesizers and other state-of-the-art equipment in the San Francisco Conservatory of Music's electronic music studio. Jenks received a B.A. from Yale University and an M.A. from the University of California–Berkeley, where he studied composition with Andrew Imbrie and Seymour Shifrin. He also studied composition with Karlheinz Stockhausen and electronic music with David Tudor.

Jenks collaborated with the Canadian composer Martin Bartlett in *Deus ex Machina*, a touring performance ensemble utilizing homemade electronics in eccentric and sometimes noisy compositions. Later he became involved in the design and creation of the Grand Canonical Ensemble, an ambitious digital synthesizer. After joining the Conservatory faculty, he was persuaded by the availability of skilled performers to introduce traditional instruments into his electronic music more frequently (as well as to compose music for concert, theatre, dance, video, CD-ROM and recorded works for playback alone).

His music has been widely performed. His works *Nagasaki* and *Marrying Music* won awards at the Bourges Electronic Music and Viotti-Valsesia International Music Competitions, respectively.

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UPDIKE It is November 11, 2013 and this is Tessa Updike and MaryClare Brzytwa, and we are in the electronic studio of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music interviewing Alden Jenks. So Alden, we'll start by asking you to tell us about your early history, about where and when you were born.

JENKS I was born in 1940. I always thought that maybe I started the war, but actually I don't think so, it was probably someone else. My uncle was in the Second World War, and I remember asking my mother whether he'd won it or not, and she said, "Yes, he won it." So that satisfied my curiosity.

I was born of a kind of petty-bourgeois family in the thumb of Michigan. My grandfather had started a factory that did something extremely uninteresting with wheat flour – processing it. My father followed him into that work. And so there we were. I was always a little alienated from the kids in the school because my grandfather was their boss, so there was a certain social distance that made me a kind of lonely child. The result was that I read all the books in the house, so that was in some ways a good thing, I think. I got to read Nathaniel Hawthorne, and read books about archaeology and all kinds of things that I probably had no business reading, but there they were. So that was Michigan. We stayed there until my father retired, which was about 1950.

Within that time I did take those first piano lessons with the cruel sister Cecilia Marie, with the ruler. It was during that period that I performed that first time on stage. I believe it was *Gopak* by Mussorgsky. If it wasn't, it was something else by Mussorgsky. It was a piece in A B A form. I played A, and then I hesitated and played A again, and rushed off the stage and announced, "I'll never do that again!" And I've been largely true to that vow, of staying offstage. [laughter] I thought the role of a composer behind the veil was perhaps more suitable for me. So I had piano lessons then, and it was kind of a drag – I didn't enjoy it a lot. My mother's mother was musical, and even published some things, but my father could absolutely not carry a tune, and it was painful to hear him try. There was one piano piece he played – I've always wanted to find it – all I know is that the title is *Webster Grows*. It was kind of an oom-pah, oom-pah piano piece. He would play it every Christmas, and every Christmas he had forgotten more and more of it, so it got shorter and shorter, and finally he stopped volunteering to play *Webster Grows* and we decided Webster had shrunk to invisibility. [laughter]

UPDIKE How old were you when you started learning piano?

JENKS I guess eight.

UPDIKE And what kind of music did you listen to while you were growing up?

JENKS We had 78rpm records, thank you very much. We had them on these things where you would stack them up, and they would drop with a crash as you would go from the end of each three minutes to the next. It was only later in my teens when I was introduced to classical music that I realized that I'd been listening to classical music all that time. I'd been hearing the Beethoven *Violin Concerto* with a shock, and I said, "I know that!" A number of other pieces that my parents had were I think more for the children's benefit than for theirs. But I

played them over and over again. Another big favorite in our household, and this more reflected my mother's taste, was musicals. Lots of musicals. I learned all that kind of – what's called the great American songbook – I learned all of that at my mother's knee.

After we'd moved up to a suburb of Detroit (Grosse Pointe) I had piano lessons with a man who taught me all of those songs. He was in fact my first harmony teacher. He was teaching me to play by chord symbols. In piano music, in popular songs, sometimes they'll have a left-hand part and sometimes they just have the guitar symbols and they'll just say C7. Or D minor 9, or something like that. And he taught me how to interpret those, and how to turn them into accompanying patterns. Little did I know that I was getting this invaluable leg-up on the study of harmony. So when I did finally study harmony formally, it went very quickly. Howard Simon was the name of that fellow. I'm sure he's gone on to his justly deserved reward at this point. He was a funny character. But anyway, I was listening to that. Another thing that was very popular at the time was a piece called *Victory at Sea*, which was a soundtrack written by Richard Rogers. This was before PBS, it was a historical thing about how the United States Navy had been so successful in the second World War. I've since watched it on YouTube, and I think it's a crashing bore, actually, as a film. But I liked it a lot at the time. So I listened to that, and when I was thirteen or fourteen I met this guy, a little older than I, who was really into Beethoven and Mahler. I thought he was a cool guy, and when he said, "Here, listen to this," I listened with great interest and quickly became a total ... well, A – fanatic, and B – a snob. [laughter] I would listen to Elvis Presley and all the stuff that was becoming popular, and of course I did enjoy it, but I would kind of laugh at it at the same time. I would say, "Well, that's all right, but it's not the Mahler *First*." So I'm afraid that was kind of a personality defect that I've had to overcome since.

BRZYTWA Has that stayed with you, or have you overcome?

JENKS I guess it stayed with me, actually. [laughter] In other sort of perverse ways.

UPDIKE And that was a classmate of yours?

JENKS Well, he was in the same school. As I said, he was a year older than I, but he made a great contribution. I would go to hear the Detroit Symphony with him, and then we would listen to – Detroit had at that time all Black radio stations. We would listen to Big Mama Thornton singing *One Monkey Don't Make No Show*, which was a song that was like, "Na-na – I don't care about you!" ... there's another boy waiting outside the door. So we would listen to that as a kind of antidote to the Detroit Symphony. I guess we weren't such snobs after all. That was fun. So, what else can I tell you?

UPDIKE What age did you go to the Salisbury Boarding School?

JENKS My grades were on a slow landing pattern toward the bottom. My parents didn't know what to do with me, so they decided to send me off to prison. [laughter] They sent me off to a boarding school, where I would be boarded up. I think it was a school kind of for kids like that. It was full of misfits, we were all like that. All my pals were just weird. Well, I guess

not all of them, but a great many of them. So I fit right in there. That was just the last two years, eleventh and twelfth grades. I made some friends there – only one that I'm still in touch with. He's a brilliant mathematician named Daniel Stroock. If you Google him you will turn up the titles of books that you will not understand. You won't know what that book is about, I promise you – I've looked. So he must be smart, right? [laughter] Because he's doing math that I don't understand. Anyway, the others unfortunately I'm not in touch with.

Well, there is a story here, because since we spoke, a month ago or so, I brought up the name of a guy who first introduced me to Bach, and actually had me writing fugues – this was before I was out of high school. He was a harpsichord player, he was studying with Wanda Landowska – named Paul Wolfe. After we talked about him, I said to myself, "Is it possible that he's still on the planet somewhere?" Well, there are a lot of Paul Wolfes. There's even a Paul Wolfe who was Dean of the Manhattan School at one time. Out of this range of possibilities I picked one that seemed the most likely, and I'm not sure why I thought it was – but I sent this Paul Wolfe an envelope with a note saying, "I'm looking for a particular Paul Wolfe. You may or may not be that person, so please check the appropriate box on this card – Yes, I am the Paul Wolfe you wanted to find – I'm not – I am the Paul Wolfe you wanted to find and please leave me alone." Well, it was he. He sent me a letter in which he told me the whole course of his life. He was the Dean of the Manhattan School, and he was the Dean at Mannes, and he was a student of Landowska. He said, "Do you know why I left Salisbury School? I left because of you." I thought, "Well, what does he mean?" He had gone to the administration and said, "I can get this boy lessons with Wanda Landowska, and they said, "No, you can't do that, this is not a music school." He was so enraged by that, that he said, "Forget it." It's too bad because I really learned a lot from him. It might have been at the end of the year – I was not aware of any big furor. All I knew was that I wasn't going to be allowed to study with her, and I wasn't all that excited about it anyway, I didn't know her from anyone else. But he just said, "You're going to deny this young man an opportunity like that? Screw you." And he took off. Anyway, he's now retired in Santa Fe, and he married one of the Balanchine ballet dancers Vera Zorina. So anyway, that was really a consequence of you getting me on this reminiscing track, and to actually turn up this guy – he must be eighty-something now. And I said, "I want to find this person," I said this in my original letter, "Because he introduced me to Bach." I thought, "Oh! This is so great. Wow, how sweet, to close that circle, and say thank you."

UPDIKE So he was a music teacher – did he teach harpsichord at the boarding school?

JENKS No, he lived in New York. He would take the train up once a week, and teach me and a bunch of other kids. I was the music teacher there, I was the one who taught – ran the little glee club. For which I was entirely unqualified. They also had me playing the organ in chapel. I would just improvise, nobody seemed to care. I would play the hymns, you know, but ... it's a funny place, they just kind of gave me these jobs. Okay!

UPDIKE I remember you had told me before that with Paul Wolfe you were writing fugues.

JENKS Yes.

UPDIKE Was that your first experience making your own music and writing it down, or did you start before that?

JENKS No, I was writing music as soon as this friend of mine had introduced me to Bach, Beethoven and Bartok – I started writing my own piano music. I have trunks full of this sort of hysterical, adolescent *Stürm und Drang* pieces. I think they still exist somewhere. I think my fugue ... I remember seeing it sometime in the last twenty years. I don't know where that stuff is now.

UPDIKE Would you play them for your friends?

JENKS The fugues?

UPDIKE Any of the pieces from your early years.

JENKS I don't remember, I don't think so. This was a pretty private act. And I wasn't that good of a piano player, so it wasn't very complicated piano music. It was just – I really liked doing it. That's why I keep doing it, because I really like it. I don't really do it to show off. Well, a little. [laughter]

UPDIKE Could you tell us about your time studying in Aspen?

JENKS Okay, so, my mother (through connections that are too complicated to go into) somehow was able to make friends with the first flutist of the Detroit Symphony – a man named Albert Tipton, who in his day was – he was the Tim Day of his day. He was very well known. He went on to teach at the Shepherd School in Texas. He and his wife, who was Mary Norris, a wonderful pianist – they were both wonderful people, actually – became friends of my parents. When he found out about my interest in music, Albert Tipton said, "Why doesn't he go to Aspen?" Where he, himself, was teaching. This was right at the beginning of Aspen, I think. Or a year or two into its existence – 1956. I don't ever remember saying, "Oh yes, I'd like to do that." I'd just kind of go where people pointed, I was very passive with that kind of thing. So I passively wandered into Aspen and lived in what was obviously a ski dorm kind of situation with some other people, and had lessons (sort of) with Darius Milhaud. By that time he was confined to a wheelchair, and was a very portly man, but full of Gallic charm. I liked him a lot, but I had no idea what I was doing there. I don't remember composing anything ... maybe I did. He had an assistant named Charles Jones, also a composer, who sort of took me in hand. I think he had me harmonizing chorales and doing more basic things like that, which I guess I needed to do. But that's where I met Elinor Armer. I still remember – the lights low – I was in their bedroom, with Elly and her roommate, reading the *Song of Solomon* to them in a husky voice, hoping to develop a little electricity in the room. Ultimately I dropped out of Aspen. I went there a second year – I joined a window-washing company and was kind of bumming around. There was a funny moment – I guess I was not being so passive anymore – one night I was supposed to go and wash windows, or clean something, and I didn't show up. Actually I was at a restaurant, trying out a

different job. So I got fired for not showing up. I said, "That's fine, I'll go and work in this restaurant." So I became a dishwasher. It was a lot of fun – just being a bum and drinking beer and hanging out.

A man by name of Lawrence Foster was there, a very unusual guy... used to bang his head against the steel struts of the double-decker beds just to, I don't know, be weird? Tortured? We were pretty good friends. He's a conductor in Europe, but he was director of the Aspen School and Festival at one point.

John Patrick Thomas is a composer and a voice teacher, he lives in Hamburg now. He was a good friend I met in Aspen. We, with Larry Foster and others, would actually sing Bach fugues – that was fun. We would sit around and each take a part. There were other people – there was a guy there with perfect pitch and I remember throwing a tin can on a rock and saying, "Okay, what pitches are there?" And he solemnly recited them. Blew me away. I thought, "Oh, man. You're so lucky." I don't know if it is lucky, but I was impressed. I don't think I really made such good use of the Aspen Music School, but I got a little life experience, and that wasn't bad.

UPDIKE So you studied more with Milhaud's assistant, Charles Jones.

JENKS His assistant, yeah. There were other things going on; everyone was required to be in the chorus, and that was great. There were master classes that you could go to, I remember the Juilliard Quartet playing Bartók and the Beethoven *Grosse Fugue* and the cellist broke his string on it. It was either that or the Bartok ... I thought, "Oh man, this is really intense. They're breaking their strings, they're really sweating here." We would go on picnics up in the mountains in Aspen, so there was a social life built in. And all the concerts ... I first heard Leonard Shure ... does either of you know that name? He was a pianist – probably one of those people who's more famous as a teacher rather than as a performer. But he made recordings. I heard him playing the Diabelli *Variations* there. It blew me away. I don't think I have anything much more to say about Aspen.

UPDIKE What year did you go to Yale? I think you said when you entered Yale you had been thinking about being a biochemistry major...?

JENKS Well, I had that intention. Nothing ever came of it. I was immediately completely blown apart by the whole environment, and they had a whole set of requirements. Biochemistry was not one of them. I quickly came to feel that science wasn't my strong suit at all. I got into a special thing called The History of the Arts and Letters, which was a weekly seminar with all of these smart, smart people from Yale who would come and talk about their specialties. They would be talking about Hegel and Kant and my head would be splitting to understand what they were talking about. I've been enrolled in the History of Arts and Letters ever since. I never graduated, but I'm still working on it. What year was it? I think it was '58. The fall of '58. I met my dearest friend, who I had over for dinner last night. He's still on the planet and we're still good pals. He's a classicist. He's now teaching history at the Crowden School at Berkeley, the music school. He loved music the way I did, he was interested in poetry ... we went and heard Gregory Corso. Do you know who that is? He was one of the big beat generation

poets like Allen Ginsberg. He's one of these people who's drinking on stage and smoking cigarettes and using bad language. Oh, so exciting! We loved it. So that was that. Biochemistry ... History of the Arts and Letters ... that was a major, you could major in that.

I took French every year that I was at Yale, and I'd already had two years of French before I arrived. But when time came for me to choose a major, I just said, "Well, I want to do something easy, so I can spend time in the library looking at all of those old books. So I'll do music. That's easy." I knew it was going to be easy for me because I'd had all this training, especially the harmony stuff. There's a lot I had yet to learn, no doubt, and there still is I'm sorry to say, but ... I wound up majoring in theory because the guy who was supposed to be my composition teacher ... what's the opposite of "hit it off?" We did not hit it off. We didn't like each other, and it was ... I thought he was an ass, and I wanted no part of it. So I majored in theory under a man named Allen Forte, who's a well known theorist. So I graduated ... I wrote a paper on the early music of Alban Berg. Of which I had no understanding at the time ... but I wrote a paper anyway. He said it was good enough. But I was pretty scattered in my interests, and have remained so ever since. Kind of an ADD thing. My son self-diagnosed ... he said, "I think I'm ADD." When he said that I said, "You too??" [laughter] But I hadn't really thought of there being a word for it, or a diagnosis. I think he's nowhere near as bad as I am. He can at least kind of keep his thoughts in order ... I think.

UPDIKE You had mentioned a man named Mel Powell. Was he at Yale with you?

JENKS Yeah, I had only encountered him because I stayed an extra year in New Haven. I applied to the music school ... I can't remember why I did that. Maybe I just couldn't think of anything else to do. Maybe I went back into my passive mode ... "Well, I'm here, I'll just stay." Mel Powell was a pianist with the Benny Goodman band, and then he started writing this perfectly awful twelve-tone music. I don't know why he did that. Some people become communists, and other people became twelve-tone composers. I don't know when he made that change. But he was a brilliant man, and a brilliant teacher. I also encountered the musicologist Janet Knapp, and then the composer Lawrence Moss. Knapp was kind of an unattractive woman, I'm sorry to say, but she would just stand in front of you and talk. She had it all – it was all in there – assembled and well organized. Albums from A to Z, it was just all ... my God! It was so awesome that she could do that. It was an interesting course, too. Those are the teachers that I remember most distinctly. I think Larry Moss is still on the planet. I think I told the story of him coming and putting a Bach chorale up on the piano and talking about it until tears came to your eyes, it was so beautiful – his analysis. I said, "God, you must really put in a lot of time preparing these." He said, "No, I never look at them before the class." Ah, so that's how it is! I'm happy to say that now I've had that experience – where I can put up at least a piece of traditional music and say, "Oh, look!" It's signaling me from off the page. It's nice to have that facility, to not have to prepare your lessons.

UPDIKE Did you encounter electronic music at all at Yale? Was anybody doing that?

JENKS There was something there, but we were only allowed to look in the door.

That's it ... it was in its very, very infant stages. It was just some toys for the composition faculty to play with. I know Mel Powell and Larry Moss both ultimately produced pieces – all electronic or with electronic stuff. No, it was only after I came out to California that it became a more real possibility.

But the person I wanted to mention was ... I think this was the summer in-between my graduation from Yale and my year at the school of music. There was a record store in New Haven ... I went into this store asking for music by a composer named Ben Weber. The fellow who was working there said, "Why do you want to hear Ben's music?" I said, "Do you know Ben?" And he said, "Yeah, I know him really well." This was Robert Helps – the composer and pianist – the greatest piano teacher I ever had. And one of the finest composers, actually. He died a few years ago, I'm sorry to say, but he was also one of the funniest people I knew. Do you know about Bob Helps' list of names? When he would tour he would go through local phone books and would write down, you know, "Ima Hogg" type of names. [laughter] All of the improbable names. He would publish these lists, there's still a website with these lists published on them [<http://helpsweb.free.fr/Persona/persona.php>]. That was the type of person he was. I would go to his house, and he had this piano covered with a rug. He'd say, "Yes, it's the only piano I know of with pubic hair!" It was kind of a bear rug ... I didn't follow that train of thought. [laughter] So that was great, I had piano lessons with him. I think I told him that I was not very happy in New Haven, and that was because of a disastrous love affair, and I wanted to leave. He said, "Where are you going to go?" And I said, "I don't know." He said, "Why don't you go to Berkeley?" I said, "Where's that?" And the rest is history. I drove across the country with my friend Michael. He had one year at Columbia in the law school, and he was washing his hands of that too. So we were both refugees from the East Coast educational establishment. He came out and went to Stanford, and I went to Berkeley.

BRZYTWA What year was this?

JENKS '63. So I settled in and reacquainted myself with that fellow, John Patrick Thomas, who was a composer and a singer. He was at Berkeley. That was great, he was a very gregarious person, he knew everybody. Since I knew him, I quickly knew everybody ... or a lot of people. He and I in short order took over a moribund concert sponsoring organization called The Composer's Forum. Andrew Imbrie and those people had been running it for a while and they just got tired of doing it and put the papers away. It had a 501c3 classification, and so they just passed it on to John and Charles Boone, who's another composer in the area, and myself – and another guy, Eugene Turitz who stopped being a composer and became a communist. He's in Berkeley, still. We started this thing, and I remember we went to James Schwabacher's office and begged for money. We made our kind of lame pitch for a while and when we were through he gave us some advice – words to the effect of – "Remember, you have to make it clear what's in it for me. Me, me, me!" said he, pointing at himself. We laughed, but it was a good lesson. Anyway, we put on concerts and even sponsored a lecture series. We didn't do that very long, because they were boring. We'd get these professors out ... Roger Nixon from [SF] State, and Arnold Elston from UC Berkeley.

UPDIKE What sort of music did you perform?

JENKS Contemporary music. Although, not always ... it would be twentieth-century music. We put on a memorable performance of a piece by Satie. You know, Erik Satie once set one of the dialogues of Plato to music? It's called *Socrate*; it's about the death of Socrates. It's so simple, just beautiful. I recommend it. I can't remember what else we put on – lots of stuff. George Crumb ... we did some of his stuff. A lot of stuff that I didn't like very much, but I knew I should. It was terribly dissonant and incoherent, but that was thought to be very good in those days, to write like that. I tried my hand at it, and wasn't much impressed, to tell you the truth. I think that's one of the reasons I was attracted to electronics, because it kind of excused me from having to do that kind of thing. It was only later when people like Steve Reich started using triads, I said, "Oh good, is it safe now?" [laughter] But by that time I was too infected with the electronic thing.

There was something called the San Francisco Tape Music Center on Divisadero; Pauline Oliveros, Morton Subotnick, Ramon Sender and Loren Rush were the principals of that center. They went on tour one summer and left a few pieces of equipment behind, and somehow they told us, "Well, you can use it." In fact, "Here, you run the studio." There wasn't much of a studio as I remember. There was a monaural tape recorder, and a Hewlett Packard sine wave oscillator. Oh, and I think there might have been an equalizer.

BRZYTWA They gave it to the Composer's Forum people?

JENKS Well, they probably knew of us because we were the Composer's Forum, but no, because we were composers. Not as an organization, just us. It seems crazy, doesn't it? Get a couple of graduate students and just turn over the building to them. It really was – we had the keys to the door. Harry Partch showed up one day. I didn't know who he was, but he was editing something with a guy who also used the studio. All I remember about Harry Partch was he would reach into his coat occasionally and pull out a flask – take a hit. I guess he was kind of a notorious drunk. But anyways, that was one thing that happened. Charles and I wrote incidental music for a play that was put on there that summer. That was the only concrete musical product from that summer. But it was probably the next summer they got a Ford Foundation grant to move the studio to Mills. It was also through the kindness of the Fords that I used the studio at Mills for free for an entire eight or nine months. It had a Buchla synthesizer, plus some very high-end tape recorders and other equipment. I was home. I can remember nights ... I would go there at seven, and just stay until seven the next morning. Having more fun than it's probably legal to have. It was all done with tape – you'd take maybe a three inch piece of tape, and maybe then a twelve foot piece of tape, and have to keep track of them all. It got a little crazy, but fortunately we had a lot of drugs to help keep our feet on the ground. It kept our humor up.

BRZYTWA How did you approach learning to use that equipment?

JENKS I was given a short instruction in it. But I skipped over something important – in my last year of graduate school – I can't tell you when it was really, probably '67, Karlheinz Stockhausen was in the Bay Area. He was hired by UC Davis to teach a seminar there. An invitation had been extended to us at U.C. Berkeley to go to it. I had never heard of the man,

and I would not have gone, except one of my teachers –Arnold Elston, said, "I think you should go." And he said so with enough conviction that I carpoled up there once a week and sat in the presence of the great man and started hearing stuff I'd never heard before – like *Kontakte*, these electronic pieces. If you know anything about Stockhausen, you know that he was into maximizing everything. How high can I go? How low can I go? How fast can I go? How slow can I go? How many different octaves can I work in? Everything was a test of the limit. Coherence was not even a question that occurred to him, I don't think. This is the result of my calculations! I thought it was fascinating. I don't know if you have any reason to know this, but Stockhausen was an absolutely magnetic personality. You just sort of ... "Yes, master." [laughter] So that was very important. So therefore when I had access to the electronic equipment, I had some kind of an idea of what you might do. I don't think my music ever exactly sounded like Stockhausen, but why would it? I realized I could do just about any damn thing I wanted. And I did. I very much enjoyed that.

I made friends with a composer named Martin Bartlett. He was at Mills also. He was a Canadian fellow, also very magnetic personality. One of those people with a photographic memory, so he'd recite long sonnets of Shakespeare – scenes from Shakespeare plays and things like that. That's always intimidating, when somebody can do that. He was interested in electronic music too, so ultimately we formed a little performing group called *Deus ex Machina*, and performed at various ... we performed at the Exploratorium in its early days. We wound up in some weird places ... we were invited to perform at some colloquium, there were some new agey things going on. We would show up at those things and play square waves at them – I don't know – they probably thought that was very enlightening. [laughter] That went on for a while. And we performed at the Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco. I did a piece that I was always kind of pleased by. We had a central table up in front with a lot of our homemade electronics – square waves. Then, from the amplifiers, instead of having big loudspeakers in front, I had little loudspeakers – cheap ones – on long, long, long, long wires. And then attached to the loudspeakers were cardboard tubes of various lengths, or other objects – pie plates and stuff. I had two rolling carts with these things on them, and I'd go out and just pass the loudspeakers out to the audience. I don't know what was going on, but once it had gone through the system some pretty interesting sounds came out. So that was kind of fun. I'm not sure what else went on in that concert. I know a friend of mine did a piece with a respirator called, oddly, a Bennett. Something he had smuggled out of a hospital where he was working. Some kind of thing that went [breathes heavily] ... he put a microphone on it. It was just crazy stuff. John Cage and David Tudor were hanging around – they were coming around too. I've got, in fact, all kinds of different diseases from that time. I did run into John Cage – I saw him then and ran into him later in life too. David Tudor was really the person – you know who he was?

BRZYTWA Of course.

JENKS This was the guy who was like, the barn burner of all pianists. He could play those Boulez sonatas, those Stockhausen piano pieces, and then he gave it all up. He stopped playing the piano. Can you believe that? You reach the summit of that skill and then he went into a field that he knew nothing about. He started building his own electronics. He was obviously an obsessive personality. Cage tells a story about how someone had shipped him some

spices from India and the bottles broke during the shipment, and Tudor separated out all the grains. You've heard that story? That's the kind of man he was. I really admired him a lot. Maybe because I'm so ADD, I thought, "Here's a guy who just focuses. You can't deflect him." I thought, "Maybe I can imitate that. Maybe I can be a little like that."

UPDIKE Do you mind if we go back to the San Francisco Tape Music Center for a few minutes, and talk about some of the people who were involved in that? Could you tell us when you first met Ramon Sender and Pauline Oliveros?

JENKS I first met Pauline when the center moved over to Mills. I could have received instruction on the equipment with her, but there was a guy named Bill Maginnis who was more of a real engineer. I don't know why, but I wound up studying with him, not with her. Subotnick ... I never knew him particularly well. He might not have even been there. Ramon ... I don't know ... Ramon kind of weaves in and out of my life in a funny way. I don't know when I first met Ramon, but he's an amazing guy. There were concerts that were put on by the Tape Music Center, after that summer that we were there. They all came back and started doing these concerts. David Tudor would come and do stuff with Pauline, this amazing piece where Pauline is on one end of a see-saw and he's on the other end, and there's a mynah bird in a cage hanging over it. The problem is, the mynah bird was supposed to start making sound, and it remained mute through the entire performance. [laughter] Berio was around, Luciano Berio. He was teaching at Mills. He did a piece one night at the Tape Music Center.

BRZYTWA Was the Tape Music Center only at Divisadero, and then at Mills?

JENKS I think that's true. I think it ceased existing at Divisadero.

BRZYTWA And it never was at the Conservatory? It never was affiliated with the Conservatory?

JENKS No, but they were. Loren Rush and Ramon sort of started something like an electronic music studio ... I think they were teaching at the Conservatory...?

UPDIKE I think maybe they were students at the Conservatory...? I think one of them was a student at the Conservatory in 1959.

JENKS Those guys are older than I am.

UPDIKE Maybe he was teaching here. The President at the time, Robin Laufer, gave them some money and helped them get equipment to start an electronic music room at the Conservatory.

JENKS It was pretty rudimentary.

UPDIKE I think they took that equipment when they moved to Divisadero.

BRZYTWA And then that equipment ultimately went to Mills?

UPDIKE I think so.

BRZYTWA Okay, so that's the linkage.

JENKS Yeah, there wasn't much. There was a Hewlett Packard sine wave generator ... I think you could have a square wave or a sine wave, you had a choice there. I don't remember much else.

BRZYTWA How big was the Tape Music Center?

JENKS Which Tape Music Center?

BRZYTWA Did you work at both the one at Divisadero and the one at Mills? You did. I know the one at Mills.

JENKS You may know what it is now.

BRZYTWA I'd like to hear more about it, if you want to talk about it.

JENKS Well, the only room I worked in was a room that was out at one end of the music building, and looked out on that pond. You know that room?

BRZYTWA That's the same one that I was in.

JENKS I think there might have been some other rooms, but that was the only room I ever worked in. I know it's changed; there are more rooms and more equipment. I stopped working there at a certain point and didn't go back. I think they no longer offered the facilities for free. In fact, I don't even think it was open to the public after that initial year. Tony Gnazzo and another guy were the directors of the studio. Tony Gnazzo came to my house also last night for dinner. So he's still on the planet, and a very sharp guy. Taught me a lot; an enormously great teacher. And still does. Actually, Tony Gnazzo is the guy a lot of people of a certain generation call up. "Tony, I've got a terrible hum in my sound system.... Tony, this computer is telling me...." He always gets really interested and has something useful to say. So he was director of the studio that year, and he was ... do you know the Nine Evenings? It was organized by Robert Rauschenberg in New York, it was nine evenings of art and technology.
[<http://www.9evenings.org>]

David Tudor made an insane piece where he had coat racks rolling around the space, under his control somehow. I think maybe the Conservatory now has a video of this. At one point in the video you can see Tony Gnazzo sorting out cables. He was there. He was early exposed to this kind of misbehavior. So when he got to Mills, he wasted no time in organizing things like ... David Tudor came and we performed in the Mills art gallery on about eight Weber charcoal grills. We had contact microphones attached to them all. What David had taught us to do was to

build devices in a tin can ... imagine a tin can, and at the bottom, four photo resistors. Current passes through this photo resistor when a light shines on it, and doesn't pass through it without the light. So we had pen lights, and we had audio coming into these tin cans, and we'd go like this [gestures] and that would send the sound out to one of four outputs. We all had our tin cans and our pen lights – actually, we weren't operating those. We were playing the Webers. The sound from the Webers was coming up, and other people were stirring the sound around, it wasn't me. Just astonishing. So we would do things like that. We did something at Pauley Ballroom at UC Berkeley – the student union – where I put on a piece called *Pretty Polly*, which is based on a folk song, which appeared in a kind of strangled, gasping form. A girlfriend of mine was holding a candle, she was walking around the balcony on the outside of the auditorium. The audience rioted. The whole evening ended with all the chairs piled up in a mountain. I was horrified, actually, I thought we were going to get in terrible trouble. Did I hear that Ivan Tcherepnin stole all the money...? The whole thing was just this huge debacle. [laughter] I don't know if you know that name, Ivan Tcherepnin? His father was a well-known Russian composer, Alexander Tcherepnin. He left Russia at the start of the revolution and had two children; Ivan, who was out here and ultimately wound up at Harvard as a professor of composition. His brother Serge created a synthesizer called the Serge.

Serge Tcherepnin was quoted saying of my friend Tony Gnazzo, "He's a true genius." Isn't that nice? I agree. I only met Serge very briefly, and I didn't know Ivan particularly well, although I did move into his apartment, off 24th Street, up above Guerrero and Valencia. That's when I got the job at the Conservatory, and I needed to move. It was Ivan who actually offered me the job. I forgot who the dean was then. Larry something?

UPDIKE It was Larry Snyder.

JENKS Snyder, yeah. When I went in for an interview, I just brought this trunk with a synthesizer that I'd built. He said, "Okay, you're hired." [laughter] He'd never seen anything like it. It was cool because I was getting a lot of my equipment from a used equipment dealer out by the Oakland Airport named Mike Quinn. He had stuff from the Second World War. He had weird things like Braille knobs. They were knobs that were different shapes – you could get a square one, a triangular shaped one.... I loved those, so I got bags full of Braille knobs. With the assistance of Tony Gnazzo and Bill Hearn who was an engineer and was interested in music ... he was actually a designer, he would design mixers and other devices for us that we could build. He would show us how to build them, too. We would have had no idea about breadboarding things and so forth. I always liked the smell of solder ... I'm sorry to hear it's not good for you. Maybe it has lead in it or something? [laughter] So I didn't mind spending hours bending over a hot soldering iron. It's very exacting work. Building a gadget, you can pretty much assume it's not going to work. It's like computer programming; you're just going to get error messages. In the case of an electronic device, you may make it smoke. It may actually blow up if you connect things wrong. Or you can destroy components – you have to go out and buy another transistor or integrated circuit.

BRZYTWA Do you think your music preparation prepared you in some ways for thinking that way? Do you see any correlation between those two interests of yours?

JENKS No. I wouldn't even say I'm schizophrenic, there's got to be something further ... polyphrenic. I never found any incompatibility. I've recently made the acquaintance of a fellow named Rodney Waschka. Do you know that name? Well, Rodney Waschka writes very accessible and attractive music. A little odd. I think its oddness has to do with the fact that he's using genetic algorithms in the composition. It absolutely sounds totally musical. How he's managing to not let the machine take over – not let the computer take over and get some mechanical recitation of turning wheels, I don't know. I'm filled with admiration for him. So no, I don't see any real connection between the two. And there's another thing I don't see a real connection between, which is the fact that I am ... I said this recently to my family ... my wife is really interested in the future and what might be. My son is really interested in what's going on. And I'm really interested in what used to be. I'm really interested in history. That stack of books by my bed is all history books. I really like old things. When I was less than ten years old, I was collecting what I called antiques. Old things. I like old things. Nothing thrilled me more than seeing a ruined old building. I would be filled with the idea of the ghosts ... what went on in there. I've always thought archaeology and those things are really wonderful. I'm not really into reading the latest anything – or Ray Kurzweil's about how the brain is going to be uploaded to the cloud or something. It's not that I don't think that's interesting, it's just not that interesting to me. Whereas I'm reading about six history books, and I really like that. So what that has to do with being a technologically tinged composer and all that ... I don't know. It doesn't make any sense to me. I don't make any sense to me, but what can you do? I'm stuck with it. [laughter]

BRZYTWA Did you have Moog synthesizers in the Conservatory?

JENKS [exaggerated] My dear! No more than later on did we have IBM computers.

BRZYTWA Everybody had Moog?

JENKS No. Moog was on the East Coast. Buchla was the West Coast. Let's try to keep that distinction clear. [laughter] There was nothing going on in-between. No, there was Milton Babbitt and the Columbia Studio. There was Moog, and there was Switched-On-Bach, and all of that. We just had nothing but contempt.

BRZYTWA It was lowbrow?

JENKS Well, you know those Moog oscillators, they actually stayed in tune. How ridiculous – what fun would that be?

BRZYTWA Oh, it wasn't subversive, or counter-cultural enough?

JENKS We didn't have those words. Maybe subversive. We knew about subversive. But – random – unexpected – unpredictable. One of Buchla's devices that he built was called Source of Uncertainty.

BRZYTWA Chaos box.

JENKS It was random fluctuating voltages that you could use to control, or have lack of control. This was regarded as sort of the correct approach to making art.

BRZYTWA During that time.

JENKS Yeah, being chaotic. And so, we did. [laughter]

UPDIKE So Alden, I think we'll talk now about some of your compositions.

JENKS Sure.

UPDIKE I have a short list here, but you're welcome to mention any that you'd like to. It would be really interesting for us if you could talk about what inspired them, and what the process was to compose them and who you worked with. And maybe who you were thinking about – if there were certain people that maybe you were writing them for, or certain performers that you had in mind. The first that I've written down is *Nagasaki*.

JENKS There was announced a festival of political art, something that I'd never dabbled in, I had never done anything like that. But I'd just finished reading a book by Jonathan Schell called *The Fate of the Earth*, in which he describes in rather graphic terms what will happen if we have this nuclear holocaust that everybody talks about but nobody does anything about. It freaked me out – it really just freaked me out. So I thought, "Well, maybe I'll make a piece – some sort of therapy for myself – to express this. What was submitted and played as part of this festival was actually the first third of the piece, which became this marathon exercise in ... it was the last piece I did in the analogue studio. It was the last reel-to-reel tape with Dolby and four-track, massive Buchla array, as well as recordings of voices and a little bit of something from Kabuki Theater, some symbol crashes and gongs. It stretched out to some twenty-plus minutes, and then I submitted it to the Bourges Competition in France, which is a big electronic competition, and it got some prize there. I guess because it was clear I had spent a long time on it. [laughter] That was that. And then it just moldered on the shelf after that. What else?

UPDIKE Another one I have is *Marrying Music for Two Pianos*.

JENKS Well, I was married to my first wife at the time. I thought since the piece is in fact pretty energetic I could combine the idea of marriage (between two pianos) and merriment ... I don't know if it's merry all the time. That piece is interesting because it starts out like it's going to be some kind of ... I won't say Milton Babbitt sort of piece, but it's pretty irregular; and then it goes through this strange slow movement, which consists of ... at least for ten or twelve bars there's nothing but E, F sharp, G sharp, kind of noodling back and forth. And it winds up in a big cadence on some tonal harmony. The last part, which is fast, was a kind of minimalist exercise I suppose. I had written a computer program that ... I guess that was only one small part of the last movement ... I've forgotten what it was, and how it worked. It was sort of a complex polyphonic set of variations. I can't remember the piece well right now. But it's nice that the first performance was carried out by a married couple – John and AnnaMarie McCarthy.

BRZYTWA What kind of computer program?

JENKS It was written in Basic. It programmed a series of phase shifts of a fixed set of durations – that's the clock, the regular thing – and then I made this program that gradually stretched that out, so that the regular patterns repeated over and over again, and then the stretched out patterns played against them, so you hear it go out of phase. I did another piece using that program too.

BRZYTWA What kind of computer was it?

JENKS Well, for that one I actually was sneaking into San Francisco City College. They had a room full of computers, and I went in there carrying the book that was used in their computer course, and they just assumed that I was a student there. So I would spend long hours programming this thing. I still remember, finally I finished it, and I pushed "Print." This thing started churning out reams and reams and reams of paper! And the guys that were administering this thing just watched wide-eyed because it was this huge program. It was all material I could use for composing, but they couldn't believe the stack ... it was still ... what kind of printer was that?

BRZYTWA Dot matrix?

JENKS Dot matrix printer, yes. It was whirling and grinding desperately. [laughter] I haven't revisited those pieces or that way of thinking for so long, I can't really remember what was going on. I thought it was fascinating. There's another piece called *Calcululations* which is also based on a computer program, but a different one. It also had to do with things going out of phase, but I found a way to chart the rate at which the parts that were out of phase would accelerate and decelerate against a fixed metronome. I like that piece; it is actually inspired by another piece by a composer named John McGuire, who is one of the more unjustly ignored American composers of the 20th and 21st century. He composes very little, and spends years preparing his pieces. He's very methodical, which I'm not. He was a friend of mine in graduate school and we stayed in touch, even though he went to Germany and studied with Lutoslawski or Penderecki, I forget which. Anyway, he had done a piece for electronics in which different strands were accelerating and decelerating at different rates and also moving from left to right and right to left. I just used that idea for my own piece, without being anywhere near as obsessive as he. But on the other hand, it took the entire summer to write the program, so there was something obsessive going on, I guess. I mentioned Tony Gnazzo, that program was actually written in a phone conference with Tony. I'd say, "Oh, let's try this," and he'd have the same program on his computer.

BRZYTWA It's like pre-networking.

JENKS It's just calling your pal, that's all. [laughter]

BRZYTWA But later on, people were networking their computers together and composing that way with code.

JENKS I've heard about that, yeah.

BRZYTWA It's ahead of your time.

JENKS I guess. What else is on your list?

UPDIKE I have *Menage*.

JENKS *Menage*. I don't know why that was written. It just was written, and it's for a synthesizer played live with a keyboard and a piano and a percussion player. I called it *Menage* because you know, there's a French expression of three people living together for fun. [laughter] So there were three instruments in this, and things seemed to happen in groups of three in the piece. Not that I'm that methodical – so I called it *Menage*. It turns out to be quite a hard piece. Nicole [Paiement] tried to get it done with some student players, some other people tried it. New Keys tried it ... it's never really come off. I think it's because I was trying to, instead of letting a player actually have a figure – you know – de-da-da – I would break it up among the three players, or among two of them, and so you'd get – de-da ... da – you'd get little excerpts from the music rather than full-throated arias from each instrument. But anyway, that's a nice piece.

UPDIKE Were some of your early compositions commissions? Or were you writing them for specific people?

JENKS Not much, really. I've never been a terribly gregarious person, so I didn't tend to hang out and network as much as I should have. I had my one job at the Conservatory, and that allowed me time to compose, and I did. I would have pieces played at the Conservatory, but nobody commissioned anything.

UPDIKE When you started working at the Conservatory, did your style of composing change at all?

JENKS It did. I was no longer surrounded by the bad company that I'd fallen into at Mills. Ha! [laughter] Martin went up to Canada, and other people fell away. I moved to San Francisco ... it was a crazy time, and the Conservatory was a much crazier place than it is now. It was this little hole in the wall out in the Sunset district. People could do what they wanted ... within limits. There was the time the head of the Voice Department got fired for being drunk all the time ... there was that kind of stuff that wasn't smiled upon. We were allowed to do things like the Lo Fi performance which was an event John Adams and I put on at the "Hall of Flowers" in Golden Gate Park. "Hi Fi" was a term in the air at the time, and we had gone to the Salvation Army and such places and bought a lot of still (barely) functional electronic – electrical? – sound producing equipment dating back to the 40s and 50s – radios, turntables, cheap microphones, whatever – and somehow connected everything to a central mixing board, and produced this continuous cacophony made up of bands of activity, short-wave radio, 78 rpm records, and so forth; and up on a raised stage we had an old overstuffed armchair, and a graduate student, Susan Sheldrake (in the program "Miss Susan Sheldrake") sat in it under a funky old floor lamp reading

a copy of "Life" magazine from the 1950s. If you ask me now what was the point of it all, I'm not sure I could say....

We also did some concerts at the Museum of Modern Art. It used to be in the Veteran's building ... to the right of the Opera House? That's where the whole Museum of Modern Art used to be, and they had a big open space that was used for lectures and performances. I can remember at least one, maybe two concerts there. I did a piece where ... Video Free America, which still exists – it's a group in San Francisco. They came in and I was playing some piece of mine along with a device that produced images sort of like your screensaver and Windows Media Player; "lissjous patterns." So I was actually producing those with just a couple of sine wave generators, but we were playing a piece of mine ... *Namo*, I think it's called. Video Free America was pointing their camera at these images that I was making and they were doing something called video feedback, where the camera looks at what it's producing, so you get these infinitely receding things; copies of the same image. They were doing a lot of colorizing and fun stuff, and those were going up to multiple TV monitors, visible all around by the audience. That was fairly elaborate. There were also some very large oil paintings (by someone whose name I forget) that were displayed within the performance. We did another piece, maybe this was a Lucier piece ... Alvin Lucier ... where we were using something called Chladni Plates. Do you know what Chladni Plates are? Well, it's probably just named for the scientist who did it, but imagine a metal plate with a loudspeaker under it, and then you put sand on the plate and you play a tone into it, and the sand travels around and arranges itself into various forms ... you know the kind of thing I'm talking about. That's an awful lot of fun. Was that the same concert? I remember we had video for that one too. Anyway, those were the kinds of things ... John Adams and I would get into a lot of trouble. We would do stuff like that. Milton Salkind was president then ... he didn't know what we were doing. He was in his own spaced out place. We never got any complaints. John and I went on tour once, up in Canada. He brought an electronic piece. I think I did that bird piece up there. I also did a piece called *Exorcism*, in which I simply screamed. [laughter]

UPDIKE How long did you scream?

JENKS Oh, not very long. Just one breath's worth. But it was a good loud scream. I've forgotten what else that piece consisted of, because that was the highlight for me.

BRZYTWA During that time period, I know there was a really active jazz scene going on in San Francisco too. Did you guys interact much with those guys?

JENKS No, it's amazing that I missed all that. I was totally unaware of it. The North Beach and all that West Coast jazz, that was maybe a little before I got here. Maybe that was more '50s.

BRZYTWA So they didn't come by the Conservatory?

JENKS The only jazz person I can recall was George Marsh, the jazz drummer. I also got briefly involved with a sax player, Gabriel Stern, and a drummer – they wanted me to

play synthesizer, but the drummer was a maniac. Nobody could hear anything because he was hitting the drums so hard, so it didn't last – that collaboration. One thing I was doing a lot then that I stopped doing kind of abruptly was improvisation– I started being kind of embarrassed by what I was doing, there was too much junk – part of the process. I would want to refine my discoveries offstage and present more finished works. Some of the early stuff I did with my own homemade synthesizer, that maybe couldn't be anything but improvised. I didn't have a keyboard – God forbid! Just knobs and switches.

UPDIKE Could you talk about your composition *Ghost Songs*?

JENKS That's much later, isn't it? *Ghost Songs* [2004] is a set of three rather chromatic songs on poems by a poet named Charles Simic, who – have you heard of him? He's written a lot of poetry, always a dangerous sign. But people have said Wallace Stevens wrote too much poetry too, so maybe it's better to do too much than too little. Simic is a Czech poet, a refugee – born in 1936, maybe '38 – I think he's still alive and kicking. He writes very funny and dark poetry, which is a delicious combination to me. It's just wonderful, because you can be saying something that's serious, sort of alarming, and at the same time there's this humorous side to it that keeps it from being too heavy-handed. The opening line of the song called "Ghosts", the second of the *Ghost Songs*, he says, "It's Mr. Brown, looking much better than he did in the morgue. He's brought me a dead fish, wrapped in newspaper." So he's having these visions of ghosts, and the poem goes on talking about other ghosts who are equally weird and funny at the same time. At the end there's this kind of chilling reminder that "I too will be a ghost soon enough." The poet reflects on that. Those songs have been surprisingly successful; they've been performed three or four times in the Bay Area, up in Oregon, and now in Malaysia. A woman in Malaysia is singing them ... I couldn't have been more startled. But you know, you just send stuff out, because people say they're looking for songs. Haul them out of the morgue [laughter] and send them on out. They're pretty good.

UPDIKE I know you told me one of the last times we spoke that you've had a real lifelong interest in poetry and love for poetry. Have you used other poems in your compositions?

JENKS Yeah. I have two other pieces, I believe, with Simic poems. *The Soup*, which is a big piece for ensemble and singer, actress, and voice transposer ... she has kind of a Donald Duck episode. That's marvelous. What else by Simic...? Oh, a piece called *Explorers*, which is written in a scale that has not twelve tones, but thirteen tones per octave in it, so that everything is slightly flat. I set it rather conservatively for two sopranos – I don't know why two. There's a live electronics part that didn't work so well, and then three recorded electronics, all using this scale. The recording part was supposed to give the singers a sense of the pitch. Turns out it didn't matter at all because singers have so much vibrato that they're going from in-tune to flat to sharp all the time. So there's no way to tell if they're actually singing the right notes or not. [laughter] I mean, exactly. I thought it was funny. I don't really like the piece that much – there was something rather cautious about the vocal writing because I just didn't know if it would work. I was in the midst of it and I – have I mentioned John Chowning? He was the guy who sort of invented computer music – he and Max Matthews. He's down at Stanford, he's retired now. But John Chowning is the guy who discovered FM Synthesis – sold it to the Yamaha

Corporation – and bought a yacht. But he's a marvelous, kind, wonderful man. I ran into him at a concert, and I said, "John, I'm writing something for a thirteen tone scale, do you think that anyone can sing that?" He said, "Oh yeah, sure." I only discovered later he was married to a singer and he actually tried out all kinds of scales on his wife. But it does seem to be a possibility. So if I do it again, I'll be more adventurous with the vocal writing. It may not be right for two people, that only adds to the aggravation. One singer is enough! [laughter]

Other poets? Well, I have a piece for guitar and recitation of a Wallace Stevens poem, but I would never actually set Wallace Stevens. Too much music in the poetry already. Yes, there is another set of poems by William Stafford. And I have *Five California Songs* for tenor, cello and piano on poems by California poets: Richard Brautigan, Philip Whalen, Robert Haas, Leonard Nathan. But that's about it, I think. When I was still in graduate school I set a text of William Burroughs. Andrew Imbrie could make no sense of it at all – it was for a chorus that would speak, yell, and laugh, but not sing. So he had no way of commenting on it. I think I'd already fallen into bad company by the time I wrote that. I wrote some unsingable choral pieces with poems by Robert Creeley, another American poet, but they turned out to be just impossible to sing. There was a performance, but it was just random pitches, it was so chromatic. I have no idea why I did that. I won't do it again.

BRZYTWA Is the score in the library?

JENKS I hope not. I tried to sing as part of the chorus, but I couldn't sing it.

BRZYTWA Well nowadays we could put it all into a computer and just move the notes around.

JENKS That doesn't help with live performance.

BRZYTWA That's true, but at least you could hear it the way you intended it. With modern auto-tuning.

JENKS I've played it on the piano. I knew what it sounded like, and thought I was giving cues and everything properly. It's a cappella, so it's really hard. Crazy.

UPDIKE Could you talk about the composition titled *Free* that you did in 1968?

JENKS Those two [pointing at scores on the wall] – the Steve Reich *Pendulum Music* there, and the Philip Glass thing – are both from *Free*, which was a "bagazine." I was given money by Tony Gnazzo. This was at the end of the school year and he still had money in his budget – this is when he was still running the Mills studio. So he said, "Well, I have five hundred dollars, why don't you do something with it?" There were no limits on it at all. So I contacted Steve Reich and he said, "Well, I'll give you a piece but I want you to also publish these other pieces, by other people." Including Glass, and a guy named Philip Corner. Martin Bartlett had a poem in there, and a man named Pat Gleeson had a poem ... it wasn't really a poem ... I think his contribution is in there, it looks like a layout for a mixing desk. I did

something ... it's just a bunch of stuff printed in different formats and different sizes, all put in a bag. I had a label made for it – stuck it on it. We gave it away for free – it really was free. It later became a collector's item, I'm told, being sold by a rare books dealer for God knows how much money. But I didn't see a penny of it! It's always that way. [laughter]

UPDIKE Do you know how many you gave away?

JENKS I think there were maybe a hundred of them. I put them in local bookstores and of course sent copies to Reich, and people like that.

UPDIKE We have a copy in the archives.

JENKS Oh, you do?

UPDIKE Yeah, MaryClare and I were looking at it last week.

JENKS Did I give it to you?

UPDIKE Probably.

JENKS They're moldering rather badly under a bookshelf at home – I have three or four of them left.

BRZYTWA What gave you that idea?

JENKS What idea? The bag? I don't know. Maybe I started to get a sense of the variety of things I would be dealing with, and I thought about all the misery of binding and all of that, and I thought ... "I'll just put it in a bag." I think it was eminently sensible.

BRZYTWA I think it's great.

JENKS It was kind of a flimsy bag I have to say ... the whole thing was rather flimsy to tell you the truth. It was not really made for immortality. It was made for the age.

UPDIKE I think it's a great idea.

BRZYTWA It's social. There's a social element to seeing all these things in a visual way altogether in a little package.

JENKS You mean, given away for nothing.

BRZYTWA Given away for nothing.

JENKS That was my communist streak. [laughter]

UPDIKE The photo that you showed us earlier of you in the bird costume – was that for your composition, *Those Long Canadian Winters*?

JENKS Yep, that was *Those Long Canadian Winters*. And Peter Veres was the artist. Peter taught at Lone Mountain. Here's a poster of another one of his events. I don't know if this was ... no, I think we first did the *Canadian Winters* at the Conservatory. It involved pre-recorded material that was heard out of loudspeakers, and then there was a loudspeaker in the bird's head. I forget exactly how it was arranged, but I had a button ... there was this enormous, elaborate bit of wiring inside this cloak that I was wearing. I would press a button and these bird-like sounds would come out of the bird head. Not only bird sounds, but I got a very funny – a woman with a real Midwestern twang – a bird identification recording ... [in Midwestern accent] "Red-tailed hawk ... awk awk awk!" She would recite these, and this would be coming out of the head. It was very bizarre. [laughter] So we did that piece also in Canada. Martin had moved up to Canada, and he said, "Why don't you compose a piece and bring it up here, and I'll arrange for some performances?" I guess that was when John came with me. We performed at the University of Victoria, and then at the Western Front, in Vancouver, which is still a going concern, it's sort of an art gallery, performance space. It was the place in the '70s for young artists of all persuasions ... not just musicians but writers and graphics people and video people.

UPDIKE What were some of your favorite compositions to write, and to see performed?

JENKS You mean my own? Overall?

UPDIKE Yeah, overall.

JENKS The songs that I like the most are ... it's seven songs ... here's the other poet that I've written on – Jim Harrison. But I have trouble getting the cycle performed, because it's so long. There are seven poems in it – it's like eighteen minutes. But that's one of my favorite pieces. I like *Ghost Songs*. *The Soup* is one of my favorite pieces, but again it's terribly hard to mount it. I like some electronic pieces – *Tokyo Crow* and *Martin Put That Gun Away* are both good pieces. The earlier pieces are ... I was just so happy when we got computer control ... I was really burned out. I think after *Nagasaki* I didn't compose much studio work because I was just burned out. Gradually ... Mark of the Unicorn was one of the first companies, and they came up with ... it's called Performer.

BRZYTWA DP. Digital Performer ... this was the precursor.

JENKS This was where you entered in each midi note in a list. I don't even think it had a graphic side to it. *Calcululations* was composed using that program. I entered every note, every duration, one at a time. I sort of had to anyway because I was using this computer program that would express ... well, you don't want to know. Well, okay. Every quarter note has two hundred and eight subdivisions, so my program would state the changing durations of notes, in terms of those that were like ... five times two hundred and eighty plus a hundred and twenty six more. And then I would have to figure out what that meant in terms of beats. I wasn't really

following the meter at all, so I would get each ... it had to be done ... I smoked back then, it helped. I'd keep a cigarette burning, and just power through this kind of project. As I grew older, I would sometimes pause to reflect ... "Is this really worth all this...?" [laughter] But back then I would just dive into things like that, and not come up for air until I was done. Very sort of obsessive ... which contradicts what I was saying yesterday about being ADD.

BRZYTWA Well, ADD can be an intense focus and then....

JENKS And then just jump away.

BRZYTWA For every Yin there is a Yang. You could be very focused, and then very unfocused.

JENKS That might be the case. But I did truly spend hours on ... what was that piece called? A piece I wrote for instruments ... oh, *The Confines of Symmetry*. [reading from paper] "A set of variations based on computer generated symmetrical rhythmic processes." I'll just let that description stand in place of the piece itself. [laughter] The piece itself is not as successful as I'd have liked it to be. That was the piece that I composed the material at City College and cranked out tons of paper.

BRZYTWA Did you have these pieces performed live?

JENKS Yeah, that one John Adams led our New Music Ensemble at the time, so he was kind enough to let me hear it.

BRZYTWA So there was electronic music....

JENKS That was not an electronic piece.

BRZYTWA Oh, it was a computer generated piece. Your electronic studio pieces, did you perform them live, or did they exist as recordings?

JENKS I don't remember what we did, but early on when I was hired we actually did a concert down at Glide Memorial Church. Anyway, my class – we went down there and did something, I don't know what. That concert was memorable for me because it was slated to start at eight, and at six the Buchla synthesizer blew out. In that day and age, girls, [laughter] it was possible to rush over to Berkeley, across the Bay Bridge, go to Don Buchla – he fixed it – and rush back in time for the show to go on. You couldn't do that these days, the traffic would make it impossible. Especially at rush hour. Amazing. I guess we were still on speaking terms, Don and I, because I called him and said, "We've got this terrible situation," and he said, "Yeah, okay, come on over."

BRZYTWA Was the tape music ever performed live? Would you bring the reel to reel and play the music that you had recorded with the synthesizers?

JENKS Well, that's what happened with that piece with the lissajous patterns that I described, I was playing a tape piece in the back, sort of accompaniment to the imagery. Doing things live was much more fun for everybody. *Nagasaki* was played on a concert by the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, which existed even back then. But it was boring to sit there and watch two loudspeakers ... "speak." It's more fun to have live pieces. There's a piece called *Seeing in the Dark*, which is really just a tape piece, but I've given it to several different performers ... one was a dancer ... that was the Naropa University summer. Hermann le Roux, who used to be part of the Voice Department, took the piece to Europe. I don't know what he did with it! [laughter] Sort of just improvised along with it. I can't think if I've written pieces that really require a performer to sync up with a pre-recorded tape. Mack McCray early on moaned and groaned about having to do that kind of piece, so I was warned off ... "If that's the performer's attitude!" But I may be wrong, I'd have to look at the list of the pieces I wrote. I tried almost everything.

Well, that *Explorers* piece, actually, had a continuously running tape in the background, so that did require some coordination on the part of the singers. I've tended to avoid that. I did *Tokyo Crow* here, in the big auditorium, but only because Jason [O'Connell] had said, "We can do it in four channels!" So I made a four channel version of it, and everybody liked that. That makes up for the fact that there are no performers – if you have the stuff moving around, that's cool. Tape pieces are made for home consumption, is my feeling.

BRZYTWA I feel ... it really depends on the piece. If the piece has a reason to be in the space, then I think it can be in the Concert Hall.

JENKS What would the reason be?

BRZYTWA Well, if it was some sort of ritual thing, where part of it was all of the people to be together when they were listening ... I think that would be a reason.

JENKS Isn't that what goes on at any concert?

BRZYTWA That's my point exactly. [laughter] I do feel that tape music could be in the Concert Hall.

JENKS If there's something visual ... if there's something for people to look at. Did I tell you about the early performance of a piece called *Visage* by [Luciano] Berio? Well, it's a tape piece, and a rather long one, of this woman sort of going crazy. Do you know the piece? We're talking classic here, girl. [laughter] It's for electronic sounds, and Cathy Berberian, who was his wife at the time, doing this kind of strange vocal behavior. It's an interesting piece, but I don't think Berio wanted anyone to sit in the dark listening to it for twenty-odd minutes. So he did it at 321 Divisadero, the old Tape Music Center. Before the piece started, all the lights went off and we heard shufflings ... movements, noises, on the stage. And then the lights came up and there was a group of about six or seven people standing, sitting, leaning, lying down – all staring at us, the audience. Impassively. And then he played this piece, in which this woman goes through sixteen different kinds of nervous breakdowns, and hysterics and giggles. And these

people are just staring at us while this is going on. Incredibly powerful. They were so expressionless that we started reading all of these emotions into their otherwise blank faces. It was like looking at manikins, and thinking – "Oh, they're going crazy! Oh, they think it's funny." It was quite remarkable. That was a great solution to what I think was an annoying problem – that tape pieces are boring, except at home. So, that's my point of view – what's yours? [laughter]

UPDIKES Do you use slide projectors? Did you project images during any of your performances?

JENKS Yes, in *Those Long Canadian Winters* there was a series of slides of an abandoned movie theater in Detroit. Each slide was the same picture but darkened more and more. I think the darkening effect was done in the camera. Don't ask me what that had to do with birds, or Canada, or anything. It was an atmospheric thing, somewhat ominous. We did a version of *Martin Put That Gun Away* that had a kind of slide show. I was looking for it recently, but I couldn't find it. A couple of kids in the Voice Department struck different poses. The guy was in a trench coat, looking kind of Mafioso. The young woman would have various terrified expressions. I think I did some other pieces in this improvisatory phase of my life with slide projections, but I can't remember any longer.

There was a really, really early piece. [looks through list of works] *LAPIS*. *LAPIS* was named after a film there were a couple of brothers called the Whitney Brothers, down in Los Angeles. They made films that were kind of mandala images. Sort of the kind of thing that Windows Media Player produces, but they're very, very, very gorgeous, and rich and pulsating abstract images. I made a piece to accompany a showing of a film called *LAPIS*.

UPDIKE What are some of the more recent compositions that you've made? *Tokyo Crow*?

JENKS *Tokyo Crow* is ten, twelve years ago ... I probably have dates there, but I can't remember. There's a piece called *Ognaggio al'Anzimonio*, which is a garbled way of saying, "Homage to Antonio Gnazzo." Anthony Gnazzo ... he really is Italian. He's second generation Italian. To call him Antonio is okay. That's a more recent piece.

UPDIKE Are you working on something now?

JENKS Well, I am ... I've completed two pieces, one is for piano and live electronics ... Ableton program. The other is a solo piece for actress with electronic sound accompanying it. But she doesn't have to synchronize with the electronic part ... I will advance to the next episode to be played when she's ready, so there will be a live performance aspect to it. That piece is *Oh It's You*. It's about that moment when ... in this case a woman encounters another person and it's a man. But the man never appears, you never see him. So she's kind of talking to the empty air. She says, "Oh, it's you." And then she will sort of fall apart, and be so confused about how to deal with this person that she will adopt various different personae; sometimes she'll sound like kind of a maiden aunt, and will say, "Oh, do sit down!" And then she'll say, [in monotone] "More coffee? Need some hot water?" Kind of like a waitress. Then she

will say things like, "Your eyes...." [laughter] So there's all this kind of attraction and repulsion and fear. At one point she says, "You say you've done time?" So there's all kinds of ... who is this person? But they get married, and live happily.... No, they don't get married. [laughter] But there is some kind of acceptance, and her panic subsides. So there's that piece, and it's called *Oh It's You*. And the piano piece is called *Hammered*. I'm having my first rehearsal with Ian Scarfe today of that piece, and I'm scared shitless. [laughter] It's very hard to bring off. You put a little pickup on the piano, and all this sound comes into the little laptop, and Ableton tries to deal with it all. It was a lot easier when I made it up with a midi piano, which you could control. But anyway, we'll see how it works out. It's scheduled for performance next February. Here, and also at the Center For New Music. With the terrifying Amy Foote. [laughter] She's not terrifying, she's charming and brilliant – a really good actress.

UPDIKE Do you have any other questions about compositions before we move to the Conservatory?

BRZYTWA I don't think so, I think I'm good.

JENKS Let me look at the list. *Mummer Music*, there's the piece that should have been videotaped, that was amazing. That was a mime named Peter Kors we made up this whole drama of a businessman ... it's the standard stereotype story of a businessman being driven mad by the intensity and competitiveness of his job and finally at the climax we have a deluge of telephones ringing. He has a psychotic breakdown on stage.

Marrying Music ... there was another two piano piece called *Ansichtskarte an Johann*, which is a very jolly piece and I like that a lot. Mack has played it a few times.

Oh, and you asked me about another poet – William Stafford was the other one, but I'm not so crazy about those songs.

Letter from Linda is going to be played in this concert, and it's one of my very favorite pieces. It's based on a letter that was found in a parking lot. The poet who found it read it and said, "Oh my God," and published it with the lines broken up as though it were a poem. It's basically this young woman who is stuck out in the country with a new kid. I imagine her living in an RV or broken-down shack, with broken-down cars in the yard. Kind of what I think used to be referred to unkindly as trailer trash. She's talking about, "Well, I don't see much of Bob anymore. He has his friends. My favorite thing is going shopping," she says. "I'll get a new book by ..." and she'll name an author who writes trashy novels, "And I'll get some new music. That's my favorite thing, singing along to my favorite songs." And then at the end at a kind of excruciating point she says – it's a letter to someone else – she says, "I think it's good for you that you're getting back into religion. I have my own religious feelings, but you know Bob, he always laughs at me when I talk about my feelings, so I just keep it all buried." It's just so sad. And then she says, "Well, Bobby's crying, so I have to go." Her kid is named after this brute that she's married to. [laughter] I regularly burst into tears when I hear the piece. That piece is really the most expressive ... the most touching piece that I've composed. But I do like the Harrison songs too, for a kind of sweetness in personality that come through. So that's it!

UPDIKE I guess if you don't mind, I'll ask if we can go back to the early '70s when you first started at the Conservatory.

JENKS Right.

UPDIKE Could you describe – I know that you already talked a little about your interview with Larry Snyder, where you brought your synthesizer with you. Could you talk about the Conservatory on Ortega Street, when you started – what the atmosphere was like there?

JENKS Well, it was very bubbly, and cheerful. I liked it. I had the impression – maybe this wasn't really true – but I had the impression that I heard a lot of laughter in the halls. And the halls were rather narrow, so you would bump into everyone all the time. So I would see people a lot, which doesn't happen here at all. I run into people in the elevator, so I have these very, very brief encounters, and then everybody goes off to what they were doing. And the administration administered with a very light hand. There was not so much of this kind of top down ... actually, I was very startled when Mary Ellen Poole asked me to write a syllabus to describe what I was going to teach. I'd never been asked to do such a thing! "Really? You mean I have to make it up ahead of time?" [laughter] It was kind of a hippy feel to things back then. We all had long hair and used illegal drugs. Electronic music has gone through such spirals. At the time that it was announced that I was teaching an electronic music class, there were people coming out of the woodwork, beating down the doors to take that class. Taxi drivers, just all kinds of people. Not just enrolled students, but they would want to buy the class. That was very interesting, and fun. And then Yamaha entered the picture, and all of a sudden everybody had a synthesizer. And then it became old hat, and everybody had done that already. The composers that came here ... they had been exposed to what was known as electronic music, and the experimental stuff was off in the shadows. They didn't know anything about that. They just knew the pop music, and commercial stuff. So electronic music got a very bad reputation because of that. My course still suffers from both the bad reputation, on the hand, that's still somewhat carried with it. And the fact that everybody has this equipment, so they think they already know everything about electronic music. I have to admit that in some cases they know more than I do about some things. I say, "Bring in your favorite pieces, I want to hear what they are." It always turns out to be this kind of industrial pop stuff, with maybe some interesting noises in it. But I don't feel like there's any real art to it, besides what the basic art of making that music is. Not inconsiderable, but....

So ... I'm not going to report on the scandals, which were not infrequent on Ortega Street, because most of the perpetrators are still here! [laughter] Including me. Just to give you the tip of the iceberg, I myself got involved with a graduate student, who subsequently became my wife, so it was all above-board in the end. But we kept our relationship quiet until she graduated. She was older than most graduate students at that point, so I shouldn't be accused of being a cradle-robbler. It wasn't like that. But anyway, such things did happen from time to time.

I really enjoyed life at the Conservatory. I was allowed to do what I wanted to do. As I am pretty much here. But it was a more sociable architecture. It has a lot to do with architecture. It was

astounding to me when I got here and saw how it was laid out and began to experience the social consequences of that. I thought, "My God, what an influence this physical structure has on my whole social sphere." Now I have more conversations with Scott Foglesong on Facebook than I do here. And McCray, I hardly ever see him. I almost never see Paul Hersh. It's weird, because it used to be really easy to just fall into conversation. Our mailboxes were all in the same place, so we were always there going through the junk mail ... you know, it would be easy to ... anyway, that was that.

UPDIKE Could you talk a little bit about Mack McCray and Paul Hersh back when you joined the Conservatory? Some of the people who have been here for a long time?

JENKS I don't know, I never really worked with Paul Hersh on any projects, it's that we were both at Yale at the same time, so we had a collegial connection there. But McCray performed my pieces, and also John Adams' pieces. I didn't know him that well. As I said, I'm not as gregarious as I wish I had been. Of course, McCray married a Japanese graduate student too. So it was all fine. [laughter] I don't know how many other ... I once accused Tim Bach of doing the same thing, but he denied it vigorously. [laughter] Because he's also married to a Japanese woman, it's weird. I think he met her somewhere else, I'm not sure. I don't think I have much to say about them. I mostly knew them, and Hermann le Roux, the singer, just in conjunction with doing various pieces, I didn't really hang out ... I always lived in the East Bay. Well, that's not true, I lived in San Francisco for about fifteen years. I've forgotten ... my family complained that I moved so much, they kept having to erase my address ... this was back when they had address books. So I moved back and forth.

UPDIKE Could you tell us about some of the different classes that you taught over the years?

JENKS Oh, why do you want to hear that? That's boring.

BRZYTWA I do. But if you don't want to talk about it....

JENKS Well, I taught harmony, and counterpoint, and history of music ... all that good stuff. I learned one serious truth, that you never really understand something until you've taught it. You may think you understand it, but then you think, "How exactly do I articulate this?" And then all of a sudden you're looking at it far more carefully than the sort of blurry impression that you had. I actually became a big fan of people like Josef Haydn, who turns out to be this incredibly inventive composer. And even Brahms, unfashionable though it may be.

My favorite course, if I may say so, was called Architechtonics. It was a study of algorithmic music from the late Middle Ages to the twentieth century.

BRZYTWA I want to take that class!

JENKS It's really fascinating stuff. Like the isorhythmic motet, did you ever learn what that was? Yes, no? Well, it was early phase music. And there's a piece by [Guillaume de]

Machaut called *In My End is My Beginning*, and indeed there are three voices – the two upper parts exchange material and play the notes in reverse order (retrograde), while the lowest part simply returns by the path it followed to the middle, also playing the notes in reverse. It's not a terribly wonderful piece, but it's just a completely mad structure. They were really into numbers in those days. They would do canons – they're called prolation canons, I think, where the top melody ... they all start together, but each one is going a little more slowly than the one before, and yet they still line up so they get acceptable harmonies. These amazing acts of calculation and contrivance. And on to Conlon Nancarrow, and his crazy stuff that he did for player piano, and along the way the variations on *Vom Himmel Hoch*, by J.S. Bach, which is another one of those sort of, "Can you top this?" Outrageous sort of canons and inversions and all of that. That was kind of a neat piece. Did I not send you a description of some courses?

BRZYTWA You did, but that was not on there – that course that you just described.

JENKS No, because it didn't really pertain so much to the technology. But the one called From Music to Mantra was material that I've tried to teach in my electronic music class, but there's never enough time to talk about, which is a topic of abiding concern to me, which is the uses of music. The way it's used, and abused, is a matter of some interest and concern to me. Particularly when it's used for propaganda or manipulating of consumers' desires. That's all ... I get upset about that sometimes. I don't like that so much. So I've done a lot of studies on it, but I've never had the forum to talk about it very much. That's the class that might have been ... Indre Viskontas and I proposed it as an Adult Education course, but only two people signed up for it, so we figured it wasn't worth doing it. But it seems like an important subject.

BRZYTWA I agree.

JENKS And it kind of touches on the acoustic ecology movement. Do you know what that is? Well, do you know a woman named Hildegard Westerkamp? There's this whole movement that started up in Canada ... well, I was talking to you about *The Tuning of the World*, by Murray Schafer. It's about, basically, what the role of sound in society ... he makes the wonderful point that it's always the people with the most power that make the loudest sound. So back in the Middle Ages the loudest sound you heard was a church bell. And in the nineteenth century the loudest sound was the factory. And now it's the car. But now people are getting their revenge, of a sort, by having really loud sound systems in their cars so they can fight back. And of course we all suffer as a result.

BRZYTWA Well, there's a huge trend right now of very, very quiet music. Do you think this is a response?

JENKS Oh, absolutely. I'm not too aware of that. Is there really quiet music?

BRZYTWA Oh, yes. We should talk. You and I think to hang out, I think, Alden. We could show each other some things.

JENKS Quiet music. But how would you hear it?

BRZYTWA You have to wait! You have to wait for the loud sound, you have to sit and wait and think about what's about to happen.

UPDIKE Is it actually silence?

BRZYTWA There are long gaps of silence. But then amazing intricate events that occur. It could be a recording of a rainforest, it could be a fugue, or just a sine wave, and then all these events kind of fade in and out of each other in a long form, with lots of silence in-between.

JENKS This is something you've made?

BRZYTWA It's not really my thing, but I studied it, and have friends who are very interested in it.

JENKS Is this La Monte Young?

BRZYTWA More like Michael Pizarro – is one of the big guys. Sometimes they use chance operations, sometimes they don't. It's very ... coming out of Cage ... but it has sonification of phenomenon in nature, sometimes they'll use data from biological processes for the composing. I think you might find it interesting.

JENKS I might. Do you know a guy named Bernie Krause? He's been recording soundscapes for the past forty years. He's the person who observed that in the rainforest all the different animals have different pitch levels at which they operate, so they don't conflict. So, "My mating call is not going to be drowned out or confused with someone else's danger call." Quite nice.

UPDIKE Did you ever go out into the world and record your own sounds from the environment around you?

JENKS Oh, yeah. Actually not that much. I remember going to a scrapyard on Third Street in San Francisco. Back in the day you could just wander in. There was no, "Our insurance won't permit...!" So I went around taping things ... I wasn't actually recording it, I was trying to get some big circular saw blades, which make fabulous gongs. I think there's some photographs in there [indicates folder of photos and ephemera] of treasures I found in that scrapyard. I remember at one time I needed the sound of pigeons flying – and I had to go to the Oakland Museum, where they have a library of nature sounds, and I had to actually buy it. [laughter] It just seemed like the easiest way to solve the problem at the time. I can't remember why I needed that sound, but I did. *Tokyo Crow* is entirely based on sounds I recorded in Tokyo. Not only the crows, but the markets, the street noise, parks, and the TV news. As I don't understand the language very well, I became entranced by its inherent music. Some of my pieces have important moments that are "anti-climaxes", places where everything gets very quiet, intimate – and there is such a moment in *Tokyo Crow*, where a woman from TV seems almost to be singing. It turns out she's talking about the weather!

UPDIKE Are there any memorable composition students that you've had that you want to mention?

JENKS That's a good question. The first name that comes to mind is Barry Philips. He and his wife Shelly were kind of American Hindus. Lots of incense, and vegetarian ... very kind of peaceful, sweet people. He was a pretty ambitious composer for a time, but then he went down to Santa Cruz and became more of a recording engineer. He's put out quite a few recordings. One that's very funny, actually, it's called *Toolbox Christmas*. It's all of your favorite Christmas melodies, but played on equipment in a workshop, like circular saws ... it's basically sampling them. But you would have *Hark the Herald Angels Sing* played on saws and stuff like that. That's cute.

Who else? I know there have been others, but I'm really not good with names. I'd have to look through the class lists. Dick Mathias, he's a clarinet player. He was a composer and clarinet player. I think he still sort of survives on his clarinet playing. He's around, he's an Easy Bay person. There's a guy named David Levine, but I probably shouldn't mention his name because he still owes the Conservatory money. I don't know, he may have passed the statute of limitations at this point, he was quite a long time ago. I won't say anything more, he might read this. [laughter] We're still friends. Do any other names come to mind? I don't think so ... not right now.

BRZYTWA Alden, could you tell me a little bit about the evolution of your electronic music class over the years, with the new technology that's been coming out? How much has it changed, or are the fundamentals still the same?

JENKS Well of course they're not. I'm no longer teaching anybody how to use patch cords and go from an oscillator to a filter. Although I still do have recourse to it as a way of explaining how synthesizers work, and whatnot. Obviously what I've had to teach has changed as the technology has changed. And the way the technology changed ... you wake up the next morning and everything's different, so you have to learn the next thing. I think things have kind of topped out at this point. When the FM synthesizer came out, the Yamaha synthesizer, I mean – "Oh my God!" Everything you knew is wrong, everything you owned is useless. So that was amazing, and then computer music – "Oh my God! Forget FM and Yamaha, now we can do it ourselves." The final evolutionary step that needed to be taken was finally taken when digital audio became common. You could not only use digital synthesis, but digital audio sampling and sound manipulation with programs like Ableton. There's a program called Metasynth, an Apple program, I used only that for *Martin Put That Gun Away*. You can just do extraordinary things with that. If only it were a Windows program, it would be the centerpiece of my work here. At least an important part of it. But that having been achieved, the rest just seems like refinements and, "Oh, these midi controllers are kind of nice..." but I haven't seen any

BRZYTWA Mind blowing

JENKS Mind blowing – "Now I have to forget everything I know." Ableton was

sort of the last. I always thought I ought to know Max/MSP really well, but in fact the students here immediately glaze over when I try to explain it ... that's the problem, they don't like to hear me explain how devices work. It hasn't changed that much, because the students always arrive thinking they know what electronic music is. And then when I expose them to what it really is, they're very shocked. [laughter] And say things like, "It made me want to run out of the room!" That was one student's reaction to a Stockhausen piece. But she didn't run out of the room, to her credit. Sometimes I get the feeling that not only do they not know what electronic music is, they don't really want to know what it is. Because it's too weird, and it kind of threatens their perspective on who they are and what they're doing. We get a lot of composers here who basically see themselves as going into commercial lines of work, like film music or game sounds, or things like that. What I'm interested in is electronic music as an artistic medium. Whether it's profitable or not. That's kind of airy fairy stuff. These more sensible students don't have time – they don't really want to know about that. They get interested in it, but life happens. It's amazing that my circumstances permitted me to be frivolous like this for as long as I did. By the time I got a job, I didn't know how to be anything but frivolous, so I just went on. [laughter] I have done commercial work, but I haven't gone out and looked for it, it found me.

BRZYTWA Do you feel like having to learn new things over and over again in your field – do you think that has influenced you as a composer? This curiosity that you have – do you think that's connected to this exercise of having to relearn the technology every five to ten years?

JENKS Maybe. At the same time it really interferes with my life too. When I would get a good program, I wanted to stick with it until ... what was it called ... Studio Vision was the program, I forgot the name of the company ... they just went out of business, they disappeared. So I had to learn something else. I can't remember what I learned next, but ... I've seen it all. [laughter] But of course, as soon as you get a new program ... there are things that Ableton does that I still ... there are things it can do that I haven't had occasion to use. I'm one of those people that actually reads the manual. Not cover to cover, but if there are things I don't understand, I read about them, because that's my job – to know what it's about. And there are really some extraordinary things that they've put in there that ... although on the surface it seems like a program made for rock and pop music, it doesn't have to be. It is convenient for that, but it doesn't have to be that way at all. I like that.

BRZYTWA It's powerful, it can do a lot of things.

JENKS So, what else can I bore you with? [laughter]

UPDIKE About a month ago you had described your meeting with a Tibetan Lama, and this seemed to be an experience that really made an impression on you and shaped your life. I was wondering if you could tell us that story of how you first met the man and the experiences that you had with him.

JENKS Well, a guy I knew was into Zen, Japanese Zen. He had heard that this guy was coming, and they needed someone to record his speech. He knew that I had a tape recorder and a microphone, so I went and recorded this lama, Chögyam Trungpa was his name. But I was

astonished by the man, because he came out wearing a very, very nice British suit ... Savile Row, you know, very handsome. He would come out on the stage, sit down, and light up a Marlboro. He always spoke without notes, and his presentations were absolutely beautifully organized and very interesting. His way of describing psychology was ... "Right on! Absolutely!" and, "How did you know that about me?!" So I was impressed by his intelligence, I was impressed by his smoking – I smoked too. I remember a woman in the audience was incensed by it – "How can you smoke?" He said, very calmly, "I just smoke." He also liked to drink, it turned out. I was impressed mostly by a quality of fearlessness that he had. He would come out there – and this was a man who was partially paralyzed, so he was somewhat ... he couldn't walk very well. English was not his first language, but he spoke the language beautifully and very expressively. He was able to convey his ideas in unmistakable ways. He was really kind of an astonishing man. After I did that first recording, I went to hear him speak again on that same visit to the Bay Area. And then, Jerry Granelli, who was Mose Allison's drummer. Do you know Mose Allison? Jerry Granelli was also impressed by this guy. He stood up and said, "We're going to start a meditation center inspired by his instruction, and he'll be our teacher in name." He wasn't going to live in the Bay Area, but he would help us set it up and give us some guidelines. So I went along with that, and got involved in starting and running an organization – not my favorite thing. Ultimately I was even allowed to teach Buddhist philosophy and meditation practice. That became quite an energy drain. There's kind of a process that one goes through, at least in his way of doing things, which is – you go from very basic kind of stupid mediation. You just sit there and watch your brain run amok. That's called the Hinayana. Then the Mahayana is more like Zen practice, which is a more outgoing thing, where you supposedly got yourself together through the first level of practice and now you can actually teach other people and experience that all important Buddhist experience known as compassion, where you actually let other people into your domain. And then there's something called the Vajrayana, or Tantric Buddhism, which I never understood ... it had a lot to do with mystical stuff and manipulation of energies. In order to be admitted to that level of Buddhism, you have to do a hundred thousand prostrations, while visualizing a tree filled with all the teachers of your lineage floating there and looking at you. I tried it for a while, but I began to feel that maybe this was not ... that this was a little too serious. [laughter] It seemed to be saying to me, "This is what you're going to be doing. You're not going to be doing music. This is a full time job." I basically resigned. I said, "I'm at a crossroads and I'm not going to go there. It's too demanding and I don't know if I believe all this stuff ... or at least understand it." So I'm happy being a happy-go-lucky Buddhist without affiliating myself with any ... that teacher is dead now, anyway. But his organization still exists – that Naropa [University] where John Cage came ... I told that story.

BRZYTWA Did you tell the whole ... I don't think I heard that story.

UPDIKE I think you told me a month ago, but if you'd like to tell it now we'd be happy to hear it.

JENKS I guess. This was early '70s and this guy's name was Chögyam [Trungpa]. Chögyam started – for someone who was disabled and a drunk he was sure dynamic. He started centers all over the world, he started a university and a monastery. Unbelievable ... unbelievable fellow. Intensely charismatic. So he started this university – he had Allen Ginsberg there and a

bunch of other friends of Ginsberg – a variety of other people that I hadn't heard of, who were philosophers and whatnot. William Burroughs, Anne Waldman, maybe Gary Snyder, all got involved. So I said, "I'll get John Cage to come." I wrote him a letter saying, "Dear John," (I knew he had Buddhist sympathies) so I described what would go on, and said, "Could you come and do some kind of performance here?" As it happened, he was going to be flying out to the West Coast to see his friend Nobby Brown. Probably that name is not known to you, but Norman O. Brown was a very important philosopher for some of us in the '70s. He was a chess companion of John Cage – they would play chess together and discuss philosophy ... I don't know what they did ... I don't know what smart people like that do. [laughter] But anyway, he said, "I'll stop in Boulder and I'll do a performance." And so I was like, "Oh my God – oh my God – oh my God!" [laughter] "He's coming!"

The Conservatory allowed me to take a small synthesizer – actually I think it was that same cabinet, but had more Buchla stuff in it. I took it on the train and rode to Boulder, and set up a little studio there in a building. I had some students, that was fine. But then Cage came, so I danced attendance upon him. We had a lovely day, we went around and collected mushrooms. He was head of the New York Mycological Association. So he knew which ones would not kill you. He collected a big bag of mushrooms, and then we all went to a big Indian restaurant where he gave the mushrooms to the cook and said, "Please prepare these the best way you know how." So that was nice. And then he put on a performance of this piece. It's based on [Henry David] Thoreau's doodles in the side of his diary. Observations of little bugs and plants. Cage did a piece in which he would recite the text of the diary, but one phoneme at a time. So he would go – "d" – and then there would be silence. There were slides of these doodles – photographed so close that you couldn't make out what they were. Well, I can't quite describe everything that went on because I was immediately distracted ... there was a large contingent of fraternity boys from the University of Colorado in Denver who had gotten wind of this event, and decided that this would be a really cool thing to go to. Their version of John Cage was like, "Whatever man. You can do anything." So [they thought] "Let's go and be participants in this artwork." These were basically ... they seemed like football players. I don't know what they were doing there, but they started screwing around and yelling and singing and playing guitars. Just totally off the wall – totally inappropriate. Poor John, he got up afterward – all these people rushed up to him and said, "How was that? Was that your philosophy?" And John said – this was published somewhere, this speech – someone fortunately was there with a microphone, but all I remember him saying was, "Ever since I became so foolishly famous, people have gotten these ideas." He basically said, "No, that isn't my philosophy. That's just a lot of kids playing – letting off steam – just a lot of ego and display." I had to go and apologize to him. He was so sweet about it. And then, the tantalizing thing I held out was, I said, "You'll have a private audience with the Lama." And the Lama's front office was saying, "No, no, no – he's too busy. He can't meet this guy, whoever this guy is." I went ballistic. I said, "Wrong answer. That's not what's going to happen." And so they finally conceded that maybe he would have a half hour to talk to him. Cage came out just radiant from that. He was so touched by this guy, and so impressed by him. He said, "Do you know what he said?" He said, "I'm so glad that you're doing the work that you're doing." And Cage felt vindicated by this. It was really so sweet. So that wasn't a total disaster. [laughter] It had the earmarks of a total disaster after a while. So that was that. I did a concert of my own stuff that summer. That was a one time thing. I didn't resume my relationship with Naropa. It's still going

though. The Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics – is one aspect of it – that's Allen Ginsberg's name for this workshop, or series of courses. And there are all kinds of Buddhist courses.

UPDIKE I guess now, if you don't mind – and I certainly don't mind if you repeat anything that you've already said, but I was wondering if you could reflect a little on some of the key elements of your own life that have contributed to your music – your own compositions?

JENKS Well, I already talked about Paul Wolfe, the harpsichordist who introduced me to Bach. Even before him, there was that guy named Robert Kraus who introduced me to classical music in the fullest sense of the word. Those are obviously really, really important people.

UDPIKE Were there some big events in your personal life, maybe, throughout the years, that influenced your compositions? People that you knew, relationships...?

JENKS Well, everybody who took LSD were fundamentally changed forever by that. [laughter] So I supposed I would include that as a life-changing event. Stockhausen, clearly an important influence. Hmm ... not really. It sounds like you have something in mind, like "Oh, when I fell in love." Or, "When I fell out of love," or "Was almost murdered," or something dramatic, but I don't have anything all that colorful to convey. [laughter] Sorry about that. There are people who want to externalize everything that is internal to them, and they become performers. And then there's people like me. [laughter] As I said, I even gave up improvising. I said, "I want to do this all rather carefully and quietly at home, and then send it out like a Frisbee and see who catches it on the other end." No big dramas. I did scream that one time. [laughter] But it shocked and embarrassed me when I did it. I couldn't believe I had asked myself to actually stand up on a stage and scream at the audience.

BRZYTWA I love that.

JENKS I remember nothing else about the piece. Obviously there was more to it than I stood up and screamed. There was electronic sound.... Oh, you know who was a really wonderful person – I didn't know all that well – was ... I can't even remember his name! You know the Oppenheimer who was an important person in the atom bomb? His brother started the Exploratorium, and he was very welcoming to me. There was something called EAT – Experiments in Art and Technology, which was kind of – there were people on the East Coast and people on the West Coast – I don't know what kind of organization there was, but through them I met Bill Hearn, this engineer, and we collaborated and he made designs for us. This was all through the auspices of the Exploratorium and Oppenheimer. Larry Shaw, who is now retired, was head of electronics there for years. I would call him up and say, "Larry, I need to borrow your...." "Fine, fine." The kindness of strangers, and the kindness of friends, have certainly made a difference. Martin Bartlett was certainly important. But you know, my freshman year roommate – well, he wasn't my roommate, but was on my floor – I had him for dinner a couple of nights ago – he's a classicist. We toured Greece together. Talk about life-changing events. He would stand there on the beach and he would say, "This is where Odysseus's son came when

he...." He would describe.... We would see a stump of something and he would say, "That was Nestor's Palace." Oh, my God. I was talking about old stuff – I like old stuff – and this was really old stuff. Fantastically old stuff. There were illegal drugs involved in that trip too, but they only enhanced the experience. None of this is going on the permanent record, by the way! [laughter] We will redact this later on. I'm just telling it like it was.

I actually gave up drugs at a certain point. That was when I was a Buddhist. I decided – especially marijuana – I said, "I'm not going to do this anymore." Immediately stopped, never missed it.

BRZYTWA Did it change your music?

JENKS What, marijuana? Or not using marijuana?

BRZYTWA Both.

JENKS I don't think so. It's just a recreational drug for me. LSD was always not a recreational drug for me. It was a terribly serious, sort of amazing, profound experience. I couldn't believe it when I heard that people were going to rock concerts on LSD. How can you do that? But ultimately, I did go to *Tristan and Isolde* with my eyes wide as saucers. [laughter] I thought the first act was funny, because there's this big fat lady up there singing. And then the second act I said, "God, this is beautiful." And the third act ... "This is terrifying." [laughter] The whole thing turned into this Oedipal drama up there. Talk about life-changing. My Wagner period was very intense. That's when John Adams entered the picture. I said, "Have you ever heard any of this stuff?" He got very excited about it. Okay, I think I have nothing more to say, unless you have anything else you'd like to ask.

UPDIKE I had one last question, which you may or may not want to speak about. So I'll ask, and then you can decide. [laughter] And now that I'm thinking about it, this may parallel what you were talking about with how teaching electronic music has changed over the years. But I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about how electronic music in the Bay Area has evolved since you got involved in the '60s.

JENKS Well, you know, there was a time when I knew everyone who was in electronic music. It was a community of maybe fifteen people. But it took off so rapidly that in short order I didn't know half the people, and then ultimately I hardly knew anybody, because everybody was doing it! So it changed from being this kind of marginal avant-garde quirky behavior, to something where I had to explain carefully, "Well, it's electronic music but it's not that kind of electronic music. Because people would immediately think that I was talking about fake French horns and electric pianos. One's social status changed from being this weirdo to being suspected of collaboration with the enemy – the big companies. Oh, you're just writing this industrial schlock. It ain't so.

UPDIKE Well, thank you so much, Alden.

JENKS Alright, well you send me ... I'll have to redact it carefully.

UPDIKE We'll go through it together.

JENKS I have no idea what I've given away. [laughter] That's fine, I'm pleased that you invited me to reminiscence. I don't normally.

UPDIKE It's been fascinating.

JENKS Well, you know, my son never asks me anything about my history. And I never asked my father anything about his history. And I deeply regret it. Deeply regret it. I hope that my son ... well now, I'll start telling him about something and he says, "Yeah, you told me about that five years ago," rolling his eyes.

BRZYTWA Someday he'll be glad to have....

JENKS My mother's grandfather wrote a diary, which came into my hands. It was just fascinating, this portrait of the 1870s in Missouri. This guy was a judge. So I started writing something as well, that attempts to convey what it was like to grow up when I grew up, because there's going to be a time when it's as remote as the 1870s, you know. So maybe that will fall into his hands.... Of course, he'll say, "Oh yeah, he told me this already." [laughter] Or, "It's another one of his political rants." [laughter]