

Music at MIT Oral History Project

John D. Corley

Interviewed

by

Forrest Larson

August 19, 1999

Interview no. 1

**Massachusetts Institute of Technology
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Note on timing notations:

Recording of this interview can be found either as one continuous file or as split up over two audio CDs. Timings are designated in chapter headings in both formats, with the timing on the full file preceding the timing on the CD version.

Contributors

John D. Corley (1919-2000) was founding Director and Conductor of the MIT Concert Band from 1948 to 1999, and conductor of the MIT Symphony Orchestra from 1955 to 1965. He was a leader among conductors dedicated to performing music originally written for the concert band, giving Boston premieres of works by Copland, Hindemith, Schoenberg, and others. A strong advocate for contemporary composers, over 50 new works were commissioned by him for the MIT Concert Band. He had been a member of the Boston Brass Quartet, and was an active freelance trumpet player. During World War II he served in the U.S. Army as Band Leader in Iceland. From 1973 to 1980, he conducted the Boston Conservatory Wind Ensemble, and was Director of Music for the Brookline Massachusetts Public Schools from 1956 to 1973. He also founded and directed the Boston Brass Ensemble.

Forrest Larson, Library Assistant at the Lewis Music Library, has attended training workshops in oral history methodology and practice at Simmons College and by the Society of American Archivists, and is a member of the Oral History Association. He is also an active composer and violist.

Interview conducted by Forrest Larson on August 19, 1999, in the MIT Lewis Music Library. Duration of the audio recording is 1:28:22. First of three interviews. Second interview: September 3, 1999; third interview: December 10, 1999.

Music at MIT Oral History Project

The Lewis Music Library's *Music at MIT Oral History Project* was established in 1999 to document the history of music at MIT. For over 100 years, music has been a vibrant part of the culture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. This history covers a wide variety of genres, including orchestral, chamber, and choral musical groups, as well as jazz, musical theater, popular and world music. Establishment of a formal music program in 1947 met the growing needs for professional leadership in many of the performing groups. Shortly thereafter, an academic course curriculum within the Division of Humanities was created. Over the years, the music faculty and alumni have included many distinguished performers, composers, and scholars.

Through in-depth recorded audio interviews with current and retired MIT music faculty, staff, former students, and visiting artists, the *Music at MIT Oral History Project* is preserving this valuable legacy for the historical record. These individuals provide a wealth of information about MIT. Furthermore, their professional lives and activities are often historically important to the world at large. Audio recordings of all interviews are available in the MIT Lewis Music Library.

1. Early musical training and experience (00:22—CD1 00:22)

FORREST LARSON: I'm here with John Corley, the retired conductor of the MIT Concert Band. I'm Forrest Larson. We're in the Lewis Music Library. It's August 19th, 1999. So John, thank you very, very much for coming. I've been looking forward to this so much!

JOHN CORLEY: I am, too! [laughs]

FL: You have quite a distinguished career, and lots of things to talk about. So can you tell me about where you grew up, your early musical training, experiences, teachers, and high school bands, orchestras, that kind of thing?

JC: Well, condensed, or quickly: born in Vermont, lived in northern New Hampshire through the second grade; then down to Connecticut near Hartford, and then to Medford [Mass.]. And Medford was from grade three or four, on through high school. And then my musical experience started in junior high school, as a trumpet player. I was really turned on by the trumpet, and I trace that back to my excitement in hearing the town band back up in Vermont and New Hampshire, when we'd go back to visit with relatives during the summer. And so, it seemed a natural thing to be attracted to the trumpet. And that happened in junior high school.

And I was fortunate in studying with two elderly trumpet players who were prominent in the field. One was Bert Fisher [spelling unverified], who was Walter Smith's solo cornetist, in the [Walter] Smith Band, in Boston, and a pupil of Herbert L. Clarke [cornetist and bandleader]. And consequently, I had to learn all of Herbert L. Clarke's solos, which were very difficult pieces.

On into high school, as not only the solo cornetist of the band, but as a student conductor of the band, which turned me on. And I had a group—a performing group—it was a brass sextet. And we played at women's clubs, we played at various affairs throughout the town, and ended up playing in competitions. And I wrote a lot of pieces—not composed, but arranged a lot of pieces, for the sextet, hence the beginning of my arranging experience. Then to BU [Boston University] music school, continuing on trumpet lessons, pursuing a course in music education.

2. U.S. Army Band in World War II (03:15—CD1 03:15)

JC: My senior year was interrupted by World War II, and I enlisted at the end of the first semester, senior year, and played in an Air Force band, solo cornet, and ended up going to the Army music school [U.S. Army School of Music] in the fall of 1942—and graduating there, the head of my class, and stationed in Texas.

My first band was—oh, I played in Texas—my first band was in the 28th [Infantry] Division, Omar Bradley's division. And immediately I was not only conducting band rehearsals and concerts for the troops, but training with fixed bayonet and steel helmet, and the whole business. Because after all, we were infantry! Our mission was CP Security, Command Post Security. And when we

weren't doing that, we were entertaining the troops. I had some very good musicians in my band, people from Julliard [School of Music, New York], Curtis Institute [Philadelphia], conservatory, so I was privileged to have a very good group to conduct, and for which to arrange music for band.

I was taken suddenly from the 28th Division, to the 29th Infantry Regiment, which was going overseas, and the band leader of that group was elderly and they wanted a younger band director. And I was the youngest band director because I just made it by one day, qualifying for age. So I was suddenly transferred, after going through desert maneuvers and mountain climbing and all that, to Iceland—completely different! [laughs] The Army way of doing things.

But in Iceland, I ended up not only playing concerts every night except Wednesday for the troops—a different concert each night for a whole month, then the cycle would start over again—but also included Canadian troops, British troops, the American Navy, and one concert a month for the Icelandic civilians, the purpose of which was to break down the anti-American feeling. My programs were censored to make sure they had the proper music that wouldn't be offensive to the Icelanders and would still give a good impression of the American taste in music.

For those concerts I invited refugee musicians, musicians who had fled from Nazi Germany to the safety of Iceland: violinists, singers, one pianist, for which I would write arrangements of concertos, or excerpts from operas, to use those musicians. And that was a very exciting experience! I could go into detail on that, but I think I'll pass that up. But we played everything from Mendelssohn arranged for band [laughs], believe it or not, to an excerpt from *Die Walküre* of Wagner for a German heldentenor [English: heroic tenor – deep, rich dramatic voice], who was so exciting—I get goose bumps just thinking about him, Peter Johanson [spelling unverified]. So those were exciting days!

But even then, I was writing for that band, and I was inviting people to write for the band, one of whom was the Postmaster General, who was pro-American. And it was through—Sigurður Baldvinsson [name unverified], an older man, was most friendly to me. He kept a language barrier between us, so he could turn me off if necessary. He always spoke Icelandic, and I had with me always an interpreter, who was Major Hilmarsson [name unverified] in the CIA. And he would go with me to all the appointments I had with Baldvinsson.

Baldvinsson wrote a piece for us—for the band, that is—dedicated to the commanding general of the Iceland Base Command, who was a former Governor of Oklahoma. And we played that; Baldvinsson was present, the General, of course, was there, and all his staff. This was like eight a.m. in the morning. I made a lot of friends, obviously, with the staff, [laughs] on a Sunday morning, eight a.m.

And then we were invited to play down at Borg Square, in Reykjavik, the capital city, on a Sunday afternoon. And when we went into the square—this takes time to tell, but it's worth hearing—it was overcast, and it was beginning to sprinkle. And Baldvinsson, there again Major Baldvinsson, arranged that we go into the Borg Hotel, which was on the square, and play in the ballroom. And the crowd followed us in. The program—I had programmed the *Danish Festival Overture* by Tchaikovsky.

I can't whistle a bit of a tune or anything from that. It's not much of a piece, but it includes the Danish national anthem as the finale.

Well, I didn't know about it at the time, but that was the day that the Nazis made the King of Denmark a house prisoner, in Denmark. And Iceland was a part of Denmark in those days. So the feelings were running very much anti-Nazi, where there'd been some doubt; there'd been a lot of anti-American feeling. But anyway, I played not only the "Icelandic Hymn," which Baldvinsson had secured for me, so I could arrange that for band, which is their national anthem, and the *Danish Festival*. The next day, headlines: "American Band Plays Danish Anthem," or whatever the name of the piece was. And I was suddenly a hero, a big frog in a very tiny pool. And I was invited right away to the government building and everything, and toasted that night at a dinner.

And then the next Friday was my time to go see Mr. Baldvinsson at his home, and there was no Hilmarsson; the Major wasn't there. And I said—and it was sign language—I said, "Hilmarsson? Hilmarsson?" And he said, in perfect English, "It won't be necessary. He won't be with us today." He spoke English all along, and waited 'til that moment to converse with me in English! And we became very good friends. He used to ask me to sit and listen to Boston Pops records! [laughs] I'll leave Iceland, but I was there twenty-nine months and conducted some seven hundred concerts, for our own troops, and allied troops there—and for USO musicians. I have one more story to tell you.

FL: Certainly.

JC: USO sent various troops to Iceland to entertain the troops, one of which was Isaac Stern [1920-2001, violinist] and his accompanist, and a soprano from the opera, from the Metropolitan.

FL: Was that Samuel Sanders, his accompanist, or was it before him? [Editors note: suggested name of Sanders incorrect]

JC: That's very familiar, that name. This would have been—

FL: He was his long-time accompanist. I don't know—

JC: I think it was Sanders. And he was accompanying also the soprano, Polyna Stoska [b. 1911]. She sang Strauss [probably Richard Strauss]. Boy, and also "O Mio Babbino Caro," from *Gianni Schicchi* of [Giacomo] Puccini. And wow, I'll never forget that trio. They got weathered in and couldn't take off to go to England, and so Isaac Stern needed a place to stay, and he stayed in my quarters with me. And for six days he was there. We'd have breakfast together, our noon meal, and our dinner together. And then he'd practice all the time and I'd go do my concerts and rehearsals, and so forth.

And [laughs] I was in the middle of a rehearsal one morning, and the weather had cleared and my orderly came down and said, "Mr. C., Isaac Stern is leaving now, but he'd like to see you before he goes." So I cancelled the rest of rehearsal and dashed up to my quarters. And he was all dressed, but he was barefooted. And he said, "I just washed my socks this morning. I need a pair of socks." I reached in the drawer and gave him a pair of GI socks. We shook hands, and he took off.

Years later, when my son—this would have been about seven or eight years later—was a small boy, I took him to the Boston Symphony Youth Concert. I was one of the founding directors of that, along with Harry Ellis Dickson [1909?-2003, violinist and conductor]. And Isaac Stern was playing with the BSO [Boston Symphony Orchestra] that weekend, and so Harry Ellis Dickson invited him to make an appearance at the Youth Concert that Saturday morning. I asked my son John, “Would you like to meet Isaac Stern?” He said, “Sure.” We went backstage, and as we stood in line at the door where he was signing autographs, he looks up at me and he says, “I owe you a pair of socks.” Would you believe that?

FL: [laughs]

JC: “I owe you.” [laughs]

3. Family Musical background (15:10—CD1 15:10)

FL: Wow! When you were talking earlier about some of your growing up, you mentioned a Vermont town band. Tell me a little bit about that. You said that really inspired you to start playing music.

JC: Well, just the thrill of the sound of it! I can still hear it now in my mind as it came down the street in Newport, Vermont, in step, playing a [John Philip] Sousa march or something, and the excitement of that sound! And I’m still turned on by marches, by the great old marches. Of course, as an Army bandleader I knew a lot of marches, and there are certain marches where all the company buglers—each company had a bugler, and the buglers were all trained by one of my trumpet players. They would augment the band and play those marches that had bugle calls. [sings] Bum-bah-bee Bababee-bah-bee! That sort of thing.

FL: A whole art to just that, yeah. Were town bands still relatively common then?

JC: Yes, yes.

FL: Because these days, they’re gone.

JC: My father saw Sousa. And bands were still going, into the—certainly the thirties. And I think there’s still a tradition for town bands. I just received a letter within the last couple of weeks from a former musician friend of mine who is now in Sanford, Maine, and he says he’s playing in the Sanford Town Band.

FL: Oh, good! I know in some of the places they keep them up.

JC: In rural areas. It was a very important medium for sharing music with people in those days, was the band, because of its projection, the way it could project out of doors, you know, where string instruments would be limited.

FL: Absolutely.

JC: Yeah.

FL: Did you come from a musical family? Was your father a musician?

JC: Dad was not a musician. But he should have been. Mother was a musician; she was a fine pianist, had studied at Lasell Junior College [Newton, Mass.]. Her father-in-law, in other words her mother's first husband, was the President of Lasell. My mother studied with George Dunham [spelling unverified] and would play all the Beethoven sonatas and that sort of thing, and was my accompanist. And when I became a soloist, she was a very adequate accompanist.

Dad, however, had the musical taste and ear for music. I remember bringing home from school, from the Brookline schools, the Seashore Test, which was a hearing test, to decide, hear, to recognize pitches, or the lengths of notes, or the intensity, several areas. And we had a bunch of musicians; we had a family orchestra. And I passed out the answer sheets, and we all took the test. And Dad asked if he could have a copy of it to follow. And I played the test, and my brother scored very high, and I scored, oh, in the upper eighties, I think. I've forgotten what all the various people did. Dad passed his sheet to me and he had a perfect score!

FL: [laughs]

JC: He said, "You see, my ears are uncluttered by training."

FL: [laughs]

JC: But it was through Dad that I went to operas. We went to operas together; we went to Boston Symphony together. I wasn't the only one he took to operas and symphonies, of course, it was just the two brothers, myself and Bob, and Mother, of course. But it was important for me to be taken to operas. In the WPA days, operas were inexpensive. [WPA: Works Progress, later Projects, Administration – Government relief program employing workers during the 1930s Depression]

FL: Any particular ones that stand out as memorable, that you liked?

JC: [laughs]

FL: [laughs]

JC: Now my tastes have changed, but *Madame Butterfly* [by Puccini] was the first opera that we attended, and right away we had the complete recording of it on 78s.

FL: How many disks?

JC: I was going to say eight or ten!

FL: [laughs]

JC: And then we went—that grew into *La Boheme* [Puccini], and then to *Tosca* [Puccini]. And early on Dad took me to *Die Walküre*; I heard Arthur Bodansky conduct *Walküre* with Kirsten Flagstad [1895-1962, Norwegian soprano] and Lauritz Melchior [1890-1973, Danish-born American tenor]—wow! To this day, Flagstad is my favorite. That turned us on. But we ended up seeing *Butterfly* as a family about ten times. It became a family opera. Now my tastes have changed, and I don't hear it that much, although I have, I think, three complete recordings at the house! [laughs]

FL: [laughs]

JC: My tastes have turned to the late Richard Strauss operas.

FL: Did any of your siblings play music?

JC: My number three son is very interested in music. He doesn't perform; he doesn't play, but he's become an avid listener. Just this week we followed the score together of *Der Rosenkavalier* [by Strauss]. And the week before that we followed the score of *Tristan [und Isolde]*, by Wagner]. I'm so pleased that he asked, "When can we hear some more music together?" It's very important to him. My daughter, by my second marriage, is also very much into music. Not a performer, however, but she collects a great deal of music, mostly of the young people's variety. But she loves to go to Symphony. So I feel very grateful with their taste.

FL: Now your—like your brothers and stuff—did they play music at all?

JC: My brother—I have just the one brother, Bob [Robert O. Corley], three years, three months younger. And he became a very fine trombone player. He played in the Indianapolis Symphony and then left the symphony after only a few seasons, married, and came back and became a music educator, as I was. And Bob was the Director of Music in the schools in Weston [Mass.] for many years, while I was in Brookline.

FL: Wow. Did you have any sisters?

JC: No sisters.

FL: No sisters, just your brother. Wow. Growing up, did you ever play any jazz?

4. Professional trumpet freelance playing (22:50—CD1 22:50)

JC: I played in a big band, you know, and that was great experience. And we were very busy on the weekends. You know, we were playing arrangements of Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey stuff, that sort of thing. We had people in the band who could listen to a recording, then copy it off and play the same tunes. "Tuxedo Junction," "One O'clock Jump." Wow! [laughs] That experience proved very, very helpful when it came to playing at the Schubert Theater [Boston]. The dance band experience was so helpful in quickly grabbing the style of whatever show I was playing.

FL: So tell me about playing at the Schubert Theater. Was it a group?

JC: I was on staff at the Schubert Theater, as a trumpet player.

FL: And this would have been about what time, what year?

JC: Well, this is in the—I'm going to say the early seventies, but I'd done a lot of playing before that, orchestra playing, as an extra man in Boston Symphony. I would be usually the trumpet player, or one of the trumpet players, that would be hired to play with the Royal Ballet or Sadler's Wells or even the Russian ballets that would come and play. And I also played the Metropolitan Opera. I played *Aida* [by Giuseppe Verdi] more than once, onstage.

FL: Wow!

JC: And—

FL: So you had considerable orchestral experience as well?

JC: Yeah. Played *Die Meistersinger* [von Nürnberg, by Wagner] more than once. Also played in the pit on *Die Meistersinger*—wonderful opera! So, the gamut ran everything from symphony to opera to ballet to Schubert Theater, and other solos at other theaters.

FL: Now was there an established group at the Schubert Theater? Was there like a resident dance orchestra or something? How did that work?

JC: There was a list of musicians that were called upon for whatever was needed. Some shows would come in and wouldn't need trumpet players; they had trumpet players with them. Some shows would come in with only one trumpet player and maybe a couple of woodwinds and maybe a concertmaster, a first violinist, and a drummer, usually, and then hired the rest of the people from the Boston Local [musicians union] through the Schubert Theater. There was a contractor there who would call me up, "Can you come in and play such-and-such a show? It starts here, the rehearsal is here. It runs for three weeks," or something like that. And I would have to make arrangements to cover my other evening rehearsals or whatever.

Which leads me to say, I was lucky in those early days at MIT, back when I was doing a lot of playing, that I had a woodwind specialist, [Felix] Phil Viscuglia, and a brass specialist, Willis Traphagen, to assist me with the Concert Band. They were available at all the rehearsals and would come in on other times, to lead the Brass Ensemble or Woodwind Ensemble.

FL: So tell me about playing with the BSO [Boston Symphony Orchestra]. You were a sub in the trumpet section?

JC: If they needed an extra trumpet, I would get a call. And consequently, I played for [Erich] Leinsdorf. I played in an all-brass group from the Symphony at Sanders Theater [Harvard University], in which we played a Walter Piston [1894-1976] piece for brass.

FL: Which one was that, do you remember?

JC: It was a piece for brass and male chorus. And I have a recording of it, but I can't tell you the name of it now. [*Carnival Song*] Good piece, strong piece. I like Piston very much.

FL: Mm-hm. I've noticed you've programmed Piston. I looked at a list of things you performed.

JC: Yeah, yeah. And when I conducted the orchestra at MIT, we did the complete *Incredible Flutist*. We did the ballet, the whole ballet, and Piston came to the rehearsals! And the theater would be dark, Kresge [Auditorium] would be dark, and he'd be sitting up there listening to the rehearsals. Jan Veen [1903-1967], who had done the choreography, was still living then, and the dancers were from the Boston Conservatory. So it was a natural to bring Jan Veen and Piston together, at Kresge, and I'm conducting the orchestra in the pit.

And I remember saying to the orchestra that Mr. Piston was here in the audience. And my third trombone player, Mike Lee [name unconfirmed] from Texas,

came up and he said, “Is the composer of this piece there?” I said, “He’s sitting right there on the end of the aisle.” And he says, “You think he would write on my program?” I said, “I’m sure he would.” And he went and he got his program and crowded by me out of the pit, and I stayed in the pit with my music stand, looking at the score in the light. And he went up to meet Mr. Piston. And he was back in a flash, and he said, “He did it! He did it!” And he opened it and showed me the program underneath my music stand light, and it said “Johannes Brahms”!

FL: [laughs]

JC: That was Walter Piston! He was forever doing things like that. [laughs]

FL: I was going to ask you a little bit about him. What was he like?

JC: Piston?

FL: Yeah. Sounds like he was a very funny person.

JC: Well, I’m going to say he was a Yankee. First and foremost, he was a Yankee, you know, and very, very friendly, very human, and funny, obviously. Those were his jokes, and there are a lot of Piston stories. A woman coming up and says, “Oh, I love your *Magic Flute!*” [Mozart opera] Of course, she meant *The Incredible Flutist*. [laughs] And he says—I’ve forgotten what his response was, but it was something in line with Johannes Brahms, you know. [laughs]

5. Interest in new music (30:25—CD1 30:23)

FL: [laughs] Wow! One thing I’m really interested in—when you were with the Concert Band, and your dedication to new music, and your—you have a deep love for some of the non-tonal and so-called dissonant music. Where did you first hear more modern music like that? How did that taste develop for you?

JC: Well, I think it goes back to my Army band days. We were forever trying new sounds, and I had a progressive group, you know. There again, the Julliard—conservatory training. And the Icelandic pieces that were written for us were on the modern side. I had played music of Ruggles.

FL: Which Ruggles?

JC: Charles Ruggles [1876-1971, commonly known by first name, *Carl*]

FL: Yeah.

JC: *Angels*.

FL: Yes, that’s beautiful!

JC: Isn’t that Ruggles?

FL: Yes. That’s a brass piece [for six trumpets].

JC: Yeah, yeah, I had played that before I went into the Army. I like Copland [Aaron Copland, 1900-1990] very much. I arranged for my Army band in Iceland *El Salon Mexico*, which was a favorite of mine, and played it for the Icelanders at the formal

concert that we did once a month for the Icelanders. It was the first time Copland was ever played in Iceland. When the MIT Concert Band went back to Iceland, five years ago, six years ago, we did *Emblems* of Copland—we were to do Copland again in Iceland. One of the first pieces written for the MIT Concert Band was written by Ernst Lévy—[1895-1981, MIT Professor of Humanities, 1954-1960]

FL: Mm-hm, who taught here at MIT.

JC: —who taught here at MIT. And he wrote a piece called *Suite for Band*, simply, but it's a set of variations on the Swiss national anthem. He was from Basel, Switzerland, and he wrote a system of variations on that and themes derived from that. And that was quite contemporary—mixed meter, quite difficult. Very strong music. And also on staff in those early days at MIT was Gregory Tucker [1908-1971, MIT Professor of Music, 1947-1971].

FL: Yes.

JC: And Gregory Tucker composed a piece for the band, *Prelude and Allegro*. It was also known as the “Centennial Overture” because it came at the time of the MIT centennial. And we played it then, and we played it many, many times. And that's a strong, mixed meter piece, with a lot of dissonance and some hidden references to [sings] “If You Knew Susie, as I Know Susie.” [laughs] That's hidden in there.

FL: [laughs]

JC: You know, he, like Piston, had a sense of humor! I have to pay tribute to Bill Grossman [William Billett Grossman, MIT class of 1969], who was a student conductor back in those early days at MIT. The score to the Tucker piece was lost, so I was conducting from a lead sheet with just the melodies because we didn't have a score. And Bill Grossman, who went on to conduct *Cats* [by Andrew Lloyd Webber] in New York—Bill Grossman took the parts, and from the parts constructed a full score. He carefully edited it; we did it together. And so now the *Prelude and Allegro* is available. It's a fine publication—ready to be published—for other bands to play.

FL: We'll get into some of that later. I wanted to ask you about some of your other earlier pre-MIT experiences. When you were at Boston University, who did you study with there? And you must have studied conducting? Did you do any conducting there?

JC: Yes, I did. I didn't have any lessons as such with Arthur Fiedler [1894-1979, long-time conductor of Boston Pops]; he was the conductor of the orchestra [Boston University]. But nevertheless, we got to know him as well as any student did. And I watched him very intently at his rehearsals, which were my rehearsals, too, because I was playing for him as first trumpet. And Fiedler really turned me on, in the strength of his conducting, the strength of his downbeat if he wanted a strong downbeat.

And believe it or not, it was Fiedler who—when I was a freshman my first concert with Fiedler was the Beethoven Seventh Symphony [Symphony no. 7 in A Major, op. 92], which was quite an experience for a freshman trumpet player, to play [imitates trumpet]. That's quite a piece, and thanks to Fiedler, more pieces like that. Later on, I arranged for him to conduct the New England Intercollegiate Band. And I went to Fiedler's home with the MIT library list, band library list, and we selected a

program for him to conduct—all original music, of course, and it included an Andy Kazdin [Andrew Kazdin, MIT class of 1963] piece. And there again, we had a piece written for the occasion. The composer escapes me right now; he's since deceased—Hugo Norden (b. 1909). Hugo Norden wrote a fugue, prelude and fugue type piece. I asked Fiedler, "How do you like the Norden piece?" He said, "A fugue's a fugue." [laughs]

FL: Were there any experiences at Boston University in regards to contemporary or modern music that stand out to you? I'm just really curious because you have such a deep love and a strength in your musicianship with that repertoire. Was there anything at Boston University that helped you in that way?

JC: Well, [pause] Karl Geiringer [1899-1989] was probably my most famous teacher [internationally regarded musicologist].

FL: So he taught at BU?

JC: He taught at BU.

FL: I see.

JC: And Karl Geiringer was a teacher of mine and my thesis reader. Yet there wasn't that much modern music around. I think I was probably the agitator to get more modern music going on there. Fiedler did some modern things with the BU Orchestra.

FL: What were some of the things that he did?

JC: He did a piano concerto by Rhené-Baton [1879-1940], and I've never seen it. I'm not sure it's in the catalogs anymore. He did some—I was going to say some Poulenc [Francis Poulenc, 1899-1963], I think so. He did a lot of Haydn symphonies, of course. The Beethoven Seventh, and also the Beethoven no. 6 [Symphony no. 6 in F Major, op. 68 "Pastoral"]. And he did some student compositions. He did the [Franz] Liszt E-flat Piano Concerto [no. 1], I remember. But there again, it was very limited, the number of modern pieces.

FL: So you were kind of a bit like an agitator, to kind of get things going at it?

JC: Yeah.

FL: Yeah.

JC: I think I was collecting recordings. I remember early on buying a recording of Stravinsky [Igor Stravinsky, 1882-1971] *Song of the Nightingale*, and just being so turned on by that. Of course, I had the *Petrushka* and the *Histoire du Soldat*, *Rite of Spring*, *Firebird*, of course—all those things. But I was also interested in *Ragtime*, in the Stravinsky *Ragtime*. And the Milhaud [Darius Milhaud, 1892-1974] pieces turned me on. I think it was really through recordings that I got turned on to the contemporary there.

FL: Did you listen to any of the Second Viennese School, Schoenberg, Berg? [Arnold Schoenberg, 1874-1951; Alben Berg, 1885-1935]

JC: Yes, yes. The Second Viennese School is important to me now, very much so. Believe it or not, one of my favorite composers is Korngold [Erich Wolfgang Korngold, 1897-1957].

FL: Mm-hm.

JC: His Violin Concerto [in D Major, op. 35] I think is a beautiful piece. [laughs]

FL: It's a good piece. It's starting to get more performances.

JC: Yeah. I'm really turned on by Korngold, and Strauss, of course, the late Strauss. My taste changed, and there are some composers I avoid. And then, when I do hear them, usually by accident, they come back as old friends.

FL: [laughs] Who are some of those?

JC: Schubert, *Unfinished Symphony* [Symphony no. 8 in B Minor].

FL: [laughs]

JC: And Tchaikovsky! [Petr Ilyich] Tchaikovsky—I, as an orchestral player, was turned on by Tchaikovsky and the way he wrote for brass, which was very strong, you know. I've played the Fourth Symphony [Symphony no. 4 in F Minor, op. 36] of Tchaikovsky as a trumpeter more than once, and that's a lot of fun. But to listen to it over and over is kind of boring because it's so repetitious. His way of developing something was to do it over and over and over in different keys or different pitches. I don't have a favorite Tchaikovsky and I avoid him. I've done one, two, three, four—I've conducted four of the Tchaikovsky symphonies with orchestra and that's enough. Brahms comes and goes. I've conducted three of the Brahms symphonies more than once. I must say, I haven't heard them for a long time. Having mentioned that, it's time to hear them again! [laughs] But rather than talk repertoire, let me go on to your—

6. Teaching and conducting before MIT (43:03—CD2 00:00)

FL: Talk just a little bit about your teaching in the Brookline schools.

JC: I was the band director. I was hired as the band director. After the war I came back to finish my senior year. I came out of the Army in January or February of 1946 and immediately signed up for the second semester of the academic year, which would have been my senior year, at BU. And right away I was teaching private lessons in trumpet, and teaching, at Medford [Mass.], instrumental lessons. And then I got hired in [pause]—it was '46, in '46, to teach at Medford High School, as the assistant band director.

And then immediately Brookline came looking for a band director, and I went to Brookline in '47, 1947. And the band consisted of about thirteen or fourteen students, and I built the band up right away by giving a lot of lessons after school, and getting people interested in instruments. If I saw a big student walking down the corridor, I used to see if I could get him to take the tuba, you know—I wanted big tubas. And that worked. Pretty soon I was able to put out on the field about thirty, forty people. And we were playing pretty easy music, but by God we were playing it with spirit and a lot of energy!

And very shortly that band had built up to the extent that we did actually a transcription of *Siegfried's Rhine Journey* [from Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*, the last of "The Ring" cycle, *Der Ring des Nibelungen*], the high school band! Or *Pines of the Appian Way* [by Ottorino Respighi]. And I had [French] horns, and for the *Pines of the Appian Way* I had, obviously, the English horn. [laughs] And Mike Hillman was the English horn player, and very good. And I arranged for that band. I arranged the *Polovtsian Dances* [by Alexander Borodin] for the high school band, and we did it with chorus—the high school band!

FL: Wow!

JC: And we were doing original pieces. We were also doing transcriptions. And we were scoring high marks at the audition festivals, and it was really going well. So when the directorship of the department, the Director of Music position, opened up, I was on a crest, I was on a high with the high school band at that point. And I didn't apply for the position of Director of Music right away, but when I saw some of the candidates who came in as applicants for that job, that position, I decided I better apply too because I didn't want to work for any of them. I'd rather work for myself. And I did, and applied, and was selected as the Director of Music, which would have been—what year was that? Fifty-six, I think. Yeah, 1956 thereabouts. I gave up being band director because I couldn't do that plus be Director of Music and handle all those responsibilities.

FL: It was a lot of administrative work?

JC: Oh, yes, because it also involved the Brookline Music School, which was the lesson-giving organization. Plus the chamber music classes—I was a member of that board, bringing chamber music to the school. And the Brookline Youth Concerts, which would be ensembles from the Boston Symphony that played for the children of Brookline. There was a lot going on that involved the Director of Music's presence, and input at meetings.

FL: Now you also taught at the Boston Conservatory of Music, and you were conductor of the wind ensemble there?

JC: Yes. That's—those were good years. And the group was not as large as the MIT Concert Band, but they were expert musicians because they were all taking lessons, which is something the MIT people don't have a chance to do because they're busy enough with their academics. But the Boston Conservatory group gave a wonderful performance of the [Paul] Hindemith Symphony [in B-flat for Concert Band], the [Arnold] Schoenberg *Variations* [*Theme and Variations for Wind Band*, op. 43a], the [Vittorio] Giannini Symphony [no. 3], and new music, compositions. So that was a very progressive group. I was engaged by Randall Thompson [1899-1984] to score for band his *Testament of Freedom* [from the orchestra and chorus version].

FL: Really? I wondered about that.

JC: And it was published by E. C. Schirmer, and the transcripts that I did for band for that—and I worked from the full score, of course. And the reason I happen to remember this: Randall Thompson became a very good friend, and he wanted also a band arrangement of *The Last Words of David*, a shorter piece, of course. So I did

- that, and at that time I was at Boston Conservatory. And I arranged that the Boston Conservatory Chorus sing *The Last Words of David*, and Randall Thompson conducted the arrangement I had done. So that was a Randall Thompson night at Boston Conservatory. It was on his birthday, as a matter of fact. I don't know what birthday it was, but he was already on in years anyway. But it went well, and that was the first performance of that arrangement, with the composer conducting, which was a nice experience.
- FL: My goodness! I'd seen a reference to that in Klaus Liepmann's "History of Music at MIT" ["Music at MIT: A Short History of Music at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology," 1980] he had written, and I'd wondered what that was. [Klaus Liepmann 1907-1990, first Professor of Music at MIT, 1947-1972]
- JC: Well, the *Testament of Freedom* was for male chorus [and orchestra]. And we did it—there had been a band arrangement made. Each movement was done by a different arranger, and Thompson was not happy with it. But Klaus did that with his Glee Club and the Concert Band in that edition. And I think that's what inspired, at least moved, Thompson to want a new arrangement, a better arrangement, that was consistent from movement to movement. It's been recorded. I have a recording, I have a CD of Randall Thompson *Testament*. I can't tell you the group right now, but I'll give that information to you.
- FL: I'd be very interested. I also read that you were guest conductor of the Cambridge [Mass.] Festival Orchestra. Tell me about that group because I didn't think they are around anymore.
- JC: No, they're not, but it was an orchestra of professionals which played under that name. Why it was the Cambridge Festival Orchestra—I think it's because a number of the performances were at Sanders Theater, probably the extent of it. But this should have been back at the time of the Boston Arts Festival, which was on the Boston Common.
- FL: What years would this have been?
- JC: That would have been, I'm going to say, around '52, '53, '54, maybe five and six—somewhere in that period. I played a number of times there, trumpet. I also conducted a professional band. The union organized a professional band for me to conduct American music for band at the Boston Arts Festival which was—and we played a lot of stuff that MIT was already playing.
- FL: Wow. So the Cambridge Festival Orchestra—what kind of repertoire did you do with them?
- JC: That was usually ballet. It was accompanying ballets. I think ballet conducting was my favorite kind of conducting because you had to really know the score, so you were free to watch the stage all the time. You watched their feet and their knees; you didn't watch their faces. [laughs] You were watching their motion to see if you were with them all the time.
- FL: That's very demanding.

JC: And a climax was frequently a lift. It wasn't hitting the floor, it was when they would leap into the air—that was the climax. [laughs] When we did *The Incredible Flutist* at MIT, I opened with a reduced version of *The Seasons*, [Alexander] Glazunov's *Seasons*, which is lovely music. And then we had a manuscript—and that composer's name escapes me right now. [pause] And he's no longer in the area. But I'll think of that someday.

FL: Yeah.

JC: Gerry Siddons [Gerald J. Siddons, b. 1939], that's the name. Gerry Siddons wrote a ballet called *Roots of Sand*.

FL: From the Civil War speech, the pre-Civil War—is that referring to that? Or is that that Congressional speech—I forgot who it was, talking about—?

JC: This is a love story, as I recall.

FL: Oh, interesting.

JC: A love story that somebody coming along the road and turning on a young, unaccompanied farm girl, or something. Anyway, the climax of the thing is when they [claps], they come together. And [laughs] Andy Kazdin, who was playing percussion in the orchestra, said he didn't know which was more exciting, watching the stage or watching me [laughs] on that climax!

FL: Oh, wow. What were some of the other groups that you conducted? There's an orchestra in Hingham that you conducted?

JC: Yes, it was twenty-six years in Hingham, which was a community orchestra and never a very large orchestra, although we combined with the Arlington Orchestra, under John Bavicchi [MIT student 1940-1942, composer, conductor], and with the combined orchestra did a [Dmitri] Shostakovich Fifth Symphony [Symphony no. 5 in D Minor, op. 47]—big forces for that. That was one of the high points. But the Hingham Orchestra was pretty much locked into traditional repertoire: Haydn, Mozart symphonies, Beethoven. We did two Brahms symphonies. Two? Only two of the Brahms. But we did concertos and we did ballet performances with a local dance group. That was a growing experience always for the members of that orchestra, but it was forever searching for more violas, or more cellos, you know. And orchestras have sprung up in quite a number now, on the South Shore, so we were competing with other people for those players.

I miss the repertoire. I'm especially fond of [Jean] Sibelius, and we did Sibelius; we did the First Symphony. We did the *King Christian Second Suite* [*Kung Kristian*, op. 27]—which was a lovely piece—and of course, *Karelia* [overture or suite, op. 10 or 11]—things that fit the orchestra. You find music that fits the orchestra because you can't always fit the orchestra to the music you want to do! [laughs]

7. All-State Festivals, influential band and orchestra conductors (58:22—CD2 15:21)

FL: That's right. Now you also did work regionally and nationally as a clinician in some of the professional organizations you worked with. Tell me a little bit about that.

JC: Those were music festivals. I conducted All-States. Each state would have an All-State Festival. Some states would have a—Massachusetts, for example, had a Northeastern Festival or Southeastern Festival, a Middle or a Western Festival. And I would be invited to conduct at those festivals. I did the New Hampshire Festival All-State twice.

FL: Were these mostly band or were they also orchestra?

JC: Mostly band, but I did orchestras too. I did Maine, more than once in Maine; Vermont, twice. Those were band. I did Connecticut and also Rhode Island, also New York State. And out west I did New Mexico; I did a festival in Texas.

Thinking back on those, you work very hard for a day and a half or two days, and then suddenly you're saying goodbye to the youngsters. I remember I did a Pennsylvania Festival, and worked so hard. I was exhausted when I got through and I was a young man in those days! [laughs] It was a chance to influence a lot of—I conducted at the Midwestern Music and Art Camp. That was for a whole week in which I conducted two bands and the symphony orchestra. The band, we did the Hindemith Symphony. We did Giannini. With the symphony I did *Pohjola's Daughter* [op. 49], by Sibelius, that wonderful tone poem! And the Beethoven no. 8 [Symphony no. 8 in F Major, op. 93].

FL: Wow!

JC: This is high school students! But I had rehearsal every day for a whole week, of each group. So I did a lot of conducting.

FL: Now with these, at some of these festivals, how much original band music were you doing?

JC: All original band.

FL: So you had already gotten interested in it already.

JC: Yeah, and [laughs] at Kansas, at the Midwest Music and Art Festival, which was at the University of Kansas, the head of that group, who was band director at the University of Kansas, was playing a lot of transcriptions all the time. And his guest conductors would always come in and do transcriptions, which would be Tchaikovsky tone poems arranged for band. And he did *Till Eulenspiegel* [*Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks*, by Richard Strauss] arranged for band, and the kids could play it!

FL: Wow!

JC: The players were good. And I came in with [laughs] Hindemith's Symphony and Giannini—I've forgotten who else, now—which required a lot of playing too. But I remember my host standing behind me as I was signing autographs at the end of the

last concert, and he was there for the whole summer, the student for whom I was signing the autograph. He said, “Well, next week, it’s back to transcriptions!” [laughs] And I didn’t feel small, but I was sorry he said it because my host was standing, looking over my shoulder.

FL: So how are some of your ideas about original music—what did your fellow band conductors feel about that? Was that a new idea?

JC: It was new in that I was playing only original pieces. And I added up, in anticipating a meeting with you, I added up the number of composers who have written for MIT—sixty-five composers have written for MIT! Thirteen of them are MIT composers. And of the sixty-five composers, that represents a hundred and forty-five different compositions.

For example, Bavicchi’s name appears. I counted him as one composer, but he’s on here for I think about thirteen pieces of Bavicchi’s that I’ve done. And some of the other composers, like Eddie Madden [Edward J. Madden, b. 1960]—he’s on for six pieces, but only one was written specifically for us, but we’ve done other pieces, same composers. Some of these composers—one composer is from Japan, two are from England, two are from France. And one from Spain—a wonderful piece from Spain. I shall miss that repertoire!

FL: Wow! I’d like to get a copy of that list sometime.

JC: Can I give you this one?

FL: We can make a photocopy after the session.

JC: Yeah, yeah.

FL: Who are some of the band conductors that you admire over the years?

JC: Well, [laughs] the man who influenced me a great deal, although I was fortunate enough not to be a student of his, was William D. Ravelli, University of Michigan. You know that name?

FL: Yes, yes.

JC: He conducted the New England Music Festival Band in 19— 1952, I’m going to say. About then. And I listened to his every word. I was at every one of the rehearsals, taking notes and listening to him. He really turned me on, But he was rough on the kids, and he was rough on the music educators of the area and made a lot of enemies—enough so that when I wanted him as a guest conductor for a New England event some years later the memories held and they wouldn’t take Ravelli. But Ravelli and I became friends, enough so we’d look each other up whenever we were near each other. And I saw him most recently when he was at Concord conducting the Concord Band, which would have been about four or five years ago.

Ravelli turned me on very much. When I hosted, when we hosted at MIT, the New England Intercollegiate Band, I had Thor Johnson, who was at the time the conductor of the Cincinnati Symphony. And then in 1985 I had Eugene Corporon [wind band conductor], who has moved around; I think he’s now in Texas. But he was very good. But Ravelli was really the master of all the band conductors.

- FL: What were some of the things about him that you liked?
- JC: The tone that he got from the band. He'd stop on a certain chord and play that chord until it was beautiful. Then he'd play the whole piece very slowly so it would still have that same beauty, that chord, even if it were a march, a chord in a march. And I think that's a technique that I've used, that I adopted in quite a way was that if I found something that didn't sound right: play that note, spell that chord, only the woodwinds, only the brass, upper brass and upper woodwinds—you know, to find out where the ingredient was that wasn't right, the fungus among us.
- FL: [laughs]
- JC: You know, to find where it needed to be fit. Then if it was a note that was flat: why is it flat? Because was his instrument not in? It was worth it to take time to tune the chord, to tune the first note of the piece, and move on.
- FL: Did he do transcriptions or was he also interested in original repertoire?
- JC: Um. [pause] I would say mixed. He put out some albums, "The Ravelli Years," which I recall were mostly original works, like Percy Grainger, that sort of stuff. I don't think of him so much on contemporary music. Fred [Frederick] Fennell [1914-2004] at Eastman [School of Music] was more into some of the more recent compositions. Of course, the old masters—there isn't much to choose from, from the old masters. There's only one Respighi piece that was just barely five minutes. Fennell said to me that he thought Respighi could have done better by us, meaning us band directors!
- FL: So your ideas about original repertoire and just contemporary music—that seems really inner-directed with you. It wasn't—it seems like it was your ideas and your inspiration? That's remarkable.
- JC: Well, I think Koussevitzky had something to do with it. [Serge Koussevitzky, 1874-1951, conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra 1924-1949]
- FL: Ah ha!
- JC: You know, I was going to Symphony when Koussy was presenting new pieces. I remember the Roy Harris [Symphony] no. 3—wonderful piece!
- FL: Did you ever play under him?
- JC: No, not even off-stage. But I played under Leinsdorf and also Steinberg. [Erich Leinsdorf, BSO conductor 1962-1969; William Steinberg, BSO conductor 1969-1972]

8. Coming to MIT, starting the Concert Band (1:10:30—CD2 27:30)

- FL: Um-hm. Wow. Well, it's just at this point I was going to start asking you about MIT. We've been going for about an hour and ten minutes. Do you want to talk a little bit about—we can talk about some of the early stuff—years at MIT and then maybe in a subsequent interview we can get into more detail?

JC: Sure.

FL: So tell me about the circumstances that brought you to MIT?

JC: In 1948 I had received a message to call Professor Liepmann at MIT. And I did, and he wanted me to come over for an interview about being band director. And I put it off and put it off; I had no desire to go to MIT because it wasn't known for its music or anything.

FL: That's right!

JC: It had its Banjo Club and that sort of thing. [MIT Banjo Club existed 1884-1936]

FL: Yeah!

JC: And although I knew a—I was friends with Bob Cady [spelling unverified], who was a flute player and had played in an orchestra at MIT, but I put it off and put it off and put it off. And finally I went; it must have been three weeks after that initial phone call, I went and met with Klaus Liepmann, and Jim Burkhardt [James Burkhardt, MIT class of 1951], a student, up in the top floor of Walker Memorial Building, on this end of the building, the west end, in the corner room. And he explained that they had more wind and brass and percussion players this year at MIT than could be accommodated by the orchestra, which ideally needs one or three trumpets, maybe, or three or four trumpets, three or four trombones at the most, and maybe one or two percussionists, you know, and wind players also, woodwinds. And a number of the students had gathered together under Jim Burkhardt, who was sitting there, and had met and decided they really needed some professional guidance, a professional conductor.

And I asked Jim what the instrumentation was and he told me and it was quite complete. Quite complete instrumentation: flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons even, horns, trumpets, trombones. I'm not sure what the baritone situation was. Tubas, percussionists. And this was a Wednesday, and they're rehearsing tonight. Well, I ended up staying there for that rehearsal, and I've stayed ever since. Because not only was it an exciting group—they were so bright! They were quick. They were some of the most intelligent musicians I've ever conducted, of course. And the enthusiasm was just contagious! I just—it became the high point of my week. It was once a week, I think, in those days. So that was the way it started.

FL: Did Klaus Liepmann have a hand in making sure that you were hired? How was he involved in that?

JC: I just said, "I'll do it." So Klaus hired.

FL: Yeah. Now I also read that you had the title of Assistant Director of Music for a while. Was that assistant to Klaus?

JC: Yeah, but it didn't mean anything. It was only in name. Klaus and I got along very well at times, and other times we didn't. I have to say that Klaus would get in over his head financially on some of his projects, and he'd take money from other accounts, including the band account. And I was trying to procure instruments to outfit this band because a lot of the students didn't have their own instruments, like tubas and that sort. So I was buying used tubas and baritones, that sort of thing. So

- every now and then there would be a blow-up between Klaus and myself. I admired his musicianship and we had a lot of good times together, but also I had reason to question his validity or—I'm trying to find a nice way to say I didn't always trust him on the financial matters. Because I would hate to go ahead and line up some instruments to purchase and then find the money was no longer there, in the account which presumably I had.
- FL: What was he like as a violinist?
- JC: Good! Good, he played in the [Boston] Pops [Orchestra]. He played in the Pops, and he was a good violinist.
- FL: Did you ever conduct while he was playing a violin concerto or anything? Did you do any collaborations like that?
- JC: The only collaboration—I played for him when he was conducting.
- FL: Oh, really? What did you play?
- JC: Trumpet.
- FL: Yeah, but what was the piece, do you remember?
- JC: It was *Messiah* or one of the [Bach] cantatas or something that he would be doing at Kresge. And on the commissioned work from Copland, *Canticle of Freedom* [commissioned for the opening of Kresge Auditorium, 1955].
- FL: Yes?
- JC: I didn't play trumpet; I played triangle!
- FL: [laughs]
- JC; [laughs] Among the first [unclear] of that. Klaus was hard to follow; he was all over the place, technique-wise. Nevertheless, the music sounded. He'd ask me to cover his rehearsals for him frequently. And I've forgotten what caused me to be named Assistant Director of Music because it didn't mean anything. It didn't change the salary, it didn't change what I was doing. In those days I was doing the band, the brass ensemble, and the woodwind groups. And then with [Willis] Traphagen and [Felix] Viscuglia, I had some assistance on some of that, you see. Klaus, the collaboration I had with Klaus musically was on *The Musical Joke* [*Ein musikalischen Spass*, K.522] by Mozart.
- FL: Uh-huh, yes.
- JC: You know that piece?
- FL: Yes.
- JC: In which Klaus played violin, I played French horn, my wife played second French horn, and Mike Somebody-or-other [Michael Coleman, MIT class of 1964] played string bass. And Klaus was brilliant in that sort of thing and funny as could be! This was for Techs-a-Poppin'. It used to be a thing in the fall that we no longer have. It was a fun affair where various living groups put on a skit or something. What was that called? I've forgotten now.

- FL: Later on, when there were more people on the music faculty here, did you do any collaborations with any others?
- JC: [pause] Um. No. I was trying to think of Gregory Tucker—no, because he was a pianist and didn't play with us, although he wrote a wonderful piece for us. I've forgotten who the organist was. I did combine with the organist. I can't remember his name now. When Kresge organ was built, he'd be at the organ and I'd be over in the choir loft on the other side. In fact, we tried to do a commencement like that, and the communication between Rockwell Cage and Kresge broke down, so we kept playing long after they wanted us to stop. And I think from then on, we were live music in Rockwell Cage, and later in Killian Court.
- FL: Now you were conductor of the MIT Symphony from 1956 to '64, is that correct?
- JC: Or '66.
- FL: Sixty-six?
- JC: I think it was '66 [official MIT records give 1965].
- FL: Okay. Tell me about some of the repertoire that you did and some of the ideas that you brought to that group.
- JC: Right away I wanted to do some of the exciting, twentieth-century pieces. And the first program—maybe it was the first program; I'm not sure—was the Roy Harris Third Symphony, which was a wonderful experience. It turned the orchestra on.
- Early on I invited students who had done solo work, concertos, to play with the orchestra. And Gerry [Gerald] Litton [MIT class of 1960], a pianist who also played violin, played four concertos, piano concertos. And also we had some violinists. Janet Stober [MIT class of 1964], who was concertmistress, played the Beethoven Concerto [Violin Concerto in D Major, op. 61]. Al Ray [name unconfirmed] played the Sibelius Concerto [Violin Concerto in D Minor, op. 47]—this is with the student orchestra, you see. Litton did the first concerto; I think he maybe did the [Edvard] Grieg Concerto [Piano Concerto in A Minor, op. 16]. The [George] Gershwin Concerto, I know.
- FL: It was the Gershwin Concerto in F?
- JC: Yeah, yeah. It's been thirty years since I've thought about these things! [laughs]
- FL: What were some of the other twentieth-century pieces that you did with them? Did you find resistance among the students?
- JC: No, no resistance.
- FL: Wow.
- JC: We did the *Firebird Suite* [by Stravinsky]. We did a manuscript by a student, a Greek student, [Nikos] Hontzeas, which was a—who had lived in Greece, in his homeland, at the time of Nazi strafing and that sort of thing. And there are air raids in the piece. It was a full-length symphony. It's a terrifying piece! Yet we found a balance, things like that. We had other concerts, the Haydn Cello Concerto [no. 2 in D Major] with Carlos Prieto [MIT class of 1958; became a well respected concert cellist]. Some names are coming back now. I told you earlier about the ballet we did.

FL: Mm-hm.

JC: We did the *Prelude to Rumpelstiltskin* by Andrew Kazdin.

FL: What was that piece like?

JC: Well, Kazdin went to [New England] conservatory—

FL: Yeah.

JC: —and then he came back to MIT, wrote a piece, the *Rumpelstiltskin*, for small orchestra and narrator. And that's a very attractive piece. And I had it done at the Brookline Youth Concert, which was Harry Ellis Dickson and an orchestra of about twenty, twenty-four people. And Andy did the *Prelude* for full symphony, opened with the *Prelude*, and we did that with the whole symphony at MIT. I did the complete *Rumpelstiltskin* for chamber orchestra down at Hingham, and Andy came to that performance. Very attractive piece.

FL: When Andrew Kazdin became a record producer, did he continue composing after that, do you know? And is he still—is he doing anything like that?

JC: No. The only writing he did was a thing on one of his first records that he did with a combined brass ensemble of Philadelphia, Boston, and Cleveland [brass sections from these major orchestras]. It was *The Twelve Days of Christmas*. He wrote that arrangement. That's the only thing he wrote.

FL: He's a very talented composer.

JC: Yeah.

FL: I just wondered if had continued doing anything—

JC: I've been slowly reading a book by Pierre Boulez [b. 1925, composer and conductor]. It's an interview of Boulez. I just yesterday came across a paragraph in which he talks about Kazdin as being probably the best that he worked with as a recording engineer, producer.

FL: Wow! So with the MIT Symphony you were doing some new music, but it sounds like the orchestra was pretty supportive of that. That's not always common with college orchestras.

JC: Well, I never sensed any reluctance to play those pieces. In those days we used to combine with other orchestras at girls' schools. It had been the tradition to take the orchestra to Smith College and also Bryn Mawr and Mount Holyoke. I did the *Midsummer's Night's [Dream]* incidental music [op. 61, by Mendelssohn] at Mount Holyoke with chorus.

FL: Wow!

JC: You know—and I can remember to this day the expression on the girls' faces when they sing “you spotted snakes.” [laughs] Oh and we played—I'm trying to think of what modern pieces we'd done at Mount Holyoke. We did the Shostakovich Fifth with Smith. We combined with Wellesley. Isabelle Plaster played the bassoon. Isabelle Crower was her maiden name; she was a student at Wellesley, still at Wellesley [faculty member]. No, I felt a thirst for American music, modern music.

FL: Wow, that's great! What other ensembles did you conduct at MIT? Was there a brass ensemble you had?

JC: I had a brass ensemble which met once a week at MIT. And we'd play around at clubs, men's clubs. It wasn't as busy as it is now, and there would be some overlap between the brass ensemble and the Concert Band. And if we had the right combination of instruments, I'd do a Mozart Divertimento or something, with woodwinds. In other words, I had a lot of chamber music I wanted to use.

FL: Were you ever involved in any of the jazz ensembles, like the Tectonians? [existed 1923-1963]

JC: I didn't need to be because somebody was doing the Tectonians. I've forgotten who it was now. Of course, I remember Herb Pomeroy [founder and director of the MIT Festival Jazz Ensemble 1963-1985], but before that? I don't know who it was.

FL: This is the end of the first interview with John Corley.

[End of Interview]