Music at MIT Oral History Project

Brian Robison

Interviewed

by

Forrest Larson

August 17, 2007

Interview no. 2

Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Lewis Music Library

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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

Brian Robison (b.1964) was Assistant Professor of music composition at MIT from 2002-2006. His teaching and creative work reflects his performing experience in a broad range of musical styles. He has written orchestral, chamber and vocal music; recent works have drawn on his interest in the electric guitar, the theremin, and the vocalizations of non-human primates.

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 17, 2007 in the MIT Lewis Music Library. Duration of the audio recording is 1:59:32. Second of two interviews. First interview: July 2, 2007.

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. Graduate school—instructors (00:24—CD1 00:24)

FORREST LARSON: It's my distinct honor and privilege to welcome back Brian Robison for an interview. It's August 17th, 2007. I'm Forrest Larson. We're in the MIT Lewis Music Library. Thank you again, Brian, for coming. This is really good for you to come back. So, last interview we got up through just before your graduate school studies, and you had briefly mentioned some of your reasons why you had decided to pursue graduate studies. You went to Cornell University; you got a M.F.A. in 1992, and a D.M.A. in 1999. Can you just briefly talk about, again, your reasons for pursuing graduate studies?

BRIAN ROBISON: Well, I had—toward the end of my undergraduate career, I was trying to figure out how to—how I might want to make a living—what I wanted to be when I grew up. And at the time, it seemed as though teaching college was something I would enjoy, but which would not leave me enough time to write music. And in the course of a couple of years of trying other possibilities, I realized: hmm, I'd really rather teach music, and in order to do that, I would need a doctorate. I'm sorry, what was the—? [laughs] Off to a roaring start!

FL: Yeah, just, yeah, okay. So that was your basic reason?

BR: That was precisely why I went to graduate school, yes.

FL: Yeah, okay. While you were at Cornell, you studied with Steven Stucky, Karel Husa, and Robert [Roberto] Sierra. Can you talk about some of the things you learned from each of them?

BR: Well, most of my work was with Steven Stucky, and he's important to me for several reasons. The broadest, he just provided a marvelous example of how to be a composer in the academy, in a very healthy and productive, and fruitful way, not simply teaching as a way to pay the rent, but interacting in a very helpful and useful way with various musicologists and graduate students and undergraduate students. He provided for me a model of non-dogmatic composition teaching, in particular.

I had enjoyed the lessons I'd had with my undergraduate teacher, Burt Fenner. And Burt tended to focus on whatever I was trying to do in a very—in a more narrow, technical way, which is what I tend to do myself, actually, in my own teaching. One of the things I enjoyed about Steve Stucky is that if a problem comes up in the course of writing a piece, rather than suggest solutions directly, what he often does is suggest—cite several passages from the repertoire for the student to go investigate, so that you can see for yourself how [Igor] Stravinsky dealt with a similar problem, how [Luciano] Berio dealt with a similar problem, how [György] Ligeti dealt with a similar problem. And I've always admired that, and it's something which I still don't have nearly the encyclopedic knowledge of the repertoire that underlies that approach.

And in terms of finding my way in my harmonic language, I think Steve may have been precisely the teacher I needed because of his own work on [Witold] Lutosławski. Before I got to graduate school, as an undergraduate, I composed—I really had a split personality. There was one very spiky music that I wrote for—this sounds familiar, so I don't know if I said this already in the previous interview—very spiky, dissonant music for instruments, and then a much more diatonic idiom for choirs.

And neither of those corresponded to what I wrote for, in terms of pop songs for the various rock bands that I was involved in at one time or another, and these were different still from anything that I tried to write by way of theater music. And so that was one of the issues I had going into graduate school: how was I going to pull these things together, and unite

these different aspects of my musical background, without simply sounding like I was traversing the radio dial across contrasting stations?

And the other was the question of bringing the music that I wrote up to match the music that I listened to. When I was applying to graduate schools, one of the other schools where I applied was the Eastman School of Music, and that process included an on-campus interview. And when I went for the interview, I was originally scheduled to meet with Warren Benson, but he was ill, so Christopher Rouse came in at the last minute.

And as I was chatting with Christopher Rouse, the whole time I was just maniacally aware that in this box on his piano bench there were the scores and tapes of various applicants, which he—he said at the outset that he hadn't had time to listen to it yet. So somehow, those were just in the forefront of my mind as I was talking with him, thinking about how the answers I was giving verbally related to the music that was actually in the box.

And as he asked me about the music I was interested in, the composers I was interested in, and I was naming names like Ligeti and [Krzysztof] Penderecki and [Iannis] Xenakis and Berio, and I realized the music that I had been writing as an undergraduate didn't sound like any of that, that essentially the music that I wrote as an undergraduate all could have been written prior to 1939, or maybe even 1929. So those were my main issues as a graduate student.

And on the issue of my harmonic language in particular, it was incredibly useful for me to see what Steve Stucky pointed out about Lutosławski's harmonic language, in terms of constructing harmonies from a limited palette of intervals—so, for example, having a harmony that's made up, where adjacent notes are either three semitones or five semitones apart, or maybe eight. And so that gives a certain consistent color to the sound, and yet, for example, you can create twelve note chords that have very clearly contrasting identities, based on the subset intervals.

This was a revelation to me, and especially useful because I found, for example, that it helped me to realize, to recognize in some other music that I was interested in, for example [Olivier] Messiaen, and see the extent to which in some passages, at least from works of the 1940's, that Messiaen would construct some harmonies by combining subsets that were diatonic unto themselves, but, for example on the piano, the left hand might be playing four or five notes that belong to one diatonic scale, and the right hand four or five notes that belong to another. And so each one is clear and logical in its content, and then when you put them together you get something richer.

And so, for example, the "statue theme" from the *Turangalîla-Symphonie,* which—it has these large leaps, and then if you separate the material by the leaps, you realize, oh, there's this kind of white key thing in one register, and a black key set of notes in the other. And I think some similar chords in "Neumes Rythmiques," [no. 3 from Messiaen's *Quatre études de rythme]* although it's ages since I've looked at that score.

And so I found, for example, so some of the more kind of jazzy or rock-oriented harmonies that I was fond of in my popular music, I could take those chords or portions of those chords, and then simply invert, combine it with an inverted form above or below, and come up with a post—a clearly post-tonal harmony, but that had a connection to sounds from other idioms.

FL: Mm-hm. Was the issue of working with kind of post-tonal stuff—was that clearly on your mind, as far as something you really wanted to explore?

BR: Well, I mean, as an undergraduate I had already explored it. Again, what I was mainly interested in exploring were the possible connections and transitions.

FL: So you were trying to integrate some non-tonal stuff with things that referred to some tonal chords?

BR: Yes, yes. And the other early influence I might mention—this is one of those cases of creative misinterpretation—my friend Stephen Andrew Taylor, who's currently on the faculty of the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, spent I believe its the summer of 1990—it might have been '89, I'm not certain. Oh no, I think it was '89. I had two friends that went to Fontainebleau, and I think Steve went in '89, and then Stephan Prock went in 1990. But anyway, so my friend Steve gave a presentation about what he had learned at Fontainebleau, including—

FL: Fontainebleau was—?

BR: I'm sorry, the American Conservatory at Fontainebleau, in France. And Steve had worked with the composers Gilbert Amy, and Tristan Murail. And when he presented aspects of Murail's work, I became interested in this idea of continuous transformation. And it may not be completely irrelevant that this was about the time that there was a certain trend in the so-called morphing in computer animation in film and music videos, and what not.

So—and so again, this doesn't precisely match anything that Murail did, but one thing I began to experiment with fairly early on—I think this would have been the fall of 1990—was a voice-leading technique in which I might define four voices, and I might say, "Well, they're going to start on a high cluster, and going to descend to a low harmony," something that might be, say, from bass up to tenor, three semitones, from tenor to alto, five semitones, and from alto up to soprano, three semitones.

So you have your major-minor triad at the end, this essentially tertian sonority, though one that's not quite what Bach or Beethoven or Brahms would have written. And then—that's the goal, and then starting, though, from just four notes, semitone cluster. And then if one just, at simplest, define a sort of straight line from one to the next, then each voice could descend by semitone, and given the different distances they traverse, they're going to traverse a different number of semitones.

And so this generates a polyrhythm, which is kind of fun, because the progress of each voice is essentially predictable very soon, but the relationships among them are not. So—and that's even, again, just something as simple as a straight line, linear motion from one to the next, where they're isochronous pulses. And then, and part of the fun of that is you start with one kind of harmony, and then you move continuously to the next one, because at first, the voices are remaining essentially one semitone apart, or occasionally two, and then the two semitones become more frequent, and then occasionally it's thr—it's mostly ones and twos, but occasionally three. And then the ones become less frequent, and it's mostly twos and threes, and then the occasional four, and so on. So there's no sudden transition from cluster to tertian.

FL: Mm-hm. Now you mentioned that there's polyrhythms kind of involved in that, so tell me more how that helps with that harmonic transition.

BR: Well, it's the fourth species trick. It clarifies the relationships, because only one note is changing at a time. So there's this very clear connection from one harmony to the next, because it's almost all the same notes, and especially if one takes care to make sure that the cardinalities are co-prime. So sometimes, that will affect the choice of where to begin or end. If I start with something and say, "Well, this might be a good place to start. I like this as a place to end." And then I discover, oh, but then I'm actually going to have—this is going to be eighteen semitones, and this is twenty-seven, so every two of one will line up with three of the other, and I don't want that; I want to have them change individually.

So that'll often drive playing with things until I come up with something where, again, the cardinalities are co-prime. And the other way to make things interesting is take something like that—instead of, even with those complex polyrhythms—large-scale polyrhythms that are generated—if it goes on long enough, then it does become a bit predictable. So the one way to keep that from becoming stale is instead of having each voice proceed in a steady fashion, to have some kind of exponential acceleration and deceleration [taps]. And that's where one winds up.

At first I was using, writing very, very simple computer programs, and I hesitate to dignify them as programs, but just simple algorithms to calculate for me the times when a given voice would change. And then at Fontainebleau, when I went to Fontainebleau in the summer of 1991, Tristan Murail caught an error that I had made calculating things by hand, and he pointed out, well, for short passages, one can—or if one's not maniacally concerned with the precision, one can calculate these graphically: just draw a curve on quad-rule paper, and then see where time points line up.

And then one thing that I've done, especially since, well, around 2002 or so—well, 2000, 2001—the last six years, give or take—is to experiment with stretching this over longer and longer time spans. So the first times I did it I think I was using it to control spans of maybe a minute and a half, two minutes. And more recently I've played with: well, what if I use this control voice-leading that takes place over a seven-minute stretch, or a ten-minute stretch?

And in those cases, then, its—it becomes cumbersome to try to do it graphically and keep it accurate, so then, it is my house-mate Jesse Ernst who's a physicist but a very talented drummer as well, currently on the faculty of State University of New York at Albany. And he saw what I was doing. He said, "Couldn't you just do that with a spreadsheet?" [laughs] And I realized, oh yeah!

Its—so that's actually part of my sketch process for a lot of this, is once I figure out what I want to do, and what the time span is, just plug it into a spreadsheet, calculate the timings within really excessive precision. And then that's not a very musical way to work, though, and especially compared to—even the graphic version's a bit confusing to look at, but it gives you at least an approximate sense of how things relate. But when it's entirely numeric, it becomes almost meaningless to me.

So then, the next stage is to take that stack of numbers from the spreadsheet, and transcribe it onto staff paper, and see what the actual pitch relations are, and then get a sense of: oh, right! So here it's a cluster; here it becomes sort of whole-tone clusters. Here it becomes tertian; here it becomes quartal. And here it's back to what would be clusters, but now it's sevenths and ninths instead of major and minor seconds, and so on.

FL: So when you're deciding on some of the basic parameters from which to subject the material to these processes, how do you—what goes into picking the material that you're starting with?

BR: It's—[pause]. I suppose the choices are transparent to me. Perhaps they are essentially arbitrary, but it may just be starting with the kind of overall plan for the form, where I get a sense that, for example, I want this piece to evaporate into nothingness. And if it's going to do that, well, I think I want it to evaporate into nothingness in a high register rather than a low register.

And then, given the kind of psychoacoustic difference between close spacing in the high register or close spacings in the low register, I realize, well, rather than start with a low cluster and have it open up into high chords, that it might be more practical to start with

something that's more open spacing and have it contract, because at the top, the close spacing actually will sound more open than it would in a middle register. And so it's, I suppose these just very basic, overall decisions about the overall trajectory of a piece, or at least of a section within the piece—do you—how does it begin and how does it end? Are you moving from chaos to order, or vice versa? Are you—is the beginning stormy, and resolving to something more serene, or vice versa.

FL: Do you find that working with these processes, that you end up with results that you didn't predict, but you actually like? And is it a way of kind of taking outside of your habits?

BR: Absolutely, because for example, I'm not fond of the whole tone scale, as a referential collection. When I've tried to write music based on it, it very quickly becomes static and boring to me, because of the limited palette of intervals that it makes available. But, if, with one of these processes, then something that begins as a cluster and ends tertian, will likely move through a sort of whole tone region, or whole tone-ish harmonies may pop up intermittently here and there. And then this is a very useful way to let those happen, not to shut them out of my vocabulary entirely. And they, right, because of course, the things that I like, if I used them exclusively, even they would become boring and monotonous. So this is a nice way to open things up, that these harmonies that I otherwise might not create for myself arise "naturally," logically, and I can—they're available, they provide contrast, but I don't get stuck in them.

FL: I want to get back to more of your compositional processes a little later. What kind of work did you do with Karel Husa?

BR: Not much. I worked with Husa for all of two semesters, and the one was a bonus. It was made clear to me when I applied that he was nearing retirement age. And I believe his—I always forget to check this—I think his birthday is in June. And he had been planning to retire at the end of the spring 1990 semester, and then he discovered to his chagrin—oh sorry, no. His birthday is later in the year; that's what it is.

So he had planned to retire in 1990, but then he discovered that as far as the university was concerned, if he retired in the spring of 1990, then he would be sixty-nine years old at the time of retirement and receive one benefits package, as opposed to what he would receive if he were to retire at the age of seventy. So, he discovered: oh, he would need to teach for another year. So I did get one more semester with him.

And I admire Husa's music. Husa was known among graduate students for being very polite, very attentive to what one was bringing in to show him, but offering very little in the way of concrete advice or feedback. And it was a little maddening. I have—I won't risk embarrassing him by name, although I don't think he would be embarrassed—but I have one friend who said that he had thrown something together and didn't think much of it, showed it to Husa, and Husa didn't complain.

And he began to—he joked that he would try spending less and less time bringing in worse and worse material until he could get Husa to snap, and say, "What is this garbage?" And it wasn't that he was not bothering to look; he would always catch, it's like, [with accent] "Oh, you mean B flat here?" "Yes, this is still B flat." Or, "Here you forgot to change from tenor clef back to bass clef." Or sometimes, like, he was always clearly—he was looking at every note, but it was this funny thing: [with accent] "Well, the way you have these harmonies and chromatic is very tricky for the players to tune." "Oh, so should I change?" "No no, you have been very careful. It should work." [laughs] Then why did you bring this up?

And in that very last semester, he seemed to open up a bit more, and occasionally he would seem to express an actual personal opinion about this, that, or the other thing. But there were a lot of anecdotes; I mean, he was very charming. He was always fun, but there wasn't nearly so much concrete feedback as, for example, with Roberto Sierra, with whom likewise, I think I worked for—I think only one semester. Maybe two, because then I was still in Ithaca, but I was no longer registered as a graduate student or whatever; I was technically, I think, on leave or something.

And Roberto had the opposite problem, at least early in his teaching career. We had an affinity, because he had studied with Ligeti, and I was a huge Ligeti fan. And to this day, if I were to discover at the end of my career, it's like, oh yeah, I was basically an American Ligeti epicon, I wouldn't be terribly torn up about that. So I would bring things in, and Roberto would have very concrete comments about how I was handling rhythm and so on, and then he would—he would start by making an observation about what was less than ideal. And so I'd realize, "Oh yeah. Yeah, he's right."

And then he would start to suggest one way of correcting it, and I remember on one occasion that he started with a verbal suggestion, and then he was demonstrating. I was sitting at the piano, because I had kind of hacked through it myself, and then he reached over to show me, and then wanted to use both hands. So then I get off the piano bench, and he gets on the piano bench, and he starts playing, and then he realizes that he's essentially rewriting my piece for me! [laughs] And then he stops himself, and says [with accent] "But, you don't have to do that! You can do whatever you want!"

So, it's—so I certainly valued the lessons that I had with Husa and Sierra, but by far my principal teacher was Steven Stucky.

2. Formative & memorable moments (26:06—CD1 26:06)

FL: When you think back at Cornell, and you've mentioned some things already, but are there some kind of key formative moments and experiences that you had, that when you think of kind of your Cornell experience in general?

BR: I think the biggest early—the most important one early on was learning how Lutosławski structured his harmonies and transferring that to my own pieces. And, so that was something which really transformed how I write music, and it still very much affects what I do today.

And the others, I suppose, would be trying to figure out what Harrison Birtwistle was up to for my dissertation, which was ironic, because I originally thought I would write, I might like to investigate the topic of irony in Ligeti's instrumental music. We all agree that it's there, but without the verbal cues that we have in opera or song, how do we know that this music doesn't really mean what it's presenting? And that seemed like an enormous topic; it seemed as though it couldn't be anything less than a book!

And it also concerned me that it seemed to be something that would involve literary criticism, and especially the kind of post-structuralist shtick that was extremely trendy at the time, and perhaps because I grew up in a family of scientists, I thought, "Well, no." Even though I—right—even though I, among composers, at least, I was comparatively adept with words and writing, and to some extent enjoy certain aspects of that, I lean toward the more scientistic things like Peirce, and—Charles Sanders Peirce.

And I decided, I was like, "No, if I'm going to do an analytic topic I'd rather be typecast as a number-crunching geek than as one of these fast-talking, post-structuralist

charlatans." So instead, I'd look for something else that would be more, a smaller, more self-contained project.

And my friend Stephan Prock—on my first visit to Ithaca, when I was I was apartment hunting, and he graciously put me up in his dorm room, I came by one day from having looked over apartments, and he was listening, with his Walkman, listening to, and following the score of, Harrison Birtwistle's piece, *Carmen Arcadiae Mechanicae Perpetuum.* He said, "Here, listen to this!" and put the headphones on my head.

And so that's how I was introduced to that piece, and when I was looking for dissertation topics, I thought, "Hmm, okay, well it's only about nine or ten minutes long, and it's only thirteen instruments, and why don't I just pick this apart?" I thought, "That'll be shorter than writing a book about Ligeti." [laughs]

And the only inkling I had that—of what I was really in for, was that I had briefly presented it in a composers' seminar, a kind of Friday afternoon seminar where we were essentially helping each other to prepare for our comprehensive exams. And I knew from that presentation, with a very cursory analysis, that the piece would not lend itself to simply turning the mainstream, post-tonal analytic crank. You can't just: "Oh, hmm, yes! These are all instances of Four Z Fifteen, with various inversions and what not." So I had the sense that this piece would keep me honest, that I would have to really dig. I didn't grasp the extent to which I would have to kind of forge my own methodology.

And I mean, to this day, Birtwistle is not my favorite composer, or even one of my three or five favorite composers, but there's certainly a—I think it's an affinity for non-literal repetition, that when I was an undergraduate, I investigated music of the minimalists, and I enjoyed it, but ultimately I decided, "Well, I like this techniques for accompaniments, but it doesn't hold my interest as foreground material." And Birtwistle's music is all about doing things over and over, but not quite the same way from one instance to another.

And again, going back to Charles Sanders Peirce, the type versus token distinction, that you can have these different things, so each one represents an individual token, but they all fit the same type; they share certain general characteristics. So that's something I've done in my music.

So that's another formative experience, and I would say another one I probably ought to mention is just encountering more music of other cultures, or encountering it more deeply than I had previously, which I think goes back to around 1995, that I started investigating things like Brazilian popular music of the mid-twentieth century.

And my dissertation, which I think I began plotting sometime in 1995 or '96—at that point I was working part-time; in fact for a while I had a couple of part-time jobs, so the progress was very, very slow. But as I recall, I mapped out the movements of my dissertation piece, and then it took about a semester [laughs] to write each one, and that I very consciously decided, rather than just do what I'd done previously, or proceed with a strictly abstract plan, that each movement of my dissertation piece would explicitly grapple with, or steal from, some bit of music from a non-Western, or non-classical, idiom. And just so for example, taking Irish sean-nós singing, and trying to draw on that melodic sensibility, or taking electric blues, artists like Howlin' Wolf, and trying to draw on that rhythmic language, within some more complex framework, and so on.

FL: So what was your dissertation piece?

BR: It's called *Imagined Corners.* It has nothing to do with the [John] Donne sonnet. It's just this idea that—the piece is a sort of imaginary travelogue. It engages this music of other cultures and places I have not physically visited.

FL: We'll get back to some more things about that piece. I didn't realize that was your dissertation piece. It's a wonderful piece.

BR: Well, thank you.

FL: Your list of compositions, at least the printed ones I've seen, the earliest ones are from your Cornell years, but nothing prior to that?

BR: Mm-hm, yes.

FL: Is there a particular reason for that?

BR: I don't much care for it. Or at least, I haven't listened to it in a long time, and I'm hesitant to listen to it. Yeah, at this point—at this point, the earliest piece that I list, I think, is this thing called *Charmonium*, which is a little concertino for harpsichord and chamber orchestra, and even that one I'm not sure I would ever want to hear again. I mean, it was an important early experiment. It was the first piece in which I experimented with these logarithmic curves to control voice leading.

But it's—I'm not—I think the foreground material is awfully pointillistic. It doesn't really hold my attention any more, and it does have a certain balance problem. It was performed—well, it premiered at Cornell in Barnes Hall, which is very small. And it worked surprisingly well, although the recording was better—hearing the recording was better than hearing the live—hearing it from the audience, because, of course, the microphone is directly over the stage. And ideally, the harpsichord does need to be slightly amplified. And unfortunately, I had forgotten that. It was recently performed again—when was that? 2003, maybe? I can't remember precisely. It was performed at Old Dominion University, and I'd forgotten about this. And their hall was slightly larger, and it was, if anything, a more pronounced problem from where I was sitting. And I was, like, "Oh, yeah, oops! I forgot to tell them: amplify the harpsichord slightly." It's—it can be heard, but much is lost, because it's—right—just the delicacy of the instrument.

FL: Mm-hm. The recordings of your music that I've heard, some of those are performances at Cornell. Were there any memorable performances of your pieces that you want to talk about?

BR: Not of my pieces, no! [laughs] There are other—I remember, I think the most memorable performance I heard there was the premiere of the Mario Lavista's fourth string quartet by the Cuarteto Latinoamericano. He'd been commissioned by an Ithaca resident, and so it was premiered, [phone rings] the world premiere was at—so that was something I felt privileged to hear. Another was the—don't tell me—Valery Gergiev and the Kirov—I almost said Mariinsky! The Kirov Orchestra came and gave a concert, and which—wonderful program which had one of the [Sergei] Prokofiev piano concertos, which was all performed.

But that was actually the weak link for me. It had the [Richard] Wagner's *Parsifal*, Act I, the "Prelude." And then the [Dmitri] Shostakovich *Eighth Symphony* [*Symphony no. 8 in C* minor]. And it was just breathtaking performances, especially the end of the Shostakovich. I almost wanted to strangle the first person who applauded, [laughs] because I just wanted that moment to last forever! It was wonder—beautiful music.

FL: While you were at Cornell, you also performed as an instrumentalist, singer, and conductor. Is there anything you want to mention about that?

BR: Well, no, only that it—I suppose it represented a continuation of the kind of a checkered past that, for better or worse, I tend to be a jack of many trades, rather than mastering only one. I think it's just a sign of short attention span.

FL: What about some of your fellow students? Were there any that you want to mention?

BR: Oh my! Well, I think I may have mentioned this in the acknowledgments of my dissertation, but my friend Steven Andrew Taylor at University of Illinois now, and David Feurzeig, who is now at Illinois State University. I spent a lot of time with them, and there was one year the three of us were a triumvirate, running the student-organized new music concerts. We had a lot of fun together; we were compatible personalities, and we had compatible musical tastes, and David in particular is just one of the quickest wits I've known in my life. And they were like musical siblings for me. Well, and because I took so long to complete my degree, that actually meant many marvelous composers that I got to know there, too many to name, really.

FL: You had mentioned earlier your study at the American Conservatory in Fontainebleau, France. Is there anything more you want to talk about, your studies there? Just things that kind of stayed with you?

BR: Well, one of the most important things for me there, as I think I may have mentioned in the previous interview, that I decided comparatively late to pursue music seriously, when I was seventeen, and I was no child prodigy. And so, for the first ten years [laughs]—wait, is it really that long? From the time, yeah, from the time I was seventeen, until I was twenty-seven, when I attended Fontainebleau, I had always had this nagging worry that I wasn't really musical, that I was musical-ish, somewhat, and that I was compensating through kind of raw general intelligence, which I had always kind of scored well on, and done well in school, blah, blah, blah.

And at Fontainebleau, I met someone for whom that was actually true, someone very, very smart who was actually tone deaf, and who, in the—we had a placement test for musicianship classes, and this person was sitting next to me. And I realized early on in the testing that the guy next to me was copying off my paper! [laughs] And, this is someone who actually, I think, had just finished a bachelor's degree at a prestigious conservatory in the United States, and who went on to graduate studies at a prestigious Ivy League institution, and earned a doctorate, and then taught at one, another prestigious, even more prestigious, Ivy League institution, and now has a tenured position at another university.

And I won't say where, and I won't name the fellow, but any—to cut to the chase, meeting this person, who really was very, in conversation, in talking about music or analyzing music, could look at music on the page, and parse relationships, spot parallel fifths, recognize set class equivalencies, and what not, but who couldn't hear any of it!

I realized, oh! [laughs] What was I worried about? Okay, so I don't have perfect pitch, so I don't have a wonderful musical memory, but, you know, I'm not nearly so far off as I had worried. And so if nothing else, the Fontainebleau experience was extremely valuable for that.

3. Harrison Birtwistle & musical indeterminacy (41:39—CD1 41:39)

FL: So, you had earlier talked about Harrison Birtwistle, and the relationship between your music and his, or at least some parallel interests. Is there anything more you want to talk about that, particularly in terms of structure, harmony? And there's this thing about chants, with Birtwistle?

BR: Mm-hm.

FL: Do you want to talk anything more, go more into depth about that?

BR: Well, I probably ought to, especially because it's been taking me so long to put it into print, I'm beginning to wonder if I ever will. I mean, the big difference between my approach to non-literal repetition and Birtwistle's is that I prefer to direct mine, so to the extent that I relinquish any control, is just setting up a process, letting it run, and then figuring out what I want to do with—if something comes up that is not precisely to my taste, then what notes can I add, or how can I re-voice the chord to make it something more to my liking?

Birtwistle does something which is more radical in that he will—from Michael Hall's 1983, 1984 book, there's a dictum that Birtwistle says, "Reserve decision-making for higher-level matters." So Birtwistle will decide on the general characteristics of a passage of music, or of any given component of a passage of music, and then leave the details to chance.

FL: Okay.

BR: Right, so there is variation, but it's non-developing variation. Things keep changing, but they're not going in any particular direction. So the—unto itself, any one of these components might be a static block, and then the interest is often just a kind of contrapuntal combination of several of these, Or he might have music that's based on three strands, and one of them is particularly fixed, or consistent in its characteristics, and then there's a second which is actually—which varies somewhat more, and then a third which varies yet more, so there will be a contrast in terms of variability within each strand, and then also generally there's some kind of timbral and/or registral, maybe, rhythmic contrast as well.

So again, that—I like what Birtwistle does with the general characteristics, but especially with regard to harmony, I can't imagine [laughs] just allowing the kind of random combinations that he does. I just like to maintain stricter control over a combination of sounds.

FL: Speaking of chance with Birtwistle, there's your paper called "Does Birtwistle Play at Dice?" And you're questioning some of the analyses by other scholars, and you're showing that there's more order to what he does than has been previously thought.

BR: Mm-hm.

FL: You want to go just—do you want to make any comments about that?

BR: Well, I mean, this is probably in the abstract, and again, any day now, if there's one article I write, this is going to be the one. But it's that previous writers on Birtwistle have not sufficiently recognized this aspect of micro-variation, or of constrained randomness. They've tended to operate on a really Manichean notion of: "Well, either everything is strictly ordered, or anything goes!" And so, in the extreme case this leads Michael Hall, in his book—in his first book—to say, "Well, Birtwistle likes randomness, and therefore misprints are a good thing, because they represent another choice that he didn't make."

And in the interview in the back of that book, Birtwistle corrects him, and says, "No, actually, I don't approve of misprints. I wish my publisher would fix them." And this is bewildering, was bewildering, to many people, because wait! He can't have it both ways. How can he want randomness but not all randomness? The answer again is that it's a constrained use of randomness. It's saying, all right, in this passage there's going to be a series of three-note clusters, and so there are four possibilities for the clusters. They could be a semitone over a semitone, right, one over one, or the top could be a major second over a minor second, two over one, or vice versa, one over two. Or, they could both be major seconds, two over two.

So there are four possibilities, and then Birtwistle will say, "Well, rather than choose individually which of those four possibilities each instance of an ostinato would take," to say,

"Well, every four instances are going to run through all four possibilities." And then to say, "But, to avoid any patterning, each set of four is going to go through those four in a different succession." And once you understand that, then it is entirely possible actually to find the misprints, to recognize the overall order, to spot the anomalies, and recognize: Oh! Hm! This group of notes doesn't fit the pattern, and in fact specifically it's the F sharp that doesn't fit the pattern, and it's, you know, it's about three ledger lines over a treble staff. And hmm, what if he meant G sharp?

And then it's a matter for sketch studies and what not to determine whether it's a scribal error on the part of the copyist creating the final score, or in some cases that I found in my research, scribal error by Birtwistle himself, something that starts off clearly fitting the pattern, and then at some point, or especially that in a sketch it's one note, but the spacing of the ledger lines is inconsistent, and so at first glance it looks like a different note. And then you see that it's been transcribed as that different note in a later, in the autograph score.

FL: Mm-hm, so in your own music you've used some compositional strategies that lead to results that you might not have been able to consciously predict?

BR: Mm-hm.

FL: Have you done, employed things so that the result in performance is indeterminate?

BR: I've tried. It doesn't always work out that way. There's a piece that I wrote last year for Boston Musica Viva [BMV] called "A Field Guide to North American Car Alarms," and I decided I wanted the piece to start off—bit of a childish shocker, to have these aggressive sounds that are just bursting from various parts of the auditorium, because the players are arranged in a sort of a large ring around the audience rather than in a line in front of them.

And so I decided to carry that idea through, that I didn't want to set—and that it would be this very crude sort of tempo canon that the first instrument would enter with a series of honks and swoops and chirps. And then the next instrument would enter with the same sequence, but slightly faster, and so on, until they build up to chaos. And I decided I didn't want to fix one sequence, so in that score, it's written so that any one of the six instruments can enter first; any of the remaining five can come in second, and so on.

This, so it's the sort of thing where the parts come with six different versions of the opening page, and of course, it's the same material that any instrument would play, it just would be playing at a different speed, so virtually, it's just playing at different tempos, or in this case it's notated with different meters, with equivalent bar lines. So I like this idea. And I think I—oh, yes, and I also included [chime in background] sorry about that—several—several empty measures at the start, with sort of X, an indeterminate number of empty measures. I like this idea that even the conductor, him- or herself, at the start of the piece, would not know—would start giving a tactus but would not know when or where the first sound of the piece would come from. In practice, BMV did not actually play it that way. [chime] I could swear I just turned this off. I'm sorry, I didn't. [Editor's note: BR answers cell phone.] Bob, can I call you back? Yeah, sorry—I should have turned the phone off! [laughs] Thanks. I'm still learning how to use this thing. [chime as cell phone turns off] T-Mobile shut-down jingle. Sorry, where was I? We were talking about—?

FL: I just got distracted. Oh, the BMV—

BR: Oh, yes, yes, yes! So, for practical purposes, they settled on one sequence that they used in rehearsal and in performance. But that's I think the most extreme example of indeterminacy that I've written so far.

FL: Is that something you want to explore in the future?

BR: You know, it's not on my list of priorities. I guess I'm too much of a control freak. I am interested in—the dissatisfaction I have with some of the music I've written up to now is that some of it does seem a little too controlled, and a little too programmed. I'd like to free it up a bit, but I'm still more interested in writing—writing notated things that sound improvisatory, rather than simply turning the players loose.

4. Composition, pt. 1: inspirations (52:30—CD1 52:30)

FL: So this is kind of, maybe a ridiculous question, but in general, or maybe in specific, what kinds of things inspire your music? What gets you going as a composer?

BF: Mmm—good question. The easy one, for vocal music, is particular poems that may have a certain imagery to them. And sometimes it's just arbitrary in terms of people who ask me to write for them. For example, when Dick Pittman called me to ask me to write a piece for a concert that would feature music with spatial separations, spatial considerations, my first inner thought, which I didn't say, was, "Why are you calling me? I don't do that kind of thing."

And then I realized, oh yeah, but actually! [laughs] Things like my wind ensemble concerto grosso, that I wrote here at MIT, "The Congress of the Insomniacs," I had originally imagined that the group of soloists would be in the back aisle of Kresge Auditorium [Editor's note: the large concert hall at MIT], so there would be an antiphony going on between them and the [unclear]. And that was quashed when I checked and discovered: oh! There isn't really room for a vibraphone, or at least not a vibraphone and a vibraphonist playing it.

So that piece, actually—it started, for example, with very abstract considerations: well, I need to write a spatial piece. Well, okay, so I'll go whole hog. Instead of just putting one person backstage, or putting them on two sides of the stage, I'm going to just scatter the players as far as I can apart from each other. And I'm thinking, "Well, what am I going to do with that?" Well, okay, so you can have cheap, kind of rotating effects of having a motive that's going around the audience clockwise or counterclockwise. I certainly did some of that.

Then I thought also, well, things like polyrhythm, or especially polytempo, a kind of [Conlan] Nancarrow or Ligeti sort of thing. When that's being played by musicians who are next to each other, it can become this very complicated monolithic texture, that is just heard as a texture rather than as separate streams. And I realized, well, with spatial separation could clarify that, so that's one respect which, as of this recording, I still have to go back and finish the piece because I ran out of time.

Early on, I had the sense, okay, it's going to start with this very crude tempo canon, and it will end with a more elaborate one. And I ran out of time, so the preliminary version of the piece ends with a thirty, kind of thirty second coda that is a somewhat more elaborate tempo canon. But that's actually the last thirty seconds of a much longer four minute tempo canon.

FL: And this is "The Field Guide to—?"

BR: "Field Guide to North American Car Alarms," right. So, oh yes, so to finish the whole account of the inspirations—so I had these abstract ideas about what I might do, what the instrumentation—you know, knowing the instrumentation, this idea that they're arranged around the audience in a circle. And still, and at that point all I had was a sense of maybe writing something that would arise from poetic ideas of distance and separation, especially something like forging emotional connections across psychological or geographic distances.

But it was still all very abstract; I didn't have many concrete ideas. No, at that point I had almost no concrete musical ideas! [laughs]

And then I heard a concert [clears throat] here in Boston, and there was a piece which, not by Messiaen, that was based on birdsong. And it was very beautiful—it was very well-constructed. It was by no means an incompetent piece, but it—maybe I was just tired, but it seemed to me forgettable, that as soon as the piece was over I couldn't remember any of it, really. And it reminded me of a comparison that a composer had made when I was in high school, a fellow named Andrew Rudin, who was talking about the difference between taking very simple materials and making something wonderful out of them, or having wonderful materials and making something—something that was less than the sum of its parts.

And that's what I felt like this piece that I had heard was, and so I made this kind of mental resolution that I was not going to commit the same sin, and if anything I would go to the other extreme, which had been a tendency—always has been a tendency in my music, I think, because I'm not a virtuosic player of any one instrument. Rather than write technically difficult material for any one player, I tend to write materials that are very simple unto themselves, and then they're combined in interesting and sometimes very complicated ways.

So in graduate school there was one brass quintet, "Tamna Noci," that I wrote, and managed to come up with money to hire the faculty brass quintet from Ithaca College—excellent players! And in one of those rehearsals, the horn player joked, "I have no trouble playing my part by myself. It's understanding how it fits with everybody else that's driving me crazy!" [laughs] So that's true of my music in general.

And so I decided to really push that in this piece, so, and I must have heard a car alarm go off or something, because I had this idea, like, okay, that's what I'll do. I'll just take the dumbest, simplest materials that I can, and then write the piece from those. Or again, that it's not necessarily a simple process, that the piece I've completed most recently, this spring, titled, "Broadcast Recovered from the Room Marked '1930's'," I decided, well, I wanted to write a piece that would incorporate theremin, for myself to perform, and decided, well, it would probably be with Jennifer Ash, the soprano teaching at College of the Holy Cross, and the percussionist Bob Schulz. And this was a concert that was to have taken place at Holy Cross this April, but had to be canceled for another player who was involved had to withdraw. But I knew I would probably be working with those musicians, and I decided, well, I'm not going to write my own texts.

So I contacted the poet Gregory Brooker, who lives in Los Angeles, whom I had met at the MacDowell Colony in 2006. And Greg's poetry often touches on themes of science or science fiction and/or the supernatural, and this kind of seemed like—I thought he might have something on his shelf that would be suitable for a theremin-vocal piece. So I asked him this, and he obligingly sent half a dozen or so items. And then there was one which was just perfect, or especially perfect for this particular combination of instruments, where it turned out that Greg's grandmother had sung—was a classically-trained soprano who had sung on radio broadcasts in the 1930's, on WGAR, Cleveland, Ohio, which was one of the superstations that had a signal that reached as far as New York City.

And while studying letters of the poet Hart Crane, Greg discovered that Crane used to listen to WGAR, so he realized that Crane very likely would have heard his grandmother singing. And Crane committed suicide by jumping overboard on a ship that was on its way back to New York from the Caribbean, I think.

So, the poem is this—I can't recite the text, but it's this wonderfully surreal evocation of the radio, of radio broadcast. And it starts with the line: "Now the blazing static ghosts make," and there's this image later in the poem that's essentially Crane sinking in the ocean,

and "his phosphorescent bones a blue antenna for the dead"—this idea that as he's dying, he's picking up these radio broadcasts, and hearing Greg's grandmother, whose name I've forgotten, singing something like [Franz] Schubert's "Ave Maria." And there's also an at least metaphorical reference to jazz in the piece. Oh, and the poems end with reference to "the swank soprano's wavy 'Ave Maria'."

So there were these references to classical music, references to a soprano, reference to jazz. It just—it fit perfectly, so it was just interesting, starting with a certain abstract set of criteria, looking for a poem that might fit, and then finding one that was just tremendously inspiring. So that was, often with, when there's a text, the piece will seem to write itself.

But it's—but even in purely instrumental ways, I mean, I find two basic tendencies. The one is to look at what the instruments do naturally and try to pursue that—and not necessarily what's idiomatic and conventional, but, right, even going beyond that and saying, "Well, this is what's normally done, but that's just using arpeggios. Actually, players have to practice a lot to be able to execute this cleanly." [laughs] "So how can I apply this in another harmonic context?"

And then the other way I've found fruitful is often to just come up with a completely abstract structure, and then—which might not fit the instruments, and then look at, well, what is the most practical way in which I can realize this abstract structure using these instruments?

5. Composition, pt. 2: objectives & improvisation (1:02:38—CD2 0:00)

FL: Your music, is as you mention, looking at scores, it's obvious it's highly rhythmically complex. How important is it that the written rhythms be played literally accurate?

BR: Hm. Well, it depends on whether I've marked it "freely" or not. If I mark it "giusto," then it matters, and it should be performed accurately. Although, in general, if I write anything that's more complex than a sixteenth note, if I write a quintuplet, for instance, those are usually not intended literally, and they usually carry a marking of "freely."

So I had a conversation with the conductor Eric Culver about this, because this soprano, vibraphone and theremin piece, there's a passage which is kind of fake jazz, because of the reference to jazz in the poetic text. And so again, I didn't want to just say, "Okay, perform this in a jazzy manner," because a classically-trained soprano, someone with the training to cope with the chromatic pitch language, would not necessarily have experience singing jazz.

So my solution—and I've done this in a couple of other pieces, although at the moment I can't recall, offhand, what they are—the solution is to write something which, if performed literally, would sound pretty jazzy—maybe a little stiff. So right, so you can't just write two eight notes, and say, "Okay, swing this." So that particular passage, the soprano line has, you know, what may be daunting to many singers to see at first, which is essentially an alternation from beat to beat, of rhythms based on triplet eighths, and rhythms based on quintuplet sixteenths.

And in some ways, it's like an early instance—I remember first noticing this in Wagner, *[Die] Meistersinger [von Nürnberg]*, the prelude to Act One, [sings] "Da tad um, buh pa ta da dum, buh pa ta dad um," where it goes back and forth between triplet eighths and two sixteenths, eighth note. So it just comes—but it's just in these little three-note groups

that it comes across as this more flexible line, even though it's being played by a section of violins.

So in my piece, the idea is that in the worst case scenario, an overly-literal soprano, literal-minded soprano, sings exactly what I have written on the page, even though I've marked it "freely." But if they were to sing it exactly that way, and this sort of needs to be tested in computer playback, in a software application, that it's close to what I want, and it would—even if they're counting maniacally, to most listeners, rhythms will sound swung. And they will sound free, because from beat to beat it's not falling into a pattern of articulating quintuplets or triplets; it's going back and forth between the two and so listeners will perceive the flexibility. And then writing in lots of grace notes, and portamento, to simulate bends and blue notes, and what not.

And then ideally, the performer has heard some jazz, and they see that word freely, and they get that—and I should probably reinforce this in the performance notes—that, I mean, I would rather hear a singer depart, perhaps, from some of my pitches, or take out a grace note here, add in a little roulade or a slide there, that is more, that just is extra jazzy.

FL: Mm-hm. Getting to a related—and maybe it's the same topic, but from a different standpoint—there's kind of a paradox in your music that it's highly structured, but it doesn't have a controlled feeling, in the way that Elliott Carter, you know that it's very controlled all the time, and he's wanting that controlled feeling.

BR: Yeah.

FL: Do you want to talk just a little bit about that?

BR: Yeah, that's interesting. You're right, it's the same issue, I suppose, of, that in order for the music to hold my interest, it needs to project some sense of freedom and spontaneity. But, and I suppose—you know, I can't remember exactly. I have this vague sense that as an undergraduate, or even early in my graduate period, there were times when I would write things which I wanted to be done freely, and the classically-trained players would tend to perform literally, and I'd always have to push them to be looser with it.

So, yeah, I don't know that I have anything more to say about that. It's not something I've actually thought about in a deep way. I just know it's a goal, to try to build in a sufficient illusion of freedom, which, it's interesting. I've tended to concentrate on the opposite, the, what I titled one talk this spring: "Illusion of the Inexorable," which is what this long-term voice leading is about, where I played with stretching things out to these long chromatic ascents or descents, wedges that converge or unfold, and accelerate and decelerate, and projecting those over longer and longer time spans, to try to achieve that sense of inevitability of a certain event, like when the lines converge, and you reach something. It's like, yes, that's where this thing's going all along!

So I've tended to focus—and of course, again, that arbitrary—in reality, it could have gone anywhere! Anything could have happened. But I'm trying to create that illusion, that this is what must be. So that's what I've tended to concentrate, rather than the illusion that the performance was spontaneously emoting. But I think that emphasis may be shifting somewhat. I do put more, I suppose, more attention to it, but it's not a philosophical attention; it's more the kind of nuts and bolts: what to write on the page.

FL: We've talked about, and you mentioned some examples of some pieces that have some indeterminacy in performance. Have you actually worked with improvisation in some of your pieces?

BR: Not in the pieces per se. Improvisation for me, it's something I did a lot of when I played in rock bands. It's something that I've done a lot at home, especially, for example, the piece that I wrote, that I premiered here in this library, the "Music in Stacks." Well, that was based on using this looping device that I had at home, which was sort of generally just improvised.

FL: That's your looping device for your electric guitar?

BR: Exactly. That records what I'm playing, and then plays it back in real time, and I can add, essentially overdub, and do multiple, record multiple tracks in real time. And that's the sort of thing I can sit down with and just have no preconceived notion of what I'll play, and then end up filling twenty or thirty minutes letting something evolve. So I've done that.

And then there are—there's some improvisation that I've done, For example when I present the theremin to groups of students, I'll generally do a little bit of performing, or explanation of how the instrument works, but also allow plenty of time for each student to come up and try it for themselves. And to help them feel a little less exposed, I'll improvise, usually the piano, accompaniments.

And I think the most extensive version of that—any day now I'll release highlights on the web, at MacDowell—this highly unusual [laughs] collaboration with the fiber artist—I forget how she prefers to be billed—a wonderful artist named Sherry Wood, from North Carolina, who makes art quilts and various installations and art works that draw on traditional crafts such as quilt-making and knitting. And when she saw a theremin, one of her first thoughts was, "Well, what if you were to stand at it and crochet?" So, she did a little of that as the photo-op.

And then we got this sense of, like, well, why don't we try putting this on as an informal performance for some friends, where—where we did it for each other, but we invited people to come along and watch? Where she would crochet at the theremin, and I would improvise accompaniment at the piano? And we didn't make any previous arrangement as to what we would do. We didn't really talk about it at all.

I had—from the photo op, when I was just taking pictures of her, experimenting with the theremin, I got—I made some observations about the sounds she was making, and what might be useful to complement that. Although, in the event, I had to toss out about half of those, and come up with other things to do. So, I'm still too tight-fisted to release the entire, [laughs] the entire soundtrack of it. But there was—an example, I think we went on for about half an hour, or so, and—this was half an hour of piano improvisation.

It's a strange thing for me, because—especially because I never pursued jazz. I don't have the chops for it; it would take me a long time, if I did get into it. But compared to a tradition like, that, I'm not a competent improviser. But compared to classical musicians, who are accustomed to being given predetermined notes on paper—I mean, I was surprised. Once, in Ithaca, where a pianist, who was much, much better than I am, asked me something about improvisation. I said, "Oh, no, I don't really do that," she said "what are you talking about? You're a wonderful improviser!" "What?" [laughs] "Me? Huh?" So, it's something I'd like to explore more, but I'm still trying to figure out how to do that.

One project I've had in mind, that I just haven't implemented this summer, but once I get my studio set up in Middlebury I'm sure I'll do this, too—do some noodling with, say, electric guitars or synthesizers, to just create kind of backdrops for improvisation on another instrument, such as theremin, or maybe synthesizer backdrop for guitar improvisation, or vice versa, just to explore this more.

6. Music libraries (1:14:04—CD2 11:28)

FL: You've had a particular interest in music libraries over the years. Do you want to talk a little about how music libraries have been a part of your musical development?

BR: Well, it goes back to my undergrad years. I worked part-time in the Music and Art Library at Penn State. I think it's the fourth floor of East Pattee Library, which would involve—see, I think—I'm trying to remember now. The shifts ran from, I think, four o'clock to ten o'clock. So there would be an hour of overlap with the regular, grown-up staff, and then what was essentially being a night supervisor from five to ten. And those were the hours in summer. I can't—I guess it was, I think in the regular year, maybe it went to midnight? I can't remember—it's been too long.

So, and that was, fortunately it was this kind of job which had limited explicit responsibilities. And so a lot of the time, you were just sitting at the desk, and you were expected to be available to, and help, patrons with anything that came up. But on the other hand, if no one was coming up to you, then after a certain amount of shelf-straightening, or pre-sorting books to be re-shelved, that one was permitted to work on homework, or in my case, sometimes just going through scores that were in the reserve section, or in the kind of caged, to protect the rare items. And say, "Oh, so what's this? What's this all about?"

And then, when I was at Cornell, there was—let's see if I can get this right—I think it must have—I can't remember whether it was—it was either the summer of 1990 or the summer of 1992; I can't remember exactly which. A situation came up where Cornell's graduate school had less money than expected to supply to departments. And as I understand it, they set up a kind of matching grants system, right.

At any rate, there was a situation where departments were not handed, simply handed the cash, with which to fulfill commitments to various graduate students and said, "Yes, we're going to give you some support," for that summer. And fortunately for them, it was kind of written into the whatever contractual obligations [laughs], that it wasn't necessarily just free money, that it could entail an assistantship or some research work. So that's essentially what came up. Lenore Coral, who was the music librarian at Cornell at the time, and the director of the United States office of RILM, was able to—

FL: And RILM is the—?

BR: Répertoire International de Littérature Musicale, or International Repertory of Music Literature, an index of abstracts to scholarly books and articles on music. And at the time, I think RILM was about six years behind reality, so when I, during my first year of graduate studies, 1989 to 1990, it was a big deal when a 1983 volume of *RILM Abstracts* arrived in the library. Now, you know, we had more organized access to what on earth had been published in 1983, six years previous.

So, Lenore was able to obtain money from the international operation of RILM to hire graduate students at Cornell to write abstracts of various books and articles, to try to get the database caught up, to get it closer to current. And I can't remember exactly how many of us there were. I think there were about five, maybe six musicology graduate students, and [laughs] somehow I was also chosen for this. I guess I'd done well enough in Lenore's bibliography course, and/or just having a reputation as being a composer who was more interested in musicology than was normal, or probably healthy, for composers.

So I was hired to do this, and somehow I accomplished more than some of the other musicology graduate students. And this may be partly that I was fanatical in my work ethic,

especially if I was working on something and somebody came up and struck up a conversation, I would make a note of when they interrupted me. [laughs] So I didn't count that time toward the—I think we each had to put in a hundred hours for the summer, of reading and writing abstracts.

But I think it may also have been that I just didn't have—the short attention span, that I think the musicology graduate students probably felt more of a professional responsibility, and obligation, to read the book, each book, or article, very carefully, and digest the author's argument, and grapple with it fully. And I didn't have time for that! [laughs] It's just: okay, what's this about? Oh, great! Here's a helpful paragraph at the beginning. Yeah, mm-hm, bam, bam, bam. Flip through the article, and yeah, no, that paragraph really covers it. That's the abstract! Next!

So I just—I learned afterwards that I just wrote more. The way I learned this was that in the spring of 1993, as my four-year graduate's work package was running out, the woman who had been Lenore's assistant was going to be moving someplace else. I think it was that her husband had taken a position in another town. So Lenore was looking for someone else to fulfill this job, and she tapped me for it; she asked me if it'd be interested. And I said, "Sure!" [laughs] I didn't look better—I didn't have any better prospect in mind.

And it turned out to be a really marvelous help to me—perhaps prolonged my dissertation process, because I didn't feel immediate pressure to finish my degree and get on with things. From Lenore's point of view, she felt that I was overqualified for the job, but was very happy to have me for as long as I felt that I needed it. So rather than slap together my dissertation and get out, I felt, you know, I suppose it enabled my perfectionist streak.

So that had me in the music library for nine years, at least part of the time. And there was a time in there—I forget exactly when, or long—I was also working as a night supervisor in the same music library. So, I mean its, right, as a composer, it's a candy store. I'd have all these scores and recordings right there at my fingertips, to be able to browse, to look over things, to decide whether or not to take it home, investigate it more fully. And certainly the quiet environment suits me better than some of the more bustling workplaces would've been.

7. Teaching music at MIT (1:21:35—CD2 18:59)

FL: So moving on to your time at MIT, you were assistant professor of music here from 2002 to 2006.

BR: Mm-hm.

FL: And the courses you taught were "Harmony and Counterpoint," "Music since 1960," "Introduction to Composition," "Writing in Tonal Forms." I don't know if that covers everything. There's this perpetual stereotype that somehow it is odd that MIT has such a strong music and arts program.

BR: [laughs]

FL: But, as we all, as you and I know, music has been a vibrant part of the culture at MIT for well over a hundred years, and the Music Department was established in 1947. That being said, most musicians at MIT, even those who are highly accomplished, do not plan to become professionals.

BR: Right.

FL: What does it mean to teach rigorous theory and composition courses to these students?

BR: Well, for me, it's—I come from a family of scientists, and perhaps because of that, I am always a bit irked when I encounter the ongoing nineteenth century myth of the composer as the creator who's simply inspired, and everything just flows as self-expression. That's ridiculous! I mean, there's a lot of technique involved. There is plenty to study; there is plenty to know.

And so, just as part of the whole undergraduate experience of learning to think, I enjoy this as a very fresh way to get students to think about things that I think is—it seems to me, or maybe it's just because I've had this direct view of it, that it expands their horizons more dramatically, I think, than—or it certainly is my case that many of the non-music courses that I took in college represented incremental extensions of things I had learned in high school. They didn't turn my world upside down; they didn't make me rethink how the universe is put together.

Whereas in music especially, given that fact that so few instrumental teachers really focus on the theory and the structure, then you can help to break down this sense of worshiping the great composers as these god-like beings who are far above us mere mortals. So, I mean, that's, for me, generally—that's true for me generally.

And here at MIT, I suppose it takes a somewhat more extreme form, that the students are particularly inquisitive. Once you lay out this premise before them—even before you do, right, in some cases—they may come into your class with the assumption that well, there is some set of rules, and they'd just like you to give it to them, so that they can take those inputs and just construct the grammar, or reconstruct the grammar in their heads. And of course, it's not quite so simple as that.

FL: Are you also keeping in mind that some of them may actually continue composition after?

BR: Right, exactly. That's the funny thing about this program, is that of course, no one in their right mind chooses MIT, or based on what they think they know about different schools, people are not going to choose MIT in order to major in music. But while they're here, they may find themselves majoring in music. Or perhaps they waver between science and music, and they chose science, or engineering, as the more practical option.

I almost did that. I went to college with the plan to double major in computer science and music, and I would support myself with computer science. And I never even took [laughs] the introductory computer science course, because I heard that was where they weeded out the people who couldn't really hack it, and besides, I was just kind of intoxicated, taking all these various music courses my first year. So yes, in many cases they may arrive and realize that they're actually better at music than at another field, or at least that they enjoy it more, and even if it means a less lucrative career, that they'd like to pursue it.

So, I suppose one—I'm a hardcore egalitarian when it comes to teaching. I don't believe in separating students into the anointed few, and the great unwashed. So anyone who comes to me with a question, I try to answer it, because for all I know, they might decide to pursue it seriously. So I just try to share whatever I know, or point them toward where to find the answers, engage it fully and exactly. There are some of the students who are really quite talented. It's certainly no smaller proportion than what I've encountered at other liberal arts colleges.

And it's this funny ethical thing, where the ones who are talented, you don't really want to wish on them the struggles that go with being a composer of classical music, or music for classically trained musicians, in our society. But you think: well, here's someone who could if they wanted to, you know, they have the ability, that even if they don't choose to

pursue it professionally, I hope they'll keep doing it. I'd be really interested to hear what they're writing five years from now, or ten years from now, or twenty years from now.

FL: Further to that point, did you have some general kind of musical goals for particular courses? Besides opening them up to new ways of thinking, and some of those more abstract things, but on a musical level?

BR: Well, in the tonal theory courses, it's mainly about getting them immersed as deeply as possible in a narrowly-defined style. And I think when I taught those courses here, I never compared notes closely with fellow instructors, but the sense that I got was that I tended to focus more narrowly on eighteenth century style, or early nineteenth century style.

For example, in "Writing in Tonal Forms I," when we would get to *lieder*, I insisted they weren't just writing songs; they were to write songs in early nineteenth century German romantic style. I wanted it to sound like Schubert, sound like [Robert] Schumann. And my comments would be geared toward how they had or had not quite achieved that style. And it was not because I was necessarily insisting that people should do this in life, but simply as an academic exercise, an intellectual exercise, to define things very—in as concrete a way as possible, so it's not just about taste. It's not just about, "Oh, yeah, I like this, you like this; we're happy." or "Well, you like this but I don't like this. Oh, how are we going to get along?" But just to say, "Look, here's a very clearly defined goal. Here are the ways you've met it. Here are the ways you haven't quite."

So that's what I tended to do in the tonal forms. And again, and it was mainly just to get them to focus on thinking very specifically and concretely about these different aspects of music, so that when they moved beyond that, that—and I think I would usually make this explicit to them—that in their own music, they could think about these things, and come up with their own ideas, their own little sets of principles or rules.

And indeed, students in those classes, because I played a hide-bound reactionary in the classroom, were generally surprised or even shocked to hear the kind of music that I write [laughs] in my own career! They discovered, "Oh, it doesn't sound like Bach or Handel, or Schumann!"

And in the "Introduction to Composition" course, that was mainly just to get the students to think about all the different grammars of music, and to, especially to think about how, about the extent to which, in any given passage of music, features along some parameters may be essentially constant, and that features along another parameter might change, and how? And that this is a very efficient way to avoid monotony, that when a passage of music is boring, it's usually because the harmony is very consistent, the volume is very consistent, the register is very consistent, the tempo is very consistent, and so on. And it's particularly common for people who've been immersed in popular music, because that is what's going on [laughs] so often in popular music, especially anything that's created more for dancing than for just sitting and listening.

So that was, I would say, the main focus of the "Introduction to Composition" course, to just get them to really pay conscious attention to all the different aspects of music, and to understand that. And then again, that I defined the parameters in one way, in terms of my feedback, and I tended to insist on a certain level of variety, but to make sure they understood that, again, outside of my classroom, they were certainly free to write music that was either more repetitive than what I insisted on, or perhaps something that was more radically changing.

FL: Mm-hm. What were your understanding of the pedagogical goals of the music section? Did they specifically say that there were—did they talk about goals for the department?

BR: That's an interesting question. I can't specifically recall any such discussion. I can't swear that there was none. There might be one that I've simply forgotten. [pause] So right, now that you mention it, I can't be sure of how much of what I've just expressed is simply my own opinion, and how much of it does or doesn't necessarily match the section's missions.

But again, I think it's, right, it's overall—I think it's safe to say that we want to get the students thinking about what they're doing, that it's not simply going in and—that there is a performance aspect, but getting them also to think about the theory and structure of things, getting them to think about the history, and where things—how things got to be the way they are. And that it's an intellectual experience as well as a musical experience. And just insist on the highest level with all of that.

FL: Mm-hm. You've touched a bit of this a little bit ago, but I'm just phrasing it in a different way, and maybe the question might be a little blunt. But there's this traditional idea that beginning composition students are supposed to know tonal music, and know the rules of tonal music, first, before so-called breaking the rules?

BR: Right. No, I don't buy that, because I feel it doesn't fit my own development, that I, especially that the music that I wrote as an undergraduate was mostly post-tonal, and that I did well in my theory classes. But it seemed largely irrelevant; I didn't see a way of connecting the two.

In the course of teaching tonal theory I've become, I think, a much better tonal composer. I'm much more competent at that, and yet the connection to the post-tonal music I write is again comparatively distant. I mean, I don't set up harmonic grammars when I write, that there are some ways in which the, you know, I half-jokingly refer to these large-scale linear progressions as *Urlinien*, as the *Ursatz* for a given piece, but I know [Heinrich] Schenker would turn in his grave to hear anything that I've written. I'm sorry, I'm drifting off! [laughs] What's the question again?

FL: Teaching tonal theory.

BR: Oh, right, right, right, yes. And that's one of the things I'm looking forward to this coming year at Middlebury College, where their sequence for music majors actually places an introductory composition course before their formal study of tonal theory. And another thought on this, which I had: I remember early on, sometime as an undergraduate, this sense that the way that we teach, that we start with the smallest aspects, the moment-to-moment aspects of musical grammar, and we gradually work our way up to form—in a way, it's like a series of chemistry courses, in which we start off with, you know, electron orbital, suborbital paths, and then work our way up to atomic structures, and then molecules. And then some time in the third year we start talking about how, well, if you heat water above a certain temperature, and it boils.

And I've often been curious to go at things the other way, or that especially the way that I've, the approach that I take in the "Introduction to Composition" course is, in a way, perhaps the influence of Birtwistle, that I emphasize the large-scale form, the large-scale aspects, right, that if you plan the forest, the trees will take care of themselves. Birtwistle randomizes the trees; I control them more carefully. But if you make a decision like: well, I want this passage of the piece to move from a very dark, stormy, tormented effect, to something that moves continuously, to something very calm and quiet and serene, right there you've made a whole series of decisions about texture, about dynamics, probably about harmonic language, rhythms, timbres. And it's overall a more efficient way to work.

I mean, yes, you can start with some materials and some details, and say, "Okay, well what kind of context could I generate for these details?" But in general, I do tend to work the

other way, and I feel as though, even if students decide not to pursue that, that it's a useful exercise for them to at least attempt this top down approach.

FL: Right. Well, you've had a lot of experience with this, working with MIT students, where most are highly trained in math, science and engineering. Do you notice, or did you notice any special qualities that people with these kind of backgrounds brought to music?

BR: I suppose the main one is just the insistence on an explicit account of what on earth it is I'm trying to tell them, that at some other schools, or especially, I'm thinking of some job interviews, the students who are oriented more toward performance are in the music theory class essentially under protest. They just want to get the hell out of there! [laughs] They're content to let you blabber on, and they'll try to understand as well as they can in order to pass, but they're not going to delve into it any further. And so, to the extent that you tell them things that are useful to them, they're happy and they don't want to go beyond that.

At MIT, the students, I think, are more likely to say, "Well, wait a minute, but what about?" Or, "But if you follow that line of thought," and they'll extend it, and just dig into things more deeply, and again, especially in terms of insisting that you formulate it as crisply as possible. Because again, once they've got—if they've come in, if they've had this fuzzy nineteenth century idea of music as just being subjective and inspiration, and self-expression, that once they say, "Oh, well yes, there's a rigor to it!" then there's the opposite extreme.

I had one student in the first semester course who had computer science chops, and he has this idea like, "Oh, well! I'll just program my computer with all the rules of counterpoint." And then probably was hoping that he could kind of farm out his homework [laughs] to his machine! And then, I think it took really just one individual meeting in my office to disabuse him of the notion that it was this simple, because I just kind of had to say, "Well, it's this generally, but then there's this exception. And, this is common as well, so you have to keep this in mind." And they quickly come to understand that it's this very complex balancing act of competing principles that you cannot simply reconcile in a deterministic way.

FL: Mm-hm. Some of the people that I've interviewed who are performers, and working with MIT student performers, have found that there's a particular kind of focus and attention that they bring to the performance aspect of making music, at an artistic level. Were there things that you found that were maybe distinctive among—not necessarily just because they were MIT students, but because of their science and math background, on a creative level? Are there things that kind of caught your attention?

BR: None I can point to definitively. I know in my wind ensemble piece, "Congress of the Insomniacs," there are instances of kind of virtual polymeter. So for example, at the start of the piece there's a steady pulse going on in the piano, but it's actually in three strata, and one is articulating I think it's measures of eight-eight. Another is articulating measures of ten-eight; another is articulating measures, virtual measures, of twelve-eight. I think it's all notated in four-four, but it's a question of where there are accents.

And it was suggested to me, maybe by Fred Harris, I can't remember exactly, that this was something which students at another school might be thrown by, but it was something that students at MIT get very quickly—that you have this organizing scheme, right, and it's simple arithmetic. Yeah, I mean, it's that overall work ethic that exists here at MIT.

It's an interesting question, the extent to which the students who are adept in performance—to what extent was that kind of drive in science and math influenced by their prior experience as musicians, and learning that the sustained concentration and effort pays

off in the long run, and to what extent they've transferred that to science and math, or maybe to some extent it works the other way as well.

FL: Mm-hm. So here's a hard question to answer briefly, and it's fraught with all kinds of problems, even in asking the question, but I'm going to try anyway.

BR: [laughs]

FL: Can you talk about similarities and differences between a scientific, mathematical perspective, and an artistic one? You have some mathematics training, and you know mathematics at a high level, and you know, obviously, music at a high level. And you've done analyses that have some mathematical—when you've analyzed Birtwistle's music, there's a mathematical component to that.

BR: Yeah.

FL: So you seem like you might be in a position to be able to talk about some of these issues.

BR: Mmmm—maybe!

FL: [laughs]

BR: Maybe. I mean, well, the funny thing is, I just recently ran across some discussion of this, and now I can't recall just where! But for me, the biggest one is the joy in experimentation, and the kind of trying always to bring a fresh eye or ear to something that already exists, or some phenomenon that catches your attention, and say, "Hmm. Why is this? Why does this work the way it does? How could this be amplified, or reinforced, or taken to the nth degree? What happens if I push this variable in this direction?" You know, testing things to destruction, not being bound by the conventions.

And so in that respect, for example, if I had become a scientist, I almost certainly would have been one pursuing what Thomas Kuhn called extraordinary science, rather than ordinary science. Rather than building incrementally on what people before you have done, of looking for more radical ways, exploring the questions that the current paradigm doesn't account for adequately.

Yeah, it's interesting, because I certainly subscribe to, even though I haven't read it in any depth, Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, because what I've found, certainly in teaching tonal theory, as well as my life experience, is that yes, that verbal intelligence and mathematical intelligence are two different aptitudes, not necessarily correlated, and likewise that musical intelligence is something separate from those.

And the funny thing about tonal theory is that it doesn't exclusively draw on one, any one of those, that there are some students who come into the classroom, who are tremendously accomplished musicians—far better performers than I ever would be—but they struggle with the theory. Or students who have aptitude with other symbolic languages and grammars, they might be extremely adept computer scientists, but they're taking music, and now things are fuzzier and not as crisp, and they have trouble with that. Or conversely, sometimes students who have just a little bit of musical experience, but they have an aptitude for it, and they come in and they very quickly learn what to call things, and they learn the vocabulary, and they soak up the grammar really quickly.

So, it's a set of relationships in which I think there's a lot of—a lot of work can be done exploring it. But again, for me, I think the most important one for me personally is just this sense of experimentation, the sense in which any—something that you've taken for granted all your life you can stop, and look at, and realize, "Well, wait a minute."

In science, for example, yes, this is true at our scale of existence, but the physics are completely different for microorganisms in a drop of water, or it's very different on the interstellar scale. And likewise for music. It's like, "Well, yeah, this is the way things always have been done, but what if?" [laughs] What if I do this other thing? And then how do you—you know, that you can test things to destruction, and find out, "Oh, yeah, actually I like this. Or, mm, I don't like this so much. What if I take it in this way, or if I adjust this like so?"

FL: Mm-hm. Here's an interesting quote from Arthur Farwell, who was MIT Class of 1893.

BR: Oh, right, yeah!

FL: He had a degree in electrical engineering, but went on to be a nationally recognized composer. And recently I interviewed his daughter for this project. So, anyway, here's this really interesting quote. He says, "Not that I loved electricity less, but I loved music more… I longed for the day when I could throw off the restraint of the absolute and inviolable laws which bound scientific deductions, and unfettered and unrestrained, drive recklessly upon the roadways of dawn in the Phaeton-chariot of music."

BR: Mm-hm.

FL: So he was kind of feeling that, this more kind of traditional idea about science being a restraining thing. But you were talking about it from a very different perspective, you know, different way of seeing that. That surprised me, that quote.

BR: Well again, it's been a while since I've read Kuhn, but this whole interesting way in which—I may be mischaracterizing some of this—but that most of what goes on in science is this—normal science—is building incrementally on what's gone before. And in this mature stage this represents generally specialists investigating specialized topics, and writing for other specialists. And it's very narrowly constrained to a single discipline.

And that works for a while, but then you're left with some questions that the current scheme doesn't account for—cannot account for, cannot explain. And you have to start casting about for something else. And the people pursuing the normal science are not going to be able to do that. They are unlikely to be able to transcend the framework within which they've been working; they can't step outside it. And so it's the extraordinary science, these paradigm shifts that people talk about, I think in most cases clearly not having read Kuhn at all, that that's more likely to be interdisciplinary work, it's generalists.

It's like the invention of radar, in World War Two, that that was an interdisciplinary team that developed that. Likewise, about which I know even less, the cryptography, and the, well actually, part, which had to get mathematicians together with other scientists. So, sorry, I'm drifting, because it's way outside my expertise! But this—and maybe it's because my tendencies are more as a generalist than as a specialist, that I feel more of an affinity with that. Those are the moments in science that really interest me, the more dramatic discoveries.

FL: You're not feeling a restraining kind of thing with science, in this kind of simplistic notion of logic?

BR: No, because I mean, within my lifetime, there's been things like fractal geometry, and fuzzy logic, fuzzy set theory, that turn a lot of traditional ideas on their heads, or at least move beyond them to encompass what we've thought of as normal, and discovered: Oh, actually, that's just a special case which happened to neatly fit the intellectual framework that we inherited from—going back to Aristotle.

FL: Mm-hm.

BR: And that it's actually wildly inadequate for an awful lot of what goes on in the world.

FL: Right. So, some concluding questions here: are there any kind of memorable—obviously you have memorable experiences at MIT. Is there any particular ones that you wanted to talk about?

BR: Hm. You know, it's hard for me to pick out individual ones, but there certainly have been some marvelous performances, including performances of my own music. When I first arrived, and John Harbison graciously programmed my dissertation piece, "Imagined Corners" for MITSO, even though I didn't think that student players would be able to cope with it. But John decided, yup, they probably could, and he pushed them to it, and they did an excellent job of it, and in fact as good as, or in many cases better than, what had been done by professional musicians in a reading situation.

FL: I noticed the difference between the recordings. And I had gotten them mixed up in my mind.

BR: Interesting.

FL: And then I looked at the CD, and it's like, oh, that MIT Symphony!

BR: Yeah, the students here apply themselves, and they do things very well. And especially, right, one of those opportunities of the extent to which it's hard to get classical musicians to play things freely. The fourth movement in my dissertation piece, in which all of the material for the winds is based on chimpanzee vocalizations, various pant, hoots, grunts, shrieks, what have you—this is one of those cases [laughs] where it's hard to get players, classically trained players, to be loose enough. So especially with any of these [vocalizes the chimpanzee] kinds of sounds, to get that from like a bass clarinet or a clarinet, it's something much rougher and sloppier than what players are trained to do. So you really have to encourage them to let loose. And I'm sorry, I forgot the player's name, but the student here did that marvelously well! Or yes, the performance of my wind ensemble piece, "Congress of the Insomniacs," that was a tremendously rewarding experience, working with Fred Harris and the students on that.

You know, it's not so many big, dramatic moments; it's more just the whole series of really smart and capable students that I've worked with, and really rewarding one-on-one sessions in my office, or sometimes lively discussion in the classroom, or particularly revelatory improvisation that might have occurred in the "Introduction to Composition" class. There's only so much the students will believe if you tell them, but if they hear it with their own ears, and one of them figures it out, then the others hear it from that student, and it carries more impact.

FL: Mm-hm. Are there any particular individuals you want to mention?

BR: I won't try to pick anyone out.

FL: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

8. Future compositional goals (1:54:07—CD2 51:32)

FL: Do you have some long-term goals for yourself as a composer?

BR: It's mainly just, the one that's been going on for years is to write with greater fluency. When I was in graduate school, I worked very, very slowly. And I work more quickly now than I did then, but it still takes me longer than I'd like to complete projects, and especially I can still spin off ideas more quickly than I can follow up on them. And maybe that's a good sign, that I've been getting enough, generating enough commitments for new projects, that for

example, I still have to go back and complete that, revise "A Field Guide to North American Car Alarms," to complete that unfinished tempo canon at the end, and also to revise some things earlier on, because there are some bits where I have this woefully stupid material, and I've gone back and realized: well, you know, in order to hold up to repeated listenings, I do need to make things a little more refined! [laughs] So that's the main goal, is just to be able to work more quickly.

FL: Mm-hm. Do you see your music changing significantly in the future? Is that something you—?

BR: Nothing that I can foresee at the moment. I think more of it will incorporate electronic instruments, because that's been an interest for years which I haven't actually pursued. And I do intend to purse that more, so more—I have a couple of proposals floating around involving writing for acoustic instruments with a theremin in the ensemble. I have at least one outstanding commitment that I just haven't followed up on yet to do something, acoustic instruments with an electric guitar in the ensemble.

But I suppose that's the most dramatic change, but otherwise I'm essentially happy with the overall direction of things, so this piece, my first piece with theremin, I had the opportunity to record a demo, a demonstration of it, this summer, at College of the Holy Cross. Sharish Korde was good enough to hire Bob Shulz and Jen Ashe to come in and do this. And I discovered that the theremin part was much harder than I thought when I wrote it! [laughs] And it was very difficult, and I'm still learning to execute it cleanly. But I have no intention of going back to revise the score; I don't want to simplify the theremin part. The notes are right. I just need to learn to do it. So that's a piece I was quite happy with.

So, it's, as I say, at this point, my goals are more incremental, to write more pieces that incorporate an electronic instrument, but nothing that's going to be an entirely electro-acoustic piece, or to achieve a more, a sense of greater freedom and improvisation, but not to write pieces which just turn the players loose. Maybe that could come later.

FL: Yeah. Are there any concluding comments, topics of your choice, or anything, as we tie this up? We have just a few more minutes here.

BR: Mm, nothing I can think of. I think we've essentially covered everything that's on my mind now. [laughs] I mean, right, it's hard to predict, because I'm sure at some point in the next few years, I'll discover some other sound source, or musical idiom that I hadn't heard previously, and become fascinated with it, and dig into it. And then I'll transform what I'm doing.

There is this digital sound—audio manipulation software, Max/MSP, that for years I've been meaning to look into, and with my usual dilatory pace, I did purchase a copy back in December, but I haven't got 'round to learning it yet. So it's possible that that will change the way I approach music.

On the other hand, that's the sort of thing that's very finicky, and again, perhaps in line with the way that I write music that's a complex combination of comparatively simple elements, for now I'm happy to just proceed with things using more reliable technology, such as electric guitars. Theremin's a little temperamental, but guitar in particular, it's like, you know what you're getting when you walk in! [laughs] And then you set things up, and you plug them in, and there's not this question of performing a sound check, and then having to spend half an hour discovering why the computer is not cooperating, and rebooting, and the software is still—and you're still not getting the sounds! And what happened with this patch? And, oh, this!

FL: Well, I want to thank you very much for this tremendous contribution you've made with this interview.

BR: Oh, thank you!

FL: This is just great.

BR: It's a privilege to be interviewed, and I'm honored to have been selected.

FL: Thank you very much.

[End of Interview]