Interview of Robert Hurwitz
UCLA Library, Center for Oral History Research, University of California, Los Angeles
Interview of Robert Hurwitz

Transcript

Session One (January, 25, 2017)

CLINE:

Today is the 25th of January, 2017. This is Alex Cline. I'm interviewing Robert Hurwitz in the Young Research Library, second floor Staff Conference Room, while he's here in town teaching a class at UCLA, and this is session number one. Good morning.

HURWITZ:

Good morning.

CLINE:

First question is always the same question, and it is where and when were you born?

HURWITZ:

I was born on July 31st, 1949, at Cedars of Lebanon Hospital, Los Angeles, at one minute after 12:00. [laughter]

CLINE:

Wow. Just made it.

HURWITZ:

And this is a story about how strange life can sometimes be. Last week I was having a meeting with Habitat for Humanity in Los Angeles, and they are going to do a build in June, ten houses in ten days.

CLINE:

Wow.

HURWITZ:

And I asked where it was, and they said it's in Culver City. Culver City was very close to where I lived, and I said, "Where in Culver City?" They said, "On Globe Avenue." And Globe Avenue was where I lived right after I was born, which is about one block long, and it's where the 405 Freeway--apparently, whatever happened to the street, doesn't exist anymore, but that is where I came from.

CLINE:

Wow. Yeah, that's where they widened the 405 Freeway a few years ago and--

HURWITZ:

Maybe that's why.

CLINE:

--and many people had to relocate during that time.

HURWITZ:

But they're building ten houses in ten days.

CLINE:

Wow. Good to know. I live in Culver City, in fact. So let's start with looking at your family background. We'll start with your father, if you could tell us his name and what you know about his family background, including what his occupation was.

HURWITZ:

My father was named Sidney Hurwitz, he was born in 1919 and passed away in 1967, died of a heart attack at the age of forty-seven.

CLINE:

Whoa.

HURWITZ:

He grew up in Chicago, he was a musician, and he ended up being a salesman, gave up a lot because he married and had a family. And always played the piano. He never stopped playing. The one insight to his ambitions happened a number of years ago, maybe twenty-five years ago, when we were cleaning out my parents' house and I found some songs he had written, and I brought them back to New York and played through them, and they were pretty good. His sister, my aunt, came over one day and I started playing the songs, and she had memorized the words and had remembered them from when they were in high school or early in college back in Chicago, and she started singing the songs as if they were the songs that George or Ira Gershwin had written, that period.

And, in fact, he was under the spell of Gershwin when he wrote these songs. They were for a college musical, and they were quite good. And that's where his great interest in music had come from, from sort of Tin Pan Alley. I always had wondered if he had grown up in a different time or under different circumstances, that he might have followed that pathway for his career, but, unfortunately, he didn't. He had a grueling job, getting up at 5:00 in the morning every day, and I think he made the most of it. I don't think he could have derived an enormous amount of happiness from it.

CLINE:

What did he sell?

HURWITZ:

He sold kosher foods.

CLINE:

Interesting. Do you happen to know what brought him out to Los Angeles from Chicago?

HURWITZ:

I was not entirely sure, but what happened was he moved somewhere in the Fairfax area in the early forties, and my mother, who moved from Brooklyn, who was also quite musical, also moved out to California in the early forties. I know she told me once that she landed around New Year's at that time, and was in Pasadena for the Rose Parade. After all those winters in Brooklyn, sludging through--you know, before global warming, it was a lot colder back east. [laughter] And she just said, "I'm never going to leave this place." They moved into a duplex apartment, and I think my father's family was on the first floor and hers was on the second floor. And she heard him playing music all the time and she said, "I really want to meet that boy." So that's how they met. She was a singer and a dancer. And so once they got to California, they fell in love and got married, and then he went off to the war. I suppose it was his good fortune that they needed a pianist in a house band (in his army regiment).

CLINE:

Oh, wow.

HURWITZ:

So that's how he spent most of World War II, away from combat.

CLINE:

Excellent. And then they came out here after the war.

HURWITZ:

And then they stayed out here, and that's where I grew up. And my mother--again, this is just the legends of a family, but as a ten-year-old, she said she used to go to Radio City every Saturday and sang and danced on the radio. You know those little kids who tap danced.

CLINE:

Oh, yeah.

HURWITZ:

She also thought she might have some sort of career in music, but she ended up becoming a housewife. I have this theory that's holding true for myself, and it's actually true for a few other people I know, about the different generations of immigrant families in America, which is to say my grandparents' generation came from Russia or Poland or the parts that weren't clearly Russia and Poland, and they came to places like Chicago and Brooklyn, and their main job was surviving. And then their children, like my parents, that their aspirations was what you would probably call the middle-class life, but then put all their aspirations into their children, which is my generation. You know, John Adams' father was a salesman too.

A couple of people who are very close colleagues at Nonesuch were salesmen. Willy Loman is a big figure in all of our lives. And our children's generation, we have not placed the same kind of aspirational ideals. It's in a different kind of way. We want our children to be perfect people and completely screw them up by doing so. [Cline laughs.] But our parents wanted to live through us, and I think I certainly got a tremendous dose of that as a child, and it probably wasn't a bad thing, but I do think that if I look at my family life from grandparents, parents, my generation, my children, that the messaging that went out to each of those generations was different.

CLINE:

Yeah, I think that's true. I've interviewed many immigrants as part of my job here, and it's still being played out the same way, from what I can see. So what about your mother, then? What was her name and what do you know about her family background?

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HURWITZ:

Her name was Eveline Fain. That was her maiden name. She took the name Eveline Hurwitz. She was a crackerjack of a person. She, as I said, grew up in Brooklyn. Her father was a barber. She was a brilliant woman. My father was a pretty brilliant person, but they kind of gave up a lot of their ambitions just to have a normal family life, and so she became a housewife. She lost a lot of her family in the Holocaust. Her mother, who also came out to Los Angeles with her father, had five sisters in Poland who they used to get letters from on a regular basis, and sometime in the early 1940s, letters just stopped, and they never heard from them again.

She had also family near Paris, some who survived and some who didn't. She sang and my father played--I'd come home from school every day or on weekends, and they basically went almost every single day to the piano and they would go through the sort of Great American Songbook, and she'd sing and he'd play, and that's really where they came from. They really loved the music that had come out of (Broadway musicals; they went to every show) at the Civic Light Opera here, down in Pershing Square. There was an auditorium on the north corner where they used to have the Broadway musicals would come out there for like a three- or four-week run, and so they went to those and took us to many of them when we were children.

First time I ever heard a live orchestra, I was about nine years old, when Oklahoma! was playing there, which was for me one of the most memorable nights of my life because that was also the big breakout game of Sandy Koufax, and he struck out eighteen people the same night. [Cline laughs.] Everybody was outside during intermission, with their ears on the transistor radio. So musicals and baseball were, as a child, a big, big part of my life, and having a Brooklyn mother who was a Brooklyn Dodger fan, a Chicago father who was a baseball fan, added to that.

CLINE:

And I guess your mother didn't hold it against the Dodgers for relocating at that point. [laughs]

HURWITZ:

Oh, she was thrilled. She was thrilled. I do remember walking down to the corner and seeing the headline. I had no idea, of course. It was the pre all news all the time days, and I was nine years old in 1958, and I saw the headline, "Dodgers Moving to Los Angeles." And I already liked the Dodgers, and I was simply out of my mind. And only, of course, later did I realize that there were tens of thousands of nine-year-old boys and maybe some girls--Doris Kearns Goodwin writes about this--who on that very same day, it was the greatest blow in life.

CLINE:

Yeah, heartbreaking.

HURWITZ:

Then when I moved to Brooklyn, I had this deep longing for Ebbets Field to be right across Prospect Park where it used to be.

CLINE:

Oh, yeah. Wow. So what about siblings?

HURWITZ:

I have a sister. She's still living in Los Angeles. She was two and a half years older than me. We did not have a close relationship as children. My family, on the other hand, lived upstairs from my father's sister. So my aunt and uncle lived downstairs in the duplex on Alcott Street, and we lived upstairs, and my aunt and uncle had a daughter who was about my age and a son who was my sister's age. I was closer to the two of them, one being he was a boy, and the other being she

was in my class, but I probably didn't pay that much attention to any of those people, because as a child I didn't pay attention to most anybody. [laughter]

CLINE:

Interesting. What sort of, if any, religious or ethical or political atmosphere or practices were there in your family when you were growing up?

HURWITZ:

They were all there.

CLINE:

They were all there.

HURWITZ:

My parents were sort of Stevenson liberals. My mother, I do believe, when she came to Los Angeles, had been part of in some kind of what we would call communist organization. I don't think they were radical, but they had very strong political beliefs. I remember when I was eleven, during the 1960 election, the Kennedy-Nixon election, and I, like many kids that age, totally fell in love with JFK, rode my bike to the Democratic headquarters up on Pico right by Beverwil every chance I had. I worked very hard to convince them that Kennedy was the right choice for the Democrats and, you know, watched the convention every day. I was totally swept up in that election. As far as religion, they were three-day-a-year Jews, which they belonged to a Conservative synagogue on Pico Boulevard. I was bar-mitzvahed.

CLINE:

Do you remember which one?

HURWITZ:

Mogen David.

CLINE:

Mogen David, yeah. I had friends who bar-mitzvahed there too.

HURWITZ:

I got kind of caught up in that whole thing during that age, for the same reasons a lot of kids do, but as time went on--a colleague once said to me when we were talking during Rosh Hashanah or one of the High Holy Days, and I was talking about how from that point on for me I found myself first drifting and then consciously separating myself from that upbringing. She said, "Usually as people get older, they try to kind of go back to their religion, and it sounds like you have been just going further and further apart." And I think that's pretty much what happened to me. I found a lot of things troubled me in terms of the social ways people treated that whole thing. It would be 90 degrees in Los Angeles or 95 degrees in Los Angeles in October, and all these women would come in these minks, you know, coats, to temple. [laughter] And there was just something that I was deeply troubled about, even at that age, but I didn't start articulating it probably till I was in college.

CLINE:

Well, that makes sense. And then in terms of the dynamics of the family, let's start with your father. You describe him as being somebody who did not get to fulfill what really appeared to be kind of his life aspiration, and you even invoke the name of Willy Loman, which does conjure up some troubling ideas. How would you describe him as a father and how would you characterize your relationship with him?

HURWITZ:

I think we bonded on a number of things. Many of the happiest days of my childhood were the Saturday afternoons where he and I would drive down to Alvarado Street and look at old bookstores. He bought used books and I'd look at old baseball programs and Sports Illustrated because I was completely hooked into that, and then we would drive over to Chavez Ravine and go to the ballgame. And I think that as I look back in retrospect, I know that there was a lot that he was putting up with that he was not happy with, one of which was what happened to his career. Another was that when my grandfather's wife died, my grandfather moved into our house, and there was something disruptive in terms of relationships.

My grandfather had a terrible relationship with my sister. And so there was that aspect of it. But I think that we, by and large, got along pretty well. I think he understood that I was doing well enough in terms of the things that I was interested in, whether it would be sports or school or piano, and so I think it was a kind of supportive life. But, of course, he was taken away from me when I was eighteen years old, and that is a huge gap that was never refound. And I don't know if I spent my life searching for fathers, but it certainly changed the direction of my life. I'm just going to push forward a second, because I do think that his death had a very--I think it even speaks to the difference between my sister and myself. For me, his death happened in our house three months after my grandfather died in our house--

CLINE:

Oh, wow.

HURWITZ:

--in the same period of time that Martin Luther King got shot--

CLINE:

So '68.

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HURWITZ:

--the same period of time that Robert Kennedy got shot, in the same time at the height of the Vietnam War, at the same time that I was in college, starting college.

So you take all those things together, and it was like a lightning bolt that went through my system, that totally changed my life and, in a way, put me on a road that might not have happened without his death or the combination of his death plus all these other events, because that was where it was simply an inescapable fact about mortality, which I understood in a way I'd never understood before. It was only a concept. Now it was real, and it made me--I remember being up at the USC library at 4:00 in the morning reading about Martin Luther and thinking, "Well, you know, he's been dead for four hundred years. I guess that's it." I guess that's that moment where you just realize, okay, now the stakes are much higher in your life than you ever thought they were, and it changed me in a way that I know a lot of friends were not changed.

It was interesting. An artist who I've worked with and who's a very good friend of mine named Mandy Patinkin, who said that his father died around at the same age, and he said, quite poignantly, in some ways it was the greatest gift his father could give him is, as painful as it was, because, I think in his case, too, it just changes your energy level. It just doesn't let you kind of wait around for things in life to happen. You just realize that you are kind of now on a precipice and it's really up to you to kind of create that definition. And I was also aware of my father's deep frustrations of not fulfilling himself, and I just felt at that moment I wanted my life to mean something. I didn't want to just pass through life and then disappear and be on some headstone in some cemetery. I did not want that.

CLINE:

I look forward to exploring this some more, because that's an amazing insight of impermanence right there, when it must have made life seem extremely insecure and unpredictable and unstable. That's a lot at once.

HURWITZ:

Yeah.

CLINE:

So what about your mother, then? How would you characterize your relationship with her and what was she like as a mother?

HURWITZ:

She was one of those mothers who adored her son. Again, the kind of messages your parents give you. When I was about ten years old, she woke up one day and said, "You know, I had a dream last night that one day you're going to be governor of California. Not president, I don't know if you can do that, but governor," which is--and I was completely into politics. I said, "Really? Do you think it's possible?" So sometimes parents do give out fake messages that have a positive impact of, like, empowering children. All the way until she passed away, which was in 1991, both my parents had those old health habits of smoking two packs of cigarettes a day. She died of lung cancer. I'm sure it was completely related to it. Bad diets, all those things that people used to do back in those days that ended up--

CLINE:

Yes, proving fatal frequently. [laughs]

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HURWITZ:

Yes. But she was just sharp as a whip. But she was widowed at forty-three years old, and she struggled because of that. I stayed pretty close to her. My wife adored her. She had a great love for many of the things that I had a great love for. She loved to talk about politics. Like my father, she was very well read. We maintained a good relationship throughout her life, never had a lot of conflict--I felt my parents loved me. I was never one to look back at my childhood with any kind of remorse or a sense that somehow I was cheated or something. I just sort of accepted, even as a kid, life as it was.

I think the one thing I will say, which relates to some of the things we've talked about, that one of the aspects of growing up in this very, very middle-class family--my father when he died was making $13,000 a year in 1967 dollars, which is like 85,000 or 90,000 dollars now--we had everything we needed, but I grew up with a kind of unspoken message about an idea that the many elements of who I was were the best. So it was best being an American; it was best living in Los Angeles; it was best being male; it was best being Jewish; it was best being white. And whether or not anyone ever spoke that way, I think those were messages that were kind of very subtly drilled, and I think part of what you do in life is you just have to sort of rip those things apart.

I could say to some degree that even though I was never a rebellious kid in that kind of traditional way, that ultimately I kind of rebelled in the way I lived my life to almost everything that happened to me in my childhood; that is, at a certain point, and maybe it was at that Martin Luther moment, that it was, "Okay, it's my life, and now I'm going to invent it the way I want it to be invented." And so the values, the points of view, the interest in things, all the things that I care about are not things that I got from my parents. What I got from my parents is a love of music. But where they came from and where I come from, in terms of that, are two completely different places.

CLINE:

So you obviously heard show tunes and, as you said, Tin Pan Alley songs and that sort of thing.

HURWITZ:

And jazz. And a lot of jazz.

CLINE:

I was going to say, what else did you hear musically?

HURWITZ:

Oh, my parents loved jazz. I'm sure it's some sort of folktale that my mother would say, "We probably heard Art Tatum play fifty times.in L.A." Maybe they heard him play ten times. But they heard Billie Holiday and Art Tatum, Duke Ellington, and they went out and had an active interest. That was seen in the old records that they had that they collected. They had very little interest in classical music. My grandmother was a piano teacher, my father's mother, and so that was the person who was--she was the one who would, like, take me down on the bus, which I suppose was probably Beverly Boulevard, to hear the L.A. Philharmonic or Arthur Rubenstein, who played in that same hall.

CLINE:

Philharmonic Hall.

HURWITZ:

Philharmonic Hall, where they used to play. So I remember those events from my childhood. But it wasn't my parents who did that; it was my grandmother who did that. And my grandfather, who lived with us also, cared a little bit more about classical music. He came from a musical family in Russia. And, again, another possible legend was that his mother left his father. She had been a Russian trombonist. They moved back to Kiev, as opposed to--so he was born in New York and moved to Kiev and then came eventually back to New York.

CLINE:

Wow. Interesting. So let's talk about the neighborhood you grew up in a bit. You mentioned the street a while ago, and I don't know if you moved around much.

HURWITZ:

No. We lived on Globe Avenue, which is where the Habitat project is, for maybe a year and a half. And then my mother and father, aunt and uncle bought a duplex house on Alcott Street, right off Robertson, right by the corner of Pico and Robertson. And went to Canfield Elementary School, Louis Pasteur Junior High School, and Hamilton High.

CLINE:

So if you could, just sort of describe not only the neighborhood as it existed when you were younger, but the kind of people who were living in the neighborhood and the kind of friends that you were running with.

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HURWITZ:

The neighborhood was very pleasant. Only, again, as I got older and began to get interested in things, I thought it was actually architecturally pretty interesting. We lived in a Spanish-style house with a winding staircase. We were on the second floor. It was certainly enough room for us. Most of my friends in the neighborhood were kids who lived in houses a few doors down one way or another, and we did a lot of sports. We had front lawns, and so we'd play touch football or some baseball game where you sort of hit the balls fungo style, and we created some game about that. The street itself, I remember the first time, probably in mid-fifties, '58, '59, when they started tearing down the old houses and started building up these modern apartment buildings, the ones today that are probably the least-earthquake proof, the ones that have these poles holding up the front of the buildings, that was built right next door to us. So half the block, probably, in that ten-year period got torn down. But it was very exciting as kids to go on the constructions sites when the workers left, and we'd have rock fights and things like that.

I went to a school that was six blocks from my house. I never had more than two or three friends at a time. I have fond memories of the school. I probably began to excel in some ways by the fourth and fifth grade, which has kind of been true (for my entire experience in school). I was

always kind of perfectly happy to be alone, and even as a kid, I liked to be in adult company as much as I liked to be with friends. I (got a job at the age of) eight--right at the corner of Pico and Robertson there was a drugstore called Barko's Drug Store where I used to go regularly--sort of like ten years later I'd go into record stores regularly, because they sold baseball cards and candy. And I became friendly with them, and they gave me a job for twenty-five cents an hour. Mostly I'd like to have to clean up all the dirty drugs and things that had gathered dust, but sometimes they'd let me be behind the cash register.

I did that for a year or so and became very friendly with all the people, and they were very nice to me. We had a movie theater around the corner called the Stadium Theater that was eventually turned into a synagogue. It was bought by B'Nai David, which was the other local more Orthodox synagogue. Again, in the innocence of those days, as a ten-year-old, they'd had movies every Saturday, and I went every single Saturday, and possibly my love of movies came from that, from that time. And my parents would take me to movies. It was a kind of carefree childhood, riding bikes everywhere and riding bikes to school and being able to walk by yourself to school at a very, very young age, and nobody ever had any fear about that stuff. It was kind of ideal.

CLINE:

What subject areas or anything of that nature did you find that you enjoyed or excelled in, other than you've mentioned music and you've mentioned sports, of course.

HURWITZ:

History. I was fascinated by American history. I was fascinated by presidents. I was really interested in geography. I would say in those two areas I really excelled to a certain degree. I read those Landmark Books and biographies as a seven- or eight- or nine-year-old about all these kind of famous American people. As I said, during the Democratic Convention in 1960, I did not budge from the TV for like fourteen hours every day, and began to get some sense of a political identity. I was obviously fascinated with the Second World War, which you have to remember in 1960 was only fifteen years earlier. That's like us today talking about something that happened in 2001, like 9/11. That's how far back World War II was from me at that point. And I looked at Time magazine and looked at Life magazine and sometimes went to the library and looked at old Newsweek magazines. It was of great fascination to me as a kid.

CLINE:

And then you mentioned going downtown to hear music and these kinds of things occasionally.

HURWITZ:

I went with my grandmother to hear music.

CLINE:

What other parts of the city did you possibly visit or have any reason to visit when you were young?

HURWITZ:

It was pretty limited. I mean, by the time we were maybe ten, in the summer me and some buddies would go take the bus from Pico and Robertson to the beach. I mean, again, something we could do by ourselves. So I knew sort of the Santa Monica part of the beach pretty well. But I didn't have a lot of great curiosity at that point in my life about visual things, and I don't think it was something that my parents emphasized very much. By the time my wife and I had kids, that was all we cared about, was understanding how light worked. So really my corridor was really Pico and Robertson going south and west and very little at any other part of the city, to be honest. Sometimes we'd go to that--they had a playground in Rancho Park where I played Little League or the park at Olympic and La Cienega, where we'd sometimes play football in junior high without any protection at all.

CLINE:

[laughs] Right.

HURWITZ:

And going to school. And the other thing I probably should mention is my piano teacher, she was briefly in Beverly Hills on Doheny, but most of the time I went to see her, she was on Berendo near Vermont on Wilshire. And for many, many years I would go to the corner, take the bus which came once an hour from Pico to Wilshire, and then transfer on the Wilshire bus. It was about an hour-long trip, which I would do once a week often by myself, or my mother would go with me for a large chunk of my life. In the last couple years, she was in Westwood, but she had this beautiful studio downtown. It was quite remarkable.

CLINE:

I was about to ask if you ever just ventured slightly north into Beverly Hills.

HURWITZ:

Not really.

CLINE:

Interesting.

HURWITZ:

No. I mean, if we go to a restaurant, we'd go to a movie theater, but my life was really contained like in a really small village, and then eventually we'd go out. We'd go to the Valley to see relatives or go downtown for piano lessons. But I had no real perception of what a city was, certainly up to the age of ten or eleven. It was just the world I knew, Dodger Stadium or the Coliseum if it was a sporting event, but that was about it.

CLINE:

It must have seemed like you were going quite a long ways then at that point.

HURWITZ:

Oh, going to the Valley over Coldwater Canyon was like going on vacation, it was so long. [laughter]

CLINE:

So as you were growing up with all these various interests and this sort of kind of cultural climate in your household, how aware were you of the developments in what we might call popular culture and certainly the presence of things like TV in the household and popular music, that sort of thing?

HURWITZ:

I think I was pretty much hooked in both musically and in terms of television. On TV, we didn't watch an enormous amount. There were a few shows I liked. I have to speak up for one of them which had an impact on my life, which is this old crime show called Naked City.

CLINE:

Oh, yeah.

HURWITZ:

I don't know if you remember that show.

CLINE:

Yeah. I never watched it, but I know what it is.

HURWITZ:

But Naked City was one of those things that made me think at a young age, "I want to be in New York." There was something about just all of these shots of people walking on streets and the grittiness and the kind of poignant stories that really had a big impression on me. And anytime I'd see something on television--like I remember the earliest "I Love New York" ads, which were black and white, because we didn't have a color TV--

CLINE:

Sure.

0:42:35.70:44:20.0

HURWITZ:

--till I was seventeen years old. I mean, I lived in the world. I remember seeing a color TV for the first time in 1961 at a friend's house for the championship game of the Green Bay Packers and Philadelphia Eagles. I even remember what their uniforms looked like. It was like I had no idea. So everything was this black-and-white world, which probably made Naked City look even more desirable to me. And I kind of was aware of what was going on in pop music. This is actually something I talk about in my class all the time, (that prior to) the Beatles--I use the Beatles as a kind of a cutoff point--there were some very positive aspects of recorded culture. Jazz was in an incredible period of Riverside, Blue Note, and Columbia was recording Miles. There was Milestone, Fantasy. All those great labels were around, and there was a lot of folk music being recorded, but in the pop world, it tended to be these kind of pretty-voiced singers, Johnny Mathis and Andy Williams and people like that, or sometimes Frank Sinatra, who was more evolved than any of those people during that period.

But (musicians stopped making records like that) after '65 So pop music was the Top 40 and Elvis Presley and rock-â€˜n-roll. You could be aware of it, but it was hard to be aware of a culture. There was certainly not a soul that I knew who up till that age had any kind of real interest in it. I think post the Beatles and growing up in L.A.--the Doors were from L.A.--and then you had Buffalo Springfield and Dylan and the Rolling Stones and Jimi Hendrix and all those people happening, but they all came after that moment. So up until that moment, I just kind of looked at the world in a kind of non-sophisticated, very naÃ¯ve, and innocent way, and what was out there as popular culture was where I was, and I was not one to start digging as deeply as I might in terms of my interest in history or politics or music or sports. I don't mean music. But those three things, I was more likely to be digging hard.

I don't know how much interest was in your family in baseball, but one of the things about baseball that I always liked for myself, and I was interested in all sports, but was that by the time you're like eleven or twelve, you could be as smart about that as any grownup. You could have a real conversation with them. Some areas, you were so nerdy you knew more than they did, because we'd listen to every game on the radio, and it was this thing I talked to my friends about at school. But I didn't have that intensity about music, and that didn't happen till probably I was fifteen or sixteen when all of a sudden that completely changed.

One other thing which I think is something that I have to note is that I started taking piano lessons when I was seven years old from a spectacular teacher, who was really my primary piano teacher for my entire time I took lessons, and I was completely socially isolated in terms of music. As far as I knew, there was one other kid who played guitar in elementary school and junior high school. I didn't know anyone else that took piano lessons or had any interest in that, and it was kind of hard. I think I might have looked at music a little differently if there were somebody who I could actually relate that experience to. The only kids I knew who took piano lessons were kids who worked with my piano teacher.

To digress for a second, when I sometimes go back and think about just what a (remarkable

woman she was.) She was best friends (when she was a student) in Europe with Yvonne Loriod, who's Messiaen's wife.

CLINE:

Oh, yeah, right.

HURWITZ:

She always had someone playing a Messiaen piece at recitals--

CLINE:

Amazing. [laughs]

HURWITZ:

--because she loved this music. But I'd go back and find these old programs that she did when she took maybe ten of her best students, and I found two of them long after I had moved to New York. I was very young at that point, I was maybe eight or nine, but I was in that. And she would have like a Schumann night or a Chopin night. And the youngest student might play the Arabesque, and the second youngest, who was me at that point, played the Papillion, and all the way to the oldest, most advanced student playing Kreisleriana. So she was able to kind of look at music in that kind of way that she could put a recital together, that she could have an eight-year-old and an eighteen-year-old who were all playing music that took one step to--the same thing with Chopin, where I remember one where it was at a studio that eventually became the Whiskey--

CLINE:

Oh, wow.

HURWITZ:

--on Sunset [laughs] where I played a Chopin prelude. That was before it was Whiskey. [laughter] And Eddie, (whose last name I can't recall), who was her more most advanced student, played one of the Chopin Ballades, and, in between, there were mazukas, nocturnes, scherzos, all the way up to sonatas, I mean the whole range. But that was the only environment where I could actually even talk to people, and at that age you didn't talk to anybody anyway. So that's the one thing that L.A. did not give me, which was I didn't feel--my grandmother would take me to a concert, and there was something inherent that I was being drawn. We would buy the supermarket records. I don't know if you remember those as a kid where like they would have--

CLINE:

Yeah, collections of things.

HURWITZ:

Yeah, Bizet, a Carmen suite, that would be like probably forty-nine cents. [Cline laughs.] And then I would just completely be taken over by--play it to death. But I also played Jimmy Rogers records to death and other things that I actually cared about.

CLINE:

Okay. So, in a sense, the music was almost one of the elements of a kind of alienation.

HURWITZ:

Yeah, to some degree.

CLINE:

Interesting.

HURWITZ:

And probably I just felt very isolated in terms of doing that.

CLINE:

And speaking of pop culture, you mentioned that you used to go to the movies once a week.

HURWITZ:

Yeah.

CLINE:

And I wanted to ask if there were--you mentioned Naked City as being a particularly influential TV show, or memorable, anyway. Were there any particular movies that you felt had a strong impact?

HURWITZ:

Oh, absolutely. West Side Story, which I'm sure we went to the first day it played at Christmas Day in Los Angeles around 1961, maybe. We could check on that, but it was right when it happened, another New York movie. After I saw it and was just overwhelmed and, of course, went out and bought the record, for years I'd see it on television and I thought, "What was I thinking? This is just terrible." And then years later, it was probably 1992 or â€˜93, I happened to be in Los Angeles, (it was playing at the) Cinerama on Sunset.

CLINE:

Yeah, the Cinerama Dome, right?

HURWITZ:

Yeah. Played West Side Story in the on a big screen, and I realized that West Side Story on tv was cut in half, (all of the impact of the original was lost and seeing it in a theater again). I just was in tears watching it.

CLINE:

Oh, wow.

HURWITZ:

The Jerry Robbins scenes were incredible, and the music, and hearing it, seeing it in a movie theater--and movie theaters sometimes have the greatest sound systems--and just being kind of drawn into that visceral experience, of course I understood why that had such a big impact on me and why I just thought I was crazy after that. And I have to say that's one of the only times that a musical movie, in a way, was better than any production of West Side I've ever seen. I've just never seen a stage production that had that impact, and part of what happened in that movie, why Jerry Robbins got fired, is that he wanted to make his dance scenes absolutely perfect, and the scene of the dance at the gym, the dance at the rooftop for "America," the fight, which were the parts that he did, are simply as great--they're better than La La Land. Let me tell you. [laughter]

CLINE:

Oh, yeah.

HURWITZ:

They're just incredible. And my parents took me to all the Rodgers and Hammerstein movies, and they began taking me things like To Kill a Mockingbird, which, as a kid, had a huge impact on my life. And, by the way, when my kids were eight years old, both of them, I played that movie, which was kind of the first serious movie they saw, just to have a different taste of what life is. And they also had an interest (in serious films). There was a great wave of directors like Bergman and Fellini and people like that whose movies were shown in Los Angeles, and they, normally not taking us, went to see those movies (themselves). Again, this is I have to look up what year Wild Strawberries was, but I remember the day seeing Bergman on the cover of Time magazine--

CLINE:

Huh.

0:51:43.5

HURWITZ:

--when Wild Strawberries came out. Years later, there was a website, where I started looking at old Time magazines, and whoever the cover of Time magazine every week was a big deal. We looked forward to see who was on the cover. When I went back and looked at the archive of old-time covers, it amazed me that, first of all, Stravinsky, Leonard Bernstein, Leontyne Price, but theologians, scientists, authors. John Cheever was on the cover of Time and Newsweek. When you think about the culture of that time and how that people understood that there were other important things that were going on. The idea of celebrity culture just did not exist as it does today, and a great author was as much a celebrity as a movie celebrity, maybe even more so. [Cline laughs.]

And, again, as I'm beginning to think about it, my parents put me in front of the TV to see Bernstein's Young People's Concerts during those days, which it was clearly more older people's concerts than young people's concerts, in terms of what he was talking about, but a lot of it seeped in. There was somehow this reality that you saw in the evening news, that you saw on more CBS than the other two networks, that you saw in places like Time magazine, that just had a much different view about what modern life meant than what eventually happened over the last forty or fifty years.

CLINE:

Wow. [laughs] Yeah, for sure.

HURWITZ:

So my parents were very attuned to all that stuff. They could actually explain what Wild Strawberries meant being on the cover of Time.

CLINE:

[laughs] Wow. Any other movies, before we move on?

HURWITZ:

I mean, I'm thinking of that period before I was twelve or thirteen, West Side Story just certainly had this visceral impact. I mean, when Ben Hur played or Exodus, of course, they would take me to see those things, too, but those were the things that really stood out. And sort of go back, with my fascination with my heritage and my interest in history, I started reading kind of grownup books around that time, but not serious fiction, but books like Exodus by Leon Uris and things like that, which I found really, really interesting. And when they made movie versions, of course we had to go see that.

CLINE:

Yeah, Irving Stone or that sort of thing.

HURWITZ:

Yeah, that kind of pop culture, historical books, James Michener, those kinds of things. When I think of what we exposed our children to, it's a different time.

CLINE:

[laughs] Yeah. So what was the transition like for you going from elementary school into what was then called junior high school?

HURWITZ:

It was a little rougher. I was going through adolescence. I kind of left elementary school having a certain belief in myself. I had been in school with nothing but white kids. Pasteur Junior High School was a racially mixed school. Like they do in schools, they have sort of a smart class. I tended to be in that class in elementary school. It was a much more mixed class in junior high, at least in the beginning. But I somehow found my way there too. I still enjoyed playing sports. I got to meet a lot of teachers who I thought were very, very good. But that period was the sort of the beginning of both the transition in my life and the transition of what was going on in the world.

That was one of those days we all remember, which was the day JFK was killed, and I had (a little school) job. I always found little jobs. Once I got a job working the cash register in the teachers' cafeteria, and I was working for the vice principal of the school, (when Kennedy was shot, it was) one of those unbelievable blows that you just never fully recover from. And I continued being involved with music. I played piano in the orchestra. I became the pianist for the Glee Club. They had a big Book Fair at school, which I won. There was a poetry contest, I finished second. [Cline laughs.] I played at student assemblies, and I kind of kept active in those ways, kept my great interest in sports, didn't make a lot of friends there. We lived pretty far away (from my school). What part of L.A. did you grow up in?

CLINE:

West L.A., so near Sawtelle.

HURWITZ:

Sawtelle. So you went to Palms.

CLINE:

No, I went to Webster.

HURWITZ:

Oh, you went to Webster. Well, I would say 80 percent of the kids from Canfield went to Palms Junior High, and I was in the 20 percent that went to Pasteur. I mean, I just never sort of questioned things. Instead of getting the bus on Robertson to Wilshire for my piano lessons after school, I'd get on the bus on La Cienega to Wilshire for my piano lessons. Those things that were of interest became a little bit more interesting to me, and, again, I think I probably excelled pretty well. If I was assigned by a teacher to do something, I just never questioned it. I mean, that's just what I was supposed to do.

CLINE:

Now, when you say that the junior high was more racially mixed, what specifically are you referring to, racially speaking?

HURWITZ:

If you looked at Los Angeles, I would say La Cienega at that time was a dividing line, that west of La Cienega it was pretty white and pretty Jewish, and east of La Cienega was a more integrated neighborhood. So a lot of the kids who were east of La Cienega were the ones who were attending Pasteur. So, I mean, it was probably still 80 percent white. There were a few Asian kids. I don't remember many Hispanic kids. But it was just a different school and a different environment, and it was valuable because of that.

CLINE:

And pondering the inherent challenges of adolescence and the changes that started to happen, particularly during the junior high school years, how did you find yourself coping with that transition as well?

HURWITZ:

It's a good question, and I've always sort of thought that the hormones kicked in much more in high school than they did in junior high school. I mean, I can't say I had a girlfriend. There was a girl (I had a date with at) Senior Night at Disneyland together. [Cline laughs.] And you notice girls in a slightly different way. I was always kind of easy around girls, but I was not (socially aggressive). I sometimes ponder what it would have been like for me today. I kind of was a happy-go-lucky kid, and I didn't really worry about social things. I'd go to parties and this, that, and the other, but it was not forefront on my mind at that point in my life. I just was occupied with a lot of other things, and I have to say I moved through life pretty unconsciously. I only say that because I think as I got older I started moving through life far more consciously.

CLINE:

Well, related to that directly, then, how conscious were you, and maybe therefore concerned were you, about the escalation of developments in Vietnam and the draft and that sort of thing?

1:01:35.1

HURWITZ:

Well, I think we're sort of moving into a little bit later. To go back to the comment, I said America, white, male, all those things that are kind of implanted in you, I was someone who clearly was--what's the right word? It was America first. [laughs] I never really thought about that. What changed me about Vietnam was seeing the Ramparts article in about '65 or '66 where they showed the results of napalm, and it was the first time I actually thought, "Holy fuck, what is this?" and began to--and then I have to say--and now we're moving into high school--I remember in '66, with the escalation of Johnson starting, that it began to appear as a far more real thing, and it was kind of horrifying at that point.

Now, I have to say that there is a part of me that does not hold much of a moral high ground about the anti-Vietnam War movement, because I really feel as someone who was of draft age of that time--and now we're sort of pushing up into the later 1960s--that, in retrospect, I think that a lot of people who were against the war were against for self-interest, because you've got to remember that all of us were of draft age. All of my friends were of draft age and we were in college. I was sitting around a radio when they had the lottery decision of what birthdays or what numbers. I was 115. And when the Iraq War happened, you didn't see that kind of protest,

because there was a volunteer army, and it's one thing if you're about to be drafted, it's another thing if some other guy who you don't know is just going to say, "Okay, I'm going to do this right now in my life."

And I've thought about this a lot in recent days with a lot of the stuff that's going on, is that rarely have we seen those kinds of protests. I think in the Civil Rights Movement we did see that, where people who were selfless in their desire to be supportive of in terms of that whole moment of the whole integration movement. But Vietnam, I was, of course, against the war. It was a nightmare to think of being drafted and being there. I mean, I would have nightmares about it. But I just think that the anti-war movement, except for those people who were truly outside and were not really concerned with themselves, I think so much of it was about self-interest, unfortunately. And, unfortunately, you've got to remember that the big years of the movement were '67, '68, '69, '70. War was over in '75. That's not what ended the war.

CLINE:

And this was also you're growing up with during basically the classic Cold War years.

HURWITZ:

Right.

CLINE:

And what, if anything, do you remember about how that may have affected your perception of the world, of life, of your security in it?

HURWITZ:

Well, we were all quite alarmed during the Cuban Missile Crisis in '62, and I think that

everybody was a little concerned what was going to happen, and nuclear bombs were a big deal. They probably should be as big a deal today as they were back then.

CLINE:

Well, you must have had drop drills and all those things at school, right?

HURWITZ:

We certainly did. Yeah, we did then. But I don't probably think that I was as focused on what was going on in terms of that. It was, again, growing up and having this belief, kind of very right-down-the center belief in America as this "shining light" in the world. We were "the right side" in World War I and World War II. The Union was "the right side" in the Civil War. We have the world's "best democracy." "We are the best. We are the best. We are the best." That was the mind of a twelve- or thirteen-year-old.

CLINE:

Right. Sure.

HURWITZ:

I say that with a little irony, because it's now in the minds of a lot of fifty-year-olds in this country. [laughter] But I just didn't question a lot, and I think getting older duringVietnam, I remember just in college never understanding that there was an anti-war movement in World War I, for instance, in this country, because you don't learn that--

CLINE:

Yeah, we didn't learn that.

HURWITZ:

--in high school. And you begin to dig deeper into areas like Jim Crow or Reconstruction or what happened to the Native Americans or the absurdity of many wars that aren't talked about, like the war in the Philippines or the wars with Mexico and the rest, as you begin to see that, your whole world view begins to change, and when you dig deeper and realize it wasn't the most perfect country in the world, and yet at the same time you hold on to things that you want to believe, and I think that's one of the things that is valuable about a liberal education, and you spend time questioning things, and I think that you begin to change your views and try to understand more than what you've been brought up with. But I do look at that. Remember I was saying a second ago about leaving elementary school and even junior high school as this kind of happy-go-lucky, positive view of the world, and then you turn like fifteen or sixteen and all hell breaks loose.

CLINE:

That's exactly right. [laughter]

HURWITZ:

And I'll jump forward for a second, if that's okay.

CLINE:

Okay. Sure.

HURWITZ:

Do you mind a little improvisation?

CLINE:

No. And this will probably wrap us up, I think.

1:09:36.5

HURWITZ:

Yeah. But there was a song by Joni Mitchell called "Don't Interrupt the Sorrow," and there's a line when she said, "When I was seventeen, I had no one over me." And one of the very hard things about being a parent is, especially in that fourth generation of the way kids get brought up, is that you become very possessive of your children and you want to make sure everything in their life is perfect. And I had this revelation that when they were seventeen or twenty, they were me. And when I was seventeen or twenty, I didn't want to hear from anybody and I didn't want anybody telling me what to do. I wanted to make my own mind up. I began to challenge everything. Remember, I was kind of accepting as a kid.

And that then went to another step where I thought about that period between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five, which I remember the heat of what that period was. But, really, when, for me, those ten years were the most critical years of my life, because in that ten-year period, I had the highest highs I ever had. I had the lowest lows I ever had. I experienced death both personal and from a distance. I lived through a war. I lived through civil rights. I went to college. I moved to New York. I lived on my own. I had girlfriends. I experienced sex and drugs and music in a way I had never experienced before. I traveled. I went to Europe for six months when I was twenty and just bummed around. I began to understand. You all of a sudden, you crack open everything, and I was out on my own. I had a parent who was no longer there.

I started listing all the things that happened in that ten-year period, which was so different than the first fifteen years of my life, that you can't help but be changed and understand what it is to be alive, and which was helped along quite a bit by some drugs, not all drugs. [laughter] Some dulled my senses, but some didn't. I took psychedelics, and I'm grateful that that happened to me. I never was a serious user of anything, but it cracked open some doors, so to speak, that were valuable, that I was able to kind of remember after the fact, and began to meet all these--

especially in my early twenties, because I was all of a sudden in New York and thrown into this situation where you met people like Ornette Coleman or Aaron Copland or Elliott Carter or all these people and began to kind of witness this world I had always hoped to find.

It's really interesting, and you may have some view as a native Californian about this, but I left California when I was twenty-one, and I now realize what the value of New York has meant to me, because I probably now know more people in California than I would have known if I would have stayed here, just because I had gone to New York and all of a sudden, I began to be able to make relationships here with people that I might not have met if I had not gone to New York in the first place.

CLINE:

Interesting.

HURWITZ:

I would probably say I know twenty times more people here than the people who I actually knew growing up in Los Angeles. I know about fifteen or twenty people left from L.A. from my youth. So all this happened at an accelerating speed. You probably sort of put the beginning of it with Kennedy's assassination, the end of it at Watergate, if you want to put it in historical words. And so it wasn't, by the way, just my time; it was the world's time. It was a time of Dylan and the Beatles and all that going on, the war, civil rights, women's movement, the beginnings of the gay liberation movement, all the changes, the days of Easy Rider and what was going on, I mean, just--

CLINE:

Yeah, a sort of a collective loss of innocence of some sort, yeah.

HURWITZ:

Yeah, which I'm utterly grateful for. [laughter]

CLINE:

Yeah.

HURWITZ:

There is more to life, and I was really happy about that.

CLINE:

[laughs] Excellent. Well, the period that you just described is what we're going to take up with our next session.

HURWITZ:

Okay.

CLINE:

And we'll get more into the details, the texture, and the insights and significance of all of that time.

HURWITZ:

Yeah, well, thank you.

CLINE:

Does that work for you?

HURWITZ:

Perfectly.

CLINE:

Okay. It looks like it's five minutes to 12:00. Thank you.

HURWITZ:

That was great. [End of January 25, 2017 interview.]

Session Two (February 8, 2017)

CLINE:

Begin at the beginning. Okay, everything appears to be working. Today is February 8th, 2017. This is Alex Cline interviewing Robert Hurwitz, and this is our second session. We're in the YRL second floor staff conference room at UCLA. Good morning.

HURWITZ:

How's it going?

CLINE:

Oh, it's certainly going. Lots is going. And to start with, I wanted to just kind of tie up a couple of loose ends from the last session, a little follow-up. First of all, we didn't get your sister's name.

HURWITZ:

Carole.

CLINE:

Carole.

HURWITZ:

With an E.

CLINE:

Okay. And also your piano teacher's name.

HURWITZ:

Her name was Zlata, Z-l-a-t-a, F-a-y.

CLINE:

Oh, wow.

HURWITZ:

Zlata Fay.

CLINE:

Great. And one thing I wanted to ask you about before we leave the time period that we were talking about last time, which was your earlier years, you would have been, I would think, to some degree aware of what was going on in the early sixties when the Watts Riots happened.

HURWITZ:

Yes.

CLINE:

I wondered if you had any memories around that.

HURWITZ:

I did, because even as a child, I was a news junky. [Cline laughs.] And I remember, not by design but by coincidence, our family took a short, like, week trip down to San Diego as the riots were happening, and it was obviously a very, very frightening moment in Los Angeles. (Even though I was in New York at the time) I was very aware when the Rodney King's riots happened, there was a burned-out building within six blocks of my family's house, it was on La Cienega and Pico, and I think because this was such a new thing for any of us to experience, there was some fear, because we lived within a mile of the African American community, that it could spread to even our neighborhood.

But it was just a terrible story when it happened, and just having it happen in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement, which I was, again, very aware of even as a young teenager, it was a situation that's so different than today in terms of what information you got, you might have gotten on the 10:00 o'clock or 11:00 o'clock news on television or in the newspaper, but there wasn't this nonstop information, so it took actually weeks and even years to actually find out what happened. And I will say, as a kind of addendum to that, in sixty--it must have been '67 or '68, I went, because I just felt this was the right thing to do, I went to the Watts Summer Festival, which was right after that, and I went to see a concert, and I remember seeing Sam and Dave, and it was really great. And at some point, I was with a friend of mine, a woman who I'd gone to school with, and we looked around, and it was about 5:00 in the afternoon, and I said, "You know, I think we're the only white people here," and we started leaving, and I got attacked.

CLINE:

Wow.

HURWITZ:

It wasn't anything serious, but some guy just went up and hit me.

CLINE:

Wow.

HURWITZ:

It was like I was kind of in shock, but it didn't change any of my viewpoints, but that was just the experience that I had there.

CLINE:

Wow. So, last time, we talked about your growing awareness of what was going on in the world and the gradual what we thought of as perhaps something of a loss of innocence for those of us personally, but also for the nation and for the world as a whole. You mentioned that you became more aware of what was going on in the Vietnam War, and you mentioned, for example, reading in particular an article in Ramparts magazine. How did you come across that? How did that come into your orbit?

HURWITZ:

Just a friend of mine, his brother-in-law was kind of pretty far on the left, and we were all together and he pulled it out, and it was about the napalm bombing. They had very graphic

photographs. And it was probably relatively early before the conflict had completely blown up. And it was the first time--and, by the way, in those years I never watched television--

CLINE:

Oh, wow.

HURWITZ:

--for a whole variety of reasons. So I didn't follow the Vietnam War on TV, except in the rarest times. So what I knew about was what I read, basically. And, of course, those photographs would never have been shown on television anyway, and that just all of a sudden began to make me think, "What is going on here? This doesn't seem what a democracy is supposed to be doing."

CLINE:

So during the 1960s, we see the emergence of what we could call the counterculture. How did your awareness of the counterculture and its emergence grow, and what was your relationship to it as you started to change your views and emerge into a greater awareness of, as you said last time, questioning, beginning to question more of the assumptions that you grew up having?

HURWITZ:

Well, being of that age, I mean, I was fourteen when the Beatles arrived, I was thirteen when Dylan made his first record, although I didn't hear Dylan probably until a few years later, but I heard his songs being sung by Peter, Paul, and Mary or by the Byrds or other people. I think that just being alive and around during those years, it kind of seeped in without you even trying to seek out, or it wasn't like you needed a Ramparts magazine to know which way the wind was blowing.

So that aspect of this kind of merging of this just singular moment when popular culture happened to also be serious culture, and you had Dylan and the Beatles and the Rolling Stones and Jimi Hendrix and Motown and this incredible range of music, and at the same time, when I was fourteen or fifteen years old, I began to have a much keener interest in jazz, and I was playing classical music, so I was just kind of swept up in that. But I have to say that three specific events had just the most profound impact on me, which were the assassinations of Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and Bobby Kennedy. Of those three, the Bobby Kennedy one was probably the most despairing of all, simply because it was just one thing after another.

CLINE:

Yeah, it was the third in the sequence.

HURWITZ:

And it was the third. And I didn't know enough about Malcolm X at that point. I was obviously aware of him. And I have to say, one of those moments in life that is an unforgettable moment was I remember I was at my mom's house the night of Kennedy's murder, and I was watching it on television, and I was just totally distraught. And I got into my car and just sort of drove around the highways. It was probably on 405 heading south at a moment where they put on Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind"--

CLINE:

Oh, wow.

HURWITZ:

--and a song which I always knew, but it was a song that was one of those moments where you knew this was written for this moment. And the power of what his voice spoke at that point, how

many deaths do (will it take till he knows that too many people have died), that was that moment that I think just is kind of just carved into my psyche in terms of even in kind of his most famous song, almost, the impact of what that could have at that kind of moment of just utter grief. And it was utter grief. In my own naÃ¯ve way thought there had to be a conspiracy because these were like three people who represented so much hope and were so positive and were so progressive, and they're all gone. You probably were a very young child.

CLINE:

I was twelve.

HURWITZ:

Twelve. So you knew something about it.

CLINE:

When Kennedy and King were assassinated, I was twelve. I was a bit younger, of course, when JFK was assassinated. But also, of course, Bobby Kennedy was assassinated in L.A.

HURWITZ:

I know, at the Ambassador Theater. Another small irony, that was in '68. A year earlier, there was the L.A. Herald-Examiner--there was a newspaper here called the Herald-Examiner, and they had a high school journalism program that I was heavily involved with, and I got a journalism scholarship and it was awarded at the Ambassador. It's the only time I was ever in that hotel. And even there, there's a family story that is very touching to me to this day, which was it was my parents'--I have to remember this--twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, and they had this very big party. It was a big deal.

In a modest family like ours, those things were a big deal. At the very same time, I'd just graduated high school, and my best friend, his name is Jonny Evans, and I took our first road trip, driving up to the redwoods and to Redding, California, up north and down the coast, by ourselves for the first time. And the Herald-Examiner event was right in the middle of it, and my parents' anniversary was the next day. My parents really wanted me to be at their anniversary, but they thought my being at this awards thing was more important. So I got my first airplane ride ever at the age of seventeen, flew down (from Sacremento) and missed their party. And then my father died like three months later.

CLINE:

Wow.

HURWITZ:

So that whole moment was just filled was utterly raw, and as I talked to you last week, that whole time had this just powerfully transformative impact on the rest of my life.

CLINE:

And driving on a road trip up north and getting into that part of the world at that time, and I'm speaking of the counterculture, there was quite a lot of that going on up there.

HURWITZ:

Being in Berkeley the first time.

CLINE:

Yeah. What was that like for you?

HURWITZ:

It was like nirvana. [laughter] I couldn't believe it. So it was pretty amazing. And just going out. My parents had taken me to places like Yosemite and Big Sur, down the coast as a kid, but I was ten years old. But now being completely free and independent was something amazing. I remember driving out on this Sunday morning and just as we're driving on 5 going up, starting up north towards Sequoia National Park, some radio station played the entirety of Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, which never used to happen. On a Sunday morning, they just played the whole record straight through. It was kind of magical.

CLINE:

Wow. And you said you were also listening to jazz and--

HURWITZ:

KBCA, yeah. Miles Ahead, which I don't know if you even remember this, but there was a guy who had a radio show every afternoon after school, and he played sections of Miles Ahead right in between songs as kind of background music.

CLINE:

Interesting.

HURWITZ:

That was the thing, I absolutely fell in love with that record, and it was a good station. It was a really good station.

CLINE:

Yeah, I'm sure. I remember listening to it. So what about live concerts and things or clubs at the time?

HURWITZ:

Well, I mean, just right off the top, there were probably four--I'm just thinking--at least four concerts or events that had again that kind of life-transforming experience and all kinds of music. And at the absolute top of the list was the night I went to Shelly's Manne-Hole, which used to be on Hollywood.

CLINE:

Yeah, on Cahuenga.

HURWITZ:

Was it Cahuenga?

CLINE:

Yeah.

HURWITZ:

To see Miles Davis the first time. And I was just some student without a lot of money, I was with a friend of mine, and we got there like an hour and a half early because we were just a couple of kids and we didn't know anything. I remember nursing a Coke through three sets. I knew who these people were, but I'd never seen them before, and the first thing is I see this young guy who's just sort of sitting down and playing the piano. It turned out to be Chick Corea.

CLINE:

Oh, wow.

0:16:02.4

HURWITZ:

And then Dave Holland came up, and then it ended up being a band with Jack, Miles, Wayne, and I was there for five hours, and I was as close as we are to each other. And the only tune, which was right in the middle of the set, that I could immediately recognize was "Nefertiti," and it was just the most breathtaking thing that I had ever seen. Then at one point in the middle of the set, Jack goes over to the piano, and he's a really good pianist, and Chick starts playing the drums.

And I thought, "What the fuck? I mean, what is this?" It was like all of a sudden going from zero to 100, and as good as you could ever imagine. And the interesting thing is that the Sony reissued some live stuff from that band, and as soon as I heard it, of course, that's what it was. It was that good, and it holds up. And seeing Miles and Wayne in that kind of context was amazing. I remember Bill Cosby was in the audience that night, and I guess he and Miles had some relationship. But that was one thing that had an incredible impact.

The second thing that had an incredible impact was seeing Jimi Hendrix at Winterland, it was one of those things that just blew the top off at a level that I had never experienced. And then the third thing, which was a little bit later when I was twenty years old, I left school and bummed around Europe for six months, and I got to the Isle of Wight, which was the festival where Hendrix, the Doors, Miles Davis with the Chick and Keith band, Joni Mitchell, a kind of famous set where she kind of moaned at the audience, and The Who playing Tommy at 2:00 in the morning. But, again, at its very best, it was one of these absolutely incredible moments. I was alone.

I kind of snuck up to thirty feet from the stage. I later found out that Caetano Veloso was there, because he was in exile in London. Of course, I didn't know who he was at that point. That was the second year of the Isle of Wight, and that was also one of those astonishing events. Then I would have to say one other thing that also had a huge impact, which I only thought of recently, is I heard Bernard Haitink conducting the Concertgebouw, Zellerbach Hall, doing Mahler's Ninth, which is the first time I ever heard that live, or Mahler's symphony live, and it was a staggering experience. And what made me think about it was that last year, forty-five years after the fact, or forty-six years, same conductor, Bernard Haitink, who is now almost eighty, conducted the New York Philharmonic, and it was even better.

And that was this kind of tie-in of a way of hearing music that has been incredibly important to me my whole life. I would say just off the top, besides all of the records that had a huge impact, those were things that definitely affected me and kind of, I have to say, set a very high bar for the rest of my life.

CLINE:

Yeah, I can see that. That's a very broad range of musical expression. How many people did you know at the time who shared that broad interest in different kinds of music?

HURWITZ:

I'd probably say nobody. [laughter]

CLINE:

I would think.

HURWITZ:

I had my jazz friends.

CLINE:

Oh, I see.

HURWITZ:

I had my rock friends. I didn't have very many classical friends. But when you think about Miles Davis or Jimi Hendrix or Joni Mitchell or Mahler, they're just four incredible individual perspectives about music that are great as they are, as opposed to belonging to one part of the world. They're all like nobody else before them.

CLINE:

And regarding more popular music or what we might think of as rock music or, in some cases, folk music, you had said in our last session that during the first half of the sixties you really had very little interest in it, perhaps understandably so, considering what it was really like. But what, if anything, started to interest or even excite you as far as that kind of music goes? When did that start to transition from lack of interest into a more concerted interest?

HURWITZ:

Well, I think it all had to do with individual bands and groups that were--

CLINE:

Such as?

HURWITZ:

I would say that probably in my early college years, in my kind of daily going to record stores on Telegraph Avenue, things that would excite me would be, obviously, a new Miles record, a new Chick record, a new Joni Mitchell record, a new Laura Nyro record, new Bob Dylan record, new Beatles record, and many other things. But, obviously, I was more exposed to what was going on through my friends on the pop side. But I tended to have a very individualized interest in the things that I was interested in, and so I would seek things out. I may have mentioned last time that especially in my last two years at Cal, I probably spent 80 to 90 percent of my time either in the practice rooms playing with musicians, hitching into San Francisco because there was no BART then and nobody had a car, to see the San Francisco Symphony or to go to the Fillmore or go to Winterland, and then just voraciously listening to records.

If there was someone who I deeply cared about, (I sought them out. I spent time) buying new records, going to Moe's and trading in records and buying used records, going to the Berkeley Public Library and checking out records, playing in my apartment. I had a little Wurlitzer electric piano, which was the best I could do at that point. It was just basically that was the thing that I cared more than anything about at that moment, and there was enough stuff to keep me busy all the time. And then playing and putting a band together and starting to play with them too. So all of that was probably, of those two years, was, I'm sure, like many, many people at that point, it's a combination of what you have inside you to begin, your training, all that you've listened to as you've grown up, things that are going on at that moment, and what your opportunities are. That was, for me, a very, very rich and thrilling moment, and I had no idea what I was getting into. [laughter]

CLINE:

Well, you had taken us into your college years, and what we would like to know when you were getting ready to graduate from high school what your ideas were about what direction you wanted to go, and then it sounds like you went to UC Berkeley, so how you went there.

HURWITZ:

Well, I didn't start there.

CLINE:

Take us through the sequence.

HURWITZ:

Okay. Well, when I was a junior in high school, I started writing for the--I'm sure you're going to love this one--the Hamilton Federalist.

CLINE:

Oh, wow.

HURWITZ:

That was the name of our--

CLINE:

For Hamilton High School?

0:24:06.4

HURWITZ:

--high school newspaper, and I kind of became like the assistant sports editor really quickly. I was writing about sports. It was one of my parallel interests. And by the time I was a few months into my Hamilton writing career, the person who was the actual sports editor got mononucleosis. And why that is relevant is there was a local newspaper in Culver City called the Culver City Evening Star News, which is Copley newspaper, , which hired one kid from each of the Western League Schools, University, Westchester, Venice, Hamilton. But, actually, I don't even know if it was even that far. It was just in the Culver City area, so there was some non-city schools there, Culver High, obviously, and they had them report on the school's football team.

So I get a call from the coach like three days before a Friday night when Hamilton was playing Venice, and he said, "The guy who's supposed to do it has mononucleosis, so would you like to do it? They pay you 25 cents an inch." So he said, "You can make $6," which, by the way, would be the biggest payday of my life so far. So I said, "Oh, yeah, sure." And I'd just gotten my driver's license, so I went and I covered the game and stayed up all night and delivered it at 6:00 in the morning, and it came out pretty well. And then next Friday I did the same thing. (Soon afterward the editor) said, "You know, we need a high school sports editor at the Culver City Star News, we'll pay $25 a week."

CLINE:

Wow. [laughs]

HURWITZ:

"And you'd coordinate all that stuff." I said, "Sure, I'll take it." And during that time, I was also

doing a lot of writing in the paper, and I got chosen, first, for the Herald Examiner, took twenty-five or so high school journalists from the four hundred or so Southland high schools and had a two-week seminar up in what was now, I guess, Cal State San Luis Obispo or Cal Poly San Luis Obispo.

CLINE:

Cal Poly, yeah.

HURWITZ:

And so I went up there, and it was kind of amazing because they brought in probably a dozen or two writers, people from television stations. There was a bunch of really smart kids, all thinking about careers in journalism. Lawrence Schiller, who kind of became known because of his photographs, was one of the teachers. He was at Life magazine at that point. A guy from NBC News was there. A guy from the Herald-Examiner was there. So it was this kind of big eye-opening thing that was happening which I also remember as the Vietnam (war was expanding)--every week (we would read about thousands more troops being sent).

CLINE:

Oh, wow.

HURWITZ:

So all of this was also happening. And from that, I was realizing, hey, I've got this job that's paying me 25 bucks a week, and the Herald-Examiner had a weekly page on their Saturday paper where they had high school kids write for the paper. So I started doing that regularly, which is how I ended up getting--which now seems crazy to me--three different journalism scholarships at three local colleges in the Southland, one of which was at â€˜SC, and I took it because I still had

my roots in LA. And from that, doing the writing at Culver City Star News and the writing at the Herald-Examiner through the high school years and getting a scholarship through the Herald-Examiner, somehow I landed a job my first year in college at the L.A. Times--

CLINE:

Oh, wow.

HURWITZ:

--as one of those people who sits around the desk and answers phones, and occasionally if USC was playing Washington in a basketball game, I was the guy who sat at the radio and took copious notes and then wrote like a little four-column piece about it for the Times. And so I was kind of gearing up to have that kind of career, and it was something--I was a quick study. I had a great interest in all of that. I kind of put music a little bit on the back burner. I stopped taking lessons from Madame Fay, as we called her, when I was about sixteen or seventeen. And I thought, "Well, this might be a great option in my life," and that was at that point a very powerful newsroom at the Times. I remember at the Times in '68 walking to the tickertape machines, because I was always looking at it, and seeing that Martin Luther King was killed, over the tickertape.

CLINE:

Wow.

HURWITZ:

And I would probably do that four nights a week from 4:00 to 1:00 o'clock in the morning, would have that, and I still somehow kept my relationship with the Culver City paper and I was going to school at â€˜SC, which I hated. I just hated it, and even though I had some really good

professors, I hated it because here we are in the midst of everything going on, and it was a fraternity, sorority school, and these kids couldn't give a fuck what was happening, and there were kids who were racist, and I felt very isolated. And I was very isolated, and my father'd just died. I was running all the time to these journalism jobs. I was going to school, I was doing well enough, but I really, really did not like what was going on in my life and being at that school. In my second year there--because I stayed there two years--in my second year there, I went to the music department and wanted to start up playing again and found a very good piano teacher, whose name I forget, and just be started kind of after maybe a two-year hiatus, started playing again. And then by that summer, I was on my way out the door and up to Berkeley.

CLINE:

And how did that happen?

HURWITZ:

I just transferred. I just wanted to get out of there as quickly as I possibly could.

CLINE:

And you chose UC Berkeley because?

HURWITZ:

I just loved being there, and I had twenty friends from Hamilton High School who were there. It never lost that attraction.

HURWITZ:

I was there this weekend for John Adams' seventieth birthday party, and the one thing that really struck me, because when you're twenty years old, or at least when I was twenty years old, I had a very unformed visual intelligence; that is, I just wasn't as interested in looking at things as I became as I got older. And things, whether they be architecture or late afternoon light or just sort of witnessing all the things around you, which has become something that's very important to me at this point--and I took a long walk to the campus. They did something at Zellerbach Hall for John which was quite wonderful, and as I was walking around and just kind of looking, I realized I'd seen days like this probably forty or fifty times, and I never noticed. When you're twenty years old, there's things you just don't pay attention to. Then as you get older, you begin to form, whether it's a musical intelligence or a verbal intelligence or a visual intelligence, the way things change. But I was certainly--my visual acuity was at a very low level. I knew where I was, but my head was wrapped up in so many other things at that point.

CLINE:

What year was that that you went to Berkeley?

HURWITZ:

Sixty-nine. I mean, a month after People's Park is when I went up there.

CLINE:

That's what I was actually using as my barometer, yeah.

HURWITZ:

I walked by People's Park on Saturday. There's still nothing there [Cline laughs.] after almost forty years, or almost fifty? Almost fifty years. Nothing happened.

CLINE:

So you were at the epicenter of the counterculture, but also at a time when it--depending perhaps on one's point of view, had the more kind of positive, optimistic, idealistic expression of it had perhaps peaked by then, and it was kind of unraveling and things were just becoming, I think, angrier and more frustrated and, in many cases, more violent. What did it feel like at that point for you personally?

0:34:27.4

HURWITZ:

There were about five keywords in the question you just asked me. Idealistic, I think that my idealism was kind of kicked in the groin pretty heavily on June 6th, 1968, when Bobby was killed. So, optimistic, I think that when I got there, I was in both a state of, sorry to say, shock and awe. I was in shock just at where the world was, and I was in awe of just what this community was. I had never experienced anything like that in my life, and there were so many things that were deeply attractive to me. One thing I was always lucky about, or maybe even good about, is I always knew how to find really good teachers, both at â€˜SC and at UC Berkeley. I studied with Kenneth Stampp, who was a very prominent historian, who wrote one of the most important books about slavery, who passed away a couple years ago, who had a powerful impact; with Leon Litwack, who's another great American historian. And their classes were really memorable and provocative and intellectually challenging. And I also had that same experience at â€˜SC.

One of the things when I say about instructors that I found was at first it was like kind of finding out about musicians today, is that I had people who I kind of trusted who had been there, who were older than me, who could say, "I recommend Alex Cline. He's a great biology teacher," [Cline laughs.] whatever that subject was, and I took it pretty seriously. And then I was reading so much during those years, I would then choose classes based on what the reading list was, because I figured I had ten books to read, and five or six of them I really wanted to read anyway (were on the list), well, that allows me just to read what I want to do anyway. And the fact that they'd chosen those books, there's a higher chance it's probably going to be a pretty interesting class. So even though the music part was very dominating, I was pretty focused in terms of trying to make as much out of that education as possible.

CLINE:

I see.

0:36:54.6

HURWITZ:

Probably the singular person who had the biggest impact on me at Berkeley was a man named David Littlejohn, who taught an arts criticism class. David Littlejohn was a kind of semi-public figure. He had an arts program on KQED Television in the area and for one year actually had a PBS national arts program. Something terrible had happened to him in his childhood, which I found out forty years later, because we stayed in touch until he died, which was last year. When he was thirteen or fourteen years old, he dove into a quarry and hit a rock and was paralyzed his entire life, and rather than be in a wheelchair--and he was probably, when I was in college, thirty or thirty-five years old--he used to come in with crutches. And I didn't know what was wrong with him. I thought it might have been polio, or who knew? It wasn't until he told me. And struggled just to get from the door to where he sat at the seminar table.

But in this class, he asked us to do things that I'd never thought about doing. He asked us to review a movie, which was Five Easy Pieces when it came out. He asked us to review Cossi Fan Tutte at the San Francisco Opera. He asked us to write a book review. He asked us to see Hans Hoffmann's paintings at the newly opened Berkeley Art Museum that just opened. And what that did for me was it all of a sudden cracked open this idea that if I'm going to be talking about music, that there's this whole other part of the world that I have to start thinking about in the same way I think about music, that they weren't completely unrelated. That expression "critical thinking" is kind of thrown around in the academic worlds, but it was a kind of a lesson in critical thinking that actually helped me expand my horizons, I think made me a far more curious person, because one of the things he did, which was just amazing, is that what he wrote back to us on every essay and he took what we wrote really seriously, and he took what I wrote really seriously, with a kind of wit and sense of humor.

He wrote dozens of books. He was a really, really special person, and it was one of those sort of mentor experiences that you could have at an early age that can affect you for the rest of your life. Even in my teaching, I try to kind of bring in a little bit of what he did, to just try to move people a little bit off the dime, (to say to students) who are musicians, that, okay, there's a big world out there. And one of the things I think I have found being around musicians is that the most interesting musicians are often the people who have the widest range of interests and read books and go to films and understand (a broader sense of the world). They may not understand everything about every subject, but there's a kind of curiosity there that I find kind of amazing. And whether it's someone like Jeremy Denk or Richard Goode, who are classical pianists, or John Adams or Brad Mehldau--what we talk about is about a lot of different stuff, and music is

part of that. But I'm always kind of amazed at just how broad their interests are, and I think it ends up coming back into the music.

CLINE:

Yeah, right. So what were you thinking you were going to do with your music study now that you were back focused on that at Berkeley?

0:41:24.60:43:28.8

HURWITZ:

I had no idea. I remember, I mean, there was just a lot going on in those times, and just as I had that one road trip at the beginning of college, I had another road trip at the end of college with my same friend. And in that trip, I went through that big crisis of "What the fuck am I going to do with my life?" because I was aware enough at that point in my life to understand my own abilities as a musician. I remember, and if I'm repeating a story, you should stop me, but sometime around that time I had a dream about Miles Davis, and I was in his band [Cline laughs.], and the tune was "Freedom Jazz Dance." I really know that from the recording on Miles Smiles, which, to me, seemed like the hardest piece to solo of any (music the band played). Even Herbie Hancock. I was aware of the difficulty. And I had this dream, and I was in Miles' band, which, of course, for a piano player, what greater thing is there at that time? That was the Holy Grail. And I remember just a kind of--not a sense of shame, but just like the deepest frustration, because there was nothing I could do--it was one of those dreams where you were completely unable to do anything.

And I remember waking up and thinking--I mean, my piano idols at that time were Chick, Herbie, and Keith, and I thought, "That's not who I am." And I never had that discipline, because I was interested in so many other things, to spend those six or eight hours (to practice and play). And I thought, "That's not where my life's going to be. I'm not going to do that." It was this kind of my first A&R decision. [Cline laughs.] And I knew that I could write, and I was starting to write now not about sports but music, and I was playing with this band, and my second A&R choice or thought was, "This is not good enough. This is just not good enough, and I'm not that committed to it." So those things were playing on my anxieties. I had a history degree. I was Phi Beta Kappa in history. Big deal. [Cline laughs.]

And I was interested in it, but I was really at a total, total loss when we came back, and I, in fact, left the road trip in someplace in southern Idaho and hitched back to Berkeley, knowing, "Okay, I've got to get serious." And this probably was in late August of 1971, and I had graduated probably four or five months earlier. I wanted to write. I didn't know what I was going to do. I was at a complete loss. And I called up one of the guys in the band, "What are we going to do?"

"Well, I've got my uncle in New York, my mother's boyfriend in New York." And we did some more, and we played a couple of gigs, and just deep down I knew, just like deep down I knew when I heard Miles when I was eighteen, or deep down when I heard the Concertgebouw, I knew. In this case I knew something was not there.

So we had to fire the drummer, and I liked the drummer. He was kind of like a young Robert De Niro. And I went up to see him just because I felt really bad. His name was Ricky something. And we're there and he's really distraught, and I remember he just was in a really bad way, and then all of a sudden, he pulls out a gun. [laughs] It wasn't like he was threatening. He was like, "Maybe I'm going to kill myself," kind of thing. I remember calling up Michael Lotsch the guitar player, and saying, "You know what? This is a sign. Let's go to New York. We've been talking about doing it. Now's the time. We're not going anywhere here. You have a couple of possibilities. Let's just do that." So I flew back down to L.A., and a day later I was stepping on East 57th, the first time I ever put my feet on the ground in New York City in my life.

CLINE:

Wow. Okay. [laughter] So just you going back a little bit, I wanted to ask you more about the band. So you brought it up again. What kind of a band was it, what were you doing, and what was the name of it?

HURWITZ:

We were kind of--it was a kind of jazz fusion, progressive rock element, working up everything from sort of with lead guitar and keyboard versions based on John Coltrane's "My Favorite Things" to trying to do our own version of Jeff Beck Group "Rice Pudding" and stuff like that.

CLINE:

Sure.

HURWITZ:

And all pretty good musicians, but it just didn't seem very serious to me--I think that musicians who are the greatest musicians in any genre want to live that life, and I was a visitor. I was a guest. I was not a permanent resident. It was a good thing to do. Hey, it's a lot of fun to play with musicians. We liked jamming a lot. But sort of the Jeff Beck, John Coltrane cornerstones, in a way, it's a kind of enlightened idea. [Cline laughs.] But I was already a budding A&R guy, and I knew.

CLINE:

What was the name of the band?

HURWITZ:

It was called Swann, with two Ns, when Proust was getting in fashion.

CLINE:

Or the Swans, which came--

HURWITZ:

No. Swann.

CLINE:

And also at the time you arrived in Berkeley, 1969 was the year of the Three Days of Peace & Music that later became to be known as Woodstock. What was your awareness of that, and did it have any significance to you?

0:47:35.5

HURWITZ:

You know, it's interesting how just things change in terms of the past, because we just did a record by Stephin Merritt, the Magnetic Fields, called A 50 Song Memoir, which is--he's written a song for every year of his life, but it's not about what happened to him. It could be an event that took place, it could be a book he read, it could be a person he knew, it could be a new musical instrument. It's utterly brilliant. But the song from when he was four years old was called "Judy Garland." And what I had never actually realized was in 1969 Judy Garland died, which led to the Stonewall Riots. And it's a song about essentially the beginning of Gay Liberation. And there's a mention about Woodstock going on. I mean, so not only was Woodstock happening, which everybody knew about, the Charles Manson happening at the same exact time, which everybody knew about, there's also Stonewall going on in a foreign place called New York, which I knew nothing about.

So all I could do about Woodstock was read about it and be aware of it, but have no inclination--you just didn't pick up from Berkeley, California, and go out to New York. You just read about this kind of massive event that was happening. But this was, again, living in a different age in media. Like I was saying, if you didn't watch TV, you didn't listen to radio to hear people talking, you kind of depended on talking to people or reading it in newspapers a couple of days later.

CLINE:

Right. And during this time, speaking of media, this is the beginning of what at the time would be called underground radio, rock radio, certainly in San Francisco, and the beginning of a very short period of a programming philosophy that was wide open.

HURWITZ:

You're absolutely right. KSAN in San Francisco was the station. And that's another thing I spent a lot of time, was listening to KSAN.

CLINE:

Okay. I was going to ask you.

HURWITZ:

KSAN, which would literally go from Ravi Shankar to Appalachian Spring to Rite of Spring to John Coltrane to the Grateful Dead to the Beach Boys, which kind of dovetailed to my own kinds of interests.

CLINE:

Yeah, exactly. That's one of the things I wondered. And also, from Woodstock, we ultimately kind of decline or descend into Altamont, and you mentioned--

HURWITZ:

Yeah, which was happening when I was also at Cal.

CLINE:

And the Manson murders, which put, at least especially in this town, a major chill on a lot of the things that were going on. And I wondered what else might have been going on in your mind

when you were thinking about relocating to New York on the other side of the country, with all of those things going on.

HURWITZ:

My interest in New York was completely separate. I'd always wanted to go I had actually, again, spent six months traveling around in Europe, which also had a huge impact on me, on a shoestring, as they say,

CLINE:

Yeah, you could do that then. [laughs]

HURWITZ:

Yeah, like six months for under $2,000, including airfare. Hostels.

CLINE:

Wow. Yeah, some of us remember the Europe on $5 a Day book.

HURWITZ:

Yeah. I mean, it was maybe $7 a day, but it was kind of amazing, and it was trains and, again, hitchhiking. Hitchhiking was a big, much easier thing to do back then--

CLINE:

Sure.

0:51:15.5

HURWITZ:

--and without the kinds of danger attached to it. You'd be out of your mind. No one hitchhikes anymore. There are really a lot of separate stories, narratives all going simultaneously. Obviously, there was that very personal narrative of being shell shocked after the death of my father and grandfather who lived with us, the Kennedy, King assassinations, the Vietnam War, and just the amping up of popular culture. All of those things had this impact, but I was also at a point where I was clear about this notion of creating some meaning for my life. That was going to be completely different, I mean.

I now remember one other thing which was also going on in that last period in Berkeley, is that I had grown up with a kind of pressure from my family to be a lawyer, and I never had any strong feeling about that, and I was fighting it. And one of those moments in life you always remember is that the night before I had to take the LSAT, there was a guy, I can't remember his name, he was a saxophone player I used to play a lot with, and we played probably till 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning before. I got pretty stoned. And then at 8:00 in the morning, I go in and take the LSAT, and I sit down, I look at the first two questions--and I had actually even done some preparation for it--and I say, "I'm not gonna do this," and I just walked out of the room.

CLINE:

Wow.

HURWITZ:

Went into San Francisco and kind of like, "Well, what the fuck is this all going to mean?" So I don't think I ran away from it, I don't think I wanted to postpone it; I wanted to start on some

pathway as quickly as I possibly could, and I knew what I didn't want to do. But I was blessed, absolutely blessed with just the biggest surplus of naÃ¯vetÃ© [Cline laughs.] anybody could ever have, and it really did me well, because if I actually had thought through what I wanted to do, I would have, like, jumped off the top of Yosemite Falls. I was so naÃ¯ve, Alex, it was like remarkable, but I was naÃ¯ve and driven simultaneously, and I don't think that's a bad combination.

CLINE:

I was going to ask you, too, you mentioned that there was an expectation that you be a lawyer perhaps. Your father died, your grandfather died, your mother is left there, and you're elsewhere. First you're up in Berkeley, then you go to New York. What, if any, feeling--I don't mean to stereotype, but also it's a Jewish family, you're the son, you're the only son. What was the dynamic around that at the time, if there was anything?

HURWITZ:

Well, again, once I made my mind up, I didn't ask anybody's opinion, which is sort of the way I am when I sign an artist. I always figure if I have to ask someone's opinion, I'm not sure about it, I probably won't do it, and I just walked after--at some point before I got to Berkeley, I had spent a weekend up there with some friends who were going to school there, and I just came home and I said, "I'm going to transfer to Berkeley." I didn't say, "Are you going to be okay if I do that? Are you worried?" And she'd just been widowed for a year or two, and I'm sure it was not easy on her, and even at some point, one of her friends tried to guilt me, "How could you leave your mother like that?"

But I knew I had to do it. I knew I had to do it. And it was not an intellectual thought; it was something that it just seemed so right to me at that moment, and it was right. Both of those decisions were absolutely right. And the same thing about New York. You know what? I think what I was playing in the back of my mind is I could spend another year or two hanging out in Berkeley and kind of banging my head against the wall, but this is one of those moments where we need change, and New York had always had this gigantic appeal to me, from my childhood.

CLINE:

Naked City.

HURWITZ:

So your typical New Yorker from Los Angeles. [laughter]

CLINE:

And then ultimately, how would you characterize your mother's support for your decisions, or lack thereof?

HURWITZ:

I think she probably sensed that I was very definitive about this. It's funny, when my own daughter decided to move to Los Angeles, she did not go through it like that. It was kind of, "I don't know. Should I go?" She was, like, feeling guilt, and I think my wife kind of saw it in a different way than I did, because she wanted her to be around, and I thought, "Hey, she's who I am. She's doing exactly what I did." There's a certain point where this notion of breaking away, which is sort of almost a central metaphor for that whole fifteen- to twenty-five-year old experience, is something that even if you're not consciously thinking about it, it sometimes somehow creeps into your psyche. And I think probably somewhere in my unconscious, those calculations were being done on a daily basis of--not that every place, the next place is going to be necessarily a better place, but there was some intuitive idea that New York was the right place for me to be.

CLINE:

Interesting.

HURWITZ:

And I think I was right. I think the other thing I should also say, to go back, is that I decided (at a time when) a lot of people that I knew in Berkeley were going away to Europe for three months during that time, that was like a kind of rite of passage, so I decided to go away for six months. [laughs] And it was a great decision. It was just, again, experiencing life in a way you've never known before, and I had never been anywhere basically outside of California at that point. And I just traveled as far north as Norway and as far south as Morocco and as far as east as Yugoslavia and just had the greatest adventure of my life, which also changed me permanently. It just--

CLINE:

And how would you describe how it changed you?

HURWITZ:

Well, first of all, I was in cities for the first time, real cities, and I found them breathtaking, and I found meeting all these different people and the adventure quality of it just utterly exhilarating. I traveled with friends. I traveled by myself. I spent six weeks in Paris at a hotel on Rue St. Jacques where a lot of American expats had lived for like the equivalent of like $5 a night with a bathroom down the hall. Met a woman who lent me a moped. I spent ten or twelve days just riding out to Brittany and Normandy, just completely alone, you know, sleeping bag. Hitchhiking, met people who would put us up for a day or two, just a kind of generosity that I'd never seen. Incredible beauty everywhere.

Just for someone who had never seen anything, in kind of awe. But at the same time, absolutely aware of what was going on in the States, totally aware of what had happened in Kent State and the amping up of the Vietnam War. Free jazz in Paris was like this kind of explosive thing going on. Going to record stores. Instead of doing what I did in Berkeley and going to record stores and try to buy stuff, I was going to record stores--oh, Ladies of the Canyon just came out, and putting on headphones, hearing it. That was my only connection to recordings--there was no Walkmans at that point. So that was the only way you could hear music that you really cared about. And, again, embracing it with this utterly naÃ¯ve curiosity that made that experience and a willingness to be a little bit deprived of any kind of creature comforts, but that was okay.

CLINE:

What year was it?

HURWITZ:

Seventy, from March 1st to September 2 1970.

CLINE:

Oh, okay. So this is how it got you to the--

HURWITZ:

March 21st to September 2nd, yeah.

CLINE:

--Isle of Wight. That's how it got you--

HURWITZ:

Yeah, that's how I got to the Isle of Wight, the last two days.

CLINE:

And when you think of these periods, I was thinking 1969 also Richard Nixon, of course, becomes president, which is a huge shift of sorts. But when we think of those times, I think when we think of the counterculture, we also think of the drug culture and especially in places like Berkeley. How much of an impact did that have on your experience, if any?

HURWITZ:

Probably minimal, compared to a lot of people. I had one guy who I went to high school with, Charlie Jellen who ended up hanging himself, who had just a psychotic reaction to LSD, which he kept taking. That was a little bit of a big warning sign. I smoked a certain amount of pot without becoming a pothead. I took acid or some version--I don't know if it was psilocybin or LSD, whatever--a number of times, which I was really grateful that that happened in places like Yosemite or at Point Reyes and places like that. So I tended to do it out in nature. And I think there was something kind of incredible about those experiences that I remember, again, in the pre-Walkman days. The first time I ever took acid up at Point Reyes and going on a really long hike and just having this unbelievable desire to hear music. That, of course, was not possible, so I had to play it in my head. But it was quite an experience.

CLINE:

So what year did you finally set foot in New York City?

HURWITZ:

In, for good, September 2nd, 1971, two or three days after Ricky the drummer pulled the gun. [laughter]

CLINE:

Ricky the drummer. And you mentioned that it sounded like there had been some conversation between some of your bandmates about relocating to New York. What was the--

1:04:31.2

HURWITZ:

Well, they were New Yorkers, they were all from New York, and Michael Lotsch, who was sort of the guy who put the band together, his mother had a boyfriend. The boyfriend was some Australian manager of some sort. Michael was convinced that he had all these connections that would help us. "Okay. Let's do it." So we go to New York, and I arrive there, and it's kind of like, "Oh, wow. I'm in New York. This is like incredible." Take a redeye out, go to his place at 333 East 57th. It's important to note it was a very high-end building. His grandfather was a multimillionaire who I was told was one of the founders of American Express.

I have no idea if that's true, but he had, for instance, a painting by Monet in his bedroom. So there may be some truth to this. So the very first night I'm in New York City, we go out to a Chinese restaurant on West 46th Street with this Australian boyfriend, and he brings along an Australian woman named Lillian Roxon. I don't know if you ever heard of Lillian Roxon. There's actually a book about her that's been recently published. And she's this morbidly obese, incredibly smart and friendly woman. We have dinner, and she's going to help us. She knows this person, that person, all that kind of stuff. But certainly she's a fascinating person, and at that point she was the rock critic of the New York Daily News and she had written the first big rock â€˜n roll encyclopedia. Those are the kind of professional credentials about her.

So we're in New York and I'm living at Michael's house for a month before I moved to Brooklyn, and while we're there, I call up Lillian and I say--and it may have been the first or second conversation. I said, "Lillian, could I talk to you about music journalism? Because I'm having a lot of fun with this band, but I just don't think this thing--it just doesn't feel right to me, and I might want to start writing or getting involved with music." And she, being this incredibly gracious and friendly person, sits down and gives me the names of fifty people she knows in the business.

CLINE:

Wow.

HURWITZ:

And so I go and I find fifty dimes and I go to a phone booth, because I don't have a phone, of course, and I call up every one of them, every single person.

CLINE:

Wow.

HURWITZ:

And because it's Lillian Roxon, everyone says, "Come on in."

CLINE:

Wow. [laughs]

HURWITZ:

And so I go and meet, and so I meet editors of all these underground rock magazines like Rock magazine, Circus, Changes, all these things, and I tell them, "Lillian sent me. I'm a writer, and

here's a couple of things." "Oh, great, I have some records. You want to review them?" And I start getting published in these places. She sends me to Columbia Records, and there's a woman there named Karin Berg, who was the first really successful female A&R person a major label, which happened later on in her career. And she starts giving me assignments, "Oh, we need someone to write some bios for us." One day in the afternoon I'm there, and I hear this incredible music coming out of the guy who's the boss' office. I mean, it's really incredible. I said, "What's that?" And I walk in, and Karin introduces me, and Weather Report's there, I Sing the Body Electric.

CLINE:

Which you wrote the liner notes.

HURWITZ:

Which I wrote the liner notes for.

CLINE:

First time I ever saw your name, in fact.

HURWITZ:

And so Karin introduces me and I start talking to them. They actually talked to me, and they say, "Hey, we're looking for somebody to write the liner notes for this record. Do you want to do it?"

CLINE:

Wow.

HURWITZ:

And I said, "Yeah." I mean, I'm twenty-two and I--what do I know about anything? And so all of a sudden, I get Tim Ferris, who is a writer who ended up writing a lot about astronomy, who's the editor of Rolling Stone, and so I got a piece in Rolling Stone.

CLINE:

I was going to ask you about Rolling Stone.

1:08:04.4

HURWITZ:

Yeah. So all of a sudden, I have--and I'm playing with the band, rehearsing with them, and I get a job three days, four days a week driving a cab, and I'm doing all this writing, so something's going on very quickly for me. And Lillian said to me, which is really interesting, she said, "You know, a lot of people ask me for this list." She said, "You're the only one who actually ever called everybody up." And the generosity of these people was a life lesson for sure. And I would be at a concert and I'd see her at Carnegie Hall or something, and she'd be with, like, New York Times critic, Don Heckman, say, "Oh, you've got to meet Bob Hurwitz." I mean, she was someone who could promote someone and do all that stuff.

And so from that experience, two things happened. One of the things that happened was that Columbia decided to hire me as a writer, and so I would write liner notes, I would write press releases, bios, and kind of start doing a little PR, for $9,000 a year, I could afford a one-bedroom apartment in Park Slope. I was a happy guy. [Cline laughs.] So I started doing that. And just to sort of complete the story--and tell me if I'm repeating any of this stuff--but--

CLINE:

So far you're good.

HURWITZ:

At Columbia I start meeting--there are a lot of artists on Columbia they don't know what to do with. They don't have anybody in publicity department to talk to them. So I start meeting people like Ornette Coleman and Keith Jarrett and Murray Perahia and that whole group of people in this place, because they're not really very important to them at that point. And I have lunch with Keith Jarrett and George Avakian, who was Keith's manager at that point.

CLINE:

As well as Charles Lloyd.

HURWITZ:

Yeah. And he'd just been signed to Columbia, right before Expectations came out. And it was a very nice lunch. I'd never met Keith before. Because of Forest Flower, I was completely in awe of who he was.

CLINE:

Yeah, and not to mention the Isle of Wight. [laughs]

HURWITZ:

Yeah, that's right. And then I saw him at the Fillmore playing with Miles. It was like it's this very daunting when a guy who's three years older than you can play like that, I mean.

CLINE:

Yeah, I know. Tony Williams, say no more. [laughs]

HURWITZ:

Yeah. So Keith says, "I just made this record for this guy in Germany, Facing You, and Chick made a about Chick and his record, Piano Improvisations. â€˜You've got to check it out.'" So I go out and I buy them, and I am completely floored by Facing You. It's like that is, for him, the moment that it just all cracked open, and it's still one of his greatest records. I wrote an article about these records, it went in the Village Voice the next week. And I started talking to the guys at Columbia about, "Hey, this guy Manfred Eicher (the founder and producer of ECM) is really great." Not long afterwards Manfred comes to Columbia and to a bunch of companies looking for a distribution deal, and Bob Altschuler, who was the head of that publicity department, says to him, "Oh, you should talk to Bob Hurwitz. He really likes your records." And I was, like, the lowest person in the entire company. He comes to my office and we start talking, and he's kind of a little cool at first. And he says, "Are you the Bob Hurwitz who wrote the Weather Report liner notes?"

CLINE:

There you go.

HURWITZ:

I said, "Yeah." And within ten minutes, he said, "If I ever have a company in America, I want you to run it."

CLINE:

Wow.

HURWITZ:

Seriously. I remember walking off the elevator at Columbia Records, and I'm at that point twenty-three years old, and I'm in awe of what he's done. And it's like, "Really?" [laughter] I have to meet someone at 12:30 and it's--

CLINE:

Okay. So maybe we should wrap up now. Where do you have to meet them?

HURWITZ:

At the faculty, right across from Schoenberg Hall.

CLINE:

Oh, the Faculty Center, okay.

HURWITZ:

Yeah. Nobody at this school knows how to pronounce Schoenberg Hall. [laughs]

CLINE:

Yeah, that figures. So if you can just--it takes about ten minutes to walk there, so if there's a way you want to tie a bow on your first meeting with Manfred Eicher.

HURWITZ:

Well, that was the beginning of my ECM tenure period.

CLINE:

All right. Well, that's a good place to stop.

HURWITZ:

This has been interesting for me. [laughs]

CLINE:

Okay. So we are scheduled for next Wednesday.

HURWITZ:

Yeah, we will.

CLINE:

So we'll pick it up with Manfred.

HURWITZ:

Yeah, and there's a couple things I want to talk to you about my archive, if you're--just I'd like your counsel and advice.

CLINE:

Oh, okay, absolutely. I'll turn the machine off.

HURWITZ:

If you don't mind.

CLINE:

I don't mind. Thank you.

HURWITZ:

Well, this has been--you're just been really--your insights and questions are kind of overwhelming.

CLINE:

Okay. Well, I'm enjoying it.

HURWITZ:

Thank you.

CLINE:

Sure. Thank you. [End of February 8, 2017 interview.]

Session Three (February 15, 2017)

CLINE:

Today is February 15th, 2017. This is Alex Cline interviewing Robert Hurwitz in the Young Research Library second floor staff conference room at UCLA. This is session number three. Good morning.

HURWITZ:

How's it going?

CLINE:

Oh, very, very, very full.

HURWITZ:

Happy to hear.

CLINE:

[laughs] Sometimes it's too full, but things are definitely not stagnant, let's put it that way. We left off last time with your decision to relocate to New York City, someplace you'd always wanted to go, and your very immediately coming into contact with many people in the music business for whom you started to do some writing, ultimately leading to a job at Columbia Records as a writer, where you met a number of musicians whom you had admired, influential and important people, and also the founder and president of ECM Records from Germany, Manfred Eicher. And we want to pick it up from where that ended. Manfred actually shared with you something that must have been quite surprising at the time, and maybe we can pick it up from there. You said you were in your early twenties. I don't know how long you had been at Columbia at that point, maybe you can tell us that, and share with us what your impression was of what Manfred essentially unexpectedly announced to you.

0:03:10.6

HURWITZ:

Right. Well, as I had mentioned last time, he was in New York searching for a distributor for ECM, which did not have any distribution in the U.S., and he was sent to the publicity department at Columbia because they knew that the guy who ran it, Bob Altschuler, was a big jazz fan. Bob Altschuler, who was my boss, knew that I was a big ECM fan, and so he sent Manfred to see me, of all things.

And when he--just to repeat the last story--realized I was the author of the I Sing the Body Electric liner notes, he all of a sudden thought I must be something special [laughs], which is very funny to me, thinking about that now. And we had a very brief conversation, couldn't have lasted more than twenty or thirty minutes. As I took him to the elevator on the eleventh floor at 51 West 52nd Street in New York, he said, "One day you're going to run ECM in America," which as a, I suppose, twenty-three-year-old at that point, was perhaps the most astonishing thing I had ever heard--it was like someone handed me a bag of gold, and it certainly was completely lodged into my brain, that moment.

I'm going to jump ahead about ten years, which was the day I got a phone call from someone who worked at Columbia to say that Bob Krasnow had become chairman of Elektra. I was still at ECM at that point. That instant, I had it lodged in my brain that one day I'm going to probably be running Nonesuch. But we'll go back to that story in a while.

CLINE:

Wow. Okay.

HURWITZ:

But sometimes things happen and you have this immediate blink response, to kind of quote Malcolm Gladwell, and that was what happened with Manfred. But I stayed at Columbia for another year. I have found--and I've seen this with many people I know, I see it with my own children, I see it with my students--that whatever your first job is in life, you tend to want to get out of it as quickly as possible, and you never know how good it is.

CLINE:

Oh, wow.

HURWITZ:

You know Joni Mitchell's song Big Yellow Taxi, it goes, "You don't what you've got till it's gone," which it's not quite the same thing. So for the two years I was at Columbia I had no idea what I had, because, among other things, I began to develop relationships with a lot of incredible musicians, and I had never done any kind of publicity. I mean, my background was writing, and it came very easily to me, but I kind of became the de facto jazz publicist and classical publicist for Masterworks.

CLINE:

Wow.

HURWITZ:

And so within that period, I got to meet a collection of some of the most extraordinary people that I could have imagined, because they all had some ties and relationships to Columbia, like Ornette Coleman, who at that time had done Skies of America.

CLINE:

Yeah, and Science Fiction.

HURWITZ:

--and Science Fiction, like Keith Jarrett, like Glenn Gould, like Murray Perahia, like Herbie Hancock, like John Hammond, like Goddard Lieberson.

CLINE:

And Miles Davis was on Columbia then. [laughs]

HURWITZ:

Yes, and Weather Report. I only once bumped into Miles Davis outside, and being the brash twenty-three-year-old I was, I went up and tried to say something to him, and he made some allusion to some woman at Columbia that he was waiting for outside or something like that, and that was the end of the conversation. But, in a way, meeting your heroes is sometimes not the best thing in the world to do.

CLINE:

Yeah, I hear ya. [laughs]

HURWITZ:

And so I had no relationship with Miles. But with Wayne and Joe from Weather Report, when Freddy Hubbard came in and signed with them, I was the person who (he had to talk to because I wrote his bio). Like Bruce Springsteen, whose first bio I wrote after getting a phone call from

John Hammond, "I've just signed this guy, and he's playing Max's Kansas City at 2:00 in the morning," and ten of us were in the audience that night.

CLINE:

Oh, my.

HURWITZ:

So, again, I had no idea. As I look back at that now, it was an extraordinary moment in my life to be able to all of a sudden be there. And not only these people; all of the great producers of Columbia Records, especially in the Classical Division, because I was now doing their publicity, like Andy Kazdin, like Tom Shepard and Tom Frost. There was this group of very, very gifted people that I was around, and I was clearly aware of who everyone was, but I just took it a little bit too casually, just because I had no idea what I had been thrown into.

And even the publicity department had some extraordinary people. There was a woman named Karin Berg, who's a person who really, I think, more than anyone was responsible for hiring me, who was really the first significant female A&R person in the business. She passed away about ten years ago, but she signed the McGarrigle Sisters, the Roches, just a whole range of really interesting musicians at Warner Brothers, and R.E.M. was very close to her. So it was a very heady experience that I did not fully recognize. But clearly the one relationship that had the biggest impact on me was Glenn Gould--

CLINE:

Oh, wow.

HURWITZ:

--who I kind of naively called up one day and said, "Hi, I'm Bob Hurwitz, I'm the new publicist at Columbia, and I'm going to start handling your account," or something like that. I think I'm a little bit exaggerating. But we started talking, and at that time, Glenn Gould was famous for nothing but phone calls with people, and I started having these hour-long conversations with Glenn Gould, who was already, I recognized, as just one of the most unfathomable musicians I had ever heard.

Columbia Records was having its annual convention, and they had a Leonard Cohen theater piece that was being premiered in Niagara, which is right near Toronto, and they had nobody to go up and take a look at it. So because everybody else was out in California for the big convention, they said, "You can do it," which was, I think, the first business trip I ever took. And I thought, "Well, that's close to Toronto. Maybe I'll call up Glenn Gould and see if I can meet him," who was very famous for not meeting anybody. And so I flew to Toronto.

I got there a day early. It was on a Friday. The Leonard Cohen piece was on a Saturday. He said to me beforehand, "I don't really have time to see you, but you know what? I'm staying at the Four Seasons Motel," it was not a hotel, "on Yonge Street, I think, in Toronto. That's where I'll be. Maybe you could find a room there, but give me a call when you're there. Maybe we'll have time for a cup of coffee." So I got to the motel, and I went to the lobby and I called up his room, and he started telling me that the CBC was there because of either an anniversary, the bicentennial of Canada, or I've forgot what it was, and they were doing documentaries on three institutions in Canada.

One was Premier Trudeau, the second was the Royal Mounties, and the third was Glenn Gould. And we kept talking. I'm on the house phone. And finally he said, "Why don't you come up to my room." So I went up to the room, and I think, of course, I remember is he put out his hand to shake it, which, of course, he was famous for no one ever shaking his hand.

CLINE:

That's right.

HURWITZ:

But that was the first thing that happened. Then we started talking for like four hours, and if I remember correctly, I was probably speaking for about 3 or 4 percent and he was the rest, but somehow there was some sort of relationship. And at about 10:00 or 11:00 at night, he drove me to his studio and started playing me all his radio programs, but not just playing them, playing

them in entirety, like the one-hour Schoenberg documentary he was just finishing, which was the most amazing--to this day, one of the most amazing things I've ever experienced, where he took five people: Andre de la Grange, the famous scholar who just died this week; John Cage; Ernst Krenek, who was a kind of a disciple of Schoenberg; AndrÃ© de la Grange, Dennis Stevens, who was an early music conductor, and Erich Leinsdorff, who used to conduct the Boston Symphony.

And he interviewed all five of them separately, and then he cut the program so that they were appeared to be talking to one another, even though they had never met. He called it a contrapuntal documentary. And then underneath that, he laid all of this amazing music that kind of choreographed what their words were saying, and then he played me--he did a piano reduction of another piece of Schoenberg and played me The Idea of North, and I probably was there for twelve hours with him.

CLINE:

Wow.

HURWITZ:

And whatever idea I had about who he was was just multiplied kind of in an infinite way, and we stayed friends until he died. And I was up there two more times for two more twelve- or fourteen-hour days the last time [Cline laughs.] where he played at that time the unreleased Second Goldberg Variations. He played a film of it, which was eventually released, and as we watched it, he kind of performed it right next to me, although I never heard him perform in public. So I had all these experiences that were kind of overwhelming, and also being in New York at that time for the first time and being exposed to Village Vanguard and Carnegie Hall and the New York Philharmonic, which had Pierre Boulez, and I probably went to a couple of dozen Philharmonic concerts as well as he had these things called "Perspective Encounters, which were these shows that he had downtown at either Cooper Union or NYU, where they were kind of modern music concerts.

You add all of these things up, and New York was beyond any kind of expectation that I could have ever imagined, plus I was still writing, getting things published, and writing liner notes and just being around this community of people, and yet I thought something was just missing in my career. [laughter] How little did I know. And so by the time I was twenty-four, I was just chomping at the bit for the ECM thing to come through, which because Manfred still didn't have

a deal in America, which was the thing that was holding that up, and just it was kind of a life-transforming thing being back in New York and being in New York for the first time.

CLINE:

So it sounds like then when Manfred made that statement, that you took it seriously.

HURWITZ:

Totally.

CLINE:

You thought he was totally going to come through.

HURWITZ:

Yeah.

CLINE:

You said a little bit last time, but what was your impression of Manfred at that point?

HURWITZ:

Well, you know, the first time anyone meets Manfred, or at least the first time anyone met him--I don't know, do you know him at all?

CLINE:

Yeah, I actually made a record for ECM years ago.

HURWITZ:

The first time--and maybe this might dovetail with your experience--the first or second or third times, he had a very seductive power about him that, "Really? Me? You're talking to me?" And maybe it had to do with my age at that point. So it was something that I kind of had never been around, and I think that there were--I can understand, in retrospect, I was a young guy, I could write well, I really knew my music, I was able to get along with musicians who were two or three decades older than me. There were a lot of things that I'm sure he saw that were things that he was attracted to that aspect of it. What happened was once I literally started working with him, he became the most difficult person I had ever been around.

CLINE:

But he also can't have been too old at that point.

HURWITZ:

He was and still remains six years older than me, and we've had, finally, after all these years some sort of reconciliation in the last year. When I left ECM, he was furious when I went to Nonesuch. There was an absolute Arctic chill that lasted about thirty years.

CLINE:

Wow, yeah.

HURWITZ:

He was very unforgiving. So eventually it reached a point where I knew I had to do something different, because I was "so smart" at twenty-four, I knew what I had wasn't good enough for me, and so I left Columbia. They ended up hiring a jazz publicist, a classical publicist, and a writer. They really had a bargain with me. [Cline laughs.] And I went to work, of all things, for the Rockefeller Foundation as they were creating what would eventually become New World Records. The Rockefeller Foundation, as a gift for the Bicentennial, 1976, was going to create a library of 100 records of American music. So I was brought on as a consultant to that, and it lasted a relative short time, maybe about four or five months. I was doing freelance writing still at that time, including some pieces for The New York Times and Voice and other places. And eventually, within that kind of period, Manfred finally became clear that the ECM thing was going to happen, and it happened in May of 1975.

CLINE:

So before we leave Columbia altogether, this also would have been near the end of the Clive Davis era at Columbia, right?

0:18:45.10:20:54.50:23:12.5

HURWITZ:

Actually, I should talk about a couple of people who were there. Clive Davis' famous demise from Columbia happened in--it must have been the summer of 1974--you might check the date on that--when he had his famous bar mitzvah scandal of using company monies for his son's bar mitzvah, which is a very funny idea. [laughter] And Goddard Lieberson was brought back.

But the two people who had a profound impact on me were John Hammond and Goddard, I got

to know John really well and Goddard pretty well. John Hammond, by that time, besides the signing of Bruce Springsteen, I think had a more casual relationship at Columbia. He'd come in, he'd go to Bob Altschuler's office, my boss, because Bob was a jazz collector. But Hammond and I became rather friendly, and he knew that the interests that I had were not far away from his own. It wasn't that we sat down and talked a lot, but it was just his presence and awareness of him and his kind of cheerful quality. And if he had something new that he needed a liner note for, he'd call me and have me come in and listen to it.

We kind of kept in touch until he passed away, although the last meeting in his office was very bizarre, because he, all of a sudden, took an interest in the Canadian Brass, of all things. But he was still an extraordinarily cheerful man by that age, and he had that one last incredible success with Springsteen, which Clive Davis now takes credit for, but there was--and I don't think my memory is failing me--there was a great fear that Davis was going to drop Springsteen because it was so far away from whatever his agenda was. And if you look at Davis' successes in his career, there's nothing like Bruce Springsteen. I mean, Patti Smith maybe; Springsteen was something that was really driven by a group of people at Columbia, including Karin Berg, who were fighting very, very hard for him to be taken seriously by the management at Columbia after his first two records.

And Lieberson I got to know a little bit because I had to do for in-house publications some interviews with him, and the conversation which always struck me is because I was around the age of his two sons, including Peter, who I got to know quite well later on, I think he was having at that point just concerns about both of them and kind of like wanted to know what a young person [laughs] was thinking about in those days. But he was very generous. I remember having a conversation with him about Charles Ives and Arnold Schoenberg, who were two composers who Columbia championed, who happened to be born in the same year, I think it was 1874, because there was a piece I wrote about his relationship with those two composers.

And you know he had made that famous ten volume of 2 LPs set of the Complete Music of Arnold Schoenberg, which he was the only person who might do something like that. Although I never knew John McClure (who was the head of Masterworks) when I was at Columbia.John and I became extremely friendly after I was at Nonesuch, and I started hiring him (to produce records for us). And McClure said to me about Lieberson that Lieberson said that he had a Pop Division in order to pay for Columbia Masterworks and that 95 percent of the records that McClure put out every year lost money. Classical records and Broadway orginal score albums were the things that Lieberson cared about more than anything else. And he was an incredibly important person in my life. Like Glenn Gould, there was a lot that I took from the relationship, from knowing them, and after the fact and continuing to read about what they had to say.

There was an article that Gould wrote about that time in High Fidelity magazine called the "Prospects of Recording," and, in fact, that's what I called my class at The New School. And one of the notions of the "Prospects of Recording," which is, again, you're talking about twenty-five years before the end of the twentieth century, was that one day technology would have a more powerful impact on music and how music was heard. And Lieberson--because I went back and read this article again recently--who was part of the article, said that the day will come where it will be impossible for classical labels to exist and that they would have to become like university

presses. And I think both of them were absolutely prescient in their assessment of the world back in 1975 or so.

CLINE:

Absolutely, yeah. [laughs] So you had this brief stint working for the Rockefellers, and then explain how things got going with ECM.

HURWITZ:

Well, I finally got the call in the beginning of '75 that Manfred finally had made a deal with Polydor Records, which is now part of Universal's world, a very modest deal. Polydor was going to pay ECM $3,900 per album to be released in America. [Cline laughs.] I got there just about the time Bremen-Lausanne, Keith Jarrett's three-record, three-album set had come out, around the time that the first Return to Forever record of Chick Corea's had come out, and so that was really my first experience. Like when I started at Columbia, I was extremely naÃ¯ve about the business. I got a job at Poly. Polydor hired me for, I think, $15,000 a year to be a label manager. I was making $9,000 a year when I was hired to be a writer at Columbia. So, for me, I felt like it was like a huge amount of money [Cline laughs.], because you could get a one-bedroom apartment for three or four hundred dollars in New York at that time in a good neighborhood.

CLINE:

Wow.

HURWITZ:

So, you know, life was good.

CLINE:

Yeah, people forget that New York City itself was experiencing a lot of travail at that point during the seventies.

HURWITZ:

Phillip Glass once told me that during those years his rule for his two kids was, "Wherever you are at 10:00 o'clock at night, that's where you stay," because they couldn't afford to have the kids take taxis and he didn't want them on the subways. "So wherever you are, that's where you're going to be." It's probably a little exaggerated, but New York, those were the years of the famous "Gerald Ford to New York: Drop Dead" [Cline laughs.] headline in the Daily News.

CLINE:

Where were you living at that time?

HURWITZ:

I was in Park Slope. My first apartment in Cobble Hill, I had three roommates for $60 a month, and then I found a one-bedroom apartment for $175 a month on Berkeley Place between Seventh and Eighth Avenue, which was incredible, close to transportation, near Prospect Park, a beautiful brownstone block. And it was kind of an extraordinary thing to be young and have your own place like that. [Cline laughs.] So I started at ECM, and Manfred's tough side--and I don't know if you ever experienced that became--

CLINE:

Famous.

HURWITZ:

What?

CLINE:

It's famous. [laughs]

HURWITZ:

Yes. Became readily apparent that nothing was ever good enough, and temper tantrums and both difficulty and sometimes great gentleness as well. Whenever he'd come to New York, there was like three phases of the New York visit. And I should also mention that after that first place, I had moved in with a girlfriend in another place in Brooklyn, and then we moved into a place in Manhattan, and then we broke up and she moved out. And that began ten years of Manfred staying in my apartment whenever he was in New York.

CLINE:

Oh, wow.

HURWITZ:

So the first day it was always we were the best of friends and lots of hugs, and then usually he was doing a session the next couple of days, he would grow into this just unforgiving person, and then at the end, we were the best friends in the world again. [Cline laughs.] And it took me two or three times to recognize that pattern. But he was there--I would say half of his trips for ten years he stayed, slept on my couch, and that's how close that relationship was, and probably three times a week we would talk for an hour or two on the phone. I kind of believe he never had that kind of relationship before or after, and he said as much to me when we saw each other. And a lot of the times I was a sounding board.

A lot of the times he was complaining about musicians. He had problems with everybody at one point or another. And there was a kind of theatrical fraughtness that seemed to be a part of what we were always going through. But I think I also recognized how special my job was. To some degree, I was very young and impressionable, and I had a kind of desire to do what Manfred did. I wanted to produce records. He probably let me produce probably a half a dozen albums. Sometimes when he didn't want to come to New York, he had me stand in for him, and then he'd take the record back and mix it. But that was a tiny, tiny part of what I was doing.

CLINE:

Yeah. I wondered, in fact, how much actual interaction with the musicians that he was working with you had personally.

HURWITZ:

I had a (great deal of interaction)--whether it was Keith, Gary Burton, Pat Metheny, whatever artist came to America, like Jan Garbarek, Terje Rypdal, Eberhard Weber, all those people, they would either stay at my house or we developed very, very close relationships. Others in New York, like Ralph Towner, John Abercrombie, Colin Walcott, Nana Vasconcelos, there was a real close connection with the entire label that was on ECM at that point.

CLINE:

Well, they actually also had a tour that I remember, the ECM Festival.

0:32:22.4

HURWITZ:

We had some ECM Festivals, right. We had one in 1976 that was in Chicago and New York. I was very close with Jack DeJohnette and Dave Holland. I mean, that was as much a part of my job. But what ended up happening then, and, again, all of this was sometimes very difficult but also sometimes as a learning experience was phenomenal, was that I had to develop real diplomatic skills. So I had to be the go-between Manfred and a musician, and sometimes he wanted to pass messages that he himself did not want to give them. Sometimes I had to pass messages to him because they did not want to do it.

I was the go-between Manfred and Warner Bros. or Polydor because they were the distributors of ECM, and so that was also--again, I mean, we're living in an age where diplomacy on the federal level has been thrown out the window [Cline laughs.], but I learned quite a bit, and it was a phenomenal experience, of just how to talk to people and how to create relationships where people would feel completely comfortable speaking with me. So I could complain about being in the middle and I also could speak with great gratitude about being in that position, because it, without question, had a huge impact on my being able to navigate when I got to Nonesuch finally.

We went through crises. I mean, the major crises were with Keith at different times and with Pat Metheny at different times. I remember when Keith made a record live at the Village Vanguard, which was called Nude Ants, New Dance, which sounded like Nude Ants--

CLINE:

Yes, exactly.

HURWITZ:

--Manfred was furious that Keith had made that record, and I remember one of our great classic fights at 509 Madison, where our office was, where he said to me, "If there are any good reviews on that record, don't send them to Keith."

CLINE:

Oh, wow.

HURWITZ:

Literally at that point, because he did not want Keith to have any kind of sense that anything good could come out of a record that Manfred himself didn't produce. The same thing happened with Metheny when he when he made American Garage, which was the first record than Manfred didn't produce, and by that time, that relationship had begun to fray. Pat had begun to experience--I have to just physically demonstrate it--when he was at a session, and Manfred would be like this [demonstrates], which you, having been around Manfred, you probably know what that means.

CLINE:

And I know many people who've worked with him over the years, and everybody knows that, that "head in the hands staring at the board" pose where he would-- [laughs]

HURWITZ:

And so Pat went and made his own record, and I got caught in the middle of it, of course, because Pat and I became really good friends, and he seemed to have a lot of trust in me. And this is, again, going back to being in the middle. I had to obviously--you know, Manfred was the person who had hired me, he was my boss, and I wasn't going to create a mutiny, but at the same time, I also had spent so much time with Pat, I knew the degree of how unhappy he was. And at that point, he'd become our biggest-selling artist.

CLINE:

Right. He was popular.

0:35:52.8

HURWITZ:

Yeah. And there was a part of me because of my relationship with Warner Bros., knowing how important that was, so you have that triangle again of Warner Bros., the artist, and Manfred, that I was protecting a lot of different things all at the same time, and it ended up being okay, but it created an immense amount of anxiety for me. And, again, this is one of those things that the value of that experience in terms, because it was all new to me, I mean, now I was maybe at that time twenty-eight or twenty-nine years old, being thrown into that. It was just when you're growing up, most of your relationships are not tumultuous, and it was only something that I found as I was getting older, and, I mean, that was another aspect of my education, because all of this was part of an education, was that I had never been around difficult people.

The guy who was at Columbia, Bob Altschuler, was a difficult person. The person who ran Polydor when I was there, one of them, Irwin Steinberg, was a pretty nice person. But the #2 guy, Lou Simon, was an extremely difficult person. Manfred became a very difficult person. Later, Bob Krasnow became a difficult person. And one of the things you try to take away is, if I or other people I knew had such a negative and disagreeable view towards people and I was going to be in a position like that, at the very least I should be aware how people were going to perceive how you are.

And it became something that I've always thought about, of trying to be fair and honest to people without them all of sudden feeling completely intimidated or reading me as if I'm somehow antagonistic towards them. Even being aware, that hasn't completely meant that I've gone through this thing scot-free. [Cline laughs.] But that was a big part of the Manfred experience. I mean, here you are working with someone who literally we have a big argument and we go to sleep at 12:00 o'clock, and 1:30 he's knocking on my door while I'm sleeping, to continue the argument, I mean. [laughs]

CLINE:

How much of a difference did it make when there was a transition from ECM being handled by Polydor and then moving to Warner Bros.?

0:38:11.6

HURWITZ:

It was enormous, and even though I would like to take credit for it, I definitely cannot. But after being at ECM for three years, we were an incredibly hot commodity in America. We just had one success after another, and I think that the fact of Bremen-Lausanne, The Koln Concert, Return to Forever had a huge impact on it, and it was also that post-Bitches Brew era when jazz fusion became a big thing, and ECM was kind of the one alternative to that.

I started in '75, and by '77, four companies, one of them being Polydor, but Warner Bros. Records, Columbia Records, and Elektra Records were all very hot on the trail of ECM, and I was part of all the negotiations and meetings. Elektra's interest, I think, was about the fact that other companies were interested, but I was the guy who Joe Smith talked to. I was the guy who sat down with Bruce Lundvall for Columbia. But Warner Bros. came in very, very hot and heavy, led by Bob Krasnow, who passed away last month, who was just one of the big characters I'd ever met in my life and a guy who was both brilliant and pompous--I was trying to think which one I wanted to put first [Cline laughs.]--who the first time I met him was in a big suite at the Sherry-Netherland Hotel or Pierre Hotel, just was talking about everything Warners did, selling millions of records, and smoking a big Cuban cigar, and someone who, after I saw him the first time, I thought, "I'm scared shitless of this guy. This is the wrong thing for us to do." And I remember once they flew Manfred out to L.A. and had a dinner party where he lit a cigar with a hundred-dollar bill.

CLINE:

Oh, man. [laughs]

HURWITZ:

I mean, it was that kind of stuff.

CLINE:

Interesting.

0:40:21.2

HURWITZ:

But it ended up being that they were so intensely interested because of Krasnow, and Warner Bros. at that time was the biggest and most successful record company. They had just signed Prince. Fleetwood Mac's Rumors was this massive record that had kind of taken the business into another level. They had that beautiful office in Burbank.

And to go back to that word "seduce," which we talked about Manfred, they seduced Manfred and me at an extraordinary level. And if you remember, we were getting $3,900 a record from Polydor, and Polydor also wanted to continue the agreement, and they were in Germany, which meant something for Manfred, and they offered $10,000 a record, didn't matter whether it was Dave Holland's Emerald Tears solo bass record or The Koln Concert, it was the same amount of money. And Warner Bros. came in, and the first thing out of their mouth was "25,000 a record," expecting that we would ask for more, and that was just like their opening salvo.

And Manfred, to his credit, asked for less. He negotiated downward because he felt if the advances were too high and they didn't make enough money back, they would not be interested in it. And so Warners just completely seduced us, and they brought out all of their big guns, like Stan Cornyn, Eddie Rosenblatt. They brought me out to the office. Everybody I met there were just decent, smart, music-loving people. It was such a contrast between kind of the cheap tightwad Polydor Records at that time, which had to be one of the worst of all record companies--

CLINE:

Right, and their pressings were not very good. [laughs]

HURWITZ:

And their pressings were not very good. And, in fact, that was a very big part of my life because I had to approve all the pressings.

CLINE:

Oh, my.

HURWITZ:

And you can imagine The Sun Bear Concerts, for example, where I had to fly to Phoenix where I visited Wakefield Manufacturing, which ended up being our pressing plant until there was no longer a need for a pressing plant. But Warners just embraced us at a kind of extraordinary level, and we started in May of '78, and I've, in essence, been an employee of Warners since May of '78 [Cline laughs.], which I think is about thirty-eight years. You know the famous line of Stravinsky, which was, "I was once the youngest and now I'm the oldest." I was certainly the youngest person at Columbia Records when I got there, and I think for about the last five years I've been at Warners longer than anyone else. The entire company that was there when I started in '78 is gone.

CLINE:

Right. Interesting, yeah. So how much concern did you feel there was among the seducers, Warner Bros., when it came to records like you mentioned, Emerald Tears and the solo bass record by Dave Holland? Certainly there were many ECM records that were successful and very celebrated, and there are a lot of them were actually quite esoteric and I'm sure sold very modestly. How much of a concern did that turn out to be?

HURWITZ:

Well, it was interesting, because, again, this is moving into a big successful pop record company at the height of the album pre-CD business, but it was already at a point where it was printing a huge amount of money every year and living extravagantly. I remember once when Emerald Tears came out, that I was looking at how many promos they sent out [Cline laughs.] of Emerald Tears, and it was over 8,000 deejays. [laughter] And I asked the guy who was head of radio promotion, "Why are you doing that?" He said, "Well, like, you never know at some radio station

that there might be some guy there who really likes this record, and because of that, they might play a Warners pop record." I mean, it was--

CLINE:

Oh, wow.

HURWITZ:

--absolutely ludicrous.

CLINE:

Yeah, delusional. [laughs]

HURWITZ:

Yeah, absolutely. So a lot of people had no idea what they were actually doing. But what happened was that ECM had (many surprise hit albums). I would probably just say as a side note, my view about records that have been successful in my life, whether they be Nonesuch records or ECM records, has always been the same, with maybe one exception, which is the Black Keys, is that normally when something becomes really successful, it's like getting struck by lightning. You can have a modest expectation, but when you go into it, you could never foresee, whether it be the Gorecki Third Symphony selling over a million records or The Koln Concert, which must have sold four or five million records by now. Even Wilco, who did the Yankee Hotel Foxtrot, they had never sold more than a couple hundred thousand records.

That's now sold over a million copies. There's other factors that in all of the successes ECM had or Nonesuch has had, which is about touching a nerve in the public, as opposed to the normal ways that you reach those kinds of audiences, which is by radio airplay, primarily, or media.

Touring is always a part of it. But my career has been one in which many really great records or great artists have been kind of struck by lightning, and the same thing happened to a same degree with Pat Metheny, and I think in his case, which may be similar to Wilco's, I remember when we started working with him, his dad had a car dealership in Lee Summit, Missouri, and they gave them a van, and a little Pat Metheny Group went around and played 300 shows a year.

CLINE:

Yeah. I was going to say they were road warriors. That was part of that.

HURWITZ:

Yeah, and they just built the thing up day by day, piece by piece. They may have gotten a little bit of jazz airplay, but it was just by kind of hard work and determination that they began to reach the place where they got to, at a peak probably fifteen or twenty years ago. But certainly Pat's band, that original band with Lyle Mays and Danny Gottlieb and Mark Egan, which was the first Pat Metheny Group, was certainly on that wave of that time with bands like Return to Forever or the Headhunters or others that were getting larger and larger audiences, that even a new McCoy Tyner record was a big event in those moments. And that moment happened. It's never happened before. It's never happened since.

CLINE:

Wow.

HURWITZ:

But there was this expansiveness, which also explains four companies trying to get ECM all at the same time. Can I say that Warner Bros., with its vast machinery and all that it had going for it, pushed that agenda forward? Probably not. [Cline laughs.] I think that the one singular thing

that happened from Warners that had some small impact was on the record Offramp, the track "Are You Going With Me?" that Bob Krasnow heard it and said, "You should get that out as a kind of single," because this is the groove of it," and he was right. I don't think it, like, broke the record, but that was like the one good suggestion. [laughter] And also I remember Joe Robinson, who was one of their guys who wrote copy for their label, had a great advertising line, which was, "Not AM, not FM. ECM, a different wavelength." [laughs]

CLINE:

I remember that, yeah.

HURWITZ:

So it was a great experience. It was fun to get to meet a lot of these people and to see what that relationship was. It was another learning experience. At one point, two or three years into it, they wanted to drop the label because they thought it was taking too much time without anything coming back. Mo Ostin said to me, "Well, my guys think we're just spending too much of our time doing this." And so we actually renegotiated the deal, and instead of putting out twenty-two records a year, we put out twelve records and then kind of slid that up. And I remember something that Enrico Rava, the Italian trumpet player--I don't know if you know Enrico.

CLINE:

Yeah, oh, yeah.

HURWITZ:

--said to me, which was something that I was oblivious to, because I was kind of, "Oh, Warner Bros. I mean, Warner Bros. is great," because Warners was great. But he said, "Is this really great? Even in the old days, they were putting my records out and they were getting (to the

public)." That the big record company and the big deal for a lot of the lesser-known artists wasn't doing anything at all. In fact, it was moving backwards at that point.

CLINE:

Yes, right. That's where I was actually headed with my question, because I remember when they started having selective releases through Warner Bros., and people like me had to go back to buying imports and other stuff.

HURWITZ:

Right. That's exactly what happened. I did all I could to try to save it, and I suppose part of it was self-preservation and part of it was just moving the record company from Polydor to Warner Bros. took about eighteen months of my life, of just thousands of details. It's not easy to move a catalog. You have to, in a sense, remake the entire physical catalog, and that was happening around the time that CDs were beginning to come in. So it meant redoing a catalog of CDs, cassettes, and LPs. So that was nothing that I was kind of jumping up and down thinking about what a great thing it is, let's find a new deal, let's move the entire catalog over once. Because if you remember, the records on Polydor, that all the albums that had come out up until that point had to be remanufactured again to go to Warners, and it was a massive amount of work. And I had a staff of two at that point.

CLINE:

Wow. Wow. I was going to ask you, too, since you mentioned Keith Jarrett, when he started releasing more records on ECM, he was still under contract to Impulse and was having records being released by them.

HURWITZ:

I think that kind of ended pretty quickly.

CLINE:

Pretty quickly? Because I remember there was a period of overlap that confused a lot of people.

HURWITZ:

Yeah, when he was doing records with Dewey and Charlie and Paul.

CLINE:

Yes, exactly, right. I was just going to ask if that was a contentious issue, or if it was just something that had to run its course.

HURWITZ:

No, that is two perfect notions, contentious and run its course, and I have come to the side of run its course. [Cline laughs.] Manfred always lived on the side of contentious, and anytime an artist he was working with went to record for another label, it was a problem--and was referenced in a conversation I had Manfred two months ago.

CLINE:

Oh, wow.

0:55:11.0

HURWITZ:

I'm trying to remember who he was really upset with. Someone had just made a record for him and was making a record for somebody else. Manfred was apoplectic when any ECM artist did something for somebody else. I will go back to my Glenn Gould story, and one of the things he told me that very first evening that I had spent the twelve to fourteen hours with him, was we were taking about the Idea of North, I don't know if you know the Idea ofI North. But the one piece of music that's in there is a Sibelius Fifth Symphony that was conducted by Herbert von Karajan, and he told me that he became quite friendly with Von Karajan, and the two of them decided they would like to do two records, knowing how absolutely ironclad both Columbia and Deutsch Grammophon were about letting their exclusive artists do something for another label.

So they both went to their respective companies and said, "We would like to do two recordings of maybe the Third and Fifth Beethoven Concertos, and one will be for Columbia and the other will be for DG." And DG said, "Fine." And Columbia said, "Absolutely not." And it was at that point that I realized that I would never want to be in a position to stop anyone from doing anything, even if they were an exclusive artist that I was working with. And Manfred, on the other hand, felt that anytime an ECM artist, even though no one was under a written contract, it was all handshake deals, for them to do something with someone else was just a disgrace, and it created these massive blowups. Keith's American quartet was much different than the quartet he had with Garbarek and Jon Christensen and Palle Danielsson, and it was actually a wonderful group, and it eventually ran its course, but it was also fraught at different points.

That was one of the conditions of my experience, and, again, that in life when you have an experience like that, you have to basically sort out between the positives and negatives, and there were many, many positives in terms of the quality of recording, the quality of sound, high ideals. I don't think Manfred ever said this, but I intuited that there's an intelligent audience out there that's interested in things that are not part of popular culture. Covers mean something. Those were really positive things. There were also a whole range of negative things--controlling musicians, trying to control productions, having the sound be similar in situations where it should not be similar, having only one producer, berating people, being unsupportive during recording sessions--that were incredibly negative. And I learned as much from the negative part as I took from the positive part. And so being around that for nine and a half or ten years ultimately was an extremely positive learning experience, without which I could have never had my experience in Nonesuch.

CLINE:

How would you assess Manfred's aesthetic vision? You mentioned the covers of the albums, but in terms of his influence over, the fingerprints, in a sense, on the actual music itself.

HURWITZ:

Well, I think that they came from a European sensibility. I think that there was--we used to be quite excited at a lot of the covers. There was a wonderful art director named Babs Worjirsch, who was there for a long time. Do you remember that great cover of Open to Love by Paul Bley?

CLINE:

Oh, yeah.

HURWITZ:

Which she gave me the original drawing.

CLINE:

Oh, wow.

HURWITZ:

Which is the one thing I just love more than anything from those days. And Dieter Rehm, who became the next art director, I think that he had a real keen eye for photography, and it really created an ECM aesthetic. I think one of the things that I tried to do when I left ECM when it

came to covers was to try to have an aesthetic, and photography was something I cared deeply about. But more than anything in terms of production that I realized that the record belonged to the artist and not to the label, and I think in Manfred's case, the record belonged to the label more than it did to the artist. And there were big conflicts. I mean, I remember Jack DeJohnette put out a record with his wife and two children on the front cover.

CLINE:

Yeah, I remember.

0:59:56.1

HURWITZ:

And that was not something Manfred would have ever chosen to do, but I'm sure they had a deeply contentious argument about that [Cline laughs.], and Manfred backed down. I remember I brought in Joel Meyerowitz's photographs, too, because he was somebody who I'd become friendly with in New York, and he ended up doing many covers--the American Garage cover of that Airstream was Joel's, and a Bill Connors record had a Joel cover, and a Steve Swallow record had a cover by Joel.

Steve Kuhn, it was like a little baseball field. So once Manfred found someone he liked--and Luigi--I forgot his first name. Was it Franco Fontana or Luigi Fontana, those pictures of fields that Codona had. So he had his own keen eye for photographers, and the aesthetic has never changed. It's immediately identifiable. If you go into a bookstore in, let's say, Paris, and you look at a lot of the book covers, there's usually that black and white or maybe a little color that is more typewritten. That comes from a common aesthetic. But I'm an American. [laughter] And we're big and bombastic, as you know. So covers were really important to me.

But I also came to the belief, partially because of the ECM experience, that the owner of the record, creative owner of the record, was the artist. And so I would be in a conversation about how to get there, and I might make suggestions, but if an artist was unhappy with their cover, that was something that caused me great grief, because I knew that that had happened many a time at ECM.

CLINE:

And when you were there before you left, did the New Series there start?

HURWITZ:

Yes.

CLINE:

And what was your involvement with that?

1:01:35.0

HURWITZ:

That was one of the things he had promised me. He was not great at promises, but he had promised that I, because of my interest, would get involved with the New Series. And, in fact, one of the new things--and I had become very close to Steve Reich from the very beginning. There's an often reported by Steve Reich anecdote about the first time we ever met where he walked into the office--this is before Music for 18 Musicians came out--and he said, "I heard you hate minimalist music and so do I." That's what he said to me. What happened was Kurt Nurock, who was a composer, had once come to the office, and I told him I was not that interested in minimalist music, I was interested in the composers but just as a kind of general aesthetic, and he told that to Steve. And Steve and I hit it off very, very quickly.

But a real turning point--and this is as we're moving into the transition to Nonesuch--came with John Adams, and I had heard about John Adams through Tim Page, who was a music critic at that time for The New York Times. I had never heard of him. It's one of the funny coincidences of my life is that I heard Shaker Loops and was completely killed by it, I mean, just like I'd been waiting to hear this piece and this composer. And I wrote John a letter just introducing myself, "I'm from ECM. I'd like Manfred to hear this."

CLINE:

Oh, wow.

HURWITZ:

And called Manfred about him. And also around the same time, I had heard about this other composer named Ingram Marshall, and I wrote him a letter. As it happens, without thinking about it, both letters arrived the same day, and they were living like in the same apartment building and were best friends, and they're still very close friends.

CLINE:

Wow, interesting.

HURWITZ:

And they always laughed, thinking it was like a form letter from ECM coming. [laughter] And we ended up making a couple really beautiful records with Ingram at Nonesuch. So Manfred got the John Adams stuff, and they then took it forward, and maybe Dennis Russell Davies, who was close to Keith, was conducting Harmonium. John and Manfred decided that would be the first record, and I was supervising that recording at the San Francisco Symphony. But before that happened, Manfred pulled out of the recording, like he later did with Steve Reich's The Desert Music, which is how that Nonesuch relationship began, which I will tell you subsequently.

1:03:37.3

CLINE:

Oh, interesting.

HURWITZ:

But he pulled out of the recording, and I was just absolutely furious--only weeks before (it was to take place). And Manfred was famous, by the way, for saying he would do something and never doing it, with many, many people. So when that happened, I called up Bob Krasnow, who was now the chairman of Elektra Records, and said to him, "Do you think Nonesuch would do this?" And Krasnow said, "Absolutely." So we started trying to set this up for Nonesuch, even though I had nothing to do with Nonesuch, although, as I said, in the back of my mind one day I would be, even though it had never been said to me. And so I called Manfred and said, "Nonesuch is going to do it." And Manfred said, "No, I want to do it." [laughs] And I got some from Warner Bros. to kick in like $20,000. And so that first recording of Harmonium was made under, again, very fraught conditions. And I remember--are you interested in dreams?

1:04:50.6

CLINE:

Sure.

HURWITZ:

Okay. Two dreams that happened around that time, and one of the dreams was a dream in which I was a custodian at like a school, maybe like this school. But I was a custodian and I was in this job, but there was a lot of status attached to being a custodian. And after a few days, because I tend to always look into my dreams without going into analysis, I realized that was becoming what my job was. I was kind of this high-status custodian of Manfred's company. And the other dream happened right after Harmonium, which was a dream in which I had gone into some sort of cave in some place, might have been in the Austrian Alps. Did you ever deal with Thomas Stowsand?

CLINE:

Not personally, but I certainly know who he is. HURWITZ: We were very close, and the dream may have been--

1:07:06.5

CLINE:

Yeah, you would have to have been, right? [laughs] HURWITZ: --where he had his place in Austria. And in this dream, there was this kind of monster-like figure, gigantic, and sort of like at the end of The Wizard of Oz where the witch is kind of punctured, it was somehow whatever that monstrous figure was, was somehow just kind of vanished. And I remember there was a child who was kind of this beautiful child, singing child, who I was trying to protect in this dream. And my interpretation was that the kind of purity of Harmonium, because of this just ongoing battle going on with Manfred, was what we came out with at the end was this kind of beautiful pure thing and kind of the monster disappears. And it made me just kind of again--whether that's really what it was, maybe it had to do some childhood experience, I'm not an expert in this, but at least that's how I interpreted that moment, and it carried a huge amount of weight at that point.

So mentioning Thomas for a second, because the ECM days were filled with kind of amazing things that happened, Thomas and I became very close friends, and one year we drove down from Munich to visit Enrico and Graciela Rava, who lived in a town called Corneglia, which was this little village in Cinque Terre in Italy. This is probably in '78 or '79. And in the same afternoon they played two musicians for me I had never heard of, Astor Piazzolla and Caetano Veloso--

CLINE:

Oh, wow.

HURWITZ:

--who were completely unknown in America. So, again, being involved with Europeans, there was a whole part of culture that was brand new to me that I could be exposed to. And so even with the battles that went on at ECM, there was a tremendous amount of positive stuff that also happened, and I made great relationships with many wonderful artists and musicians, some of which I still have today. I should mention a couple of other things that were going on if we have time.

CLINE:

Yeah, we're good.

HURWITZ:

When I was at Polydor and I was doing ECM by myself without even an assistant, they thought I had too much time on my hands, so they asked me to supervise the release of the Verve reissues.

CLINE:

Oh, wow.

HURWITZ:

So I ended up over a two- or three-year period reissuing probably fifty or sixty records. You may remember some of these covers. They all had paintings--

CLINE:

Yeah, sure.

HURWITZ:

--on the front cover, and it was Charlie Parker, Lester Young, Billie Holiday, Count Basie, Ella Fitzgerald, Bud Powell, [unclear], Sonny Stitt, Dizzy Gillespie, Jazz at the Philharmonic. And it was another, again, great learning experience because with these records I had put my hands on everything. What the first thing I did is a lot of them they had been recorded mono, mixed as a kind of fake stereo, so I brought them back to their original level. I got to know Bob Ludwig really well, who ended up mastering. I got to work without any interference with art directors, with liner note writers. So in a certain way, one of the aspects of this custodial period in my life was this immense educational experience of learning just so many different things about how to make a record.

And a lot of it, again, was very influenced by Manfred's great interest in quality that had a profound impact on everything I did after that. Certainly so many of those experiences, whether at Columbia around people like Lieberson or Hammond or Gould, or ECM with that label with Manfred, with producing the Verve reissues, and all the rest, certainly were lessons that I did not forget. And then the experience of then moving into Warner Bros. and Mo Ostin and that whole thing gave me, I think, a kind of rare preparation when I finally got over to Nonesuch.

CLINE:

And dare I ask, how did that come about? How did the ECM relationship come to its close for you?

1:12:29.3

HURWITZ:

When Bob Krasnow signed ECM to Warner Bros., that was 1978, three years after Polydor, three years after I started, and it was six years that I was in that relationship, and Krasnow and I became extremely close. I became, as he once said, "the son I wish I had." And as I told you, when I got a phone call from the first time I heard about it that he was going to take over as chairman of Elektra, that instant, that moment, I thought, "Nonesuch will be in my life one day." I don't know. I'd never thought about it before, but I just knew that was going to happen. And that happened around '82, and by that point, just as I was near the end of ECM thinking, "This is it. I just can't deal with him that much more," I began in my mind knowing that something was going to happen at Nonesuch.

The guy who was running Nonesuch at that time was named Keith Holzman. And just as a little background about Nonesuch--maybe you know much of this--Nonesuch was founded by Jac Holzman--Keith Holzman was his brother--back in 1964 on Valentine's Day, yesterday.

CLINE:

[laughs] How timely, yes.

HURWITZ:

How timely. And in the early days of Nonesuch, the first thing Jac did is he went to Europe, and he went and found a lot of independent classical companies and bought the rights to records for $1,000 apiece, brought them back into the States, and then released them, what he thought as a budget label, sort of mimicking what books did during the year that so many kids were in college. And to this day, one of my favorite things is people who come up to me and say, "Nonesuch, yeah, I used to listen to those records when I was in college." The Bamberg Symphony playing Haydn Symphony No. 31, so that's what I've been working for all my life. So he did that. And then probably five or six years into it, hired this woman Tracey Sterne, who really was the one who established Nonesuch as a really important label, and she was someone who I got to know very well, although I got to know better when I got the job. I knew her during my ECM days, and the first eight or ten times I met her, I had to remind her who I was. But that was just another lesson, not to do that with people if you can help it.

CLINE:

Some people are just like that. [laughs]

1:16:41.8

HURWITZ:

Yeah. But between her interest in new music, she recorded all the great Carter and Crumb records, and Babbitt and Wuorinen and Speculum and all those people, and the Explorer Series, and the kind of Scott Joplin and American music that she did, and some really great artists like Paul Jacobs and Jan DeGaetani. She had made this still as a budget label into a real sort of presence. It was kind of more or less limited to like Bach being limited to the radius of 25 miles in any direction outside of Leipzig. Hers was three miles outside of Lincoln Center on the Upper

West Side. And when she was fired in 19--was it around '78--78 or '79--and every Nonesuch artist wrote to The New York Times and all left the label because their loyalty to her was so fierce.

They brought in the younger brother of Jac Holzman, who was Keith Holzman, to run the label. He moved it to L.A., and his Leipzig was the radius of UCLA that didn't go more than eight miles in any direction. So the artists of Nonesuch became the L.A. Chamber Orchestra and Sequoia String Quartet. I think all the musicians who were on Nonesuch were good musicians, but it lost the luster of what it was, and one by one, he tried to claw back a few of the people who had left. But one of, again, the lessons, since we're talking about lessons, that I learned is that you could have a certain relationship with an artist that in some cases can be transferrable and in others cases is not transferrable. And I think a lot of Tracey's relationships were not transferrable, that Gil Kalish or Jan DeGaetani, that there was something that they had in common that she knew what might be the right record to do, and someone who was a stranger was going to say, "What do you want to do?" without putting it into any kind of context about that.

So I think the label limped around for a number of years. Bob was extremely dissatisfied. The two of them would never get on. Keith was in there, without trying to sound cruel, because he was the younger brother of the guy who was the founder of the company who was kind of charismatic and quite brilliant in many, many ways. And it was coming to an inevitable end. On Valentine's Day twenty years after the founding, which was February 14, 1984, Bob Krasnow with Bruce Lundvall in his office said, "Do you want to take over Nonesuch?" [laughs] And my answer was, "Normally you're supposed to say, â€˜I want to think about it,' but there's no way I would ever say no, so why waste the time?"

CLINE:

There you go.

HURWITZ:

And that was an important day in my life.

CLINE:

Wow. That's for sure. And what about Manfred's reaction to this?

HURWITZ:

Whatever unhappiness he might have had about the Keith Quartet recording with Impulse, it was incomprehensible to him.

CLINE:

Treason.

HURWITZ:

And I gave him six months' notice.

CLINE:

Wow.

HURWITZ:

And he was furious that I gave him six months' notice, and as a variation to what--he wanted me to immediately fly over to Munich to try to convince me not to do it. I said, "Manfred, this is one of those situations where I simply made up my mind this is what I'm going to do." I think I told you the story last week or the week before when I left to go to Berkeley and it was not a question

of deciding and talking to my mother whether I was going to do it. I am doing this. I don't always do that, but there are some times where you know that is the only thing you can do. And I knew that this was the rarest opportunity, you know, the Sondheim line out of Into the Woods that "Opportunity is never a lengthy visitor."

And I do remember a few weeks after that, walking on West 55th Street right in the middle of the block--and I can almost remember the spot--thinking to myself, "This is something that I basically recognize is never going to happen again and that I have to go to all extremes, that if I'm going to fail, I'm going to fail not because of effort, but because sometimes we just fail in life." So I came in absolutely as motivated as one could possibly be, and sort of by February 13th or 14th, my sleep became disrupted for about the next thirty-two or thirty-three years. Literally, I stopped sleeping because I just--the combination of excitement and anxiety was so strong that, as someone who had probably had your normal six, seven, eight hours a night, all of a sudden, I was up at 3:00 in the morning on a daily basis. And it's occasionally leveled out. [Cline laughs.] But I knew consciously what I had and unconsciously I knew even more than I knew consciously what I had, and this was going to be the most important move of my life. And the question for me was, "How the fuck am I going to do this?"

CLINE:

Well, we're going to find out next week. [laughs]

HURWITZ:

Are we? [laughter]

CLINE:

That's a really good place to end. Maybe we'll find out exactly what your initial moves were upon taking the new job at Nonesuch that ultimately defined your musical and music business career.

HURWITZ:

Thank you.

CLINE:

Thank you.

[End of February 15, 2017 interview.]

Session Four (February 22, 2017)

CLINE:

Today is February 22nd, 2017. This is Alex Cline interviewing Robert Hurwitz. This is session number four. Good morning.

HURWITZ:

How's it going?

CLINE:

It's really going, and here we are again.

HURWITZ:

Yes.

CLINE:

We left off last time talking about your time at ECM Records and then your decision to leave ECM Records after being invited to take over Nonesuch Records, something you maybe not in the specifics but in generalities somehow imagined it might be in your future, and then there it was. And I wanted to ask you before we totally leave the ECM era, you mentioned what Manfred Eicher's reaction was when you announced that you were intending to leave, but I was curious to know, since you had also mentioned that you had some close relationships with some of the artists at ECM, you mentioned a couple who had some rather contentious experiences with Manfred, but I wanted to know if you had a sense of what some of the artists' reaction was to your announcement that you were leaving.

HURWITZ:

There were a number of the American artists who either immediately or after I had settled in asked if they could come to Nonesuch, and I decided--and part of it was having been around him and witnessing the battles that went on, that I just thought as a point of honor I was never going to go after any artist, but if an artist came to me and said, "I want to leave ECM; I don't want to be there anymore. Do you think there's a place for me at Nonesuch?" I was certainly open to that. And, in fact, in the end, there have been four people who were very important to Nonesuch who were all at some point in ECM, two of whom I was very involved from the very beginnings of their recording career, Steve Reich and John Adams. Two of them who essentially one left ECM immediately, who is Pat Metheny, when I left--

CLINE:

Although he went to Geffen.

HURWITZ:

He went to Geffen. And then the other was Bill Frisell. And other people had approached me, and I just didn't feel, among other things, that that's not what I wanted Nonesuch to be, and so I kind of, in the most positive way, had to push myself a little bit away. And I think that the one distinction is that all of the European artists like Jan Garbarek and Terje Rypdal and Eberhard Weber had a much closer relationship to Manfred, and I don't think it ever came up. Keith Jarrett clearly, he and Manfred were like brothers. I don't know if it was Cain and Abel [Cline laughs.], but they most of the time had a very, very close relationship. I think I told you the story about Nude Ants, which I think was probably maybe the lowest point during the time I was there that the two of them had, but I think that was a relationship that was solid.

One of the things, as I mentioned to you, in that awkward but important position where I was in between Manfred and the artists and Warner Bros., and that I had to, in a way, navigate between all these entities, certainly I was there for a lot of artists, and I think Thomas Stowsand in Germany was also, we were the people they could talk to when they were unhappy about Manfred, and that was an unusual position. I had never been in a position like that before, but certainly that kind of role as the person who they could talk to was something that was a very important part of my relationship with them. And having had the history of almost ten years being in that position, of course, that there would be people who would want to continue that relationship. And I think that's unfortunate. I wish people were able to say directly to Manfred how unhappy they were [Cline laughs.], but I think there was a lot of fear about doing that.

CLINE:

Right. Understandably, I guess. And then who succeeded you at ECM?

HURWITZ:

Lee Townsend, who has now become a psychiatrist or a psychologist. He's completely changed his career. And maybe that also comes from the fact that he had to take on that role at ECM with a lot of people who couldn't really talk to the boss, but they had to talk to someone intelligent. [laughter]

CLINE:

Wow, yeah. And then perhaps somewhat ironically, he was a producer of many of Bill Frisell's records.

HURWITZ:

Yes.

CLINE:

But, of course, I'm imagining that job opportunities for record producers these days must be fairly scarce.

HURWITZ:

That's, unfortunately, the fact. Although having said that, having known many great producers, and Manfred was a great producer, without a doubt, through much of his career, including Nick Gold of World Circuit, or Lyons and Wolfe at Blue Note, or Rudy Van Gelder, for that matter, there is an opportunity for somebody in non-pop music to step in and make a big impact. I have no doubt about that that is a real opportunity in this moment. EC: Wow. That's encouraging.

HURWITZ:

Someone has to grab it.

CLINE:

So I also wanted to ask you, during these roughly ten years that you were working for ECM, what developments, if any, were going on in your personal life?

HURWITZ:

1975 to 1984, right in the middle of that, on the day that Gary Gilmore was executed on January 17th, 1977, I started a relationship with a woman who became my wife, Carol Peterson. We went away the weekend before I started at Nonesuch and nine months later, my first child was born.

CLINE:

Oh, wow.

HURWITZ:

So that was all kind of interconnected somehow.

CLINE:

So how did that work with Manfred sleeping on your couch?

HURWITZ:

Well, he was gone by then.

CLINE:

Oh, okay. [laughter]

HURWITZ:

My wife and I had one of those unusual situations that only happen in New York, which was that--and she was in book publishing and quite an independent person in her own right, and she had an incredibly cheap, really nice small one-bedroom apartment on the Upper West Side, and I had an incredibly cheap really nice apartment in the West Village on West 12th and West 4th Street, and together it was under $700 a month for these two great rent-controlled apartments, which we had for a decade. And so for the first couple years of marriage, we just kept both apartments. We never officially moved in with each other until we actually bought an apartment, which was about the second or third year of our marriage.

CLINE:

And where was that?

HURWITZ:

It was on West End Avenue and 85th Street. The one thing I could say about my New York experience is that if you could imagine real estate as this giant wave that sweeps in, and that we were always in front of the wave, so wherever I lived, my $175 one-bedroom in Prospect Park, right by Prospect Park, or my $300 one-bedroom apartment at West 12th and West 4th [Cline

laughs], these were the benefits of coming to a city that was kind of broken at that time. And so even when we bought places after that, they were always ridiculously inexpensive compared to what happened three or four years later, and so we've always stayed in front of the wave.

I don't know if I said this last time, but there was something about our generation that I've always found intriguing, because my parents' generation, they were the generation of the Depression, World War II, and they aspired to middle-class. And you would hear--not just myself, but everyone heard, of the baby boomers, "You guys have it so easy. We really had it really hard." And what has flipped is, I think, for my children's generation and for all the students who are here right now, that we could say to them, "We had it really easy. You guys have it so hard," because we were able to move into our careers more easily. We were able to find real estate that was far more reasonable in terms of the way it was priced. We just had a certain amount of advantages that had to do with that place where we all grew up, that I think kids today don't have those same advantages. I think it's much harder.

CLINE:

Yeah, it seems that way. And then how was it for you to balance family life with your career, with all that you had to do, coming up on the Nonesuch years when you said, for example, you didn't sleep a lot?

HURWITZ:

I didn't sleep a lot. [Cline laughs.] That's true. I think that I was around thirty-four, thirty-five when both things happened--(having a child, starting at Nonesuch), and I was very conscious how important both things were. Like many parents, I was not someone who was always particularly interested in all the children around me, but I was completely focused on my own child. And I think everybody who has a child for the first time thinks you're the only one who's ever done that. But I felt that I had these two responsibilities in my life and that, as far as I know, I took them as seriously as I possibly could have taken them.

And looking back, in retrospect, I know for a fact that even though my mother was a housewife, my father worked some tough hours, that I spent far more time with both of my children and was far more involved with their lives than my parents could ever have been with mine, maybe that comes from having children at a later age and having a full appreciation that when someone has a child at twenty or twenty-two you don't really have--you're trying to kind of find yourself, and you don't know how to make space. But I think that was a kind of an ideal time to have children, and I was pretty focused those years.

CLINE:

Wow. And you did mention that during the ECM years, because of the relationship with Warner Bros., that it sounds like you came out to Los Angeles occasionally. How often were you able to come out and see your mother?

HURWITZ:

I came out for work probably six times a year, and so I kept close contact with my mother and with friends and other family, but I tended to stay in hotels and went out to work every day in Burbank, and it was my job.

CLINE:

Right. So we're headed into the Nonesuch experience now. You received this invitation. You accepted it right away. You said you didn't--

HURWITZ:

There was no way I could say no.

CLINE:

--play the game, the hard-to-get game.

HURWITZ:

No.

CLINE:

What, if anything, did you feel you had to do to prepare for this new position and this new responsibility?

0:15:56.60:18:20.50:20:17.7

HURWITZ:

Well, I think a lot of times in life there's some subconscious thing driving you that you really can't put your finger on. But I was a mature grownup. I was thirty-four, thirty-five, as I said. I was offered the job in '84, so I was thirty-four years old when I was offered it. I was thirty-five when I started it. And I had been around and I had been, as I've mentioned, at least bumped into or knew Lieberson and Hammond and Ostin and Krasnow and Manfred. I mean, these were people for me to look up to and people who had had immense accomplishments in the business, and so I don't know if I could have been more prepared.

And there were a lot of things that, in terms of preparation, which I think should be mentioned, that in those kind of middle to late years at ECM, I began to--I think my mind sometimes wandered. I probably did not think the challenge even--I told you about the dream of being the custodian--the challenge was as much as I would have hoped. And so during those years, there were three or four things that I began to just dive into that I had never paid as much attention to, and one of the things that was incredibly important to me, actually, was the world of George Balanchine and the New York City Ballet, and part of it may have been the exposure I had as a child. My mother was a dancer, as I told you, and seeing movies like West Side Story and things and being aware of Jerry Robbins.

But around 1975, which was my second year at ECM, they had a Ravel festival, New York City Ballet, and I probably went to eight programs. I didn't quite understand what Balanchine was. I had missed the Stravinsky Festival in '71. But I remember seeing a production of The Four Temperaments, which is this ballet he did of Paul Hindemith's music, on PBS, that was just about the single greatest thing I ever seen, and so I started going to live performances. And in the late seventies--he died in '83--I sometimes would go to the City Ballet three or four times a

week, with my own money, on my own dime.

There some something about it that deeply struck me--Balanchine is considered like Stravinsky and Picasso, one of the great twentieth century artists. I don't know if you've seen much of his work, but there was this kind of combination of music and dance I had not experienced before. He chose the greatest music, and he was the closest collaborator to Stravinsky, and there something incredible about the City Ballet where they would never announce who was dancing. You sort of would have to go to the theater to find out. Sometimes it was Mikhail Baryshnikov, sometimes it was Suzanne Farrell, and it didn't matter, because everything was about these incredible inventions of Balanchine. It was a very, very heady place.

And one of the things that really struck me about going to City Ballet during those years was that you'd have an audience that would go see a ballet based on Webern's music or go see Symphony in Three Movements or Agon or Concerto Barocco of the Bach Double Violin Concerto, and the audience was more focused on music than the one going across the plaza to the New York Philharmonic. They knew what they were witnessing--I think Susan Sontag once wrote about it being kind of like in the days of Wagner or in Shakespeare's time, that you were actually in this institution where someone was creating new work of the highest level. And not just Balanchine but Jerry Robbins, who was probably, after Balanchine, the most important American choreographer.

And so it made me think about the fact that you could create something of just the most remarkable beauty. And they were sold out eight times a week. People were clamoring for tickets and they were packed. I remember once going to the New York Philharmonic during one of their summer New Music festivals, I decided to go because there was a piece I wanted to hear. I then walked across the plaza because there was a couple of the Balanchine things that I wanted to see, and I was so aware of the difference of the audience and the difference of the creative experience. And the other thing probably I would have to say that also was happening during those same years was my attraction to Stephen Sondheim, again, like Balanchine, a kind of genius who was able to find an audience.

It wasn't an audience like Les Mis or an audience like Phantom of the Opera, but it was a smart, sophisticated audience, and he was creating these pieces of theater that were as good as any theater that was being created at that time. So having those two examples and then sometimes seeing some of the examples of what happened at ECM when something was done for the right reason and attracted a large audience, it kind of gave me a sense that there were a lot of people out there who were interested in things that were really special, that had a deep meaning in their life, and gave me a kind of courage to kind of pursue an idea that I thought was possible.

As I think I told you last time, I remember being on West 55th Street and thinking, "This is going to be the one opportunity in my life, and I cannot do anything that is going to stop me from--." I might fail, but I didn't want to fail because I wasn't making the effort or I was copping out and doing things that just made no sense at all.

CLINE:

[laughs] Right. And you had mentioned that your predecessor was fired and that there was a rather fierce loyalty on behalf of many of the artists on the label at the time to her--

HURWITZ:

Yes, Tracey Sterne.

CLINE:

--and that there was actually--or almost an activist sort of response to that. Without maybe getting into some controversial areas or disclosing anything that might not be exactly toward, what do you know about what happened with that and how, if at all, were you thinking you were going to have to contend with this rather unusual situation once you stepped in?

HURWITZ:

Well, the fortunate part was there was a five-year gap, and Jac Holzman's brother--

CLINE:

Brother Keith.

HURWITZ:

Jac had already sold Elektra, but his brother was around, and I think the people who were at Elektra at that point thought, "Well, he must know something," and he was thrown into that hornets' nest. (He just did not have a real sense of what Nonesuch was or what Tracey was.) You just, again, spend your whole life learning things by paying attention, and one of the things that I learned from that situation was that what made Tracey's relationship with Jan DeGaetani or Paul Jacobs or Gil Kalish or Bill Bolcom or down the line of all the people was that they were connected to each other. There are kind of little marriages that happen between record companies and artists in the best of all situations. And when Tracey was fired every important artist left the label. Tracey was someone who would leave a forty-five-minute voicemail.

As she said it herself, she worked eight days a week and twenty-six hours a day. That was her entire life. She was a child prodigy as a musician, but there was a part of her that was a little bit nuts. Monty Byers, who was Richard Goode's manager, told me the story of calling up Tracey, he was a young manager at that time. And he called up Nonesuch, he wanted to speak to Tracey Sterne because he had an artist (he wanted to record for the label). And she gets on the phone, she immediately says, "How dare you call me at the office on Yom Kippur?" [laughs] And that was who Tracey was. She lived in her own world. Everyone knew she was brilliant, but they also knew she was unmanageable and could fly off on a handle and didn't communicate with Elektra. And they tried to give her a situation where they were going to give her six months off, a full salary, just to kind of chill out, and she refused. And eventually she was fired. She was someone who screamed at people. At the same time, she was a woman in a business that had almost no women in those kinds of positions.

CLINE:

Yeah, that's true.

HURWITZ:

And it was a different moment, and at a different time she might have been different. And she was utterly brilliant, but she lived in her own world. And being in the middle of a pop company--remember, I was talking before about ECM (being in a pop company)--you have to know how to talk to people. You have to develop relationships, because, if nothing else, because when you're dealing with the music that's not in the mainstream, people often fear that. They feel it's like some sort of intellectual thing they don't understand, and so you try to find a way for them, without pounding them over the head, to realize, look, this belongs in the world too. And she had

none of those skills. So they brought Keith in, and Keith was a very fastidious man who simply had no real sense of what he wanted to do, and so he tried to re-sign all of Tracey's artists, and for the first three or four years, they wouldn't talk to him, and eventually a few of them made records, but he didn't have that kind of connection with them that Tracey had, so the records weren't as good as the ones Tracey had made.

CLINE:

I just wondered if because of the political history, so to speak, if there was any trepidation on your part or any preparation you had to do in terms of interpersonal relationships or just the mechanics of the situation.

0:26:17.50:28:44.0

HURWITZ:

I was intimidated by the reputation of Tracey among critics and musicians, and there were in my youth a number of great records that she made, especially records of people like George Crumb and some of the early Elliott Carter records that I really liked a lot, that I thought were tremendous, and a lot of the Explorer Series records. But it wasn't me. I was a different person. I had a different sense of what music was.

There were two moments of great anxiety, because I was very anxious at that period of my life, (because I understood what I had to accomplish.) I find that kind of anxiety in a Darwinistic way, that there's some reason why we, as animals, have this fear of whatever that fear is about, of about not finding food or making Nonesuch a good label. But Bob Krasnow said two things to me. The first one was in my very highly stressed early days, I said, "I don't know what to do, Bob. Keith had these forty artists. Most of them I have no interest in, but they have relationships." And he said to me, "You should just drop them all."

[laughter] And I was completely shocked and made, of course, to feel more anxious. But then as I started going through the roster, there were only two people who I actually liked. One I liked enormously, who was Richard Goode, a great, great classical pianist. And the other was Teresa Stratas, who was considered one of the great Kurt Weill interpreters. And so after kind of a week of getting over it, I started having about thirty-eight meetings with people and sitting down with them and saying, "You know what? Either you and Keith or you and Tracey had a very special relationship, and I think you have to find someone in another company who's going to have that kind of special relationship. I admire what you do, I respect what you do, but it's not the thing I love the most."

And in a couple of cases, people took it really, really poorly, but in most cases, because I spoke

to people, in a reasonable voice and I wasn't being critical of them, I think they accepted it, or at least they acted as if they accepted it. The second thing Krasnow said to me another time when, "Bob, what should we do about this, regarding a forgotten issue I had at that moment?" He said, "You know what? I've hired you to take care of this. We'll talk in five years about what you're doing. Just go do what you want to do."

Now, there was a little bit of that which was said as kind of an act of theater, because he was, of course, interested, but it kind of was a very liberating moment for me because I thought, okay, (this is a good thing.) It was kind of left me fail on my own. If people saw me those first days, they probably thought I was kind of under control, but I wasn't completely under control, and getting up at 3:00 in the morning was something that happened with great frequency. There is something great about getting up at 3:00 in the morning, because you have as clean a slate in your psyche, you really see things more clearly than you do at 3:00 in the afternoon, for example, when you've had twenty things piling up, and the twenty-first you really need a little time to digest it. So I'm grateful for my insomnia. [laughter]

CLINE:

It's a virtually monastic schedule. That's when monks and nuns can get up, is around 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning because that's when there's quiet and clarity.

HURWITZ:

Yeah.

CLINE:

So you let a lot of artists go, but who were some of the artists then you were anxious to sign in those early weeks, months, or year?

HURWITZ:

Obviously, there were people who I cared deeply about from my ECM days, but I just felt I was in no position to do anything. Certainly with Steve Reich, I was in no position, although I had a much closer relationship with Steve than Manfred did. But a week after I started, Manfred, who was, as I think you personally know, was famous for making decisions to do things and then not doing them, decided that he was not going to record The Desert Music by Steve Reich. And I got a phone call from Steve, and he said, "I just got a letter from Manfred. He's decided to cancel the session," which was scheduled at RCA in September of 1984.

CLINE:

Was there a reason?

HURWITZ:

He just decided at the last moment he didn't like the piece, after committing to doing it, which is a difficult thing when you commit to something and then don't do it and then there's an orchestra with 100 people there and Michael Tilson Thomas conducting. So I said, "Great." [laughs] And we just jumped in immediately and did it.

CLINE:

Wow.

HURWITZ:

And that kind of is sort of the foundation, that recording is the foundation of what Nonesuch became. And then the second thing which happened was Keith Holzman had no interest in

modern music, so he made a deal with this organization that was funded by the Rockefeller Foundation called Meet the Composer. I don't know if you remember that.

CLINE:

Yeah, totally.

HURWITZ:

Meet the Composer had relationships with orchestras all over the country, including John Harbison in Boston and Jacob Druckman in New York and Libby Larsen in Minnesota and Joseph Schwantner in St. Louis and on and on, and in San Francisco with John Adams. And I knew that even after Manfred wanting to do Harmonium, not wanting to do Harmonium, finally doing Harmonium, and all the problems that went, that because of this deal that Keith Holzman made, John's new piece for San Francisco was going to be on Nonesuch. And so one of the first things I did--I want to digress for a second in a minute.

CLINE:

Okay, great.

0:34:26.1

HURWITZ:

But one of the first things I did was, because John was going to do it, I said, "We've got to make this to a full production," and I broke up the team that Nonesuch had been (using for these records), brought in a team from Phillips Records, a guy named Willem Helwig to produce and John Newton to engineer. I don't know if you know either of them, great producer, great engineer. And here's one of these situations where John and I have two totally different accounts of what happened. [Cline laughs.] John, I swear, said to me sometime in the mid-eighties that he wrote the second and third movements of Harmonielehre, which was the first piece (he recorded for Nonesuch) and one of his great pieces, because he didn't want to have to share a disc with

one of the other composers, because the basic idea of Meet the Composer was that one side would be John Harbison, the other side would be John Adams or whoever that would be. So he said he wrote the second and third movements because of that. And then when I asked him about it, he said, "No, I never did that." And recently he said that when he was going through his archives that the person who's his archivist, he realized that he started working on the second movement before he worked on the first movement

But anyway, we recorded Harmonielehre, which was in those days we recorded pieces like that in a four-hour session, the whole piece, all forty-five minutes. And the next day, I had breakfast with John, his wife Debbie, and his daughter Emily, who last week had her first child. John's a grandparent. And I said to John--this was kind of for me one of those incredible moments, and I said, "I want you to sign to Nonesuch, and this is what I'll do for you. I'll make the first recordings of every piece you write from now on." [Cline laughs.] And we had already developed some sort of friendship by that point, and he said yes, and I was just ecstatic, just the idea of being able to do this with John. And I had also, after The Desert Music, been able to do that with Steve. So already with those two people, we had already established something that was beyond my expectation. And then what also happened around that time was Bob Krasnow, before I was there, had made a deal to pick up a soundtrack for this film called Mishima--

CLINE:

Right, Philip Glass.

0:37:35.50:39:24.30:42:04.30:42:04.3

HURWITZ:

--that Philip had written. And I have to be honest, and I have actually even written this in the liner notes I wrote for Philip Glass' big box, which came out at the time of his seventieth birthday, that I was at first far more attracted to Steve Reich than Philip's music. I think there was something in Steve's harmony that appealed to me, but through the years I grew a deeper and deeper appreciation of Philip as one of our most important composers. I had no relationship with Philip (at the time of Mishima), but we met each other and we spent time, and we began to realize that there was some sort of connection there.

So we didn't sign a formal contract with Philip, but we slowly started doing, at first, other soundtracks, like Powasqqatsi, which was the follow up to Koyaanisqatsi, and then started finding ourselves making records and signing him directly to the label, too, but that took maybe five or six years. And we started redoing pieces like Music in Twelve Parts and a lot of his early pieces and a new recording of Einstein on the Beach, etc., and developed a very close relationship. But what is significant is that in a year after I started at Nonesuch, we were able to

put out at the same time Desert Music, Harmonielehre, and Mishima as a kind of statement.

One of the stories I heard about Tracey was that when she was there, Phil Glass' manager at that time had begged her to go see Einstein on the Beach in '76 at the Met, and she just refused to go. And there was another point of anxiety. There was a real sense of, if not animosity, wariness between the so-called uptown school of New York and the downtown school. The uptown school of Milton Babbitt, Elliott Carter, Charles Wuorinen, Speculum Musicae, Tracey Sterne, Nonesuch, that was the place that the only active recording of new music was happening up there.

And, of course, there was a whole other scene that had developed in the seventies that included LaMonte Young and Steve and Phil and Laurie Anderson and choreographers like Trisha Brown and visual artists that had begun to develop a very, very important sense of what art might be in America. So I kind of walked in and was living with the reality of the old Nonesuch and also recognizing that there was another part of the world that I was very, very attracted to. And around that time, Harvey Lichtenstein at BAM--he passed away last week too--we had actually begun to develop a relationship that began when I was at ECM.

Just two interesting anecdotes, and this shows you how important people in those positions can be. Again, I was still at ECM, and I got a call from him, saying, "Have you seen The Gospel of Colonus?" which was Bob Telson, Lee Breuer's piece, which I had not seen. He said, "You've got to come tonight. You must come tonight." And it was great. And I called up Mo Ostin the next day and said, "You know, Manfred's not going to do this, but Warner Bros. should make a record of this immediately," which they did. When I first heard Shaker Loops, the John Adams piece, I called Harvey and said, "I've just heard this new composer." And Harvey said, "You've got to send a messenger and send it to me right now. I want to hear this."

That was the kind of involvement that he had, which I've never really met anyone like that. And five years after that, he was one of the co-commissioners of Nixon in China. So, clearly there was that part of the world that I was on the fringe of. I knew a few people and I had worked with Steve. Also Meredith Monk was someone who I worked with at ECM. I knew Laurie Anderson already. So I was kind of aware that Nonesuch had this kind of history, and to a certain degree I tried to honor it, to some degree. So I would probably say in the first five years there were a half a dozen records, a record that was actually a very good record, George Perle's music, a record of Elliott Carter's, The Minotaur.

Now, of course, my interest in The Minotaur was the fact that George Balanchine had commissioned The Minotaur for the New York City Ballet. But even with that, there was a beautiful moment I had with Carter where he talked about how Balanchine had influenced him in talking about the Tchaikovsky Serenade, which City Ballet people called Serenade (note: there are two different pronunciations), which is this beautiful piece of Tchaikovsky's where Balanchine mixed up the movements. He changed the third and fourth movement. But at the end of every movement, the dance continued into the next one, it bled into it, and Carter said that was a very big influence of him of the way when he composed how things continued to morph from one idea into another.

So I didn't want to have a complete and total break, but I was just less interested in that music, and Tracey had done it. I understood why Carter was an important person. I had my problems with Elliott Carter, I have to say, about his music. And, in fact, because I think this also bears a certain relevance, it has to do with Elliott Carter and John Adams, and a moment that was one of those moments that we have where you discover something about your own taste and your own view about art. So when I was at Columbia, going back to Columbia days, I was given a great assignment, which was to write the liner notes for the world premiere performance of the Carter Third String Quartet that Juilliard did probably in 1974, '75, and I took it really seriously.

I was really interested in the first two Carter quartets, and so I got a tape, I got the score, and there was a concept like in all of Carter's pieces. It was about two of the musicians, the first violinist and the violist who were playing in strict time, and the second violinist and the cellist who were playing in a much freer time, and about this kind of dialogue and conversation that were going on between them. And I took it completely seriously, and I listened to the piece at least twenty times and studied it, tried to come to terms with it, but I have to confess I never loved it. It was never something that actually crept into my system. There was no harmonic sense that I think I always need to hear in music that was able to grab me, but yet I also thought this is what Modernism was.

And then cut to eight years later, I'm now at ECM and I've finally convinced Manfred "Let's record Harmonium," and I'm in San Francisco, Davies Hall, and I'm hearing a couple performances. I'd only heard a tape of Harmonium up to that point. This is the first time I heard the piece live in concert. And I realize that I had been completely wrong about what Modernism was. I had looked at Modernism from the idea of everything continually pushing to extremes, which was in a certain sense what the Nonesuch uptown Modernist school was about. John's piece was that, on one hand, was completely original. I already knew this was his fingerprint over the entire piece.

And the second thing that I realized is it could only have been written now. It was a piece that couldn't have been written thirty or fifty years ago. It belonged to this very moment. And then the third part was that I loved it, and I thought, of course, the difference with Carter was I never loved it. I never cared to hear it again and again. Once I was finished with that exercise, I had no interest in ever hearing The Third Quartet again, and I think that was a very liberating moment for me. I think I understood what it was I loved about music in a way that I had never understood. It made me think that I should apply the same standards to music being made now as I've always applied to music from the past; that is, that the same standards that made you love Miles Davis or Charlie Parker or Beethoven or Bach, that it wasn't wrong to apply those standards for people who were writing and composing music today.

So I think that that moment had a huge impact as I began to look at what I wanted to do at Nonesuch and accelerated my desire to kind of move away from what was at Nonesuch before and that kind of American European-based Modernism and try to look at something else.

CLINE:

Yeah. I was just wondering about two things. One is how many people even at the time viewed people like Elliott Carter and Milton Babbitt as being essentially a European-style continuation compositionally in this country versus what might be something that's more particularly and maybe even peculiarly, if it means anything, American. And Nonesuch, of course, is an American label. But also I'm wondering just how much of a difference you were perceiving at that point between something that's interesting or even fascinating versus moving and emotionally satisfying.

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HURWITZ:

Interesting, you know, listening to Messiaen's music in a concert is a great thing to do. Listening to Messiaen's music on record is almost always after ten minutes I'm going to something else. Part of it was the medium of records and what would make a good record, and the notion of music that had that emotional connection that you intuitively grasped first and then as you found out more about it later you realized it was something that was really important to me. The records I loved were the records I really loved.

They were records that I wanted to go back to over and over again. Things that were interesting, I could hear in concerts, and I didn't have to necessarily record them. Now, I wasn't 100 percent true to that in the beginning years. There were things that I sometimes made mistakes on, but I was trying things out. I was poking around what had been part of the scene at that time. For example, early music was going through this kind of revival of the original instruments, and I was kind of poking around. There were a few performers like Emma Kirkby, a great English singer who I adored. But in many instances, after one or two things, I thought, "No, let's move on. Let's try something different."

And there were other opportunities. I mean, this was a really shockingly fertile moment for me, because it was during the period where CDs were becoming really important, and the big classical companies like Columbia or RCA, were spending all their efforts reissuing old LPs on CD and not signing a lot of interesting artists. I mean, I would have thought in Lieberson's days, they would have signed John Adams or Steve Reich or the Kronos Quartet. It seemed obvious, but the so-called majors were nowhere to be found. And so they just essentially for those first few years just said, "Hey, do whatever you want, man."

CLINE:

Right. Handed it to you on a silver platter.

HURWITZ:

They handed it to me.

CLINE:

The other thing that I wanted to ask you about, which I think will connect to this whole CD transition that we're talking about in some way as well, because, if nothing else ,that also opened up the playing time quite a bit, as well as the audio aspects, but when you were making these decisions, how much of a factor was it to have to consider the bottom line?

0:51:16.3

HURWITZ:

I always considered the bottom line. I never took a business class. I never took an economics class. I don't really know how to read a balance sheet. But--and forgive me if I've said this, but it bears repeating, Goddard Lieberson's famous line, that it's easier to teach a musician about business than a businessman about music. And then another person who I worked with on the Rockefeller Foundation project said, "Always spend someone's money as if it was your own." And so that was my business education, those two things.

And I realized, even though I was told that I had five years and not to worry about anything, I was, of course, worried, because I was around the business long enough to know that eventually you're going to have to be in a situation where you're going to have to break even or make a little money. And, of course, unbeknownst to ourselves, this happened to be the moment when New Music had its--just like jazz in the post Bitches Brew era had that moment for ten years where everybody was selling hundreds of thousands of records, this was the moment for New Music. So Philip Glass' Mishima sold over 100,000 records, and The Desert Music was a big seller.

Even Harmonielehre was a big seller, relative to the world. And then we signed the Kronos Quartet, and all of a sudden, the first five records the Kronos made all sold over 100,000 copies, including George Crumb's Black Angels. [laughter] So we had just walked into this moment where (there was great interest in the scene.) Steve and Phil had an enormous amount to do with

this. They were playing in rock venues. They were having their pieces done by the New York City Ballet. They were at the center of the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Their stuff was being certainly heralded even as a far more important aspect of art in Europe than it was here. So for those first three years, in a completely unexpected way, we started selling a lot of records, and I didn't really yet quite understand how much money we were making, but we were making a lot of money. [laughter]

CLINE:

Well, Philip Glass having his music not only in his film soundtracks but as a major focus of films like you mentioned, Koyaanisqatsi, for example, where it's visuals and music only, I would imagine does a lot to help. You get a lot of free publicity that way, I guess is what's I'm saying.

HURWITZ:

Yeah. And so we were in this moment, and we were not working with Laurie, but she had a hit single with "O Superman." So something was in the air, and I just happened to be the right person at the right time. Because of my experiences with Harvey, with Manfred, my awareness of this, my close relationship with Steve Reich, Nonesuch found itself in a kind of center of all of this. And I've often looked back at the first two years I was at Nonesuch, and I think there were like seven signings that I made: Steve, John, started working with Phil, Kronos, John Zorn, Caetano Veloso, Astor Piazzolla. And that kind of launched us. I don't think that we ever had a moment again like that, but it was a moment when--and I should throw in there, because it was our first really successful record, Le MystÃ¨re des Voix Bulgares.

CLINE:

Oh, yeah, which you licensed again.

HURWITZ:

Licensed from Marcel Cellier. So just all of a sudden, more than I even knew, people started paying attention to Nonesuch.

CLINE:

How much did things like National Public Radio music programming factor into this trend at the time?

0:56:00.0

HURWITZ:

At that point, not very much. But what really was unbelievable was The New York Times. The New York Times, after the very first year named Teresa Stratas and World Saxophone Quartet, in their pop critics top ten list. That year Nonesuch had 10 percent of the top ten pop records. [Cline laughs.] Caetano's first record, the World Saxophone Quartet Plays Duke Ellington, the Teresa Stratas record, and I forgot what the fourth was when Bob Palmer and Jon Pareles were their principal critics.

So we were being appreciated in the pop world as this kind of hybrid crossover, we were being appreciated in the classical world, we were being appreciated in the jazz world. And as I spoke to you a couple sessions ago, like my experiences in Berkeley in radio at those times, we were able to put out records in all these different genres of music with people who, I think, in the case of every person I mentioned, were all very original artists who were beginning, in some cases, like John Zorn, beginning to have an impact in the world. Kronos at the beginning of their recording career. Astor, who, of course, had been around but not really known in America. Caetano, who was completely unknown in America. By the way, I had one person working for me full-time and a part-time assistant, as we did this, and it was a crazy moment. But in retrospect, as I look back at that, I think it could not have in any way been better, because while I mentioned those seven or eight artists, there's no one else who I actually wanted to be working with then who I wasn't getting to work with.

CLINE:

Wow.

HURWITZ:

It wasn't as if I really wanted to do something with Zubin Mehta. [laughs]

CLINE:

Right. No, you've mentioned many of these artists, especially the ones that you dealt with right away, still fall into the so-called "classical" genre in the eyes of the world. And you kind of walked into my next question, which was what was it specifically that you feel gave you the confidence to start moving the label into musical areas outside that definition? You mentioned John Zorn. You've mentioned Caetano Veloso and Astor Piazzolla. But particularly something as potentially, let's say, challenging as something like John Zorn's music that's very unlike, say, Steve Reich or John Adams or that sort of crowd, what, if anything, can you trace to it being--aside from your own musical interests--how did that translate into decisions that you knew were also going to affect the way the identity of the label was perceived and then, of course, again, what the bottom line might look like that would reflect on you?

HURWITZ:

Well, in the case of Zorn, it's an interesting story of how that came to be, which was there were four different people who all said to me, "You should really check out John Zorn. You should really check out John Zorn." And one day I open an envelope and it's a letter, and it says, "Hi, my name is John Zorn. I've been told I should send you some music." It was during those days he was doing these kinds of almost like cinematic pieces. He'd done a piece called Godard, and I just put it on, and it was incredible. I mean, it was really incredible. And we got together. He was a little bit more easygoing in those days. I don't know if you've worked with John or know him well.

CLINE:

I don't know him well. I've met him. I have not worked with him. I almost did once. It didn't happen.

HURWITZ:

He's a very complex man and a brilliant man, without a doubt. And I just thought it was something like I had never heard before. I immediately recognized that this was a really original mind. I thought it was accessible. I guess "accessible" to me is not the same as it is for the general public.

CLINE:

Naturally.

HURWITZ:

But there was clearly something there that was at a very, very high level. And around that time, someone else I knew was working on a project, Yale Evelev, who had a small company called Icon Records, for whom John Zorn was putting together this large group of New York musicians to do a record of Ennio Morricone. And at the same time, he was working on this piece based on Mickey Spillane, which would become Spillane. And clearly, we hit it off in a kind of way almost like the way I hit it off with Manfred in the beginning, it was very easygoing, and as time went on, it became really, really difficult.

And I would probably characterize my relationship with John today as still pretty difficult, but it's what a musician once said, it's like a slap and a hug simultaneously. And so we found some common ground. He became one of the composers I wanted to sign as an exclusive Nonesuch artist, and I thought that he was someone who was rare and really important and doing something that no one else had done before. Again, this is like the story of Harmonielehre and John Adams. In my recollection, I said to him, "You should put a group together." And the group which eventually became Naked City with Bill Frisell and Wayne Horvitz and John Fred Frith. John said, "You never suggested that idea. That was my idea." But anyway, that doesn't matter. That's just the way things were with John, and Naked City from the early days was simply a breathtakingly brilliant band. I don't know if you heard them--

CLINE:

Not live, no.

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HURWITZ:

--in their early days. They were just wonderful. And so we had a very fruitful three or four years together, which eventually broke down. But I thought he was an important figure in the New York scene, in the world scene, and I think that he certainly has remained an important figure. But I think more than even Zorn, to me, the moment where we split completely from the past and we split completely from being a classical company was Caetano Veloso, more than even the World Saxophone Quartet, because Caetano was a Brazilian pop singer who wrote these beautiful songs, and he was an incredible lyricist and a poet and a great artist. I remember consciously thinking about, again, this differentiation about art, that you have someone like Charles Wuorinen or Milton Babbitt or Elliott Carter, and they're artists.

There's no doubt about that's what they're talented composers. Then you have people who come out of a completely different tradition, and I thought, is Caetano any less of an artist than Elliott Carter? And I thought, no, he isn't, that this idea of the hierarchy of classical music or modern composition or your European-centric classical music was just an idea that had no meaning to me. Because you could intellectually have that discussion, and a lot of music critics had that discussion, but in truth, Caetano as an artist was every bit as important, and, to me, more important, in terms of what he was creating. Or Piazzolla was as an artist every bit as great. And so that it allowed me, it freed me, it liberated me to think, "Okay, let's just move ahead in this direction, and let's not be afraid.."

I think a lot of people in the music business, in the record business, operate out of fear of one or two things. They operate out of fear which has to do with financial considerations, and they operate out of fear in terms of what people may say about what they're doing. And it's not that I am fearless. I wasn't that at all. I was naÃ¯ve. But I just, again, assumed, if I'm going to fail, let me fail with something that I love. Let me not fail with something that I think people will be impressed by. Let me not fail with something I think people might want to buy because it's more commercial. Let me fail by doing something I think is important. And even John Zorn started to sell well, and Naked City sold 125,000 records. I mean, all of the new music recordings that we were doing became commercially successful. It was not the intention.

I mean, I was happy about it, but it was not the way we actually went out and started doing these things. But it goes back to that story about Balanchine and the story about Sondheim, that there was a public that somehow found its way, people who had curiosity, or seekers, who were not

being led to something, but found their way to music that was of interest to them, just as people found their way to certain films and people found their way to dance companies. There were even dance companies that weren't the City Ballet, like Paul Taylor in those days, was also drawing a certain kind of audience that had a kind of curiosity, and those audiences that you would see there, or sometimes you would see at BAM, were audiences that, at least from my perception, deeply cared about being there.

So there was something that I had tapped into that was a whole bunch of circumstances: having a boss like Krasnow who gave me that kind of freedom; my own recognition that this was the moment; my being around a lot of people who were part of that downtown world; having worked for Manfred; having been in a record company. All those things were part of the wash that I was able to draw from, that gave me a kind of ability to kind of push through.

And then it sort of went on steroids with the Bulgarian Choir, which whenever I was in Paris, I would go to FNAC, and there was a woman who worked in FNAC who knew about every great world music record coming out of Europe before anyone else did. I would go and I would pick up ten or fifteen records, albums, and schlep them back to the States, and one of them was the Cellier version of Le MystÃ¨re des Voix Bulgares, and it was one of those records you just dropped the needle, you put it on, and twenty seconds later, you try to track down the owner of it. And he licensed to me for $8,000, and the record exploded relatively and sold at least a quarter million copies in the first year. And every time one of these things happened, other artists were paying attention, and so all of these things in combination started opening up all these doors that all of a sudden we--and, by the way, maybe by this point we had three full-time employees--that we were able to begin to transform ourselves as a record company.

1:09:59.2

CLINE:

Well, this sort of speaks to what I wanted to ask about, which is sometimes, for example, last time with regard to ECM, you talked about label identity and the relative difference between sort of the label being the priority or the artist being the priority. And in this case, you start out with a label that maybe to many people in the music world has a certain identity that's now being transformed into something else.

But one of the challenges, from my own experience, is that frequently when there's a change in musical direction, the label itself already has a whole apparatus in place that allows them to know, for example, who to target in terms of critics, in terms of the public, who are going to be receptive to their label's work. And then when it changes and you throw them something that's very different, that can be a bit jarring, to put it one way. So especially with such a small staff, and with these kinds of changes going on, how was it that you were able to, in a sense, get the music that was different to the right people who were going to respond to it in a helpful and favorable way?

I can see the connection with, say, Caetano Veloso and Astor Piazzolla, if you have something

like Explorer Series, where you have world music being presented. But maybe with something like John Zorn or the World Saxophone Quartet, maybe that's a bigger challenge. How were you able to do that or how much of it was your own concerted effort versus something that just kind of developed on its own somehow?

1:11:24.3

HURWITZ:

I would have to give a lot of credit to (the fact these artists) developed on their own. [Cline laughs.] We were not marketing geniuses. But I was talking about The New York Times before, and The New York Times in those days played a spectacular role, because you have to remember about The New York Times, The Times is read by everybody. So it's a machine. In those days, if something appeared in The New York Times, every critic around the world read it. In a way, it predated the importance of National Public Radio. And The New York Times gave extensive coverage to music in those days. I mean, they've now cut back to a ridiculous point, because they have discovered that they're not getting enough clicks on their reviews, so they're just basically stopping to review things.

When John Rockwell, for example, wrote a front page Arts & Leisure piece on John Zorn after we released Spillane and talked about him being as important as any musician who's come out of downtown in the last ten years, (and John, who saw it and asked if there was a way we could buy up every copy because he was so embarrassed by it), it was seen by people in Europe, that was seen by people in Chicago, and elsewhere, and those things spread a message that was very, very powerful. And for a paper like The Times that had great music writers--Bob Palmer had just passed away around that time, was an incredible critic for the paper.

John Pareles was just starting out, and he was a great advocate of new music. And there were a few others who were writing about--Peter Watrous was the other one who was writing about New Music at that time. What Steve, Phil, Zorn, Kronos were doing was as important as anything. So that helped us immensely. Don't forget I had one guy Peter Clancy who did all my marketing. He couldn't have done everything. And he did things like when The Desert Music came out, he took Steve Reich on a road trip to like three major markets. We didn't have the resources, but I guess it didn't matter that much. We sent the records to the right radio stations, but radio stations rarely, if ever, have an impact on the kinds of things we did. And it was that old word of mouth, artists being in public, getting some really, really good press, having the records available through distribution. That was it.

CLINE:

Wow.

HURWITZ:

I think that the only reason those records did well was because every one of those artists that I mentioned at that moment was kind of new to the public. I mean, Philip wasn't new to the public, Steve wasn't new to the public, but everybody else was pretty new to the public, and they were engaging artists and they were modern in their own way, and they were all accessible in their own way, even Zorn was, I thought. And they all began to build audiences. I can't explain it.

CLINE:

And, for example, in terms of a couple of quartets, you had the World Saxophone Quartet on sort of one side of the country, and you have the Kronos Quartet on the other. You mentioned last time how Nonesuch under Tracey Sterne, and you mentioned it again this morning just in a different way, that it was kind of functioned with an orbit that just emanated a little ways from the Upper West Side of Manhattan. How much were you able to sort of be aware of or keep track of what was going on artistically in other parts of the country, stretching as far as the West Coast and beyond, outside of the immediate New York area, which in many ways related to The New York Times comments that you made, and also just the sort of the jazz press tends to be very East Coast based or it may be even East Coast-centric. How were you able to kind of stay abreast of what was happening elsewhere in the country?

1:16:03.0

HURWITZ:

Well, I think that the way one stays abreast of stuff is you are part of a community, and no one on their own could find out about everything. In New York you have a little advantage because everybody passes through New York at some point or another. But a lot of things happened just because I had developed relationships with many people. Some of those relationships started from the Columbia days. Tom Frost was a producer at Columbia who had produced Horowitz and other people. He called me up one day and he said, "I just heard this singer, Dawn Upshaw. You should check her out." And I heard a tape of it, didn't even hear her live, and got together with her almost immediately, went to a concert, got together, and offered her a contract on the spot.

John Zorn, as I mentioned, four people had written to me, including Greg Sandow, of the Village Voice. So there were people who were well respected. Tim Page in New York Times was the

first person who told me about John Adams. And I mentioned last time, I knew other musicians who told me about Caetano and Astor. I found about the World Saxophone Quartet in my ECM days from Jack DeJohnette, who went and played a gig with them. I'd heard about them, never heard them before, and it was just drums and the quartet, which was incredible. It's not like you're there and going to clubs every night. You begin to create a circle of people who talk to other people all the time, and that circle as it gets larger and larger, at least you find your way.

In Bob Dylan's Chronicles, he talks about getting signed, and it's a great legendary signing of John Hammond, signing of Bob Dylan. But what I realized, of course, having been in the business, and I knew Hammond and I adored Hammond, if Hammond hadn't signed Dylan, someone else would have. It's not like there's like one person is the one person who recognizes someone who's great. No. If the talent's there, that emanates out. People are going to find out about it. It's like you cannot keep it from rising to the surface.

CLINE:

Right. And then as time went on, you were able to also incorporate your interest in musicals, for example, Broadway, and you mentioned Stephen Sondheim, who I think we will probably get into more next time. But also there started to be some people signed to the label who, at least in the eyes of the world, would be considered more in the pop area. What, again, inspired you to venture into that area, particularly not in light of so much of the bottom line, but in terms of the image of the label and the kind of artistic identity it was projecting as a result of all these successes that were happening and as a result of that curious audience that you were referring to?

HURWITZ:

I think that the definition that I brought up regarding Caetano, that an artist is a great artist, I think was that liberating moment. I think we're jumping a little bit ahead, because I kind of see Nonesuch, having been there thirty-two years, in kind of three distinct phases. And that kind of began to happen in the second phase.

CLINE:

Yeah, right. Well, I knew it was chronologically more recent, but I wondered in terms of just your kind of conceptualizing of the label.

HURWITZ:

I just thought it was a natural evolution. There was a fellow I brought into the company, David Bither, who had worked at Elektra, who was someone who I almost hired in the very beginning, who had a relationship--because the first really pure pop artist we signed, if you want to call it pop, was Emmylou Harris, who she had a previous relationship with Elektra, and it was not an illogical signing at that point. There was another thing that had also kind of happened around the time was the Gipsy Kings. We had gone from having artists who could sell 100,000 copies to artists who could sell a quarter of a million copies now to artists who could sell two million copies, and every time one of those things happened, we were able to, in a small way expand the size of our staff, in a small way open up other kinds of possibilities.

And the Gipsy Kings just put us in a different place. That happened, I think, in 1988 or '89, and every time we would have one success, the stage set for us to begin to be a magnet for certain kinds of artists. But I think in the most idealistic way that each time an opportunity came up (to sign an artist who made sense for us), there were also a lot of opportunities that came up with artists who we knew could sell a lot of records (which we did not feel committed to. We) felt that they also either lacked someone loving their music--because I didn't want to sign or work with anyone whose music I really didn't like a lot, because once you sign an artist, it's like getting a new family member.

CLINE:

Right. It's a relationship.

HURWITZ:

And you have to stay involved once that starts, for years and years. You can't sign them and walk away from it. You have a responsibility to them, and I think a lot of people forget that, and, again, this was perhaps a negative lesson from ECM. But their decision to come sign with you is a profoundly important decision in their life. And when you have a label that has eight or ten

artists already, which is what we had at that point, when you sign the eleventh, you're taking on a big part of their life, and you don't want to do that unless you really think you could do something that no one else can do with it, and it's not, "Okay, we're going to make a record and then we're going to walk away from it for two years." And artists, by the way, when they call you up on the phone, they don't want to hear, "You know, I'm really busy. I'm working on this new Steve Reich record." They don't want to hear that. They want to hear that you're the only artist in the world and what is going on in your life is the only thing that counts. So as we became larger and increased the size of our label, I had to begin to take those things in consideration. So in terms of who was signing--somewhere I have a long list of the famous artists who approached us that we never wanted to work with--

CLINE:

Interesting.

HURWITZ:

--not because there was anything wrong with them. It could have been another label. It's just how do you get space at the table, that you're going to satisfy why you're doing this. And part of it is it's a business, but part of it you have a kind of pride of what you want this thing to represent, and be able to do something in their life that's going to be really important. I think we could go on for hours talking about just this whole area of acceptance and rejection, the sense of responsibility that I've always felt, especially when being approached by really serious musicians and having to say no, that I probably don't even fully consider how difficult it is for the person on the other side, especially in a world in which the opportunities to get signed have been essentially diminishing over the thirty-year period I've been there. So I'm going to have to actually leave, myself, now. It's twenty to 1:00.

CLINE:

Okay. I just want to--can I ask you one last thing?

HURWITZ:

Absolutely.

CLINE:

What did Bob Krasnow think when he checked in after five years?

HURWITZ:

Well, he kept checking in all the time. He was amazing.

CLINE:

[laughs] He was [unclear].

HURWITZ:

And I want to be able to talk next time about things like Nixon in China and the Gorecki Third Symphony and other really important things that were going on. But when Nixon in China opened in Houston, Bob Krasnow flew down to Houston with us for the opening of Nixon in China. When it opened at the Kennedy Center, Bob Krasnow even threw a party at the Kennedy Center for Nixon in China. When Steve Reich had a festival in London, which is probably--might even have been his fiftieth birthday festival, to show you how long ago it was--it probably was--Bob Krasnow came over for that.

CLINE:

Wow.

HURWITZ:

So his interest, even though he was a kind of wild man of the pop business, he was someone who deeply cared about this music, and so not only was it doing well, but it was something that he fully supported--

CLINE:

Wow.

HURWITZ:

--in a way that, again, I can tell you there was not a head of any record company, since Goddard Lieberson, who would have taken that position. Would have he supported Nonesuch recording Elliott Carter? Absolutely not. [Cline laughs.] But it was the fact that we were doing this that gave an enormous amount of pride. And what he did, which was the right thing, is that he also felt it was great for Elektra's business, that this was something that when an artist was approaching Elektra, he could talk about them having Philip Glass and Metallica and John Adams and Tracy Chapman as the idea that was about a large--and he, like myself, did believe in original artists and did believe in unique talent. And when he dropped Whitney Houston, he spoke about it with a certain amount of pride. [laughter]

CLINE:

Wow. Well, next time we'll get into more of what made Nonesuch the label for people like both John Adams and Emmylou Harris and the amazing development of John Adams' musical presence in the world and the milestones for the label like the Gorecki Symphony No. 3 and The Buena Vista Social Club and others and so on into the days closer to present day.

HURWITZ:

Okay.

CLINE:

Okay? Thank you.

HURWITZ:

Thank you.

[End of February 22, 2017 interview.] â€*f*

Session Five (March 1, 2017)

CLINE:

All right. We're here again. It's March 1st, 2017. This is Alex Cline interviewing Robert Hurwitz. We're in the Young Research Library, second floor staff conference room, once again. This is interview number five. Good morning, again.

HURWITZ:

Good morning.

CLINE:

We're close to the end of the morning, but it's still morning.

HURWITZ:

Yes.

CLINE:

I wanted to begin with a couple of follow-ups regarding our last session where we really got into your first years at Nonesuch and the many achievements that you actually had during those years. We talked about Steve Reich. We talked about John Adams. I'm going to get more into him today with Nixon in China in specific. One of the things I wanted to follow up on that was the licensing of the Bulgarian State Women's Choir, a very successful move on your part, something I meant to ask about last time, which is that my memory of that recording was that there was actually--I think it happened earlier--an earlier licensing of it by 4AD Records of the first volume of that.

HURWITZ:

Yes.

CLINE:

Is that the case? I was wondering how that all worked with Marcel Cellier.

HURWITZ:

Ivo at 4AD separately went to Cellier.

CLINE:

I see.

HURWITZ:

And I went to Cellier. But we didn't know each other was going to Cellier.

CLINE:

I see. Okay.

HURWITZ:

So it just was the fact that both of us heard it, and we approached him, and I probably didn't know that there was an English version of this for probably the first six months.

CLINE:

Right, because that was the first version I heard, I guess, was the Ivo Watts-Russell 4AD version.

HURWITZ:

Yes, the same--

CLINE:

But you were able to--

HURWITZ:

--exact record.

CLINE:

--release subsequent volumes.

HURWITZ:

The second volume of it. And we then tried a third volume, which wasn't quite as successful--I think that one thing I have found with at least three incredibly successful world music projects we were involved with, the Bulgarians, the Gipsy Kings, and The Buena Vista Social Club, every one of those were--and we were involved with the most successful of all. And then there were fifty spinoffs of each one, and then the whole genre died very, very quickly. I think the most successful, clearly, was the World Circuit, starting with Buena Vista because of all the other records that followed--and after that but we would get inquiries about "We would like to do a tango Social Club, and we want to do--."

CLINE:

Oh, golly. [laughs]

0:03:41.8

HURWITZ:

Just all of these different versions of how other people were going to exploit what The Buena Vista Social Club, and that happened with the Bulgarians too, that all of a sudden there was competing tours. We were working with a very specific group, which was the Bulgarian Female Vocal Choir, which was a group that had stayed together for a long time, and, in fact, prior to my time at Nonesuch, Nonesuch had put out another recording of Bulgarian choral music.

(Bulgaria is very close to Asia, the sound is a blend of European and Asian music, and that's what sparked so much attention). And they were a great chorus, they were really a great chorus, and we brought them over to the States. And it was really the first successful record that we had. By successful, I mean in the hundreds of thousands of copies.

CLINE:

Well, to give you an idea, not to get off into my own story so much, but my wife and I went to their first performance here in town on that tour, which was at the Wilshire Ebell Theater.

HURWITZ:

I thought it was at the--what's the one at Western and Wilshire?

CLINE:

The Wiltern?

HURWITZ:

Wiltern.

CLINE:

Maybe it was at the Wiltern.

HURWITZ:

I was there.

CLINE:

I can't remember now. Okay. My wife and I sat behind the entire Zappa family.

HURWITZ:

Yes.

CLINE:

And I remember at the intermission Frank talking in the aisle to David Crosby. So this is the kind of attention it was getting, very unusually broad.

HURWITZ:

It was at the Wiltern where that concert was, and I was at that concert. There were many very funny stories about the Bulgarians when they started touring. Marcel Cellier, who produced those records, was a guy who lived in Switzerland who was in the mineral business and found out about this chorus when he was in Bulgaria for work and brought them first touring around Europe. And many funny things happened along the way, such as when they went to their first hotel that had a mini bar, they just assumed that all the alcohol was for them, and they started weeping when they found out that they had to be charged for it, and they had to figure out what to do about that. And cars breaking down and buses breaking down. And when they came to the States, they had never been to a hotel which had pornography that you could buy on your television.

CLINE:

Oh, golly.

HURWITZ:

And the same, exact thing happened. And the tour manager from our office very kindly said, "You probably shouldn't do this again, but we will take care of those charges." They were very embarrassed.

CLINE:

Wow. I'll bet. The other thing I wanted to ask about last time, which I didn't, was when you talked about your signing Astor Piazzolla again, releasing some of his music, but then he actually died shortly thereafter. And I wondered how that affected your what might have been plans for releasing his music.

0:07:43.2

HURWITZ:

I remember the day I found out that he had a stroke, and I was just devastated. I had an unusual relationship with Astor. (Other people told me) that he was a very, very tough person, but we had just the easiest relationship. There's a couple of stories that I think are worth repeating, one of which was one of the last times I saw him, he told me about his daughter, who was a revolutionary in Argentina at the time when people started disappearing, and she had taken on a different name besides Piazzolla, and she was arrested. The military police, or the person who was in charge of that police station knew that she was Piazzolla's daughter and essentially said that, "I could never do anything to hurt the daughter of the man who wrote Adios Nonino which is his most famous composition, and he let her go. And he felt that his music had saved his daughter, which is probably true.

And the last time I saw him, I had recently produced a record of his orchestral music, and I remember those were the days I had a DAT machine, not unlike this, but really you had to have headphones to hear. We were in a hotel in Lisbon, which was the place I caught up with him, and I remember him sitting in these black silk pajamas with headphones on listening to the whole record and being extremely pleased how it came out. That was maybe the last time I ever saw him. He was just an incredible presence to be around and a brilliant, decent man, and a really important musician. The other thing I think worth mentioning is I obviously brought different musicians together, and I brought him and Kronos together, and they made a very beautiful record. But before it happened, I had heard Kronos play something of Piazzolla's and it wasn't very good. And so I called Astor and asked him when he touring, if he would bring Suarez Paz, his violinist, to actually coach Kronos in terms of that style of playing.

CLINE:

Yeah, the phrasing, yeah.

HURWITZ:

And it completely changed the way they played his music. So it was a very, very short but very special relationship, and I wish we could have done more.

CLINE:

And now heading into John Adams again, I wanted to ask, since you had essentially told him that you intended to release all his music, I wanted to know how, if at all, you had envisioned the scale that some of his work would take shortly thereafter.

HURWITZ:

You know, I was blissfully naÃ¯ve about that. [Cline laughs.] And that's fine. Somehow we worked it out. Unfortunately, it was a frustrating thing because certainly as the business started changing, it became harder and harder to market his records. I think he sometimes had some frustration about it. But I think that the one thing we did do is that with every one of his recordings--and I haven't counted lately, but it must be at least forty-five new pieces and five or six operas and major theater works, every major piece for orchestra, etc., etc., (for all of his recordings he's either been in the control room or he's conducted, so it really has his stamp.

I had dinner with him two nights ago, as he's conducted Nixon in China down at Disney Hall this week, and he said to me that he had just listened to the recording which we made in 1987, and he thought that it just could not be better. He still felt--and, again, it was a long time ago and it was a very good cast without being a perfect cast, but there was a kind of team that we had put together with Willem Helwig, the producer, and Edo de Waart, who was a conductor, and there were some phenomenal singers involved like Sandy Sylvan. So there was a sense that this the way the piece should be recorded, and I think he said, "It doesn't need to ever be recorded again."

CLINE:

Wow. Okay. So this was quite a landmark for him as well as for everyone associated with it, and I think a lot of people who weren't totally aware of John Adams certainly were after that. What do you remember about the planning that it took for that, and, most particularly, what to do with it once it was done? You said you had trouble ultimately marketing some of what he did.

HURWITZ:

It became harder.

CLINE:

In what way?

0:14:01.5

HURWITZ:

I should insert the fact, as they are talking about ending the National Endowment for the Arts, that Nixon in China had, I think, the largest grant from the NEA for a recording up to that point, which they contributed $57,000 in 1987 money, which is probably like 80,000 or 90,000 today to help make that recording. And practically every big piece of John's, somehow we were able to work some kind of deal with an orchestra. But I'll give you another example. We're recording Doctor Atomic next month in London, and we got an enormous contribution from Gordon Getty, who's always been close to John. Without that, we would never be able to make that recording. When we made El NiÃ±o, The Death of Klinghoffer, in both of those cases we were able to create a really great deal with the orchestras involved, where they were being paid for a service as opposed to sessions.

It was done in Europe, so that had a big impact on it. It was still expensive, but we somehow on those larger pieces we have been able to put together just unusual circumstances to have it. The biggest boondoggle on any John Adams recording, by the way, happened in Los Angeles, which

was--it's a great recording. It's NaÃ¯ve and Sentimental Music, which was done by the L.A. Philharmonic with Esa-Pekka Salonen and Ernest Fleischmann, who was the head of the Philharmonic; after the premiere, which was really an exciting event then when they were still at Dorothy Chandler, Fleischman said, "Oh, I hope we could record this. We're going to help you raise a lot of money for it, and we're going to really help you." And I said, "Oh, great," because I tend to accept what people say to me, especially when it was someone like Ernest.

He didn't come through with a penny, and it ended up costing us a quarter of a million dollars for an orchestra record, which was just (the most expensive orchestral record we ever made). Unfortunately, once you commit to something, it's very hard to pull away. And Esa-Pekka needed five full orchestra sessions, and we were paying full retail, and that's what it took. We did it. I'm happy we did it. But sometimes--although this is a rare occasion--when someone says "I'm going to get you the money to do it" and then they forget you had the conversations, (you are stuck and can't turn back.) Ernest has been an incredibly important person in Los Angeles, but this was not his best moment.

CLINE:

[laughs] I see. So when it comes to working out these special logistics that you're describing, how much of a role do you play and how do you go about trying to figure out something like those, how to realize those sorts of logistics? I mean, because these are frequently very large and consequently very expensive projects that you have essentially kind of unconditionally green-lighted.

0:15:47.00:18:22.3

HURWITZ:

I think everything has kind of changed in the musical world since--I kind of put a date on it, 1998, which was when Napster first appeared. And from that point forward, the whole sense of the value of a record changed. It had a huge impact, Napster did, on creating iTunes. It had a huge impact on the closing of Tower Records and other record stores, and, I think, had a huge change on changing the whole landscape.

And around the time we did NaÃ¯ve and Sentimental Music and then we did Century Rolls with the Cleveland Orchestra, which is his piano concerto, another piece that we ended up paying for the whole thing, those were two of the last times any American orchestras through the old union rules were still making recordings. And things started changing at that point, and I think that the new model, (for example we just made) two records in St. Louis including Scheherazade.2, which is (his second violin concerto for) Leila Josefewicz, where the entire process is flipped around, where now, instead of paying union fees to the orchestra, we pay them the equivalent of

one session for the entire thing. They record it live. We then have a couple of sessions to patch things up. They own the master.

We license it on five-year intervals. We've done that since the early 2000s with Transmigration of Souls. We did that with Lorraine Hunt Lieberson's Neruda Songs with the Boston Symphony. We've made four records now with David Robertson in St. Louis under that arrangement. So in the early days in the 1980s, for sure, and the early 1990s, we could pretty much front anything besides operas. It has really changed since then quite dramatically.

And I think that the way I adapted--and we're jumping forward a little bit, but as I saw the business changing, and I saw that the entire classical and New Music side of Nonesuch had come to a point where we were going to lose money on every record, that I went to Steve Reich and John Adams and Kronos Quartet and some jazz musicians and started saying, "What we've been used to in terms of fees, we can't do that anymore, and we'll try to on the back end be more supportive, but I don't want to compromise the quality of records. We have to find a more efficient way to do things." That essentially in those kinds of records that will never break even is the way I approached it. I'm always willing to lose ten or twenty thousand dollars on certain records. I can't afford to lose seventy-five or a hundred thousand dollars on certain records.

And so in a funny way, it's never stopped us from making anything, but the whole reality of how money works is completely different now, and it's been that way since, as I say, in the post-Napster era. And having said that, let's recognize that that period from when I started until the end of the nineties was probably the best time to make records in the history of the music business, in terms of having the financial resources that you could kind of do anything you wanted without really worrying about it.

CLINE:

Well, during that period, too, was the big transition from LPs to CDs.

HURWITZ:

Right.

CLINE:

How did that affect your bottom line, particularly since, among other things, you not only are still producing new product but you have to reissue LPs now on CDs in the CD format, and how did it change perhaps the way you approached making records?

0:20:09.9

HURWITZ:

Well, I came into a little criticism because I was very slow at reissuing the Nonesuch catalog from before I got there, partially because I thought the most important thing we can do is put out new music, music that's being created now. And eventually we got around to putting out the records that I thought were the most important ones. But what I'm saying, the protest was maybe five consumers who would not understand why the Elliott Carter's first and second string quartets were not out. And I tended to not worry. I never worried about what one or two people write in to say.

So when I got to Nonesuch, I mean, it was '84. The CD had gone into the marketplace in '81. I think, as I mentioned last time, was that a lot of classical companies were so preoccupied with reissuing CDs that they kind of let us walk in and take what I thought were the most interesting artists of that moment, where normally a big company like Columbia Records in the past might have signed in a more enlightened period, but they didn't. A big company like that would have signed the Kronos Quartet. They would have maybe signed Steve Reich or John Adams. In fact, Columbia had Philip Glass at that point and kind of let him fall away because they didn't care.

CLINE:

Wow. And it was also during this period, speaking of people missing out on opportunities in the classical field, that you had the success with the Gorecki Symphony No. 3, which I'm gathering, not based on my own memory of that phenomenon but from things that you've said, was something that you probably could not have predicted. How did that particular project come about for the label?

HURWITZ:

Well, Tim Page who used to be a critic at The New York Times and the Washington Post, now

he's at USC, at lunch told me about the record. I went, bought it. I thought it was really beautiful, but the singer who was Polish who sang it, sang it in a very operatic style, something that was more appropriate for Puccini. And I thought that this is a very beautiful piece, but the entire experience wasn't a great experience for me. I imagine it was in March or April of 1989. The reason I remember is my son had been born in early March of that year. I saw that the London Sinfonietta was doing a Schnittke Gorecki Festival--

CLINE:

Interesting.

0:24:45.1

HURWITZ:

--at Queen Elizabeth Hall. So I flew over for that, because I was interested in Gorecki and I was interested in Schnittke, and it was a very, very interesting festival. I heard some Gorecki music I had not heard before, and then for the last performance on the Sunday night was the Third Symphony, which I had never heard live. And there was an English singer, whose name I cannot remember, who sang in a kind of more of an early music style without any vibrato, and I thought, "Oh, this is amazing." That was the missing link. It was not the piece; it was the way it was being sung. And by the middle of the first movement, I thought, "I want to get Dawn Upshaw to do this."

And so I got back to the States, I had some relationship with the Sinfonietta, I called up Dawn, who had never heard of Gorecki. I sent her the music, I had my friends in Boosey get in touch with Gorecki, and I called David Zinman, a wonderful American conductor who had heard the piece and was interested in doing it. So we flew over. They had one day. They had a piano rehearsal, Gorecki and Dawn. We went into a studio out in the outskirts of London. The orchestra played through the piece once. That was the rehearsal. I remember Dawn and I just shattered standing in the room hearing it. We made two passes of it, made three corrections, two three-hour sessions, we walked out with the tape.

That was it. AC: Wow. [laughs] RH: It took six hours to make that record. And an English composer named Colin Matthews produced it, and we put it out. And I remember thinking, "This is really good. I think we might sell 25,000 copies of it." And Dawn was just perfect in that piece. She was a highly intelligent musician, she was great with language, but she just had the right balance of sentiment without ever becoming sentimental. It was incredibly moving, the performance. It's almost like a live performance.

And we put it out, and someone at KUSC, something hit them, and they played it every day at

the same time, like at 4:00 in the afternoon. [Cline laughs.] And the same thing happened in London with a new station called Classic FM. And all of a sudden, this groundswell started happening, and two months later in England, it's like reached number six on the pop charts, or three on the pop chart. I don't even remember which one, but it was certainly a top ten pop record in England. [Cline laughs.] And I remember a story that David Geffen told Bob Krasnow that he had bought three hundred copies and gave one to every one of his friends.

CLINE:

Wow.

HURWITZ:

He was so taken by that piece. Pieces like this are--you get touched by lightning. One could never create a campaign for the Gorecki Third Symphony. It was just the enthusiasm of people who heard it, who kind of spread a message like wildfire. I don't know if you could do it today, but that's what happened. We can take no credit for that success, except we made it.

CLINE:

And this was before all the social media outlets that people have access to now too?

HURWITZ:

Yeah.

CLINE:

This brings to mind a question I asked a little bit about last time, but in this case it sounds like it's relevant. How much at this point in what you're describing as this kind of golden age of recordmaking did radio ultimately play in the success of certain recordings, compared to especially now when radio seems to be just decidedly less of a factor in most people's lives?

HURWITZ:

Believe it or not, radio in the pop world today is still a really big deal, in the pop world. You get a number one single, and there's a correlation between radio, streaming, and single downloads. So if you hit that kind of golden spot, it might mean literally millions of dollars for an artist.

CLINE:

But for something like a Nonesuch product?

HURWITZ:

We've had just no successes--except for a few years ago with the Black Keys, we have essentially always lived in the world of National Public Radio, college radio, Non-com. But in order for radio to be effective, there has to be hundreds of stations playing it on a regular basis, and we just never made records for radio. So in the case of Gorecki, it was just one station a couple of places that had that kind of impact. When we did The Buena Vista Social Club, which was the biggest record in our history, no radio stations ever played it. They could have played the song "Chan Chan." But nothing ever happened. And I remember with Wilco when the first record was Yankee Hotel Foxtrot, and, again, I remember being in a meeting and saying, "You know, some of these songs sound like could have been on the Beatles' White Album." And the answer was that if the Beatles White Album had come out today, it wouldn't get played on the radio.

CLINE:

[laughs] Right. Well, it's an interesting question, in that it suggests many other questions, a lot of which I think we'll get to later toward the end of our interview where we look at sort of where things are at now, and, if nothing else, compared to how they once were, because just the gentrification of music seems to have tended to increase in intensity as the years have rolled by.

HURWITZ:

I will say that in those days the five factors that had an impact for us were press, retail visibility, international retail visibility, artists touring, and, most important, signing the right artist and making the right records. Those were the five things that impacted 98 percent of the success or failure of a record. And sometimes it was just an artist who just kept year after year putting out really good music. But there was no magic formula.

CLINE:

And how much did controversy sometimes help create free publicity? I'm thinking specifically of some of John Adams' operas that tended to generate a lot of, if nothing else, curiosity, but in some cases like in The Death of Klinghoffer a fair amount of controversy.

HURWITZ:

The Death of Klinghoffer did not sell very well, and I think it was probably dampened because just even the title of it sort of pushed a lot of people away. But certainly that controversy was a big deal for everybody, and it was happening during the first Gulf War. There were issues with Klinghoffer that I actually was deeply troubled by because the chairman of Elektra, Bob Krasnow, was kind of offended by it, and I had to push back. And I actually had at that time wondered if I would have been prevented from making it, if I would have had to leave my job.

CLINE:

Oh, wow.

HURWITZ:

I just felt that it was like a lot of things that are shocking in the moment they come out, that it was profoundly misunderstood by many people, whether it was done in Brooklyn or done in Brussels. It was cancelled by the L.A. Opera. It was cancelled by the Chicago Lyric Opera. That's a big impact. And actually right after 9/11, they were going to do a concert of the "Klinghoffer Choruses" by the Boston Symphony, and that was cancelled, and it was a huge kind of public fleecing of John Adams by Richard Taruskin in The New York Times, which, ironically, Robert Fink, who's on the faculty here, wrote a major musicological statement completely opposing what Taruskin had written. So it was a heavy-duty piece, and it continues to this day. I don't know how in the age of ISIS that Klinghoffer could be played in the public. Three years ago it was at the Metropolitan Opera, and there were five hundred people a day protesting it on the steps of the Metropolitan Opera House.

CLINE:

Wow. Well, this also brings to mind something that I've always found particularly noteworthy about John Adams, which is how he and, I think, in many cases, Peter Sellars chooses their topics for these large-scale pieces, very, very unusual and surprising much of the time. And I'm wondering, again, since you had essentially sort of unconditionally green-lighted John Adams' work, how it would sometimes sit with you when you would learn what, say, he had next on his project agenda, not just in terms of scale but in terms of subject matter.

HURWITZ:

Yeah. I have been pretty supportive straight through. I think Klinghoffer was truly the only one which pushed every single button, but the ones that followed--I mean, one of the things about Peter, who's become a very close friend and someone who I deeply respect, is that at least two of these big pieces, The Death of Klinghoffer and El NiÃ±o, which was the telling of the birth of

Jesus, are both pieces that in a funny way do refer to the Bach Passions in terms of the way that they are presented and laid out. And Peter and John are completely different people. John knows that I have sometimes wished that there could be one or two other pieces that had a more narrative approach in terms of putting them together.

But at the same time, I've also known that these big pieces--Klinghoffer, Nixon, El NiÃ±o, Flowering Tree, Doctor Atomic--they're working on a new piece now about the Gold Rush--that these have been things where Peter kind of kickstarted a kind of idea that John might not necessarily have ever done without him. A piece like El NiÃ±o, for instance, which is a wonderful piece, is now becoming the alternative to the Handel Messiah at Christmas for a lot of orchestras. I've seen productions from the Boston Symphony and the San Francisco Symphony some years that has become the big Christmas piece that they play. So I think that in terms of what ended up happening, in terms of these pieces having a life of their own, and there's been different productions of all these pieces as time's gone on, I don't think anyone is ever going to better Peter's production of Nixon in China, that that's just one of the great inventions that I've ever witnessed, that the pieces have been able to stand on their own and will have a life on their own, so it's been a good thing.

CLINE:

Well, directly related to that, I wanted to take the opportunity in a sense to take a detour from the chronology, because we're in a unique position right now to talk about Nixon in China, as you already have, in relation to both the original recording, which sounds like it's still widely appreciated, to the performance that's being prepared right here in L.A. right now. How do you view the potential relevance or perhaps contrast the context in which it's being presented now versus how it was originally in the 1980s?

HURWITZ:

It's an interesting question because it sort of goes to the question of how art can often change as times change, that it may have been created in one moment, but it's not locked into what that moment is. I mean, of course there are many things that you will think about as you watch this piece if you go this weekend down to Disney Hall. At the very beginning is just the notion of someone who was elected as a fervent anti-communist, Richard Nixon, who ended up being the first American president to go to China and opened up that relationship, and the absolute differences between how the Americans are portrayed and the Chinese are portrayed, and just the characters of all these people.

One of the criticisms of Nixon, which people were baffled about, was the third act, and in the third act in the original production, there were six beds and they belonged to Nixon, Kissinger, Pat Nixon, Mao, Madame Mao, and Zhou Enlai. I've always thought that this was the most inspired moment, which was the notion that you could be the most important person in the world, (but at the end of your life, you aren't that different form anyone else). There were also like six beds/coffins onstage, and all six of (these powerful people) are now dead. Well, all except Kissinger isn't. Kissinger in still alive.

CLINE:

Yeah, I was going to say.

HURWITZ:

But that it was about that on one hand you had these giant public figures, like we have today, that in the end, they just were people and they were trying to lead their lives in the same kind of mundane ways that everybody else ends up wanting to lead their lives. Nixon and Mao are talking about food that meant something to them when they were younger, just very funny. But I think that this is a piece that forces us to look at politics in a different way, and I'll be interested to see how I feel about it after Friday night. Are you going?

CLINE:

No, I won't be able to go. But it's also, since you mentioned Kissinger, and he's the last person still alive, it's also an extremely unflattering portrayal of Henry Kissinger.

HURWITZ:

It is. There was an interesting little controversy recently by an Asian American theater critic in Houston who thought there was an aspect of the opera that was racist, especially the portrayal of

Asian people by Caucasian singers. And one of the things he wrote is that in the second-to-the-last scene, the ballet scene in the opera, there is a scene where there's a landlord who starts beating on these Chinese peasants. But in fact, in the opera, it's Kissinger who takes the guise of a the Chinese landlord--and the critic thought it was a different actor playing Kissinger--

CLINE:

Oh, interesting. [laughs]

HURWITZ:

--but it was actually Kissinger who was doing the damage.

CLINE:

[laughs] Interesting. Another major achievement during these years when you were the first ten years or so at Nonesuch relates to something you mentioned in great detail in our last session, which is the work of George Balanchine. Perhaps you could give us a sort of an account of how that came about. Here you are, you developed this huge appreciation for Balanchine, and pretty soon you're involved in documenting his work.

0:42:14.4

HURWITZ:

Yeah. That was a folly of mine. There's been some follies that--but I had the privileged position to do things that were follies. Balanchine went down to a studio at the Grand Ole Opry studio in Nashville in the 70s to make these four programs for Dance in America, with directors named Emile Ardolino, and Merrill Brockway, and they were just the most beautiful things I'd ever seen, the most beautiful dancing. And that's what really got me--seeing those had made me really interested, and I thought, "Let's just do what I'm doing with John Adams. Let's try to document as much as we can."

I had no idea what that meant. And there was a producer in Germany who had made fifteen Balanchine films, a man named Reiner Moritz, and I sought him out. But Balanchine hated those films, and so there was no way that that was going to happen. But eventually--and, again, this was my folly--I was able to start what we called The Balanchine Library, and I licensed from PBS some of the best things that they had done, the Stravinsky Violin Concerto and Emeralds and Diamonds from Jewels and The Four Temperaments and The Prodigal Son, and also was able to acquire the rights for a bunch of videos about Balanchine's teaching methods, I don't think any of them ever sold anything, but a lot of people in the dance world really appreciated them being made available.

I ended up producing a movie of "The Nutcracker" that Emile Ardolino directed. That was an eight-million-dollar motion picture that Elektra financed and Warner Studios financed. We even made a record that Robert Irving, who was the great ballet conductor, of four pieces that Balanchine had choreographed; Four Temperaments, which he personally had commissioned from Paul Hindemith; Agon, which was the great Stravinsky Balanchine collaboration; Emeralds, which was a piece he put together of different pieces by Faure that was part of the ballet, and the Tchaikovsky Serenade, or Serenade as the music people call, Serenade as a ballet people call, which he switched around the movements. So there were all of these things that I did that it was just purely out of how much I loved what he represented and how much I loved that beautiful connection of the musical and visual worlds, to me, at the highest level.

CLINE:

And how did your forays into video as opposed to just audio documenting sit with people in the business, say, your distributors and your audiences?

HURWITZ:

You know, I had reached this point that nobody ever questioned me. [Cline laughs.] It was very funny. And we actually even did a few--we did a Paul Taylor release of Speaking in Tongues, and we did even a few things outside that, and we acquired the rights to The Catherine Wheel, which is David Byrne and Twyla Tharp. But, as I say, it was a folly just based on enthusiasm, and I'm just thrilled that we did it.

CLINE:

Another thing that I wondered about is how much certain projects that wound up being very successful made it possible for you financially to take on projects that might have been very doubtful in terms of their earning power.

HURWITZ:

You know, again, I never really thought too much about it, and when something hit really big, I didn't realize how much money they were making for us. The one thing that the first kind of massive commercial success we had was the Gipsy Kings, which all of a sudden just changed everything, because in a certain way for ten years that success helped fund everything that we had, and, again, it was one of those freak instances--in that case, I remember wanting to make the deal for them and saying to Krasnow, "I think we might sell 200,000 copies," and I was kind of laughed out of the room. [Cline laughs.]

The first record sold well over a million copies just in America, and so that all of a sudden it was the engine that pulled a lot of other things. I never really contemplated the idea that, "Okay, I'm going to do this. It's going to pay for that." It's just I saw everything in terms of how good these things were, and I just was blissfully unaware of what the financial implications were. But I knew that if we were selling Kronos records that we're selling in the hundreds of thousands and Gorecki records and the Bulgarian voices and things like that, and then we picked up a soundtrack of Ken Burns' Civil War, which sold 800,000 copies, so these we were really significant numbers, and I had five people working with me. It was a business, and we were making more money than I thought possible.

CLINE:

And related to this, and we're going to get more into this area now, you mentioned last time, for example, that it became not only possible but relevant to release a record by Emmylou Harris, opening a door to a whole other musical avenue. And I wondered how much it became an issue, especially when signing some of these veteran artists who were more engaged in the sort of popular music field and were possibly accustomed to a different level of business and financial support, it was to not only lure but retain artists who were used to, to put it in the most general terms, a bigger label, on Nonesuch, which was clearly a, quote, "smaller," unquote label.

HURWITZ:

Well, interestingly, most of those people came to us as opposed to us going after any of them.

CLINE:

No luring involved. [laughs]

0:49:43.0

HURWITZ:

There was no luring involved. I remember quite specifically that I had a dinner with David Byrne because we had been talking. He had been at Warners, and then he went to EMI and was dissatisfied, and we were approached. And I felt there had to be some clearing of the air, just to make sure, and I said, "Look, two of the things that when you were in the Talking Heads and your other projects that had a really big impact on them were radio and video." And by that time, video had already begun to change. This was in the early 2000s. "And radio, we can't guarantee anything."

And I just said, "So we're going to have to base it on sort of the quality of what this is, what touring you're going to do, and how much is there of a public that is interested in what you're doing. And so our only interest is if the thing is good, not that we're going to get radio or video play" And he actually was very accepting of it, and the record he made, somehow it kind of sounded like it biased--Grown Backwards was the name of the record--that it was just an artist statement and certainly one of his better solo records since the Talking Heads. And so in the case of Emmylou Harris, Emmylou's manager, Ken Levitan, had worked with David Bither, not on Emmy but on other artists, pop artists when David was in the Pop Division of Elektra, and he just called him up one day and said, "Do you think Nonesuch would be interested in putting out Emmylou Harris?"

He said, "Let me talk to Bob, but it sounds like a good idea." And she made a beautiful record, Red Dirt Girl, and she was a serious--the thing is that the people who we ended up beginning to migrate to us, like Emmylou Harris or Randy Newman or k.d. lang, were never people who were kind of major stars. They all had little hits here and there, but they were kind of serious adults who were still working hard at what they were doing. In the case of Wilco, there was a famous story of Warners dropping Wilco right before Yankee Hotel Foxtrot came out, and it was right at the beginning days of Napster. And we were approached by Wilco, again, I'm sure other people were to, but we had developed a reputation, and their manager, Tony Marguerita, called David

up, and David and I flew to Chicago for a meeting with Jeff and Tony. And I remember going back to their studio and Jeff saying, "The only concern I have about going to Nonesuch is that, well, you know, you guys have Steve Reich and John Adams, and I just hope they don't think we're unworthy of being on the label." [laughter] And that was before Nels joined the band.

CLINE:

Yeah, sure.

HURWITZ:

And I said, "I don't think that's going to be a problem." And it ended up being that even though they had been on Warner Bros., this was by a factor of three their biggest record ever, and it was just a completely--the interesting thing that the manager, Tony Margerita, said was that, "When we were at Warner Bros., there were fifty different departments that we had to go to, and they were all working on fifty different records. So at Nonesuch, you have three people to go to, and we sort of get answers on everything, and there's only like two other records like ours that are out there." So it's where being a small label was actually, I think, to some advantage for us, for a band that was not going to get played on the radio in a genuinely meaningful way.

CLINE:

But also during these first number of years, speaking of big labels and big people, there's a shakeup in terms of your sort of Ã¼ber boss structure. Maybe you can explain what that is and how that broke down and particularly how it affected you and what you were doing at Nonesuch at the time.

HURWITZ:

Well, Bob Krasnow was someone whose reputation was all over the place, but he was a very

difficult person. I think he was a quite brilliant man. I would say he could be uncouth. He could sometimes be Trump-like in kind of thinking of himself as above all others. And someone said to me once that the Bob that I experienced was different than most people did because we had a very close relationship. And probably in the ten-year period we worked together, we probably saw each other two or three times a week for lunch or dinner or went to things together, and he was an amazingly supportive person, who loved the fact that I was recording Steve, John, Phil, and Kronos. I think I mentioned he flew to Houston for the opening of Nixon and flew to Brussels for the opening of Klinghoffer after--

CLINE:

Oh, wow.

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HURWITZ:

--after resisting doing it because he thought it was anti-Semitic. He was a kind of legendary figure. He had worked with James Brown and worked with Jimi Hendrix and had been involved with black music. The company signed Metallica under him, and Anita Baker, and 10,000 Maniacs. He was, on one hand, as difficult as he was, he was also someone who gave me ultimately the total support and not questioning anything I did on any kind of financial basis. But he created enormous difficulties for himself, because he not only fought all the corporate people, but he could be biting and nasty and embarrassing to all of those people as well.

There was a huge power struggle going on at the Warner Music Group during those years between Mo Ostin, the head of Warner Bros., Bob Krasnow, the head of Elektra, two of the three companies, versus Doug Morris, who was the head of Atlantic, and this guy named Bob Morgado, who was the corporate head of the Warner Music Group. And it was a pitched battle, and eventually in August of 1994, it kind of broke open and chaos reigned for a number of years. And up to that moment, up till that period, Warners, the Warner Music Group, Warner/Elektra/Atlantic, was by far the biggest record company in the business, for the last fifteen the most successful. And that was the end of it. They started moving different managers in and out of the company, and they fired Bob.

I'd been at Nonesuch for ten years at that point, and I kind of assumed that that was it for me, that even though we were successful, he was the corporate guy who was a mentor and a rabbi and protecting me. I remember getting the news of his last day, and I thought, "Okay, well, I have to start thinking about what I'm going to do next." But when the smoke cleared, they decided to move Nonesuch out of Elektra and make it part of what they wanted to start, a new classical business, even though we were already moving away from the classical business, and now we

were reporting to international. And they clearly didn't want to get rid of me. So in a funny way, what happened was I ended up kind of having more freedom, and I already had a lot of freedom. And I kind of now all of a sudden was really running my own business and with my own destiny.

I was able to hire David Bither, who was the executive vice president for Elektra, who was someone who I had known and respected for many years, who came from a more pop point of view, but had really good taste, and he became a second A&R voice at the company. And our distribution situation changed. We started getting distributed by Atlantic, but we didn't report to Atlantic. And I think that in terms of my own education, it was a very valuable thing in terms of just understanding how just the whole business works from a much broader point of view. And it was after this point that things like the World Circuit deal, which gave us Buena Vista Social Club, it was after this Emmylou Harris came, that we actually became more of a full-fledged record company than we had been as a kind of label that was part of a bigger entity at Elektra.

I think the one thing that I learned was--and I had thought about this consciously--was that I'm not going to be forced to change the way I've done things. Things have gone well. I think I said to you that I realized if I'm going to fail, that I'm going to fail because I was doing what was right as opposed to I was trying to please someone, which I think has been a huge problem in the record business. I mean, I think I'll give Manfred credit, as he never cared what anybody else thought. He just did what he wanted, and sometimes he was right and sometimes he was wrong. But it became a very challenging moment, and I think we emerged from it probably in a stronger position than we were before it happened.

I'll just go on fast-forward, over the years I've ended up, after Krasnow, having six other people I reported to. The company has been sold four times. [Cline laughs.] It went from the Warner Communications to Time Warner to AOL Time Warner to the Warner Music Group, and then it was bought by Len Blavatnik, a Russian American who had $20 billion and was able to pay $3 billion for the company. And I think part of what I learned is just to keep your head down, and if someone didn't like what was going on, that's fine. I didn't own the company. That was for them to make that decision. But I kind of just kept blinders on from that point forward and said, "I'm going to do what I'm going to do, and I'm not going to (change every time there is a new boss)--." I mean, I'm making it sound a little bit easier than it was, but that's kind of what happened.

CLINE:

And the other casualty of this time period was the man who really was so instrumental in the huge success of Warner Bros. as a label, which was Mo Ostin. How much, if any, impact did that have on your experience?

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HURWITZ:

Well, I think the whole culture of Warners changed from that point forward. Mo was there for like twenty-five or thirty years; I'm not sure the exact number. Since then they've had one, two, three, four, five, six different heads of Warners. One of them, Tom Whalley, did pretty well for a few years, but he got into a similar battle with the corporate heads of the company.

And I've said this earlier, that there's something about continuity that is really important in a so-called creative enterprise, whether it's a book publishing company or a record label, that in our case, it's very simple. It took time for us to have these little successes. Every time we'd have a success, we would become more attractive to someone else. The fact that Jeff Tweedy could talk about Steve Reich and John Adams meant that someone was paying attention to what we were doing and saw an importance in that. And having had that history, just in the same way that even when I got my first job at Columbia, why did I want to be at Columbia? Because that was the label that recorded Stravinsky and Miles Davis and Bob Dylan. And to this day, why did Adele want her records to be out on Columbia? Because they had Barbra Streisand.

There's that aspect that the work you do--and on the complete reverse of that, one of my absolutely favorite movies the last twenty-five years is Magnolia by Paul Thomas Anderson. And there's a wonderful line in that movie, which is, "You can leave your past behind, but your past does not leave you." And I think that that aspect of continuity and sustainability is a kind of central aspect in the process of being a creative producer that has been kind of swept under the rug a little bit in today's culture. But I still think it's absolutely an essential part of the way you live in this world.

CLINE:

What do you see, in other words?

HURWITZ:

You're creating something over a period of time. The great thing about great artists, I think, is that they have a kind of DNA that when you all of a sudden sit back and look at what they've accomplished over ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years, you could see it as being a long sense of whole, and that that thing they did at eighteen and that thing they did at forty-eight, you could see that they're actually connected to each other. And that's much different than the pop world where it's about kind of zoning into something that exists in the moment, and you're there for the moment, and rarely are you there five or ten years later.

CLINE:

Right. You'd have to capitalize on the moment.

HURWITZ:

You have to capitalize on the moment and then that disappears. So that's where I came from, and, as you could tell, I have no apologies for it.

CLINE:

[laughs] Yeah. Well, also at the end of this period, as you mentioned already, we start heading into what you refer to as the Napster phenomenon, the change in the music business, the change away from the artifact and starting to move into this ephemeral dimension. How prepared were you, despite maybe the prognostication of people like Goddard Lieberson, for the eventual sort of revolution in the form of the music product and the effect that that would have on things like something that for you and I was kind of a hallowed place, which was the record store?

1:05:51.31:06:58.2

HURWITZ:

Yeah. Well, I'd never put my head in the sand while all this was going on. I really did not grasp--the one thing I did not grasp was that this would have a huge impact on the retail business. There's a pretty good documentary about Tower Records, and I think that they talk about Tower's failure having to do with making too many bad investments. But I think that Napster killed Tower. I think that when people started moving from Napster into the iPod that changed everything--which, by the way, I can't blame anyone. I feel the same thing had happened with CDs. Whenever you get a technological breakthrough that is just so phenomenal, like the CD, at first we just thought--we didn't think about other aspects of what the CD meant. We weren't thinking about that the notion of record making, where you're really building two twenty-minute sides that tell a certain kind of story, as opposed to someone filling up seventy-eight minutes worth of music, that it was a different--that that technology was creating a different listening

experience.

And I think that was profoundly more damaging than the sound-quality issues. I think that you could find a really great playback system, and CD and vinyl both sounded fine. An exception. Blue Note Records that were recorded on analog machines sound better on vinyl CD. And jazz may be the only area that I think vinyl made that much of a huge difference. I don't know why. I can't explain it. But everybody just fell under the rapture of the cd, they didn't scratch, they didn't have tics, you could jump to any section, they were easy, and they kind of ignored other aspects of it, which in my case, I've really become hyper aware of how the seventy- to eighty-minute experience had a more detrimental impact on record making than almost anything else, the notion we have to fill everything up.

And I think iTunes was sort of the same thing. Everybody fell in love with iTunes and their iPods, because it was an incredible revolutionary experience for people to have, and so people didn't think through what is this going to mean to the future. So you're having these two major changes. You're going to an inferior aesthetic form, which a CD is, at least in my mind, and then you're going to a further inferior form, which is not only are you now no longer bracketed by having seventy-five minutes, but now it's an endless stream of music where you're unconsciously just keep playing--it's becoming like wallpaper at a certain point. I'm talking about aesthetic things, not financial things. Maybe it was a combination of bad business by Tower and the digital world colliding, but it ended up becoming this massively transforming moment in the record business that, at least from where I'm coming from, it's been going on for almost twenty years.

1998 to 2017, it's a nineteen-year period, that I think that what has happened now is that I think the album business is in the midst of an existential crisis, and practically every non-pop label that I know about, and I will put Nonesuch aside for a moment, whether it's Blue Note or Deutsche Grammophon or Columbia Masterworks or Columbia jazz or any one of those companies that were from the majors that used to do a very good job has been (damaged, in some cases destroyed). And the independent companies, because we're in a world that doesn't have retail stores, are having a very, very difficult time to just generate the kinds of revenues just to break even. I'm not even talking about paying people; just breaking even. So I've witnessed these different transformative moments that have changed the way records are recorded and records are being made. I know we're sort of moving away from the subject, but it's still, I think, something that at least bears discussion.

CLINE:

Absolutely. Right. And this was not only a revolution in the sense that, to me anyway, it's like almost a return to the dominance of the 45-rpm single.

HURWITZ:

You're absolutely correct.

CLINE:

It's about songs now. That whole album concept, which became so influential during later 1960s, is obsolete in a sense, technologically speaking. But also this was at a time, going back to the chronology, where you mentioned smaller labels, and, of course, Nonesuch is part of a larger group of people, but a lot of the smaller labels, including the biggest most successful small label at the time, which was A&M Records, ultimately are sold and become part of huge conglomerates. How much did that particular phenomenon affect the music business at that time, from your perspective?

1:11:57.01:13:48.8

HURWITZ:

Again, I think that for a variety of reasons it had mostly a debilitating impact on the business for a number of reasons. I would probably say that in terms of colleagues, because we do want to live in a world of colleagues who are not people who work with us, Bruce Lundvall, who was at Blue Note, was the only person I know who was able to maintain what he wanted to do for a long period of time, in his case twenty-five years. He was, obviously, a very smart man. He deeply cared about what he cared about and had that kind of continuity. What I witnessed in the American business was that in that period from '84 until now, that almost every label was hampered by having massive change.. Sometimes that had to do with companies being bought and sold. And bringing people in who had high ideals when they started, but who did not have someone, like in my case Bob Krasnow, saying, "I'm not going to talk to you for five years. Do what you want to do." And so they felt the importance of having to find hits immediately.

And if you remember, as we've discussed, whether it was the Gorecki Third or the Kronos Quartet or The Buena Vista Social Club or even Wilco, that all of the successes were unanticipated successes. We weren't smart enough to be able to sell a million copies of the Gorecki Third Symphony. We were wise enough to pick the right piece and the right producing team and the right artist to be involved in it, and we had to stay out of the way. But you can't put out a Bulgarian record and expect to sell hundreds of thousands of records. So by having time on our side, we were able to accomplish something, but in every one of these other cases, people didn't have time on their side or they didn't know how to go back to the people who ran those companies and say, "I can only do this if I have ten years to do it.

I can't do it if I'm have to do it in the next two years." You can't do that with music that's not part of the pop mainstream. My recognition was that there's going to always be an audience that are going to be likeminded people who like the same things that we like, and I could say that was not something I knew, it was something I learned by witnessing, but I had also the experience at ECM of witnessing the same exact thing. I saw that happen with Keith Jarrett. I saw that happen with Chick Corea. I saw that happen with Pat Metheny. And then it continued happening with Arvo Part and other people, and it happened with Kind of Blue at Columbia Records fifty years before, and it happened with Glenn Gould's Goldberg Variations fifty years before.

There is a part of the world, which is not the mainstream, that people will find their way.Yesterday there was an obit in The New York Times about Ward Chamberlin at Public Television, who is the person who supported Ken Burns. They did The Civil War. And it was mentioned that forty million people watched The Civil War, which was as arcane as they come in terms of modern TV. People watching someone panning over a Matthew Brady photograph over three minutes while someone reads a letter from a soldier to his wife, that forty million people watched that. Just as people would go to see George Balanchine or Stephen Sondheim, that there is a part of the audience that is going to find their way, just as they found their way to Wagner or Mozart or to Shakespeare or Tolstoy or Dostoevsky, that that kind of art will always have an appeal, but it's not something that exists in the moment.

And the problem was when people were trying to get involved with jazz companies or New Music companies or companies like Nonesuch, they thought that they could do it overnight. Sting tried to have a label called Pangea Records, that lasted about three months, and he was not the only one that did that. And A&M tried to get into that at one point before the sale, and Decca tried to get into it., I remember a very funny story after the Gorecki Third Symphony had its huge success, that David Zinman, who was the conductor, got a call from the president of Telarc Records and said, "Who do you think's next? I hear maybe it's Kancheli," who's this very good Georgian composer.

CLINE:

Right, Giya Kancheli.

HURWITZ:

Yeah. But the idea that we're going to just find someone else to replicate that, and that's the way people thought.

CLINE:

That's the typical industry [unclear].

HURWITZ:

That's what I was saying before about Bulgarians. "Let's go into the Bulgarian market. Let's go into the Cuban market. Let's go into the gypsy market." It always fails. [Cline laughs.] The first is the one that has the chance if it's good.

CLINE:

Well, do you have a few more minutes? I don't want to take us too far out of the chronology because when we get to the end of this, I'm going to want to ask you how in today's market, so to speak, you've reached those curious likeminded listeners that have supported this kind of music all along. But I do want to hear about how The Buena Vista Social Club was arranged and, of course, as we know, it became your biggest selling record ever. But how did that happen?

1:18:17.3

HURWITZ:

There were a couple of things that happened. One was--and it may have been when John Zorn sent David Bither Oumou Sangare's record. Oumou Sangare is a great singer from Mali. That was one thing that happened. A second thing that happened is David Jones, who continues to be a major concert producer in London, told Nick Gold, who had this small company, World Circuit, that he should talk to Nonesuch. And then one day David was playing Oumou Sangare in the office, I walked by his office, I said, "What's that? That's incredible," because it kind of reminded me--the production was of West African music, kind of what Manfred was doing.

It was a different kind of production. So all these things were sort of hopping in the air. So we started doing a little research on World Circuit. We got in touch with Nick and brought him over to the States, just for two days. And just based on Oumou Sangare and a group called Radio

Tarifa, we were ready to make our first label deal, because I thought this guy--and part of it from David really thought it was great and I, from my ECM experience, I thought this is someone who reminds me of what Manfred was doing in the early days.

And we had a very nice time with Nick. He was leaving the office. As he was leaving, he said, "You know, I just came back from Cuba. I made this record with Ry Cooder and a bunch of Cuban musicians. I'll send you a copy when I get to London." That's how The Buena Vista Social Club happened. [laughs] What happened was Nick, who had had one success with Ry Cooder with Ali Farka Toure, Talking Timbuktu, a beautiful record, had this idea that when Fidel Castro came to America to the U.N. in '59 or '60, a lot of the Cubans and African musicians kind of commingled, and he really loved hearing these West African musicians playing at that time.

And Nick had this idea, there was some common roots between West Africa and Cuba, of trying to combine them. So they flew to Cuba, and they were going to bring some Malian musicians over, and then their visas got revoked. And so they were there with Ry for a couple of days, and so they started kind of looking around, and I think Ry had heard of Compay Segundo. And so they invented this idea of The Buena Vista Social Club, and they were able to put together certainly Ibrahim Ferrer and Compay and Ruben Gonzalez. They ended up making two records there, Ruben's Introducing Ruben Gonzalez, which he must have been eighty at the time, and The Buena Vista Social Club. Another like Gorecki, when we finally heard it, I said, "This is really good. Maybe we'll sell 50,000 copies."

CLINE:

Wow.

1:22:36.2

HURWITZ:

And World Circuit did everything. They made a beautiful cover. They made the most beautiful booklet. Ry Cooder produced it. And that was one of the lessons, again, because I've always thought that part of my time at Nonesuch was also a learning experience. You just paid attention. And I've often joked that probably from the time I started in the music business in '72 or '73 until Napster in '98--that's what, twenty-six years, twenty-five years, twenty-six years--I kind of learned everything, just kind of about the business part and why things work and this and that. Then Napster came and I realized I didn't know anything at all.

But one of the things that I remembered about this experience was that one thing about Ry Cooder was that he had retained his sense of integrity since his very first record on Warners, and

so that anybody who was a Ry Cooder fan never left, because they always knew that anything he was going to be attached with was going to be good. And so all of a sudden one day this record appears with Ry's name and these four other unknown musicians, and I think that because that loyalty to Ry was there, it sort of cracked open a door that if it was the same exact record without his name, that that very first part that may have been 25,000 people, it might have been completely ignored.

So what he did was he was the--again, like I was talking about you become a magnet, he was that magnet that cracked the door open, and then once that door was cracked open and the press started coming in--I mean, it was not a revolutionary record. It was a very good record, and it introduced some very good musicians, but it wasn't as if there was anything there we had never heard about. I mean, Charlie Parker made his incredible African Cuban record with Machito, and there was a history of Cuban music that had happened. But it was a combination of the way the record was produced, the moment that it came out, that created this kind of giant spark, and the thing just built from there.

I think one of the really wonderful things that happened was that the movie was not even anticipated, that Wim Wenders only came into the project a year afterwards. They didn't play their first concert till over a year after it was first released. Two concerts in Amsterdam and one at Carnegie Hall, those were the only three concerts that that band ever did together. And eventually, probably we sold in America alone half a million copies the first year. We sold 600,000 copies the second year. We sold probably 800,000 copies the third year when the movie came out. It just was this kind of--it's like the story of Kind of Blue that probably sold 10,000 copies the year it came out, and this year I'm sure it's one of the five biggest selling jazz records in the world this year.

CLINE:

Yes, absolutely.

HURWITZ:

So we were at the right time and the right place with the right musicians, the right kind of production. It was a kind of beautiful hi-fi/lo-fi kind of sound that just sounded right for what that music was that evoked a different time and spirit and was done in a kind of very unpretentious way. And then we got a film attached to it, and the thing kind of exploded. And kind of, again, every time one of these things happened, it just gave us a space that was extraordinary.

CLINE:

So I don't know if we want to leave it at that for today. I did want to get to your getting involved with another one of your great heroes, Stephen Sondheim, which happened during this second wave of success that you were experiencing. Do you want to say anything about that?

1:26:51.2

HURWITZ:

Well, I remember once writing on a piece of paper that there were ten people who I would love to work with one day, who I was not working with, and on that list were Stephen Sondheim, Randy Newman, and Bjork. [Cline laughs.] There were other people like Simon Rattle and Martha Argerich and other people where it never really happened. But I think just the very fact of putting it in my head, I had this idea. We had done this wonderful record called Leonard Bernstein's New York. I'd always had some interest in music theater, and I had worked with very few people. I think next time I want to also talk about Adam Guettel and Audra McDonald. But I had some relationship with Sondheim before. We had done a record with Dawn Upshaw called I Wish It So, and I had asked Sondheim if he would come to the rehearsal and just work with her while she was working on his pieces, as Gorecki did.

And he did, and he wrote a letter later saying that it was the only time he ever heard someone from an opera world who actually was able to do what he had hoped in some of his songs. And then I had this idea, which I think, again, was a very naÃ¨ve idea, and I didn't fully understand where he was coming from, of seeing if I could put from the Nonesuch community of singers who were all Broadway singers like Donna Murphy and Audra and Mandy Patinkin and Judy Blazer and other people, if we could kind of do what they did in the opera world, is put together ideal casts to make records. Because generally Sondheim's view of making records or doing productions were he wanted actors who could sing, as opposed to singers who can act, which is what the opera world is. The opera world is about singers who act. Sondheim was about actors who sang. And I didn't realize how absolutely spot on he was.

But I kind of approached him on this idea at some party one year, and I sort of came up to him, he was in a good mood, and he said, "Let's sit down and talk." And about three months later, there was a production of a piece of his that he had never had a full record produced, called Saturday Night, which was the first musical he ever wrote. And he called me up and said, "They're doing a production in New York. I think it's really good. It's never been produced. Would you want to take a look at it?" And we did. And that started a relationship, which at this point we've done eight productions of his, some things that had never been recorded, some things that were important to do recordings of, and it was again in that idea of this all being, among other things, a learning experience.

He made me understand something about both music theater and opera, about how important it was to have a singer who understood what those words meant and conveying that to the audience. It certainly made me think about all kinds of singing and not just singing in the theater world or the opera world, but even in the pop world, about what words meant and how they were projected meaning and what an impact that had on performers in recording.

CLINE:

Okay. Well, we'll continue the saga next week.

HURWITZ:

Okay.

CLINE:

Thank you very much.

[End of March 1, 2017 interview.]

Session Six (March 8, 2017)

CLINE:

Today is March 8th, 2017. It's International Women's Day. This is Alex Cline interviewing Robert Hurwitz here at the YRL second floor staff conference room at UCLA. This is interview number six. Good morning, again.

HURWITZ:

Hello.

CLINE:

Thank you for coming, making the walk up from the southern part of the campus. Your time here at UCLA is drawing close to its conclusion, and this interview will also conclude our experience together, for which I'm very grateful. Thank you.

HURWITZ:

Thank you as well.

CLINE:

Last time we talked about in many ways the certain ascendancy of Nonesuch as a more major presence in not only the musical genres that it is already known for being a leader in, but branching out into what has to be one of the most diverse and uniformly high-quality record labels ever. One of the things that this made me think about, which I want to ask you about, is as things started to head more into increased prominence and increased attention, one of the things you also increased was nominations for recordings of yours for Grammys, and this wound up being in an incredible range of genres and for a lot of different awards. And I first wanted to ask you, related to this, how significant is it to be nominated for a Grammy and particularly how significant is it to actually win one when you're in the business of putting out records?

0:03:13.3

HURWITZ:

You know, I do think to some degree that there is an aspect of the Grammys that is somewhat fraudulent, in the sense that I think that there is a genuine issues about people who are on Grammy panels nominating their own records. There have been places where orchestras like the Atlanta Symphony stuffed the ballot by having everybody in the orchestra sign up to be a member of NARAS, and the Atlanta Symphony became the most successful orchestra in the country in terms of winning Grammys for years. There is a tendency to sometimes take famous people and keep giving them the same Grammy every single year, no matter how talented they are. We could talk about Pulitzer Prizes or MacArthurs at the same time. It's simply not an unbiased system. I think there's a few awards in Europe, like the Deutsche Schallplaten Prize in Germany or the Edison Prize in Holland, that seem to make a little bit more sense.

But having said that, certainly every time an artist wins a Grammy, for them it's a very important achievement and something that they take seriously. And of the forty-five or so records that won Grammys, I took great pleasure in just seeing these musicians being recognized, even within a very, very difficult system. I mean, when you think about the fact that Brad Mehldau, who is as important a musician in jazz in his generation, never winning a Grammy, and with all great respect to someone like Chick Corea, who's a wonderful musician, seemingly winning one eight out of every ten years, you realize there's something that's out of balance. [Cline laughs.]

So it's not about a pure artistic recognition. It's about something else. There have been a few significant years, but the one that I obviously take an intense amount of pleasure about, just because of what it represented, was about ten or eleven years ago when in the same Grammys we won the Grammy award for the Best Classical Record, which was the John Adams Transmigration of Souls; the Best Alternative Rock Album, which was A Ghost is Born by Wilco; the Best World Music Record, which was Youssou N' Dour's Egypt; and Bill Frisell won a Grammy for the Best Ensemble in Jazz, plus Best Cover for Wilco and just lots of things. But having to have won Grammys in jazz, classical--and also John ended up winning three that time--jazz, classical, alternative rock, and world music was, I thought, "Okay, well, I guess it's a pretty significant statement for a company that has twelve people working there."

CLINE:

Yeah. Well, this is where I was--this kind of leads to my next question, which is, it is not unusual for a big label to be represented in all these genres, but, of course, they usually have divisions and they have a huge staff of people who are working to make all this happen. In a sense, it's labels within a label. In your case, this was not the case. So as things started to grow larger and more successful, what kind of changes did you wind up by necessity making in terms of just staffing and the way the administration of the label was organized?

HURWITZ:

I think that we've had three or four years where they've been financially incredibly successful, and we've had some tough years, and I've basically taken the position that they're all the same. So when we had really good years, we didn't staff up or start being foolish, and when we had leaner years, we didn't let anybody go and we didn't stop making the records we wanted to make, because I always looked at commercial successes were for us things that happened more or less by chance as opposed to by design. Because if you make a record by Gershwin piano rolls, which we did in the early nineties, you don't go in expecting to sell 300,000 copies. When you sign a band like the Black Keys, who'd never sold over 100,000 records, you didn't go in and expect that one day we'd sell three and a half million. When you do The Buena Vista Social Club or sign the Gipsy Kings or sign the Bulgarian voices or Ken Burns' Civil War, which sold over 800,000 copies, you don't go in with that expectation. Just for a second, if you don't mind, I'll get into a little bit of a nitty-gritty of business--

CLINE:

Sure.

0:09:27.7

HURWITZ:

--that as someone who had no business background or acumen to start with, that, again, it's just part of that process I've talked about, about being educated, I realized that for a company of our size to be successful, we had to do four things, but we had to do all four of the things. And the first was, we had to be very careful about when we signed artists, what we financially put into those deals. We couldn't go crazy in the way a lot of companies did, and sometimes we were put in that position of paying a premium, but artists were never looking for us to be the biggest paycheck anyway. So we had to be careful on everything, and I learned to be very, very careful just to have the freedom to not have to ever need to sell a lot of records.

The second thing is that we always had to have a managed overhead, that a lot of companies, for example, as jazz and classical sales started going way down after 2000, companies like Blue Note or Verve or Deutsche Gramophone had huge staffs, and they were really ruled by that. And I think that's part of my background with ECM, that very few people can actually make something run pretty well. The third thing was that we had to just be very careful with not going crazy with spending money advertising and promoting records. So if you could do those three things, that if you manage your overhead, that you are careful with what you put into signings,

and that you don't overspend on marketing. And then there's the fourth thing, which may sound self-serving, but you have to have good taste.

If you could do those four things, at least certainly until five years ago, there was no way you couldn't succeed. But every company that I knew about kind of messed up on one of those things or another. They messed up. They may have had all the proper constraints together, but they didn't have good taste, or they had too many people and they had good taste, but that they were weighted down by their overhead. And I think that if you're trying to be in a creative business and work with creative artists, the one thing you never want to do is to be in a position where you have to all of a sudden ask the parent company to accommodate financial burdens that you have. And I don't think we've ever done that.

CLINE:

Wow. Okay. And you, as we talked about last time, also weathered a number of ownership changes, sort of large managerial shifts, not to mention a couple of huge revolutions in format that music was taking, first with CDs and then to this ephemeral sort of download form. And I wondered, as all of these changes took place, one of the things that also often the record business gets accused of with for a long time was what comes under the category of industry waste. So going from a product that requires to keep up with these format changes but also by the time all that was happening you were also putting out essentially rock records and things, oftentimes, despite the decline of MTV, that entails making videos and maybe having a larger presence as far as marketing and that sort of thing goes. How were you able to take on the potential increase in overhead to produce all of that kind of thing during a time when there was clearly a decline in revenue coming from the change in the format that you were using?

0:13:40.5

HURWITZ:

Somehow because we were not in the pure pop business, we were more or less immune from the changes in the pre-streaming era. I think in the last few years since streaming has become so prevalent, there's been a far more dramatic change,We met Jeff Tweedy in 2001, put out Yankee Hotel Foxtrot in maybe 2002. At that point, there was still a healthy business, and it was the beginning of iTunes, and people were buying full albums on iTunes, though I'm sure some people were not. And I'm sure that a lot of people were downloading that music without paying at that time.

But I remember when Wilco was famously dropped by Warner Bros. and they came to us, that at the very first concert after they signed at Bowery Ballroom, Jeff Tweedy was wearing a Napster t-shirt, and he asked the crowd out there, "How many of you have downloaded the record?"

Because Wilco put up the record for free before it got distribution--and like everybody in the crowd raised their hand. And then he said, "How many of you are going to buy the record?" Everybody raised their hand. I was a little worried because Summerteeth, which was their biggest record, had sold 19,000 the first week in SoundScan, that we were not going to be able to match that, and yet we sold 57,000 the first week. So clearly at that moment, there was still a paying audience. The challenges were nothing compared to what they are today, especially for album-based artists.

And, by the way, that was without any radio airplay. I remember when we were sitting and talking about it, and I was very frustrated why we weren't getting any significant airplay on Wilco, and I made a statement--I may have said this last week--that, "Oh, this is kind of like the Beatles' White Album, that's that accessible." And they said, "The Beatles' White Album wouldn't get played on radio today either," and that was just, again, about the changing world. But because they were commercially so successful, the success always went ahead of where our marketing needs were, and because they had a great infrastructure and they toured a lot, we were the beneficiaries of that. And we respected what their designs were, and certainly for the first four or five years, we got along brilliantly with them. So it's not that hard. [laughs] If you have really good artists who make good records, especially in those days, it was not that hard to market those records. It's become more complicated now.

CLINE:

And ultimately Wilco became known as one of those bands like Radiohead, I guess, who just debuted their new albums by offering them free online.

HURWITZ:

That's post-us. That is actually post us but--

CLINE:

How does that sort of practice sit with you as a record company?

0:17:57.20:19:51.0

HURWITZ:

Well, now we're talking about sort of nerdy record company stuff [Cline laughs.], but I think we could talk about it's been nineteen years since Napster first came into the world. And in my job when I'm working on any record--and essentially for the thirty-two years I was there on a day-to-day basis, it was every record, and since then, it's still ten or fifteen records a year that I'm still working on--I was aware of every single line and cost in the production, whether it was what I had to approve, the producer, the studio, the amount of time in the studio, the sidemen, every single thing we had to do, and so I was always--and I'll give you two quotes, one from John Adams and one from Bob Krasnow.

John Adams, in the opening of Nixon in China, there's a line that the Chinese chorus sings, which is, "Pay a fair price for all you buy," which I believe in really strongly, that whether you're hiring a piano tuner or you're hiring a studio or you're hiring musicians, you want to pay everybody fairly, especially people who are at a very elite level in what they can do and they've worked hard to reach that point and you're not just paying them for a three-hour session, but you're paying them for thirty years of working just to get to be able to do that.

And Bob Krasnow's point of view, which was, "You don't make records in order to save money." So I held, and still hold, this ideal that a record is this permanent artistic object, that what my job has always been is to try to make that thing not perfect, but as good as it will be so that it will not just sound fresh today but twenty years from now it will sound better than I remembered when we first made it. And so being that heavily involved in knowing what it takes and trying to be fair in my compensation to everybody involved, I've always had a very uneasy time with any idea of anyone feeling they're entitled to hear anything without compensation, both to the artist, to the writer, and to the record company. And in nineteen years of thinking about it, I've never changed.

So if an artist who is within a certain financial situation that we can deal with has the ability, and they're obviously making money for us and for them, like Wilco, and they want to do something different, we never had a problem with that. I sometimes felt it might have hurt them a little bit, but I think that generally my view is if an artist wants to let everybody have their music the day and date of that recording and it's something that we can work out economically, I never have a problem with that. And in some cases, I think it worked more closer to the beginning of Napster in '98. As time has gone on and there's this massive sense of entitlement about music, it's no longer the case.

I had a conversation just yesterday, or the day before, about the Stephin Merritt 50 Song Memoir, which was a very important record we're putting out, has gotten a huge amount of attention, and the manager was very worried about some of the fans not being able to get the record on Spotify the day it came out. And I said, "Look, the formula on Spotify right now is for someone who subscribes to it, that essentially you get one penny for every two plays," the record company does. So it means for twenty-five cents, someone could listen to the entire record,

which we get twenty-five cents for, and the artists gets about a nickel for listening to fifty songs, and his publisher gets less than a penny. And I said, "Look, I just have a hard time putting a guy who's worked two years writing and composing and making this thing, which is brilliant, allowing someone to listen to it, and our total compensation be a quarter."

Maybe down the line we could put it out on streaming, but right now I don't think it's wrong to ask people to pay that money, because I'm not looking at it just as this thing that belongs to world. I'm looking at this as music that is not--again, as I said before about musicians who play on sessions, it's not the fact that they're just playing on that one session. They've spent their entire life getting to the point where they have the ability and skill and creativity to actually be there in that room. And I think that to jump forward to today, I think that there is a genuine crisis in the record business right now as streaming has become over 50 percent of revenue, as I said the other day, that companies like all of the labels like Columbia's Jazz or Classical Divisions or Decca and DG, all these companies, Blue Note and Verve, which are the companies that are belonging to the majors, are all in existential jeopardy of going out of business or becoming companies that represent some watered-down version of pop.

And then you could say, well, there's an independent world as well, but if you look at every single major indie company, Sub Pop or Merge or XL or any part of the Beggars Group or 4AD, the reality is none of those companies have the slightest interest in jazz or New Music, in classical music or world music. They have no interest in them. They are kind of straight-ahead rock labels. And the small independent jazz companies are watching revenue completely fall apart, and I think that there's so much money to be made in streaming by big pop record companies, that even rock artists right now are also having a very hard time getting revenue comparable to what they had. There's only three genres of music that are benefitting from streaming today, and those are hip hop and dance music, or EDM, and pop, pure pop. That is where the landscape is. That doesn't even include bluegrass or rock or folk.

Country is a whole other subculture and political world that I don't want to get into. [Cline laughs.] But it's a challenging moment. So from 1998, the beginning of Napster, till today, every two or three years there's some other challenge, and up until now we have faced those challenges really well, but we're in a tougher time now and a tougher market. There's no question about that.

CLINE:

How much do some of these labels that are under the major, you mentioned Blue Note and Verve, jazz labels, in this case, how much did they wind up partially surviving on reissues?

HURWITZ:

I think more and more greatly. And I have friends at many of these labels and they feel a kind of pressure that if I ever felt that, I would have left. I would have just simply left the label. [Cline laughs.] Someone at Universal said that they're just making huge investments in classical music, which means that they made one investment for millions of dollars for Lang Lang, and that's what their investment is in classical music. That's Deutsche Gramophone. It used to be one of the great classical labels in the world.

Fortunately, most of the labels I mentioned did have great catalogs, but even those catalogs are not having the same impact in a world in which the primary beneficiary is people who make single tracks that tend to be picked up by social media that have a very young audience. So it's a different moment. But I will say, to go back and loop around, the one consistent thing for the entire time is I've always felt you keep your head down and you make the best quality records you can, and however the cards are going to play out, they'll play out. And this was even something I thought when I got the job, that if you fail because of doing what was right, it's no real failure. If you fail because you think you're doing what people want you to do, then you really blew this great opportunity in your life.

CLINE:

So when you would sign people like Wilco or the Black Keys, who were just in a sense on the ascendancy, how much, if any, expectation was there with some of these younger, more emerging people once they started to actually experience this certain amount of success, that the label was going to in a sense ante up and really shell out on their behalf, demonstrate what they could do [unclear]?

HURWITZ:

It was never an issue. It's never been an issue.

CLINE:

No delusions of grandeur.

0:26:55.7

HURWITZ:

No, there wasn't been. There were never delusions. I think Jeff, who obviously has a major creative impact on Wilco, never thought he would make a track that would become a single. We never pressured them. Again, we signed them with an expectation we might sell 150,000 to 200,000 records. Yankee Hotel Foxtrot has now sold over a million records, and all their records did really, really well for us and really well for them, and so that on the creative side, there was never the slightest question. In the case of the Black Keys, who've become even far more successful, they had a great manager in place. There's an interesting story about both of those bands, how they came to Nonesuch. I mean, in the case of Wilco, there were all these people who told Tony Margherita that he should talk to Nonesuch. And literally there was one meeting where David Bither and I flew to Chicago with Jeff and Tony, and it was pretty clear, as I mentioned last time, his only concern was that he hoped that John Adams and Steve Reich wouldn't look down on--and which was never a problem.

In the case of the Black Keys, I had developed a very close relationship with their managers. One of my oldest friends, my oldest friend in the music business, a guy named Cliff Burnstein, who, ironically, has been the manager of Metallica and the Red Hot Chili Peppers, one of the most successful guys, he had a company called Q Prime. And one day he and his partner, Peter Mensch and these guys are at the very top of the world of rock management--took David and me out for lunch and said, "We have these two groups that we think you should check out, that we think might be best for Nonesuch." One was the Black Keys and the other was a group called Nickel Creek, which was Chris Thile's group. I had known about Nickel Creek, David had known about the Black Keys, but none of us had even thought that was in the realm, and we ended up obviously signing both of them, and they've had a huge impact on the label as we've moved forward.

But, again, in, I think, both of those cases, the artists were delighted, Dan Auerbach, to be on a label that had Ali Farka Toure, and for Chris Thile, Brad Mehldau was a god to him. So in every one of these cases, there was some other attraction, just besides the fact that I might have been a nice guy [Cline laughs], that made them want to actually come to Nonesuch. It was about a culture that we had. Literally, yesterday the Fleet Foxes has just signed to Nonesuch, and Robin Pecknold, who's the primary creative force, said in the interview in Pitchfork that this was a company that had made records from John Zorn to the Black Keys and that we were a company that did not exclude music that was different from what we had done before--and so there was that attraction to this day that there's a circle of musicians. And, believe me, there's a hundred great musicians who all were deserving, that we could have easily brought to Nonesuch that could be a really good label, that we just did not want to get so big we'd lose the closeness that we have to the relationships with the musicians that we have right now.

CLINE:

Wow. And as time went on, moving past the era in which we were covering last time, you also inherited a few artists that during all these big industry shakeups that we talked about, one of those is somebody that you had worked with at ECM, Pat Metheny, and there were others. What was it like for you to, in a sense, inherit some of these artists who weren't people who came to you maybe expressly wanting to be on Nonesuch, and how were those relationship really characterized and developed?

0:32:18.7

HURWITZ:

Maybe I mentioned in 1994 there was a huge coup d'Ã©tat, and Bob Krasnow, who is the person who had been a very important supporter of mine, lost his job. Mo Ostin was fired from Warner Bros. And then for ten years, the company went through a lot of changes, and we were moved into the international company. And one of things I said to you is that it gave me away from Krasnow a lot more freedom, I brought in David Bither, who I've mentioned, and we made some right and left turns. Then in 2003, 2004, there was another shift that was about to happen. I think 1994 we were still in the midst of being part of Time Warner.

It was before the AOL-Time Warner deal happened, which was a whole other disastrous story, as you may have heard about. But in 2003, what was Warner Communications in the beginning, that became Time Warner, that became AOL Time Warner, that became Time Warner again, decided to sell the record company, and they sold the record company to a guy named Edgar Bronfman, who had been the head of Universal. The Bronfman family was heavily involved in the alcohol business, and it was a hugely successful, multi-billion-dollar enterprise. And he put together some business partners, and it was a kind of a corporate takeover. He brought in new people. He brought in a guy named Lyor Cohen to run the Record Division.

Right before that period, I had become very good friends with Roger Ames, who was the head of the Record Division at Warners prior to the sale, and I had said to Roger at one point, "You know, we've been sort of going back and forth from international to Atlantic. I really like Warner Bros. I really like Tom Whalley. I think we should move there." And it was one of the things, "Okay, we'll do that when we make the change." So we moved to Warners, and so Warner Bros. offered me lots of artists, and they offered me the entire Jazz Division. [Cline laughs.]

And the entire Jazz Division had like twenty-five artists, and of those twenty-five artists, probably ten were smooth jazz artists. And sort of at the other side, there were five very, very formidable musicians: Pat, Brad Mehldau, Josh Redman, Nicholas Payton, and Kenny Garrett. And, unfortunately, I had to make a very difficult decision to say to Warner Bros., "There's no one within this other group of people (that I want to work with)." And there were some very good musicians, Cyrus Chestnut and other players that there was nothing that I could find fault in. It just wasn't something that I wanted to spend my time doing, because it's a big commitment.

But I always loved Brad, I was friends with Pat, and I always liked Josh, and I'd produced one of his father's records [Cline laughs.], and Dewey was at my wedding.

CLINE:

Wow.

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[This portion of the transcript has been sealed at the request of the interviewee.]

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CLINE:

I have to ask you before I forget, which Dewey Redman album did you produce?

HURWITZ:

The Struggle Continues.

CLINE:

Oh, yeah? Okay.

HURWITZ:

Yeah. With Ed Blackwell.

CLINE:

Classy.

HURWITZ:

Yeah.

CLINE:

So through this period also, you did get to work with some people who were emerging, who were already known quantities, and obviously Pat Metheny is one of those people, but some of these people were far more famous, and two names come to mind that I'll ask you about now. One I have to ask you about first because you said you'd always wanted to work with her, and that's Bjork. How did that come about?

HURWITZ:

I have an email. I can't sort of verbally say this, but perhaps if there's a written version of this, I'll

give it to you. [Cline laughs.] And it started with it was not a flush left, but it was centered: "Hello, my name is Bjork." [Cline laughs.] And then the second line, "Alex Ross (the music critic of the New Yorker) said we should get together." And so we got together. And Bjork at that time, she'd been signed to Elektra in America, and Elektra was during that 1994 period, the catalog went over to Atlantic and the artists' roster, and she never basically got along with anybody there. Then she was at Atlantic. She had no one there to talk to. So what she basically did is called me up, "Even though you're working at a different record company, I need someone to play my record at the record company. Would you listen to it with me?"

CLINE:

Wow.

HURWITZ:

I said, "Yes." And then we got together again, and there was a moment when there had been a lot of talk that she might do a New Music record. Esa-Pekka Salonen was involved. She had done with Kent Nagano a performance of Pierrot Lunaire, and it had created a great sensation and apparently was great. I remember her talking about when she was a schoolchild when Tehillim came out, she loved to sing along with that [Cline laughs.], and she was interested in Meredith Monk and they became close. So we talked about it, and I remember her saying something, "I don't want you to think I'm like some spoiled person who thinks she could just sing anything."

So we did a couple of projects with her, and like a lot of artists, like Wilco, at a certain point their management said, "We've established, why don't we just try to do it on our own." But we still have a good relationship. She's amazing--she's a real artist--of all the so-called pop people I've ever dealt with, talking to her is the most like talking to a new music composer. She has that same kind of creative spark and is a very curious and interesting and interested person.

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[This portion of the transcript has been sealed at the request of the interviewee.]

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I remember once taking John Adams to meet Caetano at a recording session when we did Estrangeiro, and walking out with John and saying, "Caetano looks like he must have really been loved by his mother," which, by the way, happened to be true. [laughter] His mother was on a couple of his covers, and I remember meeting his mother. There was a kind of just grace about him. I mean, he's maybe the most famous person in Brazil, except for a couple soccer players, over the last fifty years. I remember being at concerts with him, and there'd be someone who was working the kitchen or someone who--and they said, "Caetano, take my picture." He always did--he would always show a kind of generosity to anybody who was there, and I think that's something that I have found with artists to a large degree, that they have not lived up to that clichÃ© about them being cold and aloof and above all people, with a few exceptions.

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[This portion of the transcript has been sealed at the request of the interviewee.]

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CLINE:

Wow.

HURWITZ:

Never meet your heroes. [laughs]

CLINE:

I've been there. So, speaking of this generosity and even humility that you're describing, you, of course, stayed with many of the artists that you started with on Nonesuch for the entire time, John Adams being an obvious example of that. How, beyond what you were just describing, would you characterize the evolution of those relationships over such a long period of time and those artists' relationship with the label, including now when clearly there's a change at the label after all those years when you were at the helm?

0:54:02.80:56:46.5

HURWITZ:

Well, I mean, in the arrangement we have, and certainly it's in the foreseeable future and maybe further than that, I mean, it's ironic, I just got an email today from Josh Redman, who wasn't sure what the procedure was going to be for a record that's a tribute record to Old and New Dreams, because he put a band together with Brian Blade and Ron Miles to recreate the band with Don Cherry and Charlie and Blackwell. "How do we proceed?"

And, of course, we're going to proceed the way we did before the time that I walked away from the day-to-day operating level, and that's going to continue with the core of artists that I'm still working with, whether it's Randy Newman or k.d. lang or the Magnetic Fields or Brad, Josh, Pat, Steve, John Adams, Kronos, etc., and others. That will continue. And there are new artists who I will hopefully continue to bring in, certainly in The New Music area more than others. But in a lot of other areas, as my age gets further from the period of emerging artists, I am fully cognizant of the fact that the moment you start listening to music and treat it seriously has a lot to do with the age of when you do it, and you hear things from a certain point of view.

So there are some artists we've worked with who I have signed in their twenties, like this great young composer Timo Anders, or Chris Thile, that clearly they're kind of old souls, that what they're doing would have been something rare and unusual at any point. And there are other kinds of music that refers to, let's say, in more of the alternative or indie rock area, that I don't have the same emotional commitment because it's not music made for me. It's music made for people who are my students. I always use Radiohead as a perfect example. My kids grew up with Radiohead. They loved Radiohead.

I didn't grow up with Radiohead, but I listened to Radiohead, and I think they're really, really a great band, but I don't have the same emotional attachment to them that someone who is ten years younger than them. When they started listening to Radiohead, they were almost like their peers, and so they belong to that generation. And I think that in that part of music every generation has an ownership to the pop music that comes out. As we get older, we can appreciate things, but we don't feel the same way to that music that we might have felt when that artist was eight to ten years older than you. And Joni Mitchell was eight to ten years older.

Now, there are some artists, like David Byrne, like Caetano Veloso, like Randy Newman, like Bjork, who's close to fifty now, who are clearly not that different than artists like John Adams; that is, they are still at a point in their life where they're kind of stretching themselves. Randy Newman, in his early seventies, has written one of the best records he's written in this life and broken new ground in his music, and so he's someone like Stephen Sondheim, someone who even at this point of his life is still kind of pushing forward, but not as part of the pop marketplace, as simply as an artist. And you see that in his mid-forties, that's what Josh Redman is doing. In his mid-forties, that's what Brad Mehldau is doing. They're kind of still pushing through and doing new things and breaking boundaries and working with new musicians and trying to create something.

There are going to be other people in their twenties or thirties, certainly in New Music, who are still going to do that. There's a half a dozen really, really gifted younger composers like Timo, who I just spoke about, or Nico Muhly or Gabe Kahane or Andrew Norman or Ted Hearne, and some of them I'm working with and some of them I'm keeping a close eye on. Are they going to hit that point where they develop that kind of language that's essential? But if the equivalent of the newest version of the Black Keys or Wilco or Radiohead emerge today, even if I thought they were great, I wouldn't put myself in that position, because they need someone who is going to belong to that tribe, and I'm in a different tribe.

CLINE:

You've answered the question I was going to ask next, which is great. And you mentioned your students. Maybe you could describe your non-record company activities during this period, which included teaching at The New School.

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HURWITZ:

I had met Bob Kerry, former governor of Nebraska and senator, who was the head of The New School, who'd wanted me to join their board, which I had no interest in doing, and in conversations I talked about just sort of my own view about the relationship of music and culture and even politics. He said, "Do you ever think about teaching?" And I said, "I've thought about it."

He put me together with the guy who's the head of The New School Jazz Program, which is, I think, a pretty distinguished program in terms of just the faculty, of a lot of these great New York jazz musicians that have kind of created this beautiful faculty, and at the same time, they've gotten health insurance and been able to make a little bit of extra income, and I think a lot of

them have enjoyed that experience. And I said, "Let me try." We decided that I would do a once-a-week class. For the first couple of semesters, I had about sixty students, and it was like a one-credit requirement, and what I decided to do was to basically do it as a group of discussions with people I knew who kind of kept their ideals.

I had a session with John McClure, who was Stravinsky and Copland's producer and ran Columbia Masterworks, and Bruce Lundvall. I had a session with Adam Guettel and Brad Mehldau, and a session with John Zorn and Pat and Josh Redman and the guy who ran the San Francisco Jazz Festival, different people who in different areas as musicians or people in the business had been able to in difficult times kind of keep things going in a very positive way. After a couple years, I said, "Okay, let me see if I could change this into a seminar situation." So I kind of auditioned people. I had them write a page about a subject that had to do with their own value systems, you know, just to see how well they articulated. And so that became a class, and it's called "The Prospects of Recording," which was based on a Glenn Gould article fifty years earlier, where Gould basically wrote that one day technology would become--this was in 1964, before there was even a CD or personal computers--that technology would eventually have a huge impact in the way music was disseminated, which he was right about.

It's kind of a class about navigation, of how do you navigate--because almost all the students are musicians--between the worlds of art and commerce. Because if you are an artist, commerce is going to have to be a part of your life. You're going to have to make a living. How do you do that on your own terms? Because I've been living with musicians who've done that on their own terms.

It's turned out to be a pretty satisfying class. At least five people ended up getting jobs at Nonesuch, just because they're kind of auditioning for me in the class, they didn't know it, but by how focused they are and what they had to say and their ability to write well. You knew after twelve or fourteen weeks that these people were going to be really good employees. There's one young guy who's been with us five years, who ten years from now could run Nonesuch. We've had some great, great people, from my class who worked at Nonesuch and a couple ended up deciding they wanted to be professional musicians instead. So it's been a very satisfying experience, and I'm able to say many of the things I've said into your tape recorder on a weekly basis to these students.

CLINE:

How nice. And in 2014, the label celebrated an anniversary, which was also an anniversary for you at BAM. How did that go and what was your feeling about it then? And I'm asking about this also because I'm curious to know how your thinking led to your decision to start to pull away from being at the head of the company.

1:05:13.61:06:53.5

HURWITZ:

Well, it's a little bit tied to UCLA in some ways. We were approached by four different presenters about doing a fiftieth anniversary festival, one in Krakow, I had a conversation with UCLA and the L.A. Philharmonic, and then the Barbican Center in London, where we did about fifteen concerts, and BAM, where we did about twenty-eight concerts. In the conversations, a number of people were brought in, including Peggy Alexander from the UCLA library, and I started talking with her about what I had been doing with these journals and my papers, which had been sort of accumulating for the last thirty years.

I had really not thought that seriously up till that point about this mass of kind of Nonesuch's history and a personal history that existed. So I realized from that point forward--and there was already interest at UCLA for these papers--that for me to actually go in and put them in some sort of order, I didn't want to be hit by a bus and have someone else do it. It was going to take me about five years of my life, and it was in May of 2014 while I was in London for the London Festival that I really--and I had been thinking about a transition for a long time, that I thought, "You know, I could probably stay in this job for another ten years, but I've been doing it at that point for thirty years."

And I felt that it was one of those things where there was about a half a dozen impulses that were all converging. One of them was I felt that I had really done my job. I had done this for--I don't know if I mentioned that someone had asked me after two or three years--I don't know if this was an earlier conversation, but someone had asked me after lunch one day--you know, you remember these things--I was on West 46th between Fifth and Sixth Avenue after eating at a Korean restaurant, "What are you going to do next?" because that's what everybody does.

And I said, "I'd like to do this for thirty years." And I thought, "Everything I love is here. I love jazz; I love classical music; I love New Music; I love Brazilian music; and I get to do all those things." I love film. We were doing stuff with film. I love dance, and there were things we were putting together. I love photography; I love the process of making records; I love records. What else would I want to do? And over those thirty years there were at least ten really good offers, including once to be president of Elektra under Krasnow, which I said instantly, "No," even though I would have tripled my income.

So I had this. And once I started thinking about that, I made decisions that were not based on the next thirty days or the next thirty weeks, but the next thirty years. And so in looking at artists and making deals, I had this incredible privilege to be able to do it. So after that point, I thought, first of all, at this point in my life--and I had not even thought past staying there; I wasn't thinking about the fact that I would still be doing all these records now--I thought, "I've been involved with eight hundred records or so." I don't know what the number is. "And if I stay for another ten years, maybe there's another three hundred records I might get involved with, but it's not going to change very much. And we don't live forever. Eventually, it's going to end." So I thought, "This is more important, and so this is what I want to do."

But there were other factors, too, one of which was the fact that I was in a business that a lot of the great people who had worked in this business, like Mo Ostin, for example, like Bob Krasnow, like Bruce Lundvall, sort of the ends of their careers were just--they created a really sour taste. For Bruce Lundvall, who had been at Blue Note for twenty-five years, to have to have some accountant approve whether he could do records, for Mo Ostin, who had built Warners, to be let go, was, I think, a really hard thing for them to accept. And I felt I've done everything on my own terms, and I want to continue to do everything on my own terms.

And when I went back and spoke to the people at Warners, they were, like, generous beyond belief, and we decided I would stay in the job for two more years and then they would extend my contract, which is what's going on right now, past that, and it allowed me to keep the company identical to what it is. Nobody left the company. Everybody stayed. David Bither became the president. He brought in one guy, Kris Chen, from XL, as an A&M person. And in those difficult times, we were able to keep everything kind of working together. And also there was a part of me, I have to confess, that did not like what had happened to the music business, that did not like this consumption model as opposed to an ownership model, that did not appreciate the fact that the listening habits were changing, that it was becoming more and more frustrating.

And there were other internal issues that I don't want to go into right now, but the main thing was I have these 20,000 pages of things, of which probably 15,000 I've written and 5,000 I've kept, and I think I recognized that there were very few people who had ever dealt professionally on the range of musicians that I had dealt with, and I know that nobody else wrote it down.

CLINE:

So what inspired you to start writing a journal and chronicling all this in such detail?

HURWITZ:

My daughter was born nine months after I started at Nonesuch, and between having a new child in the house and just the massive level of my involvement, things were going by much too fast, and I just sort of started by hand-writing everything down. When I was twenty, I may have mentioned, I was on a trip to Europe, and in the back of this big map that I had as I was crisscrossing as far north as Norway and as far east as Yugoslavia and as far south as Morocco, I wrote down like five words about every day, and to this day I could remember every day. So it got me into the habit of writing down things that triggered what those days were about. And

probably by the mid nineties, I realized I had been doing this, and I started taking it far more seriously as a kind of daily part of my daily routine.

CLINE:

Wow.

HURWITZ:

So there's probably, since the beginning of '94 until now, there's probably, on average, sixty or seventy pages of every month of this object that includes what was going on in my family life but also obviously what was going on with all the artists who I was interacting with and what was going on in the business that I was dealing with and was going on to some degree in the world, even. And that's where I am right now.

CLINE:

Wow. And to follow up on a question I said I would ask this time, so in this very challenging time in the music business' story, how does Nonesuch find its audience that you've described as being this endlessly and ever present, curious, interested, and dedicated audience, more interested in the artistic than the commercial? How was Nonesuch finding that audience and reaching it with its products?

1:14:10.8

HURWITZ:

I think the primary responsibility is to still bring great musicians into the company and hopefully inspire them and give them the freedom to make the best records they can. One of the things that's still very valuable is that what is going on in this country or going on in the Scandinavian countries, which are becoming heavily involved in the streaming model, is not happening everywhere. I think in Europe and in countries like Germany and England and France and the Benelux countries and in Japan, people are still buying physical goods. There are still record

stores. There's still a culture that appreciates a kind of object. For artists ranging from Kronos to Brad Mehldau, the European and Asian audience still represent 75 percent of what they do.

I remember once Roland Kommerall who was the head of Decca, said to me that at Decca--and this was, again, a person who had kept that company at a very high level, he said that the average Decca record broke even after seven years, and he said but the real key was it had to be good. If you put out bad records, they'll never break even. So I think that we obviously are not going to change the world. I mean, one of the questions I ask all my classes now, "Hey, if anybody has an idea of how we could stem this wave, let me know." I don't think vinyl's going to change things. I think that hopefully that message will continue to resonate about that artists need to be taken seriously, and if you think that you're taking them seriously by going to YouTube or not eventually compensating them, I mean, it's frustrating. It's a really frustrating thing.

We're seeing this right now with the record that Brad Mehldau and Chris Thile put out, and seeing this with Tigran Hamasyan's new record, and anticipating this with Randy Newman's record. These people have thrown their life into these albums, and they're albums that at different times would have sold tens or hundreds of thousands of copies that we might be lucky to sell 10,000 or 15,000 copies. So it is a very challenging time. Again, and I've repeated this over and over again in these conversations, is that there has always been this audience, this curious audience. For example, at Columbia Records in the sixties or the early seventies when I was there, when they could barely sell 10,000 copies of a Bill Evans or Ornette Coleman or Keith Jarrett record, that eventually those records did sell in sometimes the hundreds of thousands as people came around and eventually recognized how important they were.

I don't believe in wishful thinking, but all I could do is be hopeful. But I don't know. I'm not one to know what the future is going to bring. For thirty-five years, between 1965 and 2000, was that kind of golden age of the album artist and the golden age of retail, of Tower and all those things. And for those, it took thirty-five years, that there was no business in the singles world. It's just 99.9 percent of the entire music business was in album business, and people were encouraged to make albums. We're now at a point where probably 30 percent or less in America is an album business. That's a kind of (momentous) shift. I hope it doesn't take thirty-five years for that thing to turn around, because we know there's going to be a lot of talented people who are right now six or ten or twelve years old who we've never even heard of, who are going to be that next generation of great artists. That's inevitable. But it's a complicated time, and I will always be optimistic about the music. How that music gets into the audience and how musicians are going to support themselves, that's a big question mark. I have a feeling things will work out in the long run.

CLINE:

Good to hear.

HURWITZ:

Or at least to the specially gifted.

CLINE:

And what about the prospect of records going out of print and becoming unavailable?

HURWITZ:

Well, I think that if anyone has a record today and they're worried about that, they should at least make the highest bit copy of it and put it on five different devices so at least they could put it up on their websites. I just don't know. I was aware in the 1970s that Columbia, when I was there on my very first job, had thousands of records that were already out of print, and many of those are still to this day out of print. I remember Oscar Levant had a couple of records that still to this day never came out again. So this has been a problem forever. We often bring catalog records out, even though we know we're going to lose money on them, just because it's important that that music's there, in terms of physical copies. And you know that there are companies now that will print up twenty records at a time for artists to go take out on tour. So there's that, and everything's in iTunes. And, by the way, if you think you're ready to go out of print, just go to YouTube, you'll find it there. [laughs]

CLINE:

That's right. I've found many things that way.

HURWITZ:

Yeah.

CLINE:

A couple of things before we finish. One is you mentioned your family life that you're also chronicling in your journal. Where are your children today?

HURWITZ:

My daughter is living in Los Angeles, and she is in acquisitions at a company called Cinetic Media and beginning to manage some young emerging directors. She was very clear, although she was gifted musically, that she did not want to be in any business that I was in. I probably was partially to blame, because I told her about certain cases of nepotism that I thought were really damaging to the children of very powerful people. I know four or five cases that once their fathers lost their jobs, their children never of worked again in the music business.

CLINE:

Wow.

HURWITZ:

So she decided she wanted--and she loved music and she loved film, and she ended up right out of college going to work at HBO, and she's kind of done everything on her own, which is great. My son is teaching middle school history at a private school in Brooklyn and has sort of jumped into education right out of college, and he's at a point now, he's going to be twenty-eight soon, where he's going to look at other kind of career options as well. But he's just like many people

his age, the first thing you do in business, you kind of want to do something else in your work life. But he enjoys teaching immensely.

CLINE:

Great. And this is, unfortunately, as yes-or-no question, but I'll ask it anyway. Do you still play the piano?

HURWITZ:

Every day.

CLINE:

Wow.

HURWITZ:

I mean, it's harder to play now that I'm in L.A. for these two and a half months, but I'll have to give you more than a yes. I've actually--

CLINE:

I want more.

HURWITZ:

--in the last fifteen years, I've taken it even more seriously. There was a period when my kids were growing up that--and this is modern-day parenting. Even though my parents were both musical, when I practiced I practiced by myself. But I kind of practice with my kids and--actually became their teacher, in my son's case for about five years, in my daughter's case for about eight years. In fact, I'm going to give her piano lessons tonight. She's learning piano again since I'm in town. I've been giving her weekly piano lessons again. She's thirty-one years old, but she remembers me as her teacher, just as I went back in my twenties in L.A. to my old teacher But when they kind of graduated into their new lives I started taking playing the piano a little bit more seriously as a kind of daily ritual, and for a couple of years I just did nothing but play the "Well-Tempered Clavier" by Bach

. But what has happened now is that I have at least three or four different groups of friends, and basically we all, by the end of the year, work up like forty minutes of music to play for each other and have these little recitals that we do for one another, which gives me a kind of a challenge. This year I played Haydn, Debussy, Hindemith and Ravel. When I get back to New York, I'm going to start working on a couple of things that I've wanted to work on for a while, and I'm a pretty good sight reader, but I have to say that as much as I love recordings and as much as I love going to concerts, that actually sitting down at a piano and playing is probably still the most musically satisfying experience that there is for me.

CLINE:

Wow. We couldn't possibly cover everything in your long career, and especially a career that's so incredibly broad in scope and diverse in its many forms, but is there anything in particular that we did not discuss that you'd like to get in the historical record before we finish?

HURWITZ:

Just that I'm not a religious person at all, but I don't think there's a night before I fell asleep that I didn't recognize what a blessing it was to be able to do what I do. I never took it for granted and understand the immense privilege and hope that I took it seriously enough to make it worthwhile for everybody.

CLINE:

Wow. And once you completely finish at Nonesuch, do you have any thoughts for where you might want to be in your life, geographically or otherwise?

HURWITZ:

The idea of being in New York and spending a quarter out in L.A. is not a bad way to go. I want to be in New York, though. I love New York.

CLINE:

Well, thank you so much for taking this time. It was really great that we had the fortune of you being here at UCLA for a while so that we could do this in connection with your amazing collection of journalistic archival materials. So, on behalf of the UCLA Library's Center for Oral History Research and here at Library Special Collections, thank you.

HURWITZ:

Well, thank you. This has been a great pleasure.

CLINE:

Indeed. [End of March 8, 2017 interview]