NOTE TO USERS:

THE PROCESS OF CREATING THIS PDF ALTERED THE ORIGINAL PAGINATION OF THE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT. CONSEQUENTLY, THE PAGE NUMBERS LISTED IN THE TABLE OF CONTENTS AND INDEX GIVE AN APPROXIMATE INDICATION OF WHERE THE INFORMATION CAN BE FOUND BUT ARE NOT STRICTLY ACCURATE.

OPERA POTPOURRI

Jan Popper

Interviewed by Leslie K. Greer

Completed under the auspices
of the
Oral History Program
University of California
Los Angeles

* * *

THIS INTERVIEW WAS MADE POSSIBLE THOUGH A GRADUATE STUDENT INTERNSHIP IN ORAL HISTORY AWARDED BY GOLD SHIELD, UCLA ALUMNAE SERVICE HONORARY.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ERRATA: p. 167a exists to correct the pagination.

[Photograph of Jan Popper by Baracs Studio, Palo Alto, California]

INTRODUCTION

Jan Popper was born Christmas Eve, 1907, in Liberec, Czechoslovakia (then Bohemia); his mother, Pauline Freund Popper, was from a cultured family and his father, Theodore Popper, was a textile merchant. Popper was raised in a Germanic atmosphere, with a love of music, but he was also instilled with a zest for outdoor living that would later provide him respite from the tensions of a busy career.

His childhood musical training included piano, harmony, and counterpoint lessons; later, he studied with Josef Langer at the Deutsche Musik Akademie in Prague. His parents, wishing him to become well rounded and employable, insisted that he also study business methods; so he worked on a business degree at night at the Handels-Akademie while studying music during the day. Later, when he was called upon to produce operas, this business training proved fortuitous.

Popper went to the University of Leipzig in 1928 to study with Theodor Kroyer and then at the Leipzig conservatory with Robert Teichmüller and Max Ludwig. In 1931 he received his PhD in musicology with a dissertation on the composer Josquin Des Prez.

His entry into the opera world came by chance, with a

helping hand from his father. A coaching job became available with the local opera company in Reichenberg (Liberec); in fact, it was financed by Theodore Popper without his knowledge. It gave Jan the opportunity to learn the basics of opera conducting and coaching. He quickly realized that he still lacked certain skills, however, and took two years off from his job to study with Rudolf Nilius at the Neues Wiener Konservatorium. He accepted an offer to direct at the Prague Neues Deutsches Theater, which included such luminaries as George Szell and Fritz Zweig, but his sojourn in the company of these greats was cut short by World War II.

Popper first joined the Masaryk League, of Czechoslovakian freedom fighters, as a parachutist, but the Nazi takeover of his country forced an exodus to the United States. His escape was aided by his uncle, who was working on the Czechoslovakian exhibit at the 1939 World's Fair on Treasure Island in San Francisco and claimed to need an assistant. Popper quickly became acquainted with the music community of the city. He accompanied such great singers as Jussi Bjoerling, Risë Stevens, and Maria Jeritza. He also received a teaching appointment at Stanford University.

Popper's tenure at Stanford, from 1939 to 1949, was marked by the success of the opera workshop there.

First performances of the group included Britten's Peter Grimes, Weinberger's Schwanda the Bagpiper, and Menotti's Old Maid and the Thief. He also established a semiprofessional group known as the Intimate Opera Players.

In 1949, Popper was invited by John Vincent, chairman of the UCLA Department of Music, to establish the Opera Workshop on the Westwood campus. He was to remain for twenty-six years and preside over such premieres as Lukas Foss's The Jumping Frog of Calaveras County, conducted by the composer in Angels Camp on the site of the original contest; and Osamu Shimizu's The Mask Maker, presented in Japanese and filmed by the U.S. Department of State.

UCLA was the site of many premieres by noted composers, including Luigi Dallapiccola, Benjamin Britten, Robert Kurka, Roy Travis, Eugen Zádor, Jacques Ibert, Darius Milhaud, and Leoš Janáček. There were also revivals of such "lost" operas as Cimarosa's Secret Marriage, Meyerbeer's Les Hugenots, and Scarlatti's Equivocal Appearances, and the first staged version of Monteverdi's Orfeo.

Guest professorships during these years enabled Popper to travel throughout the world. In 1960-61, he traveled with his wife, Beta, to Japan, where he was guest conductor of the Tokyo and Kyoto symphony orchestras

and Fulbright professor at the Tokyo University of Arts. Under the auspices of the U.S. Information Service, the couple toured Japan, giving concerts in which his wife sang art and folk songs, and Popper accompanied at the piano.

He traveled throughout California as well, spreading the concept of the opera workshop. He spent 1965-66 and 1966-67 on an All-University Professorship given by President Clark Kerr, establishing workshops on the other University of California campuses.

His work has earned him many honors, including the Henry Hadley Award, a citation in 1958 for "Outstanding Contributions to American Music" from the Los Angeles chapter of the National Association of American Composers and Conductors, and an award in 1966 for "Distinguished Service to American Music" from the national association itself.

Popper became known to television viewers when he was host of "Spotlight on Opera," a series shown on educational television nationally in 1955. The show's format consisted of interviews with noted opera luminaries and discussions of various aspects of opera production. It won a Peabody Award for excellence in the same year. The UCLA Opera Workshop was on television station KNXT, Los Angeles, in 1963, in a series called "Opera Workshop."

Since his retirement from UCLA in 1975, Popper has remained active and has traveled with his wife throughout the world participating in operas and workshops. Future plans include directing opera in Taiwan in 1979, and further work in Japan.

Because of his development of opera workshops and his innovative approach to opera programming, Dr. Jan Popper has been a pioneer in the field of music. His enthusiasm and energy endeared him to his students throughout the years and his television audience in the 1950s. His boundless enthusiasm and wit are reflected in the following oral history interview.

Leslie K. Greer

Los Angeles, California
August, 1979

INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER: Leslie K. Greer, Gold Shield Intern, UCLA Oral History Program. BA, Music, California State University, Long Beach, 1971. MA, Music, California State University, Long Beach, 1977. MLS, UCLA Graduate School of Library and Information Science, 1979.

TIME AND SETTING OF THE INTERVIEW:

Places: Residence of Mrs. Maria Holt, Director-Manager of the West Bay Opera Company, 836 Forest Street, Palo Alto, California; Room 300F, Powell Library, UCLA.

Dates: December 29, 1978 (Palo Alto); February 27, 1979 (UCLA).

Time of day, length of sessions, and total number of recording hours: The first interview session began at 10:00 a.m. and continued until 4:00 p.m. The second session took place in the morning and lasted approximately one hour. A total of six hours was recorded.

Persons present during interview: Popper and Greer.

CONDUCT OF THE INTERVIEW:

The interviewer began by asking Dr. Popper to talk about his youth and education in Czechoslovakia and Germany. Dr. Popper then continued with a discussion of the European music community, his arrival in the United States, his years at Stanford and UCLA in establishing opera workshops and performing. The interview concluded with Dr. Popper expressing his philosophy of teaching, commenting on the state of opera in America, and discussing his future plans.

EDITING:

Editing was done by the interviewer. The verbatim transcript of the interview was checked against the original tape recordings and edited for punctuation, paragraphing, correct spelling, and verification of proper and place names. Words

and phrases inserted by the editor have been bracketed.

Dr. Popper reviewed and approved the edited transcript. He supplied spellings of names not previously verified. The final manuscript remains in the same order as the original taped material.

Joel Gardner, Senior Editor, Oral History Program, reviewed the edited transcript before it was typed in final form. The interviewer compiled the index, wrote the introduction, and prepared the front matter, with the assistance of the Program staff.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:

The original tape recordings and edited transcript of the interview are in the University Archives and are available under the regulations governing the use of permanent noncurrent records of the University.

Records relating to the interview are in the office of the Oral History Program.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE

DECEMBER 29, 1978

GREER: We're going to start out with talking about your ancestors and your childhood, where you were born, and things that you can remember from when you were a child that might have influenced the way you are now.

POPPER: Fine, Leslie. That's, of course, quite some time ago, as you imagine. I just celebrated my seventy-first birthday on the twenty-fourth of December. I don't know whether I should say "celebrated," because the higher the number or the age becomes, the less you try to think of it. But, as my wife always says, it's just a number and that is all.

Well, to start from the beginning. I was born still under the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy in a little town on December 24, 1907, in what is called Sudetenland. The town then, since it was a German-speaking country called Bohemia--not yet Czechoslovakia, which happened later in 1918--was called Reichenberg. That was its German name. The Czech subtitle was Liberec, so one could refer to this town [by] either/or. And it was a charming provincial mountain town, I would say, in the foothills of the Iser Mountains. [It had] about 36,000 inhabitants, completely oriented to its Austrian culture. In other words, we

considered Vienna our capital--Prague, and after that Vienna, of course. But the agreeable part of this town (and that has quite a bit to do, actually, with our further discussions) is the fact that it was rather closely situated to the Saxon-German border. So that means we actually were equally far away from the Bohemian capital of Prague and from the Saxon capital of Dresden. And weekends, one could either, you know, take a ride in either direction: either north to Germany who had excellent roads, and spend the weekend in Dresden, go to the opera there, see the marvelous art treasures for which Dresden was known before the destruction, [visit] Castle Moritzburg and Meissen, where the wonderful porcelain still is being made; or one could go south and visit Prague, the capital, which had two opera houses, the Czech National Opera House and the German opera house (little did I know that I would be a conductor there later in life), and, of course, marvelous symphonic music.

But, speaking about that little town again, if you can imagine an idyllic town really nestled in the woods and in the foothills of the mountains--not too far from what we called the Riesengebirge, the giant mountains, which was marvelous ski terrain--it had its own culture, too. In other words, it's hard to believe that a town of 36,000 should have its own opera house, where opera,

operetta was played; musical comedy and plays (excellent company of legitimate players); and its own symphony orchestra, which was not the greatest, but certainly was a competent orchestra of about fifty-five, sixty musicians, all professionals who during the winter played opera and symphony, and in summer played garden concerts out in one of the big parks. So we really were surrounded with music.

Besides the fact that we were surrounded with music, we also were surrounded with sports, which also played, later on--and actually from the beginning--an important part in my life. My parents, of whom I will speak (I hope I'm not too explicit about these things), insisted on sports, and my father especially. So we had to go to school on skis. We couldn't get there any other way, you see, in winter. And we could [do] what now has become such a sport, not only skiing for skiing's sake, but skiing for hiking's sake, you see, overland skiing, cross-country skiing. We could go directly from our doorsteps through the mountains to the next town of Gablonz, Jablonec in Czech, where all the jewelry, costume jewelry, was made; and on to the giant mountains and just could hike. So it was really a winter paradise--lots of skiing on the Jeschken mountain. I'm saying that for the benefits of somebody who may come from the same vicinity,

to make them feel a little *heimweh*, a little homesick, you know, because it was really one of the finest tobogganning road[s] down from Jeschken mountain, which was about 3,000 feet high. So it was rolling foothill country, the type of country where you just fall in love with nature. And this is one of the things that I've kept to this very day: the adoration of nature and nature as a real healing factor. If you have ever trouble--or, as I worked very hard at UCLA, for instance, at the opera workshop, and things didn't work too well--all you do is hop in the car and go out in the open country, and before you know it, you feel all right again. So that is the place where I was born.

And now the interesting part, probably, about my ancestry. I've never really delved too deeply into the roots, you know. I know that from my father's side, I come from farmer stock. In other words, my grandfather and grandmother [Simon and Francisca Popper] lived in Jesenice, near Prague, in the midst of the Czech part of Bohemia, and they were farmers. And my father [Theodore Popper] then, later on, went to Prague and became a businessman before I was born. My mother [Pauline Freund Popper] was a city girl, but from Prague itself, while father was a country boy. Mother was a city girl, and rather cultured, and loved--of course, both loved music, but she also was

enamored with philosophical reading, and she knew her Nietzsche really backwards, and wrote poetry and her own philosophical writings and outlooks on life. So she was of a poetic nature. She was not very musical, actually, Music made her nervous, and very often, later on, when I practiced and had to practice, she would have to leave the house because she--it's more a nervousness, I think. She was sensitive and very impressionable. My father was the other way around. The moment he came home, I had to sit down at the piano, even as a child, and play. And "Now, what did you do today? Show me the Beethoven. All right, play the first movement of the 'Pastoral' Sonata for me," and so on. So he kept encouraging me to make music. But what I really want to bring out [is] that both my parents, then, were of Czech stock, you know, not German. But they did move out to Sudetenland, to this Reichenberg I'm speaking about, before I was born and before my sister, as a matter of fact, was born. My sister Edith is one and a half years older. She is alive. She spent much of the time in Israel, but she does live in San Francisco now. And we were the only two children. So then, arriving in Reichenberg, both of us went to German schools. So my education was German education in German public school, high school, and later on in German conservatory. That's why I served as a conductor

at the German opera house in Prague. However, at home my father spoke German, but a kind of broken German. Czech was really his language. So at home we preferred to speak Czech. That had the tremendous advantage for me that I grew up bilingually, to begin with. You see, now, the Czech language is a Slavic language and opens the door to all other Slavic languages--to Polish, Yugoslav, Russian, Bulgarian, and what have you--while the German I don't have to tell you, is a very useful language, especially in my field of music. So, that's the way it started.

I haven't spoken about my mother's ancestry. As I said, they were city people, but humble people. I mean, my grandfather from my mother's side [Adolf Freund] was a carpenter in Prague and made beautiful furniture--*cabinetmaker* would be the word, I guess--right in the center of the old town of Prague, right near the Jan Hus monument that many people might know and still remember. And there are these dark buildings, these medieval buildings nearby, and in one of these, he had his shop. I still remember that: how romantic it was to go into these mysterious, well, nearly caves, I would say, where he made this beautiful furniture. So that's the way it started. I never knew my grandfather from my father's side, but my grandmother, and of course his relatives, who then mostly

had moved to Prague.

The only other thing--there is a rumor that I am related to the great cellist David Popper, but frankly, I have never quite been able to unravel this relationship. I was told that he was my great-uncle. That means that his father and my grandfather were brothers. I did meet him. He died very early--he died in 1913, and spent most of his time in Budapest and Prague, and was a very famous cellist virtuoso, and toured this country also. There are compositions of his available--unfortunately, mostly only the little virtuoso pieces, which he played as encores at the end of his concerts, like the *Gavotte* by Popper; every cellist knows these things. But he actually was a serious composer and wrote a lot of chamber music. Much of it is still unpublished to this very day.

GREER: Do you ever think of doing something like working with it?

POPPER: Well, yes, actually, I've thought, if I ever have the time to edit them and to put them into publishing form. . . . He was very interesting, a marvelous man with a great sense of humor; and my father took me to him, to play for him in Prague. I was just a small boy, of course. I was only five years, I believe, at that time. And so, he had me play, and of course, I played my sonatina and whatever, and he listened very patiently and said, "All right, now,

how about improvising a little bit?" And he gave me a theme to improvise--and I always have loved to improvise, you know. Later on, that was a very serious matter in the conservatories. They did teach improvisation, which, unfortunately, I don't think they do anymore. But it was a serious subject, and you had to learn to improvise on certain themes, to make up passacaglias, or even contrapuntal forms, such as two-part fugues, but also a first movement sonata form. But from the beginning, I loved to do this sort of thing. And he listened very patiently, then looked at my hands, and examined my hands, and said, "Well, I don't think he ever will be a real pianist, a piano virtuoso, but he <u>is</u> going to be a musician!"

GREER: By looking at your hands?

POPPER: Yes. And he was right, because in the first place, my hand was really rather weak from the very beginning, and actually, this is part of my ordeal as a musician. When I arrived in Leipzig to study with that very famous pedagogue--I guess the most famous pedagogue of that time in German-speaking country--Robert Teichmüller, who guided my later fortunes as a pianist, he did the same thing. He said, "Your hand is too weak. It's underdeveloped." And he put me for six months, I believe, on nothing but silent exercises [taps his fingers on the counter] of strengthening muscles and bones, because otherwise, he said, I would never be

able to endure, even though I already had concertized. But he was right, and I must say that ever since this transformation, you know, a physical transformation of my hand, I can play for hours and hours and hours.

I'm getting ahead of myself here a bit, but the *breithaupt* method which Teichmüller taught was of complete relaxation and using the natural weight of the arm, never pressing the key. But in order to carry that weight of the arm and of the body, the bones and muscles in the hand had to be strong enough not to cave in. Well, my hand was too weak and caved in. So I actually had to undo and restudy, which, when I today work with a young musician or a young singer, and he sings faulty, or she does, and I point that out to them, and they are desperate--well, they want to sing; they want to concertize--I always mention my ordeal to them, and how terrible it was, after having really concertized in public, to have to stop completely for six months and undo and redo, and I'm so grateful I did it.

GREER: It's hard to think of it at the time, isn't it? You just think of it as something in the way.

POPPER: Right. Well, does this answer your very first question, how I got into music?

GREER: Well, what I'm interested in finding out is how much your parents influenced you on your choice of

profession. Or did they intend for you to go into music? Or did you want to go into something else?

POPPER: Well, this was an interesting thing. Actually now, I never spoke about the job that my parents did. Now, in Prague, my father had been in the textile business, which was a very important business in Czechoslovakia--textiles. Something had gone wrong with this. They had a small factory, and apparently they went bankrupt. Now, we never talked about that, but it was understood that there was a major problem there, and that might have been the reason why they moved out into Sudetenland--north--and started a retail business there, which was highly successful. As a matter of fact, the store, which dealt, well, with linens; with bedcovers; but also lingerie; also Viennese knit dresses, for which my mother went shopping every year to get the latest fashions--it was called the Neuesten Mode, the latest fashion. And it was a very, very popular store, and a big store, right in the main square opposite the *Rathaus*, opposite the city hall. And so actually I was the only son, and I guess I was expected to really go into the same business. But bless my father, who was farsighted and who was not small in any way--he realized that I had the inclination toward music and loved music and showed some talent along that line. [He decided] that he would give me a full musical education, the best one could get

in this little town--and later on wherever I may wish to go--and not force me into commerce, you see. However, he insisted on one thing, which I will mention later when we come to the schooling: that besides taking conservatories and general schooling, or university, whatever I wish, I also would have to go through business school. And so, part in Reichenberg, partly in Prague later on when I moved there to take the conservatory there, I had to go through what they call a *Handels Akademie*, a business school of higher learning. And actually, it was rough, because during the night, I studied for the *Handels Akademie*, for the business school; during the day, I practiced for the conservatory. So, it was a little rough, and actually I did come close to what you might call a nervous breakdown, although I was too young to fool with things like that. But I am grateful, because through that my practical senses were developed, which otherwise probably never would have been. I can do shorthand--of course, only German and Czech shorthand, but it can be applied to English, too--and, you know, mathematics, geography, and commercial geography, and economics, and all these things which, again, open your horizon more, make you understand some of the things that others do not.

So, to sum it up, with encouragement given to both my sister's and my musical training (my sister sang, but

later on gave it up). . . . But there was love of music in the family, and lots of house music, *Hausmusik*, as we call it in German, music of the home. No radios yet, none of these disturbances from the outside--we had to make our own music at home, and my father had bought a beautiful Steinway upright, which was a gorgeous instrument, very expensive at the time, probably even way beyond his means, but an instrument that truly attracted you to play on it. I remember that as one of the main come-ons to practice as often as I could. So with that, you see, my father just sat back and wanted to watch it because, as you know, with children sometimes there is great enthusiasm from the beginning, and then later on it slackens, or they get sidetracked, and so he didn't make any promises. He wanted to see how it was going to turn out, and would I be tenacious enough and really hang on to it. While other children were playing outside or were already out skiing or, you know, swimming, I would have to have my hours at the piano because the teacher I found in this little town--bless her! her name was Anna Herzog--was very strict, an excellent musician, but one of the spinster type who took no nonsense. You better come prepared. There was the slapping of the fingers, and so often I did leave with a tear in my eye, but she was right. Absolutely everything had to be correct and right from the musical standpoint,

as well as from the pianistic side. [tape recorder turned off] And actually now if somebody asks me, "How early did you start to play the piano?", it would be awfully hard to answer this question because I don't think back so far, and actually I just seem to take to it like a fish to water.

I always remember, later on, one of my great teachers, Theodor Kroyer in Leipzig, used to quote Ludwig Senfl (one of the great composers in the first part of the sixteenth century)--and, as you know, Kroyer made this biography of the edition of the works of Senfl in the *Deutsche Tonkunst aus Bayern* [actually *Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Bayern*]. There is a poem that Senfl wrote, twelve verses of it, which is auto-biographical, and Kroyer used to quote that. It starts, "Lust hal'ich g'halt zur Musica." ("I just had such desire to make music as a child.") From the beginning, it was irresistible to me, and this poem is so right. If you ever have a chance to see it, twelve verses of it, and they are charming--written in, of course, old German. But it says that step by step, music just drew him and enveloped him, and starting with simple do-re-mi-fa-so-la, it became an irresistible magic. And that is exactly what happened there. I loved it so much; and having good teachers, and having encouragement at home, there has been no letup from the very beginning.

GREER: You never went through the cries of having to practice, or did they ever make you practice?

POPPER: No, you see, I developed on my own a funny thing, which later in life proved to be helpful and also sometimes dangerous and detrimental. When I made a mistake, for instance, I practiced and I made a mistake, I said, "All right boy, go back to the beginning." You see, first I straightened out the trouble, what was the mistake, and then I had to go back to the beginning. And it was just a dictum that I was powerless to contradict, you see. And so, all right, if it took two or three more hours, it took two or three more hours. I had to do it. Later on, I had this very funny thing happen to me that [showed] it also worked in different ways of life. For instance, I would be skiing along by myself up in the hills, and suddenly there was a steep hill to my right, and a voice would say, "Okay, you're chicken. You wouldn't go down there, would you?" And before I knew it, I turned my skis and went down, you see. But it is one of those things that I seem to challenge myself all the time. And it developed a--what would I say?--a thirst for knowledge, a thirst for knowing more and more in different fields, and I am most grateful for that. In other words, nobody ever had to force me into learning something, or, you know, opening new horizons or new avenues to new things in geography or

history or literature. It just had to be open to me, and I was voracious when it came to this sort of thing, and that is my good star: the initiative to know more. I really think so! I think that's at the bottom of the whole thing to this very day. I cannot sit still, whether it is studying Oriental languages. . . . Right now I'm still battling the Japanese--the Japanese writing, the Chinese symbols. I don't know whether I will ever need to use it, but I have to do it. I just have to, and my wife is, thank goodness, very, very similar to that. You see, so we never have a boring time; we enjoy life together, in improving ourselves in every way we can. All right. That, I hope, is the answer to your question now. [tape recorder turned off]

GREER: After your childhood then, you probably went away to school. Did you go to a prep school, or how did they work your schooling?

POPPER: Yes. By the way, I'm doing this really all without papers, documents, and what have you, and programs; they are packed since we left our Los Angeles home, broke up our apartment two years ago Christmas of 1976. We packed all of our belongings in boxes, and they are stored in Napa, California, up to the high ceiling; so I really have no access at this point to any of the [material]. So I am improvising, and needless to say, memory is not faultless.

So if I get any of the dates mixed up or confused, I'll be happy to correct them. If they can be corrected, I'll correct them myself.

So anyway, yes, first I went to a prep school, as you might call it, and I started, actually, at an early age. They accepted me at the age of five. That means in the fall of 1912, if you can think so far back there, [laughter] 1912, I went to a very nice school in Reichenberg called the Lehrerbildungsanstalt. It really was a teachers training college, with young teachers, imaginative teachers, I mean very young. I still remember, as a child, [that] I had a lady teacher who talked about music and gave us the basic, you know, in music, and I felt they [the teachers] really were not teaching to be teaching. You see, they put their heart in it, because they were young and enthusiastic.

So then, when I finish this, which would have been--let me see; I went there five years, so about 1917; then I entered what we called a *realgymnasium*. That is a combination of a practical *realschule*--it's high school, of course--but also has the humanistic side of it. That means one starts with Latin, and later on Greek is added to it. The language bit here, of course, I should mention, because, living in a very small country like Bohemia. . . . Very soon it was to become Czechoslovakia, because soon after I entered this *realgymnasium*--the following year, I remember--we woke up in

the morning, and as I went to school, we had machine guns staring us in the face left and right. In other words, the Czechs had taken over. Now needless to say, my feelings were then quite German, because I had gone to German schools. And at first I resented that, and we felt it was like a foreign invasion. There was Czech military all over the streets, you know; and of course, very soon the street names had to be changed, and all these petty foolish little things set in. Anyway, the street names were both now in Czech and in German--of course, Czech had to be first, because it now was Czechoslovakia. Later on, of course, I reversed this opinion completely in getting to know this marvelous president, our first president, [Thomas] Garrigue Masaryk, a great university professor and a great teacher and a great philosopher and a great statesman. Of course, you see, at first through my little eyes, I did not see the greatness of this man; but then, very soon, I realized that there is great sense in having a Czechoslovakia, comprising now Bohemia, Moravia, Slovakia--all the Slavic-speaking countries--especially since the Germanic part, Sudetenland, was not curbed in any way. We could keep our schools; the language was German. Sure, at the post office, the officials had to be able to speak in two languages--which Switzerland takes for granted, you know, that anybody there has to speak German, French, and Italian.

But of course, there were these little frictions at first, especially among the little people. But it all straightened out. It is deplorable, you know, that Czechoslovakia, which then really made great strides and became a very democratic country, was undermined by nazism, by the [Konrad] Henlein group in Sudetenland, and then, of course, fell with the rest of these countries before the Hitler avalanche. So anyway, there the languages were of great importance and treated much more importantly than they would be in larger countries, because it was a matter of survival being able to speak several languages. So at first, we grew up with Czech and German, and that was taught in school from the very beginning; but from the first class of this high school on, we had to take one additional foreign language. And the first usually taken was French, because French was, in a way, our official diplomatic language of Czechoslovakia. So, in official meetings with diplomats or even with our own president, one could not speak in the Czech language. One had to speak in French.

GREER: Rather than German, then.

POPPER: Yes. I think French was preferable, because that was the diplomatic language at the time, and so nobody could expect you to talk behind their backs. You see, if you talked in Czech, that would be like a secret language to them. And so, French was taken very seriously.

Well, later on, Italian was added to it; and again, I must say, we were very fortunate that my parents not only wanted us to learn these languages, but also experience them in the country of its origin. So every summer we traveled either to Italy for the summer, or to Switzerland--French Switzerland or German Switzerland--and later on, even to England when English was added to that. So pretty soon we had about five languages under our belts, and to this very day, I see no problem in speaking those and communicating in them. And, of course, then I added Japanese to it later on because of the work I've done in Japan.

GREER: What language do you think in?

POPPER: English. Without doubt, except when I give a lengthy lecture--more than two and a half hours or so, as it happens for the opera previews I'm giving. Then suddenly, something happens that I seem to be falling back into German a bit as far as the syntax is concerned. Or some German words start dribbling in. It's a symptom of getting tired, you see; but otherwise, I have no problem. I admire my first students when I came to this country, in 1939, 1940, and taught at Stanford University (and, of course, my English was typical school English) and how they could follow. And then usually in the middle of a sentence, I couldn't get myself out of the sentence, so I usually

snapped my fingers, and one of the students, or several, completed the sentence. I must say, I've never had again such attentive students as I had at this time, because they knew they had to come to my rescue somewhere along the line. But English, definitely, my wife being American, a San Francisco girl. We spoke English from the beginning at home. I did not fall into the same mistake as many of my fellow refugees did--that they congregated in groups among themselves, you know. Therefore, it took much longer for them to grasp the idiomatic English and to think in English, as you rightly said. So now, what is your next question?

GREER: Okay. We've got you through the beginnings of schooling. You went from the *gymnasium* to Leipzig?

POPPER: No. First I went to Prague, you see. In other words, I turned south, which was the natural thing to do, to stay within the country. So it must have been, let me see, after four years. . . . It is very simple to count off that way, you see. About 1921, right, I went to Prague, and this is where I continued, but also started, with the conservatory. Now, the conservatory was called the Deutsche Musik Akademie, the German Music Academy. Unfortunately, it is no more in existence. It was an excellent school, with great teachers there. Now, for instance [Alexander von] Zemlinsky, the teacher of [Arnold] Schoenberg, you know,

was one of the teachers of conducting there. Conrad Ansorge, a name that still might be known from recordings, a marvelous Beethoven player--one of the first ones that gave whole evenings of all the Beethoven sonatas and so on--he had master classes there. But also on the lower level; they had good teachers. The director of the conservatory recently died in East Germany. . . . (You know, the Germans were all thrown out of Czechoslovakia after the Hitler nightmare was over, and, unfortunately, good Germans together with bad Germans, you know. In other words, several of my friends who were perfectly democratic people, who loved Czech literature and language, just because they lived in Sudetenland and were of German parentage, were sent out of the country together with those who were really responsible for this horrible Henlein movement, the Bohemian version of Hitler, you see. So I guess there was no time to be discriminate about it, so they were indiscriminately thrown out.) And Fidelio Finke, who was a very fine musician and composer, was the director of that German conservatory. He then went to East Germany and died there. But [he was] really a composer which is very little known, but should be better known. Symphonic works, excellent piano compositions, and chamber music, etc. His father, Romeo Finke, was the father who already had given me. . . . He lived in Reichenberg, you see, Romeo the father, the old

man. I always remember, I took private lessons, even as a child, in music dictation, in harmony, and counterpoint. You see, that was a tremendous advantage, that my parents allowed me to get these things out of the way, even as a very young person, and take it privately, and with somebody who made it interesting and who gave you personal attention. I remember the old gentleman; in the middle of the lesson, he always had to have his mixture of sherry and something else brought in. Oh, I can smell it right now. It smelled so good. He never gave me. . . . I was not allowed at that time. But it bolstered him up for the rest of the lesson to withstand the onslaught.

So anyway, then the training was good. Of course, I trained as a pianist, but you have to have an extra instrument, another instrument, so I selected the trumpet. And today, I'm not a great trumpeter, but I still play it. And so those were my two instruments. But gradually one got also into accompanying singers; and for the first time (I was not opera-minded at all yet at that time; that happened much later) I did learn appreciation of the human voice and, most of all, how to accompany and how to make chamber music and listen to other people--not only to yourself, you see, which many solo pianists do. So that was that, and then I also took commercial academy on the side, as I mentioned. Now, I never would be a great businessman, but, as I say,

it did help me very, very much.

So then something very interesting happened, which led to other things. In other words, while I already concertized here or there--I played in benefit concerts--my liking went very much towards Johann Sebastian Bach and baroque music, [such] as Scarlatti, for instance, which was a bit unusual at that time, because the only Bach that was played was played in very pianistic, murderous arrangements (Friedemann Bach was turned into a virtuoso piano piece). But I found a teacher, not at the conservatory but a private teacher. I would say my piano teacher at the conservatory, a young woman (I will not mention the name) was not as good as the lady I had had in Reichenberg. She let me get by with murder. It was one of those things--you had your thirty minutes and that's it, and the next one "Please come in," right? That wasn't too inspiring, so I looked for inspiration, and inspiration came by a gentleman who I want to briefly describe. His name was Josef Langer. Not Franz Langer, who also taught at the conservatory, an excellent teacher--it was not my good fortune to be assigned to him. He was a very technical man, a virtuoso type of teacher, and everybody who studied with him became a stunning--you know--technically, very well equipped. Josef Langer was entirely different; he was really a peasant. And he was the type of man who, say for instance (he didn't

have much money), if something interesting would happen in Dresden, an interesting concert; or if he himself was called upon to concertize, he would not hesitate to pack a rucksack, you know, and to hike to these places, or to take a small, slow train. He was really a peasanty type, you know, and there was something very honest and very archaic about him. I already had met him in Sudetenland, and he and a few other disciples would walk in the woods and discuss music, interpretation. He pointed out some composers' lives which we. . . . For instance, Scriabin, you know, which was to us was completely unknown--who was Scriabin? He played those very difficult sonatas by Scriabin. He was the first one to do them in concert. And so we really followed him like disciples wherever we could, you see, to hear him in concert. Now, he had been trained in Leipzig under Robert Teichmüller, and as I grew up and as my piano playing became better and better, he had made up his mind I should progress from his training to the master himself, to Teichmüller, and that actually was my incentive later on from Prague to move on to Leipzig. But again, I must mention that where I lived, it was as easy to go either way or the other way. In other words, you could do work in Leipzig and still live in Reichenberg. It was a short distance to these places, which is hard to imagine here in this country, where you have these tremendous distances. So anyway, then

I gravitated toward Leipzig because of Robert Teichmüller. That was actually the incentive. So, when I finally then moved to Leipzig, which I believe must have been around 1927, or latest 1928--I think 1927--then Leipzig received me with, well . . .

GREER: . . . open arms.

POPPER: Oh, I tell you, it was a music town, with [Gustav] Brecher at the opera, a marvelous conductor; and there was the Thomas Church and the Thomas Choir. There was [Karl] Straube, the organist, and later on Günther Ramin, marvelous organist. And it was my honor later on to work very privately with Günther Ramin, especially harpsichord--organ and harpsichord. So really the training was marvelous. But the inspiration, the Friday afternoon cantatas, at the Thomas Church or, you know, the entire . . . the Passion of St. Matthew and so on, which were presented half in the afternoon, half in the evening, you see, uncut completely, and sung by that marvelous Thomas Choir, a beautifully trained chorus of boys and young men. And that inspiration--for the first time, I really went to the opera regularly, to the Leipzig opera house. And then the Gewandhaus Orchester, as you know, which was started by Mendelssohn himself and which was one of the leading orchestras of Germany at that time. So Leipzig really offered everything one could possibly take in music and art; and then there was the university.

Now, I went to the Leipzig Conservatory, of course, with Teichmüller there, and Max Ludwig, a man who is little known in this country--an excellent conductor and theorist, not too much of a composer, but an excellent teacher of composition. So under Max Ludwig, at the conservatory, I studied conducting, and more theory, and more counterpoint, and more improvisation, and, most of all, score reading, *Partiturspiel,* also, playing from full scores, which was taken very seriously at the conservatories, especially in Germany. *Partiturspiel* was very important and probably. . . . I get ahead of myself.

My guiding light at the university was Theodor Kroyer, even though he actually was a musicologist of the Renaissance (late Renaissance, early baroque). You know, his *Publikationen älterer Musik,* which he started in 1923, set a completely new tone in musicological research; or his special work with Ludwig Senfl, who I already mentioned, or Gregor Aichinger--they were outstanding works. But at the same time, the same man--and I would like to mention that especially for any musicologists who ever might be listening to this--this same man was tremendously interested in opera. He wrote the history of the Munich opera, for instance, wrote other works on operatic production, opera performance, as he was a critic at one time, and also wrote, just at the time when I was there, a[n] instructional book on score playing--playing from full orchestral score--which was called. . . .

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE TWO

DECEMBER 29, 1978

GREER: We were talking about a work.

POPPER: We are talking about Theodor Kroyer and his work *Der vollkommene Partiturspiele,* which means "The Perfect Orchestra Score Player." Now, Kroyer used to refer--he had a marvelous sense of humor, about which I would love to speak for a moment--as the *"verkommene" Partiturspieler,* which means the run-down, the distraught. You know, it's a play on words, but one which always struck us very funny.

I was fortunate enough, as his student, to contribute some of the materials for this particular compendium, for this book, which still is an excellent book on instruction in orchestral score playing. Unfortunately, I don't think it ever has been translated. There would be a job for me, if I ever got the time to do that. But Kroyer was a typical Bavarian, you see. He was in his mid-fifties when I studied there, and, how would I say? You see, Saxony and Bavaria were two--we are now in the middle of Saxony, in Leipzig, and of course, Bavarians had a marvelous sense of humor. They spoke a different type of dialect, you see, a heavy Bavarian dialect as opposed to the somewhat flat Saxon. So he felt, in a way, on foreign soil. He had been, of course, in Heidelberg first, and then it was my fortune

that he came from Cologne to Leipzig just at that time. And more than that, he had purchased--I forgot now exactly, was it in 1925 or something like this?--the famous Heyer collection, which was a collection of more than 2,600, I believe, ancient musical instruments, something similar to what we have at UCLA with the Lachmann collection, but only, of course, still much more opulent. And that's how my interest in musicology and early music was awakened. It was my fortune not only to study at the university but also to take private work with Theodor Kroyer; and I must say, it did shape my life. It opened my eyes, not only towards practical music and piano playing and conducting and enjoyment of musical performance, but also to the importance of delving back into the earlier parts of music history, because it was made so lovely and so interesting and so human by this great teacher. I did most of my work with him in early music notation, which came in handy later on, even though I don't really call myself a musicologist because most of my life has been spent in performance and in opera performance and conducting. But this man, and the study there, gave me a lot of background. You might look into the schedule of courses at UCLA. When, at UCLA, the question came up, should we teach early notation to graduate students, and of course, there was really no one to be found who wanted to teach it, I gladly volunteered,

and we had this graduate course in early notation (notation from about 900 to 1600). It was one of the most exciting courses that I enjoyed. I mean, it was not exciting the way I gave it, exciting to me to give it--let me put it that way--because I had excellent students at that time. And instead of just spelling out these notations and transcribing them, we got to the point where it worked into a type of *collegium musicum,* where we learned to sight-read and sight-sing this music, which again breathed the real life into this whole thing and increased the musical enjoyment of it, not only the historical side. So anyway, that is what happened.

I did most of my work in Flemish music. My dissertation was on Josquin Des Prez, the motets of Des Prez, in German, "Musica reservata in Josquin Des Prez's *motetten*." And, as I say, I have never followed it up, really.

I probably should have stayed a musicologist and stayed in the field, but then it happened. And what happened now, I have to relate, because I still--even though I appreciated opera, I knew very, very little about it. You know, I knew opera history the way everybody has to learn it, but I was not attracted to it. As I say, my liking was Bach, Johann Sebastian Bach, and Handel and Scarlatti. At this point, I tenaciously memorized the first volume of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*--the preludes and fugues--and had started

concertizing with this, with the suites, with the *Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue*; and I gave concerts in baroque music. And at that time that was quite unusual. You know, it is hard to believe today, where baroque music plays such an important part, that anybody would give a harpsichord recital, or anybody would give a piano concert, entirely using the programming with Johann Sebastian Bach or some of the other Bachs. That was unusual.

GREER: Did you play most of your concerts on harpsichord, or on piano?

POPPER: Partly harpsichord or piano, depending also on availability, because I did not have my own harpsichord, and harpsichords were not yet as easily found in these days as they are now. So, very often, I had to use the concert grand for that. So then my father--who, of course, was a very practical man, and who saw that I am making strides in music and that I was succeeding, in a way, but I was somehow going off on a wild tangent (you see, I wanted to become a baroque pianist and harpsichordist; I never was too much of an organist, I must admit)--felt that this was somehow an impractical thing. And he must have had a quiet talk with the director of the little opera house in my hometown in Reichenberg, Direktor Friedrich Sommer, who, in his way, again, was a very interesting man. He actually was more like a regimental band conductor, but knew his operas

inside out and was a real taskmaster. The orchestra did not like him particularly, but he got what he wanted by autocratic rule. Well, this man and my father, of course, in this little town were acquainted, and my dad must have said something to him: "Look, don't you think you could get my son somehow interested?" He said, "We really don't need a coach right now." But, well, apparently the agreement, which I only found out much later, would be that I would get a call to become a coach and young conductor at the Reichenberg theater, but that my father was paying my first year's salary. [laughter]

GREER: How sneaky!

POPPER: I found out only much later. So I got this very nice offer, which was hard to turn down, you see.

GREER: That was after you got your PhD in musicology, right?

POPPER: Yes. Right. About '31. And so, in the fall of '31, I left Leipzig, and I became a young coach, and actually had, already, opportunity to conduct. Of course, a very simple thing--incidental music for plays, or some ballet music--but it was my first chance to breathe theater air and to become acquainted with theater life. And needless to say, that did it, because from then on I fell in love with opera, and learned more and more about it, and realized that opera has various sides, one side being sincere music

drama. We have some very intersting young singers, you see. It is different in Europe than it ever would be here. In other words, young singers go directly from the conservatory to these provincial opera houses. That is their first employment. And so even though they are not yet quite ready for the stage, they are very eager to learn and very eager to absorb and to be directed, and so you don't get any stars. You don't get any people with old habits who are used to doing things this way or that way, and having usually very good stage directors at these smaller opera houses. To this very day, this is true. Some of the most interesting directors can be found not at the big Munich opera house or Hamburg opera house but, really, some of the small experimental theaters. So I soon learned that opera is not just the kind of thing that I had considered it to be, or regarded it to be--an old-fashioned form of corrupted theater--but that it can be very exciting under the right guidance. And that, actually, is how I got into opera and operettas.

Of course, you know, you have to earn your spurs as an opera conductor. It was not so easy to become one. First, as I say, you had to play in the orchestra; you played celeste, even helped--when there was piano in the orchestra, you played piano. You helped in the percussion instruments as a percussionist. You learned it really

from the ground, you see. And I did some coaching for opera and operetta and choral directing, and trained choruses; but the first thing that you really got to do, besides incidental music, was to conduct operetta. And again, this is a very helpful thing that very few people realize, because in operetta, in the first place, some of the scores are very intricate. You take an operetta by Lehar or Kálmán, or you take a classical operetta by Millöcker or by Suppé or Johann Strauss, or any of the other Strausses concerned, and you will find they really are miniature operas. The finales are very difficult, and, more than that, you deal with a type of singer who is not truly trained like an opera singer. That means you have to give in; you have to accompany. You learn to accompany, to vary your beat, to lead the orchestra with a flexible beat, and that was great schooling for me. That, plus the fact that in summer, I was in charge of the summer symphony concerts, which I mentioned already, out in a huge beer garden called the Volks Garten (the People's Garden); and there, there was an afternoon concert and an evening concert. And the program was very, very ambitious. We did anything from the *Tristan* prelude to medleys from operettas known or unknown--some of them I have never heard about, but they made good garden music. And so our symphony orchestra turned into a summer orchestra.

But the challenge was as follows: the program was put together by the orchestra librarian, who was the oboe player and a very good man who knew his music--well, you know, operatic overtures, operatic medleys, or even an opera aria, with a singer appearing--and then you went into these potboilers, you know, *Dichter und Bauer* ("Poet and Peasant") and what have you. But you were not supposed to look at it before the concert. In other words, you arrived at the concert and you sight-read. You sight-read at the same time. And sometimes, you were so eager to know what's on the next page, especially with these operetta medleys (which were unknown to me, many of them), and that was the best schooling you could possibly get in conducting, because you had to quickly adjust your beat. Sometimes the orchestra smiles at you if you miss a little here or there, because they were seasoned players. They had done this for many years. So all of that, of course, worked into a marvelous school of conducting, of learning about opera. And, one more thing: you also had to compose, whether you wanted or not. The director of a play company connected with the same house would come to you and say, "Popper, next week I need some incidental music for *Faust* or *Prince of Hamburg* by Kleist or . . . "--you know, this sort of thing. "All right, why don't you come to the rehearsal Monday." And it had to be written.

They didn't ask whether you could write it, could not; it had to be done. And the music varied--all kinds of, you know, backstage music or even music in the pit. For *Faust* I wrote quite an elaborate score (*Faust*-erste teil, the first part of *Faust*).

Once I remember, and that is an anecdote that you might enjoy, I was supposed to write, again on such short notice, music for a play, a Chinese play called the *Chalk Circle*--*Der Kreidekreis*--by Klabund, and, of course, I had a whole week to do it and thought, "Oh, that is marvelous. I will get all these lovely Oriental sounds. I will get strings and harp and singers and, really, you had to read the play in a hurry and think out "This needs music here and here"; you had to make your own disposition and then, you see, go ahead and do it. So when I brought the plan to the director of this company, he would say, "Popper, are you crazy? You want six string players and you want harp. We don't have the money for that, and they are not available to do that. You do it just with piano and a singer." Well, you really had to be inventive, but this one time, after being disgruntled and, you know, sorry to have wasted all this time on writing this score, I sat down at an upright piano backstage--and, as you know, there were the candleholders on the old uprights where the candles were burning on each side. Well, I hung various percussion instruments on these

things that I could handle myself. I put some papers through the strings of the upright, which made it this percussive tinkly sound; and I had an excellent soprano from the chorus, who was very musical, sight-read some of the music. And you have never heard more Chinese music. So you had to learn to be inventive, you know, and to do something with nothing. And that also has been an excellent school.

GREER: How long did that last? How long did you do that?

POPPER: Well, you see, then from Reichenberg I took one year off, I believe, and went to Vienna and studied at the Neues Wiener [Konservatorium] conservatory, because, after two years as conductor there, I knew what I still needed from the theoretical standpoint, which I never had really gotten because it wasn't my field of study. So I went for one year to Vienna (it must have been around '33, I believe, or '34; I would have to look this up, you see) and studied at the Neues Wiener conservatory; and of course, that was now the trying time of the Hitler takeover in Germany, and unrest already started in Vienna, too.

There was, again, one anecdote which you might enjoy, which actually is a sad kind of thing. In order to make a little money on the side, I started orchestrating, while in Vienna, for a ladies orchestra, put together of very charming, beautiful Viennese young women, and most of them from high

society. The leader of this group was the daughter of the concertmaster of the Vienna Philharmonic. His name was Arnold Rosé, and her name was Alma Rosé, a very beautiful and intelligent lady who led this group while playing. And I now made arrangements of famous things that they could play on concert tour. So that was fine; that was rather lucrative, also. And I rehearsed them.

And then, at one time, they took a trip to Munich, and they asked me, would I come along with them, conduct while Alma was playing the solo and so on. It was just during the time of the Kapp Putsch,* and the Nazis were already taking over. Well, we stayed there a couple of days, but they gave us to understand that it would be safer if we left town. Many of the young ladies in there were Jewish ladies, and it was very evident that they were. So the idea was to leave town very quietly the next morning. I said, "All right, ladies, instead of going as a group, we go separately to the station, you see, to Hauptbahnhof. You go over there, and I will carry the double bass and walk by myself," so that we don't call [attention to ourselves] and because Munich was also very excited, and there were incidents in the streets and so on. So that was fine. I bought all the tickets. I was, so to

---

* My slip of memory! Kapp Putsch was in 1920. I visited Munich in 1933, during Hitler's takeover.--J.P.

speak, the manager of this group at that point. And we arrived at the main station, and everything went very well until I went through the. . . . You see, there were glass houses on each side, and conductors were clipping the tickets, right, and I forgot that I carried the double bass. As I turned to give my ticket, my bass went through the glass house of the opposite conductor, and the glass came raining down on the poor fellow. Needless to say, that created a tremendous. . . . I was taken to the station-master, and of course, people thought that was, you know, a sabotage of some kind. But, thank goodness, I got myself and the group out of there safely. But those are little incidents that happened at that time.

But otherwise, Vienna again, [Rudolf] Nilius was the conducting teacher at the Neues Wiener Konservatorium, as it was called, and it was very helpful to me to brush up on some of the things I needed. Then I went, once more, back to Reichenberg to finish out my conductorship there, and now it was opera only. I had graduated from operetta to opera only. And then I went ahead to the Prague opera house, which also happened in a very strange way. The thing was that very often young talent from the smaller opera houses was recruited to the larger theaters like the Prague or the Brünn [Brno] opera house, the Bratislava opera house. In other words, instead of asking them to

come there and audition, talent scouts would come in and listen to the singers in performance, which of course is a much better way of seeing what a singer can do. Auditions were very rare at that time. And I guess some of them had come to see me at work, conducting opera, and so my name was known at the Prague German opera house already. But once I had gone skiing, and up in the mountains. . . . It was a day when I was supposed to do *La Traviata* in the evening, and unfortunately I did the wrong turn, and I fell, and I broke my thumb. Now, that takes a lot of talent, you know, to go skiing and not break your foot but break your thumb, but I did. [laughter] Of course, you had to be very quiet about this because, actually, we were forbidden to do sports while the opera house was in session. They were afraid of just this sort of thing. So I didn't tell anybody. I went to emergency, and I have this thumb, a small cast on it. And everything was great; I just conducted very relaxed that night with my right hand and kept the left hand . . . After all, Weingartner always only conducted with his right hand. Why shouldn't Popper be allowed to do that? So it didn't catch anybody's attention, except for the time when. . . . In Europe at that time, the conductor gave the sign for the curtains to rise or to fall--the curtain bell--and of course, in the excitement of the performance, I forgot all

about my thumb, and I pressed the bell with my thumb, and I nearly fell with the curtain.

Anyway, it had been badly done, and the thumb had to be rebroken. And so, in order to do that, I went to Prague--I took time off from my job in Reichenberg, went to Prague, had it done, and went to see an opera at the beautiful Prague opera house, which still is existent now. It's called the Smetana Theatre, Smetanovo Divaldo in Prague. It's a beautiful theater. And so I sat in the audience (I forgot what the opera was), and at the intermission somebody, well, tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Popper, you are here." (It was a colleague of mine from the Prague conservatory, George Schick, who later on became also conductor at the Metropolitan Opera. He still lives in New York in this country.) And George said, "I hear you had some misfortune here. That's too bad. But tell me, would you be available, because we do need a coach very badly at this time here at the Prague opera house." I said, "Well, I have to ask, of course, for permission to be released earlier before the season finishes at Reichenberg, but if you need me, maybe this release would be gotten." And so again, paradoxically through a broken thumb, you see, and just being there when they needed somebody (and there were many people in line for this job of a young coach and conductor at the Prague opera house). . . . But they

probably felt, not to hurt anybody's feeling, they should go to the outside and get an outsider who was not in line, you see. And so I got this job, which, of course, worked into a beautiful coaching and conducting job where I worked under the guidance of people like Fritz Zweig, now in Los Angeles; and George Szell, who, unfortunately, died. Well, I cannot describe the excellence of performance of this theater. I sometimes think, you know, as we listen to the operas here, which are done beautifully and done by stars and with an excellent orchestra, one thing is missing; and that is the team spirit, and that marvelous months-long training, which our singers got, you see. Like when Risë Stevens came to Prague, she already had been hired by the Metropolitan Opera with the stipulation, being inexperienced, that she would get to Europe and get her experience at the European opera house. So she came to us to Prague, and I worked on [*Der*] *Rosenkavalier*, Octavian, with her. Well, we had about six months to prepare a role like this, with practically daily coachings, you see. So, by the time these singers got to performance, the role had gotten under their skin, you know. They got out on that stage. . . . And not only that, but they had worked together as a team for many weeks and months, which, of course, we cannot do in this country, where we have seasonal opera of the type. It's miraculous what happens in San

Francisco, for instance, with an opera season there. The people get together from all over the world and put on very challenging works, like [*Die*] *Frau ohne Schatten*, by Richard Strauss, and very difficult contemporary works by Janacek, or, you know, contemporary American works with very, very few weeks of rehearsing. It is miraculous, but it never has the same kind of real team spirit and team polish that we could achieve at this European opera house.

GREER: Most of the universities have that sort of feeling.

POPPER: Yes, we have that, but then, of course, we do lack, at the university, sometimes, of the accomplished artistry that these. . . . In Prague, that was slightly different from the provincial opera house. You had graduate singers there, already. They were not of the very youngish kind. They were people who had gone through the schooling of the provincial opera house in Reichenberg, in Aussig, and in, you know, the many different provincial towns and theaters we had in Bohemia. Or some of them were hired from Austria, from Germany, and so they had had their schooling; so now they were advanced in their artistry, in their acting, in their knowledge of the scores, in their ability to follow a conductor, and so on. So these were really performances I will never forget and I was fortunate enough in conducting many of them. I still did

opera and classical operetta, you see, like Johann Strauss, Millöcker--these are my field, but also Mozart. It was pretty much dished out to every conductor what he was to do. Some were more for Wagner, some more for romantic opera, some more in the eighteenth-century field, and so on; so we could specialize, in a way, but we had to be available for any call to do any work.

GREER: What did George Szell do? Did he do Wagner, or what. . . ?

POPPER: George Szell was the supreme opera chief, so he did Wagner, most all, although Fritz Zweig did some of the Wagners. But he did any work that was new and challenging, for instance, the first performance of Shostakovitch's *Lady Macbeth of Mitzensk*--works of that sort which were shown for the first time outside the iron-curtain countries. And of course, he was a fantastic musician. I mean, Szell's ear (hearing)--I would call it supernatural. It really was. This man, in the midst of a great orchestral outbreak, could hear if a second horn was slightly flat or not quite on it. Of course, he was an excellent horn player, besides being a very fine concert pianist himself. And of course, the orchestra, in a way, hated him because of that and because of the fact that he wasn't always tactful in correcting these things. In other words, he took advantage of the orchestra by virtue of his phenomenal hearing, of

his phenomenal ear. But nevertheless, the performances conducted by him (he also taught at the conservatory--was an excellent conductor) were outstanding, especially the contemporary works.

Of course, there were works then in--what would I say?--in the repertory which today, I imagine, would not be played anymore, besides the typical repertory operas, the works by Franz Schreker, for instance--isn't it interesting?--a post-romantic composer, contemporary twentieth-century composer, but coming more out of the, well, impressionistic field, you know. He was actually an impressionist, an Austrian impressionist, but a very prolific opera writer and. . . . *Die ferne Klang*, for instance (*The Distant Sound*), or *Die Schwarze*. . . . A lot of operas which are not given, but extremely difficult to perform. Or works by Korngold--who, by the way, lived in Los Angeles, as you know, and died there. But, works which . . . *Die Wunder der Heliane* [*The Miracle of Heliane*] and *Die tote Stadt*. I believe that was done in Los Angeles by the New York City Opera. [There were] works of that sort, which were actually local European composers which never really got international acclaim, but which formed the backbone of the opera houses at that time. In other words, audiences did not only want bread and butter in the way of, you know, Puccini, Massenet, and so on, and Wagner, but they wanted, also, unusual works. Every opera house prided themselves

on accepting each season at least one new work that had not been premiered, that had not been done, which either could be a Czechoslovak work, an Austrian-German work, or also, coming from Russia or any of the iron-curtain countries.

GREER: Did they do them in the original languages? Or did they translate them into German?

POPPER: Everything was translated in German. We did everything in the German language. And the Czechs, of course, at the national opera house, the Národní Divaldo, which is still there at the Moldau River--they did everything in Czech. Both theaters are still in action. So it was very interesting to go over there and hear *Lohengrin* in the Czech language; and it was as funny in many ways as it was for us to do Smetana and Woržischek and Janacek in German, you see. So they were translated, and the translaters were excellent. There were some very fine [translators] like Max Brod, a very famous newspaper critic and literate who did many of the German translations of Czech operas, and very well done. Some of them were awkward translations, especially of Italian opera. But you see, the people loved it, because it was their language and they could follow. They needed no opera previews or introductions of any sort. And once a year, at the German opera house, we had the Milan Scala come up, you see, and great conductors like [Antonio]

Votto, for instance. They would do their Verdis and Puccinis or other Italian operas in the original language, and that was a revelation to us because we were used to them only in translation. But then, you see, that's also different for the audience. They were so well acquainted with these repertory works that now, hearing them in the original, you were not putting the cart before the horses, but the other way around.

GREER: Did they receive them well?

POPPER: Oh, they were sold out always. They were famous singers and famous conductors, and [they] brought their own orchestra, their own chorus. It was very exciting to see. And of course, the theater life at that time--I don't have to tell you, Leslie, that under the Weimar Republic in Germany and in the time of the Czechoslovakia Republic, there were very, very exciting events in Berlin, as well as in Vienna, as well as in Prague. And the thing that happened more and more--this is why it is so deplorable that the republic broke down--is there was an approachment of the Czech and the German singers and artists and understanding of each other's cultures. The fact that we were really in the center of Europe--Prague, Bohemia always was. It was equally far to down to Italy. You got on the train in the evening, and in the morning you were in Milan. So it was a crossroads of the various cultures, of Italian

or Germanic or eastern Slavic. So it was a very exciting time, and I'm sorry that this seems to be hopelessly lost. Even though music is still very important in Czechoslovakia today, and the arts are treated very seriously, and a lot of good musicians still come out of Bohemia in the way of conductors and chamber music players, string quartets, and what have you--even singers--yet it again has become provincial because of the isolation that it is going through.

GREER: Did you feel the influence of the Hitler era and all their repressions of music, or did that affect Czechoslovakia at all?

POPPER: In a way it did, because we had this Henlein movement in Bohemia and Czechoslovakia. One had to be rather careful what one said, you know, because part of the orchestra were German nationalists who definitely belonged to the Henlein movement. Part of the cast--they being German, so even Germans from Germany--were Hitlerites. And so the spirit got lost, even though we still said what we had to say; we were still on free soil. But we were gradually being surrounded by that German clutch, and isolated.

There were some very amusing incidents at that time, too. I was not only a conductor at the opera house, but also conducted for the Czechoslovak broadcasting station. You see, it was a government, state, broadcasting station,

and they had live music; they had several orchestras. They had one Czech symphony orchestra; they had an operetta orchestra; they had a jazz orchestra--and all supported by the station itself. And they had a German orchestra that played symphony and all types of things. And so I conducted there quite frequently as a guest conductor. Mr. Nettl was the director of the German broadcast. (That was Paul Nettl, you see, the father of Bruno. Yes, Paul Nettl.) And so, I got this call once, saying, "Popper. . . ."

By the way, my name over there--this, I should have mentioned in the beginning--you see, my name really is Herbert Jan Popper; Jan is the middle name. In Czechoslovakia, Jan is a very usual name--it means John--and so Herbert sounded a little bit more exotic to my parents. So I really went under the name Herbert Popper over there. When I came to this country, it still was true. I was Herbert Popper. In some of the early write-ups, you can see that my name is mentioned that way. But my wife thought that Jan really would be nicer because it is a little. . . . So I gradually dropped the Herbert professionally, even legally, and now I'm Jan Popper. But especially when I did concerts with my wife, which I guess we will discuss later on, then Jan and Beta Popper gave a good team, because we did a lot of work

during the Second World War for Czech relief to buy care packages for Czech refugees and so on--benefit concerts of Bohemian music. And even though my wife is an American girl--she doesn't speak Czech, but she sings Czech folk songs, Moravian and Slovak folk songs very well with excellent diction, and she has a Czech national costume. So we did a lot of concerts for the Czech relief that way. So Jan and Beta Popper sounded better than Herbert and Elizabeth Popper (because her name is Elizabeth, but which in Czech is called Beta, more as a nickname is Beta Popper). So, where did I interrupt myself so rudely?

GREER: You are right in Prague doing the opera house there and talking about George Szell and things, and I interrupted you, wanting to find out how the influence of Hitler was on the . . .

POPPER: So it became more and more precarious. There was hostility; there was hostility in the streets. Well, I was called up to the broadcasting station, which was, by the way, quite close to the opera house. One could walk over there in no time at all. Mr. Nettl said that something very interesting is going to happen, that that same night from Berlin, a broadcast would take place, in form of music theater, in which the troubles and tribulations of the Germans in Czechoslovakia would be

dramatized. And of course, what were the troubles and tribulations of the Germans? We had our opera house, that we could sing an opera in our own language. Sure, if somebody insulted the Czechs, they insulted him back, you know, because it was Czechoslovakia. So anyway, there were no tribulations known to me. So anyway, we had a whole staff ready and waiting that same night. The broadcast came across. We took it down. The music, the melodies--some were operatic-like melodies. It was a tendentious kind of play, directed against the Czech regime, you see, done by the Hitler people over there. And so we sat up all night; we transcribed it. Already, some poets, some German writers were at work, and turned it all around, using the same music, and poked fun and wrote a parody, and we broadcast it the next night back to Berlin. Well, it was dangerous, but on the other hand, it was an exciting thing to do, and of course, it was fun to do this sort of thing.

But then, of course, as you know from the historical happenings, our struggle for freedom did not last. We all had some kind of hand in the war effort, especially after Austria fell in 1938. We all knew that we were next, and that we had to prepare ourselves in some way. So most of our young men, at that time, joined some branch of the armed forces. I still remember my friend

Jan Bier who was then at the Metropolitan Opera (maybe he still is; I think maybe he now is retired from the Met) joined the artillery. He was sent to Slovakia, and he came back, and his fingers were practically frozen. He had to nourish them back to life and still was a very fine pianist later on.

Now, I had learned how to fly. Among the sports I had taken, I was a pilot, and so I joined what was called the Masaryk League, which was a group of voluntary fliers--you might call it like reserve officers who were to be pulled in in case of an emergency. And so I was trained there, continued my training with military flying, and flew a pursuit ship, and we all were ready to go.

Some of us were trained as parachutists (I was one of them) and, as I mentioned to you once before, I had this very interesting review in a newspaper review as a parachutist. In other words, when I did my first jump, the music critic of the Prague paper came to the airport and wrote up the parachute jump as an editorial, an operatic production. Now, I prize this thing, because I don't think too many of my colleagues have a review of that type. So you are welcome to that, if you have somebody who can translate the German into English.

But as you know, it never did come to it. There was the Munich treaty, with Mr. [Edouard] Daladier and

Mr. [Neville] Chamberlain; and Sudetenland, my former home, was given to the Nazis, to the advancing Nazis, which means that we were dismembered and dismantled, because our Maginot Line, so to speak, was in the mountainous surrounding of Bohemia in the mountains I spoke about near my home in the Isergebirge, the northwestern part of Bohemia, which also was German, and in the southwestern part, near Pilsen, the Bohemian forest. Those were all mountainous stretches which were fortified, and by giving those away, the inner part of the country was lying open to Mr. Hitler's discretion whenever he wanted to walk in. So that means that, at this point, the opera house stopped performing; everything stood still, and, of course, the army was useless at that point.

Those were horrible days in Prague that cannot be described. My parents had fled to Prague; my sister was there. We had a little apartment. They had saved as much merchandise [as] they could bring in, because the Nazis had already. . . .

TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE ONE

DECEMBER 29, 1978

GREER: To start with, we are right with the Nazis taking over Czechoslovakia.

POPPER: Well, I never saw the takeover in Prague myself. I was again very, very lucky to get out of Czechoslovakia at that time, which was extremely difficult because you were completely surrounded by Nazidom on all sides. You only could fly out of the country. You could not take a train, or you had to take the chance that my sister did, who left much later than I did, to just walk at nighttime over the border and work your way through Nazi-occupied foreign countries until you reached freedom.

GREER: She walked the whole way?

POPPER: Yes, she did. Actually what my sister did--I was already in America at that point and of course, found out much later--she joined with another group of people, under good guidance and scouts who knew the countryside, and since we knew the mountains very well surrounding us, she walked through Austria (which was Nazi-occupied). She got into Rumania; they got down to the Danube and just at that point, the Iron Guard took over in Rumania (which also was a Nazi group--the same as Henlein in Bohemia). But they managed to get through all the way on a Danube

ship and got to the open sea (to the Black Sea), and then they sailed. . . . I believe on Cyprus, the war had broken out and bombing had started, and the crew refused to go on. Well, this is a whole saga in itself, you know, of these people, these refugees, crowded together on this ship. And finally she got on the *Patria*, which was a British ship, and they got to their goal, which was, of course, Israel, which then was the only haven that would accept people. But Israel was British-dominated at that time, still, and when they arrived in the port of Haifa, the British would not give them landing permission for some reason or other. So the boat was lying out in the harbor, quite far out; and then, as you well know, the *Patria* was torpedoed and sunk. But my sister was an excellent swimmer, and she saved herself. Another girl took her to the shore, then the British put her in a detention camp for one year, after which then she made her home in Haifa throughout the war, and then came to San Francisco later.

But I was much luckier than that, I must say. It so happened that an uncle of mine, who was an importer of Czechoslovak goods in San Francisco and traveled back and forth, had come to Prague just at that critical time and apparently knew the American consul in Prague quite well, because they had dealt on various occasions. And

it was at that time, as you remember, in 1939, when the World's Fair on Treasure Island took place in San Francisco, and my uncle was the director of the Czechoslovak exhibit. So he simply claimed that he needed an assistant for this purpose and somehow or other managed to make it possible for me to receive a visitor's visa to come to the United States to assist him on Treasure Island. Now, that sounds rather simple, but if you can imagine the long lines in front of the American consulates and the difficulty in getting permission by the Czechoslovak authorities to leave the country, which was equally difficult--it was difficult on both parts to get out and to get into the other country. I mean, weeks went by until I finally received that very coveted, prized visa (and it was a visitor's visa only; it was not an immigration visa) to come to America. And I did assist my uncle on Treasure Island and then tried, of course, to convert this visitor visa into an immigration visa, which posed many, many other difficulties that I really don't think I have to go into. It took months, it took years, until it finally could be done.

GREER: Somebody had written that you had gone via England to the United States.

POPPER: Yes, I briefly stopped in England.

GREER: That wasn't your way out. It was just a stop.

POPPER: No, just a place. Again, I had relatives in

England. I had one aunt living in London, and I stayed there, I believe, for a week or so. But that was just passing. I never had intended to stay in England, because I knew that my uncle was waiting for me in San Francisco, which he did.

That's the way it started, and [it's] interesting how the connection with Stanford University started. Of course, I was just a refugee among many others, except I had the good fortune that instead of stopping in New York, which most of my colleagues in music did, that I came to the West Coast, which then was still offering more opportunities in music than New York did, certainly, or Chicago. But still I had no job besides being on Treasure Island, and that wasn't too interesting, even though it was an interesting way of becoming acquainted with America and meeting people and practicing my English and things of that sort. But pretty soon, I was drawn to the music centers. In the first place, [Pierre] Monteux was then the conductor of the symphony in San Francisco, and of course whenever I could, I went to the symphony. You really do feel at home; the moment you hear the same music that you have heard all your life, you really forget that you are in a foreign country. It makes you right, [it makes you] really feel [that] where there is music and good people, that must be a good country. And of couse, the symphony under Monteux

was wonderful. And I still hadn't met my wife. So I was rather alone; but I went to Sherman Clay down on Kearney Street.

GREER: That's the piano dealer, isn't it?

POPPER: Piano dealer, recordings. And actually, I believe it was on the eighth floor, they had a recording studio. That's where I also met Mr. George Gibson Davis, who listened to me and realized what my background [was] and that there should be and must be a job for me somewhere in this country. He just said, "Cheer up and everything will happen." And I'm very grateful that he gave me this advice, because needless to say, just imagine yourself being a refugee and having no idea of what happened to your parents back there. Because while I came as a visitor to this country, in the meantime, the war had started and now I was a refugee. I mean, there was no way of returning. And of course, there was no connection with the homeland, so the worries really were terrible.

Anyway, I went to this eighth floor, and there was a recording studio. That means that this nice young man ran a studio. Oh, you could record your own voice, or you could even sing a song. Remember, this was very much in the beginning. There were no long-playing records, no tapes, nothing of that sort, but those home recordings. All right. I met him, he said, "Well, that's great. You

know, if you would want to accompany, sometimes singers come up here and they don't have an accompanist. Can you sight-read?" Well, I said I'd try my best to do that. Anyway, I sat out in the lobby, and lo and behold, a lot of people came. Mothers with their daughters wanted the voice recorded; sometimes they had music to play from, sometimes not. I improvised it at the piano, and they paid one dollar per recording. Now, that was a lot of money in these days when you didn't have any money at all. So that was wonderful. Gradually I could even buy a few things that I needed.

But most of all, again, an unheard of stroke of luck: that one young man, by the name of Joel Carter, came to the studio one day and wanted to record the *Songs and Dances of Death* by Mussorgsky, which are rather difficult to play. And again, he did not have an accompanist. But he met me there and, of course, I sat down and played the accompaniment for him. That startled him, and he said, "Well, you know, there is a vocal teacher in Berkeley who needs a coach very much. His name is Robert Eberhart. Why don't you come over and meet him?" Well, to make a long story short, Bob Eberhart had a large amount of students; he needed a coach. Now, I actually had a job for survival, even though there was very little pay for accompanying and coaching.

But most of all, two more results of this new connection. One was that my wife, my future wife, came with an opera group to get some operatic coaching, and that's how I got to meet this lovely, good-looking mezzo soprano. And we started dating, and it was not long till we decided that we are made for each other. And so, that happened--this fortunate thing happened. And secondly, Joel Carter also was a teaching assistant at Stanford University, a graduate student there. He took his vocal lessons in Berkeley but went to Stanford. So he spoke to Warren D. Allen, who was the chairman of the music [department], a very, very small music department at that time. I met Dr. Allen, who gave me a brief interview and examination and realized that I had the musicological background he needed but also the performance background. Besides, I had one of the prize possessions; I had with me an *Empfehlungschreiben*--what will you say?--a recommendation from Theodor Kroyer. (By the way, Kroyer died. I never got to meet him after the war. He died in 1945 in Munich, I believe.) And so, this *Schreiben*, this letter, which, of course, recommended my work and my knowledge and background, was very helpful; and Dr. Allen, within no time at all, managed to secure employment for me at Stanford as a lecturer--with a very small salary again. But, nevertheless, we lived in San Francisco, and I commuted in my little jalopy from San Francisco to Stanford every day.

But what a happy time that really was. I taught history courses, but at the same time also, which was very helpful in this small department, was able to study and to start an opera group. It's called an opera workshop in this country. As a matter of fact, it was the second of its kind on the West Coast. The very first one, believe it or not, was at Los Angeles City College, started by a German conductor, a very fine man, Hugo Strelitzer. And Stanford University, under my leadership, was the second one of the type, which again had very small beginnings, of course, but gradually grew so that within ten years at Stanford, I was able to do some of the classics, like *Magic Flute* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* by Nicolai. *The Bartered Bride*, we started out with in 1940. That was the first big production and very exciting because. . . . Warren D. Allen says, "Well, what opera? You select the opera, and we'll do it." And he was this enterprising type of a gentleman. And I selected the *Prodaná nevěsta* (in Czech), *The Bartered Bride*. We worked on the English translation and got this done. And when I came to the first stage rehearsal, I nearly cried, because here the students had researched the whole thing. Not only were the costumes completely authentic, but the setting on the stage--for instance, the inn on the side had *hostinec* (that's the Czech word for village inn, you see). And everything was just as if I were right back home in

Czechoslovakia. So my respect for Stanford and its students rose, and of course, it was a marvelous school at that time--only 3,500 students, and very small classes. Really, I'll never forget that time. And you know, I should mention here that I had done very little teaching in Europe. I had been a teaching assistant here or there, but really, teaching on my own was a completely unknown thing to me. I'm ashamed to say I have taken no courses in pedagogy or any of the basic elementary courses a teacher is supposed to have. I set out and taught, but being completely obsessed with my subject matter, regardless of whether it was music appreciation or graduate courses, period courses in history, and later music literature; or whether it was opera history, and of course, the practical courses in opera training--I just loved doing it.

And I must say right here and there that the one--well, there were many blessings for me by coming to this country. Of course, my career had been interrupted by the events in Europe. I had the choice then of either waiting out my time here in America and becoming one of the many traveling guest conductors doing opera here or there; I guess I was equipped to do it. But the fact that I got into music, into education, and into opera education and teaching at universities has opened my eyes in many ways. I realize things even about opera that I hadn't realized before.

Because in Europe you are a cog in the wheel: you are in charge of music; you have no say-so about anything else. But here I suddenly was a director of an opera workshop and had to make decisions about stage design, about costumes, about staging; and the total picture of opera, for the first time, opened up to me completely. And so I have learned, and learned greatly, by doing all of that. The fact that you work with young people, which is unheard of in Europe. . . . And I told my friends in Europe, after returning there on visits, that we are doing operas at Stanford University, such as *Peter Grimes*'s West Coast premiere, which was 1948. Well, they just look at me. "Well, you are telling some real nice stories, but this is impossible. You cannot do that, you see." Or then *Schwanda, the Bagpiper* in '49 by Weinberger--those were the two biggest productions--besides doing smaller works and contemporary works by Ernst Bacon, or Jacobi. I mean, American works for which, of course, the university workshops here in this country are known, to help the local composer hear their works for the first time, which happened later on at UCLA, again. So this was the blessing of being able to work at the university and having a good beginning, such as Stanford University.

In the meantime, my wife and I got married at Stanford Chapel in 1940, and from then on, of course, we set up home. And I have, of course, regretted greatly to find out after

the war--I tried to save my parents, but it was impossible--I found out that they both had been killed in concentration camps. My father died at Terezin--Theresienstadt (that is the German name)--in Sudetenland in 1942, and my mother was dragged to Poland and died in the gas chamber, and I will never know where. So actually, my sister and I are more or less the only survivors of the family. But having found new happiness in this country, life goes on, and having many children now--not any of our own, but many of the young students whom we have fathered and mothered and pampered until they could stand on their own feet--among them six Japanese graduate students whom we brought over (I'm getting ahead of myself now) after a Fulbright year in Tokyo, who hardly spoke English at all. We brought them to UCLA--they were all graduate students--and it's marvelous how. . . . And of course, we signed for them, affidavits and what have you, together with some professorial friends who risked writing affidavits of support for them, and they all have done extremely well. Two or three of them have stayed in this country. One of them is now director of the opera workshop in the University of Colorado, in Boulder (Kuniaki Hata), and has a very high standing in opera circles here in this country. He's with the National Opera Association, on the board of directors, etc. Most of them, however, have gone back and are now leading singers in

Japan; and whenever I go back there, it's fun to conduct and have them in the cast.

So, I got ahead of myself here. Is there any question, after Stanford, you want to ask, or during my Stanford stay?

GREER: How did you happen to do *Peter Grimes* as a West Coast premiere? Did somebody ask you to do it, or was it something you wanted to do?

POPPER: Yes. You see, I've mentioned some of the leading lights in my life. I mentioned, of course, Josef Langer the pianist; I had Theodor Kroyer in Leipzig, and people that have profound influences on your life. And one of them I found at Stanford University. The gentleman's name, who was a member of the drama department there, was F. Cowles Strickland, and unfortunately, "Strick," as we lovingly called him, also has passed away. But he was a marvelous director in the drama department, but very interested in opera. His wife, Edith, was a good pianist (is a good pianist; she is still alive) and even though he constantly claimed, "I know nothing about opera," he was a marvelous operatic director, one of the few that one could work together with, who constantly worried, "Is the chorus in the right position to see you? Are the altos next to the sopranos? Can I divide the chorus here?" [He was a man] who had a constant consideration for the musical side of the opera, but despite that, was, of course, a marvelous

dramatic director who had a wonderful eye, especially for choral position on the stage. They never looked like a bunch of people just come out to sing. He grouped them, choral groupings I should say, and also dramatic action.

And so I worked together [with him]. All of these operas were staged by Strickland that I did. When *Peter Grimes* came out, we listened to the broadcast from the Metropolitan Opera and were not too deeply impressed, because *Grimes* isn't really an opera you should hear--you should hear and see at the same time. And so we decided, Why don't we do it out here? And so, with the chorus director [Harold] Schmidt at Stanford, who excellently prepared a chorus of about one hundred; had a very fine orchestra, among whom were, for instance, Doriot Anthony on first flute, who is now still the solo flutist of the Boston Symphony; George Houle on first oboe, who teaches at Stanford now; and well, excellent people. It was a mixed university [production]--orchestra students of the university, faculty of the university, but also Palo Alto citizens--a very homogenous orchestra that worked together well. Having done various operas more or less challenging, like *Bartered Bride*, which isn't exactly easy, we decided we would do this contemporary work. And it so happens, we did it before it came out here with the Metropolitan.

And it was apparently so impressive, people still talk

about that production. I've done the opera several times since, but I must say, it never topped that '48 production at Stanford University Memorial Hall, and it was apparently so impressive that the general director of the San Francisco opera, Mr. Paul Post, asked us to bring it to the San Francisco Opera House; which we did. It may be the first time in the United States history that a student production moved into a large professional opera house in a metropolitan area, and, again, it was completely sold out at Stanford. I was allowed the same cast, the same orchestra, the same chorus, except that the orchestra had to be bolstered with San Francisco union players. I safely picked a few strings, which I tucked among our strings, because there were no rehearsals, of course; they just had to read along with them. And the stagehands had to be union people. While about two or three of our students whipped the set around at Stanford, I had to use stagehand unions, which caused some problems (but we will not talk about that).

So anyway, the same happened then with *Schwanda* [*the Bagpiper*] the next year--it also went to the opera house after it had played at Stanford University. Many of these young singers went into professional life all the way through. It would be interesting someday to make a list of those opera workshop students--from Stanford and from UCLA or other places where I may have been guest teaching as an opera workshop director--

that have become real names in the operatic world today, which is the rewarding thing. And that includes singers, conductors, and stage directors.

GREER: What are some of the names that you can remember?

POPPER: Well, some of the names would be probably not too well known in this country--but Caesar Curzi [spells out], tenor, who then went to Germany and who has been leading tenor in Nuremburg for many, many years. He is now retired, but has made many records, and for an Italian boy from San Francisco. . . . He came from an Italian family; of course, he speaks flawless German and did the opera *Rigoletto* in German, and what have you. So there are quite a few.

Marni Nixon was one of our students. Well, you know, she married Ernest Gold (I think they are now divorced), the composer of *Exodus*--film composer Ernest Gold. Marni had a lovely, lovely soprano voice--light, lyric (actually, not too suitable for opera, because the voice was too light)--but such extreme musicianship, with an absolute pitch which was infallible. So Marni, besides doing some interesting contemporary chamber music and recitals along that line, also served as a dub-in in the movies, and did a great deal of that because her ear was so infallible that she could imitate the quality and the color of the movie actor she was dubbing in for.

GREER: She did Natalie Wood's part in *West Side Story*, didn't

she?

POPPER: And she dubbed in for Deborah Kerr, I believe. She was in the *Sound of Music*; she appeared, but she also dubbed in. Now she lives up in Washington, I believe. But I mean, there is a girl that showed so much talent. And when I went to Tanglewood as a guest director for one summer, because Koldowski was in Europe, she went with me and sang the lead in an Ibert opera which I did there, *Le Roi d'Yvetot*, with the composer right there--Jacques Ibert.

And then there is John Robert Dunlap, who now again is on the West Coast, but who went to Europe and sang in Augsburg, Wiesbaden. He started in Vienna, in various theaters, and then was with the Metropolitan for several years. So you know, quite a few of them really decided not only to sing a bit and then get married, or go into insurance business, but really stick it out and make singing their profession.

There are many more at UCLA, of course. There is Irving Beckman, who is coach and conductor at the Hamburg opera house--has been for many years. His wife, Judy Beckman--they met at the opera workshop at UCLA--she is one of the leading sopranos in Austria and Germany today. She received the title *Kammersingeren*, which is a government

title which is given not too often, and especially not to foreigners.

And then of course, the classical example--I could go on and on, and use up all of your tapes with some of the singers that have made it, like Maralin Niska, for instance, with the city opera in New York and Metropolitan--is Lotfi Mansouri, a typical example of what can happen. There was this young man from Iran, sent to Los Angeles, to UCLA, to study psychology by a family high up in government circles (the Mansouris); and arriving at UCLA, he saw what we were doing in the way of opera--he had never seen an opera before. And I put him in the chorus of *The Beggar's Opera*, which we did in Benjamin Britten's version. He fell in love with opera. He had quite a nice tenor voice--not good enough to become a professional singer. As a matter of fact, we called him the "Persian version" of a tenor. But he did Smiley in Lukas Foss's *Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*--Foss noticed that he was outstanding as an actor and singer--and he did our Orfeo in Monteverdi's *Orfeo* and several other leading roles. But he sooner or later felt that singing was not his field, but he wanted to stay with opera, so he went into directing. He directed many of the student productions at UCLA; he went to Santa Barbara summer school, and Herbert Graf noticed him there. By the way, Herbert Graf, in his book *Opera in America and Its*

Future--something like this (sorry, the precise title escapes me, *Opera and Its Future in America*, I think, is the precise title)--and also in his book, ten years later, in 1951, *Opera for the People*, mentions the workshop work done at the universities and the significance for the development of opera in America. And I'm pleased to say that he gave me an honorable spot in both books, mentioning my work and giving good pictures of opera workshop productions (if you like to check with that). Mansouri took to directing, and with the zeal which we otherwise only associate with Japanese students, studied opera day and night, and, needless to say, became one of the outstanding stage directors of Europe and America. In Santa Barbara, he was discovered by Herbert Graf, who took him to Zurich, where he directed; and later on to Geneva. Lotfi has directed in all the major opera centers: in Italy and Europe; with Klemperer in London, for instance (*Fidelio*); and San Francisco Opera Company, where he still is connected. But lately, he has become the general director of the Canadian Opera Company in Toronto. So that's what can happen to a Persian, a man who comes here to study graduate psychology and ends up as one of the leading forces in opera on this continent.

So I could go on and on about this, but I think time is too short for that. If you ever wish, I could put together a list of the singers and directors and conductors

who have gone out in the world. Some of them I've lost track of, of course. Some of them gratefully acknowledge the work they have received in the opera workshops, because we used to call the UCLA Opera Workshop the West Point of the opera. Students not only had to study their music and perform, but they had to become interested in building sets and helping with costumes and doing things of that sort, and get an overall theatrical feeling of what goes into opera--and the discipline, and the fact that we forced them to do that job and do it creditably and on a professional basis. As we get into UCLA, you will see that the productions became more and more challenging and bigger and bigger, until we nearly busted our seams. Those were the days when we still had money to do these things. The challenge grew more and more, and the students appreciated the discipline that they had received as they went out into European theaters. They could stand on their own feet, you know. And so many of these letters are boxed away safely somewhere and show the gratitude of the workshop training.

GREER: What were the students like as singers? Were they, most of them, trained operatically before you got them, or is that something you added to their repertoire?

POPPER: Well, the opera workshop actually divided into two parts. We had students who were undergraduates and

some graduates, who were regular students of the university and had lovely voices but maybe not the type of voice that really lends itself to opera, you see. Of course, as the opera workshops became more and more well known, we did draw students that came to UCLA (Stanford and later UCLA) for the purpose of being in the opera workshop. But at first, the voices were mostly light voices, so we used them in supporting roles or we did lighter things like Gilbert and Sullivan, things where they were suited for--Mozart's *Bastien and Bastienne* and things of that type, because I've never believed in forcing voices. The students sometimes want to be forced. A high school girl will come to audition for you. She is enrolled in UCLA, and she sang Tosca in high school because her voice was so much bigger than the other high school kids'. So she is now obsessed with the idea that she is a dramatic soprano, and it takes a lot of persuasion to make it clear that she just has a lovely lyric voice, and forget about Tosca, at least for a while. So that's the problem we deal with all the time, you see.

But then, as the workshops grew through Extension Division, we accepted outsiders, and that was criticized, of course. Many people felt: this is cheating; we should not do this; a college production should be purely drawn from college students. Some schools stay with this and

believe in that greatly. I have found, really, that the mixture of students and young professionals. . . . I don't mean that you get somebody way out of range as far as age or circumference is concerned, and appearance is concerned, or voice is concerned--some huge dramatic soprano, dramatic tenor, mixed with the others. But if you get young professionals, or even students from other universities, like in the Los Angeles area, who did not have the opportunity at their own college to sing opera--we took them in as extension students, and the mixture was very helpful, I felt. They learned from each other, and very soon they wouldn't even know who was regular and who was not a regular student.

The rehearsals took place nightly, practically, and during the day at appointed hours. I think being an opera workshop coach or director is probably the most time-consuming job of any in a university, unless you do laboratory work. In other words, we started Monday morning at nine o'clock, and finished Sunday night, usually at eleven o'clock. There was no weekend. Saturday was one of the main rehearsal days, and frequently Sunday afternoon and evening also. So I'm afraid my wife didn't see too much of me, except when she herself was involved in any of the productions. So it's not an easy job, I want to mention it, if you take it seriously. And if

you really want to roll up your sleeves and work with the students and train them, this cannot just be done in class form. Very often this has to be individual coaching, individual talking to, individual training. So it was a good way of spending my--what was it, twenty-six years, or twenty-seven? I got there in '49, and left on the first of July, 1975. Then I was called back once more to do the production that fall at UCLA. But anyway, it was a good way of spending those years, and I'm not sorry for it.

Besides, on the other hand, UCLA was wonderful to me. I could take sabbatical leave--not only sabbatical, but real leaves of absence--having an excellent assistant, who now is director of the USC Opera Workshop, Natalie Limonick, who took over when I was away. So, I could take on guest teaching jobs in Europe, in the Orient, like. . . . In 1959-'60, I was a guest professor in Berkeley, and there I could really do a work which is still close to my heart, and which I am amazed had not been done in America before--I am speaking about *Macbeth* by Ernest Bloch. And since Bloch was so important and vital to the San Francisco music picture scene, I'm amazed the opera had never been done in America. And so we brought that performance, in 1960, together with other works, like Benjamin Britten's *Turn of the Screw*, which had not been heard in the Northern California area.

And then I was appointed to be a Fulbright professor in Tokyo. That was our first acquaintance with the Orient, in 1960, 1961. And there, I must say, again a whole new world opened up to my wife and to me. We learned more than we gave, I'm sure, about the way of living, of studying, of dedication and devotion; and to make these young Japanese people sing opera and act opera, which was even more difficult. . . . I was called in by the Tokyo University of Arts to establish an opera workshop on the American pattern, which is still going strong there now. It was the first opera workshop in Japan. And that was a very, very interesting assignment. (I don't know how I got into that.)

GREER: Why don't we back up a little bit and finish Stanford up. What I'm wondering about--you were also doing accompanying at that time, right? Jussi Bjoerling and a couple other major singers at the same time.

POPPER: The same Paul Post who was so fond of the opera work we were doing at Stanford University, because he saw the difference between the professional work. . . . Merula was then the conductor--Gaetano Merula (this was before Kurt Herbert Adler)--of the San Francisco Opera, and did lovely productions. But as I say, with these great singers like Tibbett, like Bjoerling and many others, just the great, great, names of the past generation. . . .

But of course, they were even more thrown together than today because the singers really arrived in the last moment. And so Mr. Post saw what was happening at Stanford and how well these productions were rehearsed. That's why he actually brought them to the San Francisco Opera House: to show how different opera can be if it does not have star singers in it, but if it is well prepared. So anyway, there he also, whenever an interesting singer came to town and needed a West Coast accompanist, immediately called on me--could I jump in and do the job? And so I played for some singers that had been known to me before, like Risë Stevens, with whim I had worked in Prague. I did her western concerts for her. But also singers I had never met before, like Jussi Boerling. We did West Coast recitals. Mostly, we started at the San Francisco Opera House and then went either to Los Angeles, the Pasadena area, or when the singers belonged to what was known as the community concerts, we also went into smaller communities which. . . . (This again is an entire chapter in itself--full of anecdotes and unbelievable things that happened along that line.)

But one of the most remarkable persons I was privileged to play for was Giuseppe de Luca, the first Sharpless in *Madame Butterfly*, the first *Gianni Schicchi* (the original interpreter of the role), and many, many

other firsts, both in Italy and at the Metropolitan Opera. Well, this man was seventy years old when he came back after the war to make a comeback and reestablish himself.

GREER: It's optimistic thinking.

POPPER: But what a marvelous artist and what a wonderful singer. And instead of just doing--oh, what would I say?--the old war-horses, which he could have done very easily, he did some unusual things. He brought with him some songs that had been written in Italy during the war; some interesting compositions. Well, what I learned from this man is just. . . . Again, you see, I'm a great one on learning things. So, traveling with him together, of course, I had the opportunity to ask so many historical things. It's like touching history when you work with a man, or play for a man, like that. And so I asked him about Puccini. Puccini didn't conduct very often. He usually had other people conduct for him. But he said, "Oh, when he conducted, it was wonderful. He insisted on everything in the score. For instance, when he said *poco rubato*, it had to be *poco rubato*." He said, "Too many singers do not look at these indications in the score. They take too many liberties. Puccini wrote the liberties. He wrote them out for the singers. Exactly when he wants--*accelerando*, *poco stentato*, *poco ritardando*, *ralentando*, the

fermata." I said, "How about the fermatas? How did he take them? Did he allow the singers to take them really long, as many singers will do?" He said, "Oh, when he conducted and the singer sang a beautiful fermata, he put down his baton and threw a kiss up to the stage, and the concertmaster had to take over and continue, because he forgot all about conducting." Which I think characterizes Puccini so much--his love of the voice, or intoxication with the voice, I really should say. He was intoxicated with voices, according to the description of de Luca. Something very funny happened when I played for de Luca in Pasadena, at the big auditorium there. Of course, all the singers of note, of the past and present, came to hear the great de Luca again. And after the concert, a few crowded around me and congratulated me on the accompaniment; and this lady with big black eyes, she said, "Oh, if you play when I sing, you must play for me," in very broken English. And like a fool (nobody else would ask this question) I said, "Oh, you sing?" "Yes, my name is Galli-Curci."

TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE TWO

DECEMBER 29, 1978

POPPER: Well, I just finished telling about playing for de Luca and with Galli-Curci being at the concert and this was one time my face really was red, because all the people that stood around, of course, broke into hilarious laughter.

So I played, then, for others, some pleasant, some unpleasant. I played for the comeback of Maria Jeritza at the San Francisco Opera House. As I said, Bjoerling was the really the most exciting in many ways. What a marvelous singer, and to be close by. And the programs were of high quality, anything including *An die ferne Geliebte* by Beethoven, or *Adelaide* by Beethoven, and many Schubert and Strauss and Wolf; and then, going into opera arias; and then he used to sing the Swedish folk songs. He didn't like to rehearse, though. You had to practically do it all at sight. And I remember these Swedish folk songs were pencil written, on music paper, like notation paper. But he never bothered, or whoever did it for him, to put the melody down, but only the accompaniment. So until you did it with him, you really didn't know what you were accompanying. But he was such a musical singer. I mean, his voice was so musical--his musicianship--that you knew at all times what the man

intended to do--where he intended to breathe and so on. But I still remember the concert, the first concert, at the opera house in San Francisco, the War Memorial Opera House. As we walked out, he whispered to me (and it was the group of the Swedish folk songs), "I do not feel too good. Put one tone down." Not only did I not have the melody of knowing what I was accompanying, but I also had to transpose it as well. Well, it's all clean fun.

I know you have the names of the others: Margaret Harshaw--unforgettable. In a way, a most natural singer. At that time, she was still a mezzo soprano--she later on became a dramatic Wagnerian soprano. But she was a mezzo at that time. And of course, unconcerned--you never heard her vocalize. She just went out on the stage and sang--opened her throat and out came these golden tones--very even-tempered. And I still remember at one of our community concerts stops; we were at Coalinga. I don't know whether you've ever been at Coalinga--it's sort of the crossroads. There were really two roads crossing and some oil towers. And I said, "Oh, Margaret, who is going to come to that concert? Where will the people come from? There is no one around." Well, it so happens that people came practically from one-hundred-mile distances, and I learned later on that Coalinga is a very rich oil town. The auditorium was just marvelous. They could have done the

whole *Ring of the Nibelungen* right there. And so the lady who was in charge of the community concerts explained to me that "Well, we have black gold here, and since we know it is too far for us to go to Los Angeles or San Francisco, we just bring all these attractions here," because they had the money to do it. But I found Margaret Harshaw, with the concert starting at eight-thirty, at quarter of eight, sitting in a cafeteria and devouring a big T-bone steak. I said, "Margaret, for goodness sake! You have to sing in forty-five minutes!" So she said, "So what if I have to [sing in] forty-five!" You just learn the nature and temperament of different singers; how some of them start vocalizing early in the morning to work up to the pitch in the evening, and others never give it a thought and walk out there and do a beautiful job.

Of course, it also was my pleasure and honor to play for Dorothy Kirsten on various occasions--one in Alaska, both in Anchorage and Fairbanks, and also here in California and different places. [She is a] very musical singer and an interesting lady, because the moment she walks on the stage, she commands the stage. She is really, I would say, the last of the great prima donnas, where you really believe. And then, of course, in her good, best days when you saw her as Tosca; that was

Tosca. That was just a commanding, total performance of the opera. So, it was marvelous as a side job to play for these singers.

GREER: How did you find time to do that and the opera workshop at Stanford? That must have been. . . .

POPPER: Actually, there wasn't so much time-loss connected with this, because most of the concerts were either in the San Francisco area, which means I left at five and came back the same night, or if we had to tour, like the one I just spoke of, I just drove down there and drove back. That wasn't really too difficult to do. Besides, many were on weekends, so that I could easily combine. I also was in charge of the orchestra for a while, at Stanford, and of the band during the war.

GREER: You also had the choir for a while, didn't you?

POPPER: For a while, I did. One had to do everything, and that's just wonderful. During the war, I taught the army specialized training program at Stanford University for a time--languages to the soldiers, and not only German, but also some Czech. Those were the invasion troops, and we actually trained them not only in German but in even some of the dialects, so if they were flown behind the lines, they could pretend to be natives. And we taught them the folk songs of these countries--Austrian and German folk songs. There were special students selected for that

purpose. I think the Monterey Institute of Languages uses the same principle on which we were teaching these soldiers at Stanford University. One drawback was that the army had selected students from the Pennsylvania Dutch country, and one of our jobs was to first make them unlearn what they had learned about German, because it was a very heavy American-German dialect which, certainly, we could not use in the training. But otherwise, it was, again, a very interesting experience. Unfortunately, most of these soldiers ended up in the South Pacific, and we got cards from them there. But we cannot be blamed for that.

So anyway, then I did several other things connected at Stanford. You mentioned the *Art of the Fugue* a moment ago. That was right in my early days. There was a very fine organist connected with the Temple Emanu-El in San Francisco, Ludvig Altmann--again, one of the moving forces in music on the West Coast. He had been there for years. He came there before I came to this country, and he had become a friend. And so, he had the idea of doing the *Art of* [*the*] *Fugue* in the orchestral arrangement by Wolfgang Graeser. Wolfgang Graeser is one of the most interesting persons. As a matter of fact, I had met him in Vienna. He was a very short-lived gentleman. I believe he was born in 1906 and committed suidide at the age of twenty-two. But he not only excelled as a musician, but also

in various other fields, like Oriental languages. So anyway, he was a most interesting man. And so I was very pleased to do this, what I understand being the first performance on the West Coast of the orchestral version of *Art of [the] Fugue*. I conducted, Ludvig Altmann played the organ, and we had members of the San Francisco Symphony perform the work in its entirety without cut--and that is, of course, one of the major works of the baroque era.

GREER: It hadn't been done on the West Coast at all?

POPPER: As far as I understood, it had never been done. Maybe it had been done in chamber music form, or on the organ. But in Wolfgang Graeser's orchestral version, it had not been performed before.

GREER: How did you get the offer to go to UCLA? How did that transference from Stanford to UCLA happen?

POPPER: Well, one thing just occurs to me that you also might be interested in; that, of course, with the students, even at Stanford, and later at UCLA with the opera workshop students, we took summer trips to various resorts, which was a marvelous opportunity for them to get into performance. For instance, at Yosemite Valley, we were there several summers, and of course, they provided free stay, board and room for all of the members of this little company.

GREER: Is that the Intimate Opera Players?

POPPER: No, these were really just students of the opera workshops at Stanford, and later at UCLA, the same thing. We stayed at the lodge, at Yosemite Lodge, or Camp Curry, in most cases, but we performed at the Ahwahnee Hotel nightly and in the various camps, and it was interesting. Of course, at the Ahwahnee, we would do opera excerpts in a rather elaborate form. Once we did a whole act of *Die Fledermaus*, by Johann Strauss, out on the lawn. It was greatly received; while in the camps, like Camp Curry, on the stage, you had to be more popular. So it was a marvelous opportunity for the students to try themselves in front of different audiences.

If you want me to tell one anecdote. . . . Once we were asked to perform at Tuolumne Meadows, which is a High Sierra camp. It lies very high. The singers, as a matter of fact, had a little breathing difficulty up there. And we did opera around the campfire. They pulled a piano out of a shed, which was anything but in tune. As a matter of fact, they took a rat's nest out of it before that. But anyway, we did start the performance, and a young high school student who was working up there made the announcement. He was very embarrassed about it. They had never had opera around the campfire. So he announced it, and said, "Tonight we are going to have opera." Well, nobody left, so he continued and said, "And the man who is going to present

it--his name is Yom Kippur." Well, that broke up everybody, and we had no problems after that putting on opera at Tuolumne Meadows.

GREER: I never heard of having opera there.

POPPER: Yes, so that was fun. So anyway, now you asked about the transfer from. . . .

GREER: Before we do that, did you do the Intimate Opera Players? And was that a professional group at Stanford?

POPPER: No, the Intimate Opera Players were a young professional group while I still was at Stanford University. Among them was Theodor Uppman, baritone, who has now been with the Metropolitan for many, many years. A marvelous young baritone who made headlines by singing *Pelleas* in concert form under Monteux's guidance with the San Francisco Symphony and who then was elected by Benjamin Britten, who visited in Los Angeles and saw him in performance, to be the first Billy Budd, in London, at the first performance of the opera. So another opera workshop student who did well internationally and nationally. I had singers of that type. My wife was Dorabella, and I had excellent singers for the other parts--mostly young professional singers. We worked our own translation of the opera. It took weeks, actually, and we worked as a community.

I forgot to mention *Cosi fan tutte* by Mozart, which then was, you won't believe this, a completely unknown work on

the West Coast. Thinking that today it is one of the most popular operas. Even people who know music, when they said, *Cosi fan tutte*, asked, "What is that?" And a renowned critic of the *Los Angeles Times* (again, I will not mention a name here, but I have the write-up, if you want to see it) wrote up our guest performance in Los Angeles, saying, "Even though I am not acquainted with the score of this opera, I will say this and this and this," and then he continued.

GREER: Was it Albert Goldberg?

POPPER: I guess I should say. Yes. Albert, who has honestly become a good friend, and wonderful critic, I think, was honest enough to admit that he was not acquainted with the opera at all. You see, so it was unknown. And by rehearsing these singers so well--we had weeks of stage rehearsals on that, so that everybody knew at any time where the partner was, and that you could use all the different subtleties of action and of music making. Well, the little group was called "Intimate." At first, we called it the Cameo Opera Singers or the Intimate Opera Players, and people made fun of that name. So anyway, it doesn't really matter under what name they went. We toured, and we did eighty performances of the opera, eight-oh, eighty performances up and down the West Coast. And it played for three weeks in the Los Angeles area, at the

Las Palmas Theatre. Of course, we had to use two-piano accompaniment because it was too expensive to use an orchestra. Besides, some of the small theaters we played in would not have had room, even for a Mozartean orchestra. But excellent pianists, like Ralph Lindsley, were my first piano, and I played the second piano and conducted at the same time.

In the Los Angeles area, we brought it to the Las Palmas Theatre and did the opera nightly under the title *That's the Way Women Are*, in English. And of course, I'll never forget this marquee--above the theater, in blinking lights--Mozart *Cosi fan tutte*, and then underneath, *That's the Way Women Are*--was quite unusual for Las Palmas entertainment, Hollywood entertainment. But I must say that many sailors and soldiers (it was during the wartime, of course) saw *That's the Way Women Are*, and became interested, and came in. And the manager of the company, Gene Anthony, was in there clicking people in and clicking them out, and I must say, very few of them left, because it was a handsome young cast, which was believable, and the English was clear as a bell. You could understand every word of the arias and recitatives and ensemble numbers. The acting was good, and the costuming was fesh, and we had lovely. . . .

Of course, I underwrote all that. Never in my life had I found a sponsor who would be willing to sponsor

some of the pioneer ideas that I have had. So the best thing is to write your own check, you see, which I did throughout my life. Needless to say, that means we are not rich today, but we are rich in memories, in the feeling that we have pioneered and that we have helped take another step in the development of opera here on the West Coast. So this was the Intimate Opera Player group that played. I'll never forget one performance, again in form of anecdote, was in. . . . Oh, what is that little community on the southeast of California, near the border?

GREER: San Diego?

POPPER: No, San Diego is a big town. In San Diego, we performed at the Russ Auditorium, which then was still standing. And when we arrived, touring, to the Russ Auditorium, we found an orchestra waiting for us. I said, "Well, gentlemen, that's very interesting, but we don't have the orchestration with us. And we did it with two pianos and we don't have time to rehearse." Well, that was all right. It was the union stipulation that the Russ Auditorium had to have an orchestra. So we settled for the fact that they played the overture under their own conductor, and then played the *Alla Turca* by Mozart, in an orchestral version, in the intermission. And then, the rest was done as usual, with two pianos.

It's a small community. . . . But anyway, we were a

little worried because they had never done opera there before, and so we were worried. After all, *Cosi* is a subtle work. Well, I gladly relate that at that time not only did the audience like it, but probably one of the. . . . They also had lots of vegetables in this area. We were afraid they might throw some of the vegetables on stage. Not only did they like it, but they forced an encore of the entire finale of the opera.

So you know, it just shows that pioneering is an exciting job. And frankly, I have enjoyed it very much, even more than my work with the Spring Opera in San Francisco, where I did some interesting works like Bartok's *Bluebeard's Castle*, and *L'Heure Espaňole* by Ravel, besides doing works like *Abduction from the Seraglio*, and *Madame Butterfly* and *Der Freischütz*, which we had first performed, by the way, at Stanford University also, a part of my activity there. I enjoyed it, and yet I didn't have the same thrill that I get when I can pioneer things--pioneer opera and get people acquainted with it who otherwise either had not known opera, or had a prejudice or a disregard for it. This is why I even feel that my work as an enrichment lecturer now with Royal Viking cruising lines is not degrading, but the three lectures a week that I can give there on board ship (I am always amused to think of myself as enriching all these

millionaires), but you get a lot. . . . At first the ladies come in, because they knew a little about opera. But then they drag their husbands in who never during their busy lives (they may be retired now) had any chance to go to the opera and suddenly realize that opera is not quite that boring thing that they had thought of all their lives. So it's sort of a postgraduate inspiration, I would say. But many of them now write to me, you see. They are from Chicago, or they have taken subscription in the opera; and even there, one still can do some good, by lecturing about opera with good singers assisting.

Now, again I got ahead of myself. You may want to ask.

GREER: You've taken care of most of Stanford, your Intimate Opera Players, your work there. Now, how did you get over to UCLA?

POPPER: Well, there was one internal problem that arose at Stanford University. Actually, today one can speak about that because the people who were in charge then are not in charge anymore. It so happened, while drama and music worked together so peacefully and so beautifully under the guidance of Strickland in the drama department, very soon some difficulty arose. Warren D. Allen had left; somehow the new chairman did not see eye to eye on this anymore. (That happens very often. It is nothing

unusual.) And they even started quarreling a bit. Opera made a lot of money then. You see, it was part of the subscription at the Memorial Theatre at Stanford University, and we sold out. Everything was sold out there. So it means that there was quite a bit of revenue coming in, and it was usually divided 50-50 between drama and music. And of course, drama fully deserved that, because they did the set, they did the costumes, and, even though they did not perform in it, they were the slave laborers who put the whole thing together. Any theatrical person would know and see that. Well, a dispute arose, which I learned later on, that the music department wanted 60 percent and only leaving 40 percent to the drama, which, of course, was more of an insult than anything else, because ten percent, even if you make a nice little net gain, would not be enough to quibble over. But the drama people took it as an insult; and then right there, I saw the handwriting on the wall.

At the same time, one of the graduate students from UCLA, a young baritone [Dix Brow], had taken summer opera at Stanford University--we also taught summer opera work-shop--and excitedly came back and told John Vincent, who was then head of the music department, about that Jan Popper up there doing opera, and he might be available if asked. Well, John Vincent asked. He simply telephoned

(he was very fast in these matters)--picked up the phone and said, would I be available to come down and talk things over? And I did. And I saw immediately that as much as I loved Stanford University and it was part of my life, that there would not be that opportunity anymore for development of opera there, that one had to look for greener pastures, and UCLA presented this greener pasture with more resources. The facilities weren't better at that time because, needless to say, Schoenberg Hall was not built; Memorial Auditorium--what is it, Royce Hall? (I get my auditoriums mixed up)--Royce Hall was usually very busy, and did drama productions or, needless to say, as today, many guest performances or visiting artists (and we weren't big enough to begin with, anyway, to qualify for Royce Hall), so the Opera Workshop was housed in the Education Building [Moore Hall], in room 100. There is a room 100 which has a little bit of a stage, not much. That's where we did our first production. And the stage director usually was lying under the piano and lighting (since there was no lighting equipment), lighting the show with a baby spot, you know. That was the beginning of opera at UCLA.

But immediately, I got some excellent singers to enroll and really, more and more. . . . And then Lukas Foss came also, pretty soon. One of the first big

productions was *The Jumping Frog of Calaveras*, which we did as a double bill with something else, but Lukas conducted. And again, an anecdote is connected with that which I must tell, because it does have to do with pioneering in opera. Well, having this very nice production of *The Jumping Frog*, with a composer there conducting, I thought it would really be nice if we could take it up to the Jumping Frog Contest in Angels Camp. So we contacted the people. Oh, they were very excited about it. Could we come up? But we would have to come up the day before, because it would actually be just a country fair. There is no stage. We would have to build our own stage--throw a few two-by-fours together--and do our own lighting, and the whole thing, which our Opera Workshop crew did. They went up there; they set up the stage. There were no seats--those cowhands sat on the lawn surrounding it. And everything was great, and we got them all in the good mood because *The Jumping Frog* is contemporary music and, even though the story is a well-known one--Mark Twain--nevertheless, the music is a bit advanced for people who haven't heard too much opera. So first, I had a very lovely young soprano dressed up as Jenny Lind, and she came out and sang some opera arias, and we did things of that type, and then we sprang the opera on them. Lukas got in front of the orchestra and started conducting. But one thing we had forgotten: that right next to our

improvised stage were the stables for the rodeo, for the cattle. So they came back and walked between the orchestra and the stage--that was their pathway--jingling their bells and going to their stable. Well, the audience just broke up in their laughter; and Lukas has never forgotten that, because he had no idea what Calaveras County was like when he was writing the opera in New York, and to find out where Calaveras was, to get this personal experience, with the cows walking in between the stage and orchestra; I think that was one great pioneering experience for him.

GREER: Was he the composer-in-residence at UCLA at the time?

POPPER: Yes, and he conducted the orchestra, the University Symphony Orchestra, it was. And he also started his improvisation ensemble at UCLA, and it was a very, very interesting time for the UCLA music department, to have him there.

GREER: Sounds like a lot of fun. Did you have very many other professors on the campus that would write operas for your group?

POPPER: Yes, yes. Once in a while, whenever we could. I spoke about the Opera Workshop membership, the students enrolled. Needless to say, whenever we could, we gave preference to a regular student, because if we had a limited membership of the workshop, like twenty-five only,

we saw that it had to be balanced--enough tenors, enough sopranos, etc., that the cast was balanced. We first really squeezed out and tried to get every regularly enrolled student in, if possible, and only when that didn't work, then we went on the outside. Well, the same was true with opera composers. We had Henry Leland Clarke with us at that time, who wrote an opera called *The Loafer and the Loaf*, of which we did a first performance at UCLA. And not only UCLA composers, but resident Los Angeles composers, such as Ernest Kanitz was one of them, of whom I did several works; Eugen Zador, who by the way, had been one of my teachers at that one year at the New Vienna Conservatory. He taught film music there, and I thought that would be fun to take such a course, so I took that from him. And then, of course, I found him again here in Los Angeles, so I did some of the larger works, one, even, with the Los Angeles Chamber Symphony on a more professional basis, and others with the Opera Workshop. I don't think the names matter--besides, you have them; they are listed on here. And then, of course, Roy Travis, the latest one. Roy had received a grant to write this very exciting, interesting opera, *The Passion of Oedipus*, which is a modern version of the Oedipus legend. And so we received a grant to do the work--again, partly with students, but also bringing in professional singers

and actually, a professional orchestra, which was partly student, but anyway, they were paid.

GREER: Was that the L.A. chamber group?

POPPER: No, at this time, I'm afraid, the L.A. Chamber Orchestra was nonexistent in its original form. No, they were what we called a pickup orchestra. But even those who were faculty members were paid for this effort, because it was an extracurricular thing we did, which was not really connected with the opera workshop itself. As I say, Roy Travis had received a grant to do this thing. And so, we did the opera in--was it '68, I believe? Yes. *The Passion of Oedipus*, in November, 1968. And then, later on, we recorded portions of it with the Royal Philharmonic in London. The recording is existing and features, of course, this marvelous black tenor, William Du Pré--I mean, just the right type of voice for this thing--and several other young professional singers. John Robert Dunlap, the one gentlemen I mentioned, from the Met, was among them, and several others. And so, the recording is available. Later on, I also did a symphonic recording by Roy Travis, a piano concerto. One side is done with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the other side with the Salt Lake Symphony Orchestra at the [Mormon] Tabernacle. That's available, too. That features the. . . . Well, this is no commercial. It features a piano concerto and several

other works, also some beautiful songs for bass and chamber orchestra.

GREER: What did you do with that? You were just part of the production, or were you conducting an orchestra, or what did you end up doing with that?

POPPER: Yes, I was the conductor of the orchestra; the Royal Philharmonic is wonderful to work with. You see again, the recordings are done without rehearsals, of course. What you do is, you meet the orchestra and immediately start rehearsing a few phrases, and immediately put that on tape. You work to a certain natural caesura in the orchestration, where there's a fermata, or a stop, on the barline, or something like that, where you can splice together, so that you really never rehearse the entire work. In some cases, we played through an entire scene, just so the singers had a chance to work with the orchestra for the first time (some were British, of course, English singers, you know, and the chorus was from London), so that they get the feel of the orchestra. But then you start recording step by step, and do it, each phrase, as many times over as need be, and then splice the whole thing together. But they just read beautifully and are such a willing, marvelous orchestra.

The recordings were done in an ancient church, a wooden structure which had been spared the bombing and just stood there while the whole surrounding was bombed

out. And there, the acoustics were just wonderful. You listen to that, and it reverberates. You can create an echo chamber by putting players, like the two horns, which are supposed to come from far away, and they reverberate as if you had an echo chamber. So it was really an exciting thing to do that.

GREER: You did some other Benjamin Britten works. There was one that you did at UCLA.

POPPER: Yes. Britten, whom I met personally, too--he came to Los Angeles with Peter Pears--already had heard about our *Peter Grimes* at Stanford and the War Memorial Opera House in San Francisco. Two British ladies, who lived right near him, had been at that performance and, of course, came with the exciting but unbelievable news that a college in California had attempted to do his work, and done it with great success. So when I met him in Los Angeles, at the same visit when he hired Ted Uppman to do *Billy Budd*, we had a talk about many of the things, and he mentioned some of the scores to me that he would love to see done in America. And so, I have done quite a few. All right, we started of course, not only with *Grimes*, but also with *The Beggar's Opera* in his version at UCLA. Then we did *The Turn of the Screw* in a double cast, with Maralin Niska in one cast and Ella Lee, a black soprano (who also became quite famous and still

sings in Wiesbaden now), in the title role as the governess. And so we were able to do these Britten performances. I have never done *The Rape of Lucretia*. And of course, some of them were done at USC, under the wonderful guidance of Peter Ebert, who was stage director at USC at that time. And Wolfgang Martin was the conductor.

And together with Ebert, I then did, outside of UCLA, some professional productions, like the beginning of those many *Bartered Brides* for the children. That still is being done, I believe. They have these children's performances in Los Angeles where they bus in thousands of kids to hear either *Magic Flute* or *Bartered Bride* or *Cenerentola*. This was the first one of them at the Shrine Auditorium with 6,000 children out there, believe me.

GREER: It must have benn horrible. Were you responsible for getting the children's opera going, or was that kind of cooperative?

POPPER: No, no, I was just hired to be the conductor for this production. I had just come to Los Angeles. Again, it was 1949, and Ebert was the stage director. That was the first time I worked with him together. No, I did children's opera later, in a smaller way. While I was in Berkeley in '59, '60, together with a lady who is very fond of opera--not a singer, but somebody who just loves to sponsor opera--we did opera in Oakland for

children only, and my job was to sit at the piano, with the children sitting on the floor all around it, at an upright piano and explain the operas--I mean, give them the story, in a not-too-sophisticated way, so that the little kids could follow. And we had singers--excellent singers, in costume--coming in doing arias, doing duets, and, on that small stage, acting out whatever excerpt they were doing, so that the children really became acquainted with the opera. This was limited to one hour, which is about the span that a small child can take, but believe me, it was silent in this room; we had no disciplinary problems of any sort. And so we did several of the operas that way, especially those suitable for children.

At the same time, the San Francisco Symphony hired me to do all the children's concerts in San Francisco with the symphony (in San Francisco, and the surroundings) by which I had to do my own narrating--that was a little more difficult to keep these kids quiet and keep them interested, and do excerpts from symphonic works and piano concertos with young soloists who made their first appearances, or horn concerto--Mozart, etc.--clarinet concertos, violin. So that was an interesting job.

However, was I suprised when I did the same thing in Tokyo, with the Tokyo Philharmonic in 1960-1961. Right the year afterwards, they asked me, having heard I'd done

these children concerts in America, could I do some for them? Yes. But this was different. It was in large halls; it was as silent--you could hear a leaflet drop. And instead of doing *one* movement of a Beethoven symphony, or *one* movement of a Chopin concerto, you did the whole thing, you see. They don't believe in babying their young people. So that was quite a difference; you know, it was very interesting.

GREER: Was that how you got the Fulbright to go over to Tokyo, or was that another time?

POPPPER: Yes, that was during my Fulbright year. All these were outcomes of the Fulbright. You see, the Fulbright only stipulated that I come to Japan and establish this opera workshop for the Tokyo University of Arts (Japanese name, Geijitsu Daigaku)--that was my job. But very soon it talked itself around that I was there. And so, after a few weeks, or maybe months, the Niki-kai Opera Company in Tokyo approached me [asking me] whether I would conduct some of their professional productions. So, for the university, I did a full *Cosi fan tutte* production in the original Italian (very unusual, because most of the works are done in Japanese translation, but in school they believe, for practice purpose, to have the students sing in the original languages). And that was a surprise, too, because at the first orchestra rehearsal, I had fifty-six violinists show up, and I said, "Well, my dear friends,

this is Mozart, not Richard Strauss, or Wagner. I cannot use. . . ." Oh, yes, they knew that, but they wanted to be divided in three groups, and each of the three performances of the opera were to be played by a different string section, right. So when I think what problems we have getting fiddlers here when we do an opera production--that was another surprise I had coming in Tokyo, because there, the level of violin playing and education is very high, as you know--string playing in general. They are not doing so well on the winds. As a matter of fact, many of the leading orchestras have European or American first wind chairs--first horn player, and so on. But strings are just unsurpassable in their precision.

GREER: Do you think it's the Suzuki influence?

POPPER: It is probably, yes. I think so. Suzuki had quite a bit to do with that. I think so. Well, you know, Toho University is famous for its string orchestra--they toured America--and I don't think, if you closed your eyes and listened to the Toho [University] strings, or the Boston strings, you couldn't tell the difference. They are just marvelous, really marvelous. And they do most of it by heart, you see.

That was one of the problems I encountered in Japan. They did one opera and rehearsed it for the whole academic year. And of course, opera workshops. . . . That means

that graduate students, who took four years of graduate training, were acquainted with four operas and nothing else, and you cannot go into professional life that way. This is where I came in. And I established a variety of opera excerpts in study and style, so that they know how to behave when they come to eighteenth-century opera and when they come to romantic opera and what the difference would be there--in approach, in acting, in the way of singing, and so on, and I called those opera highlights. Well, interestingly enough, that is my one and only contribution to the Japanese language, because that has become a term in the Japanese language--opera Hi-li-to, actually. And it is spelled that way and it is announced that way--you can see announcement of opera Hi-li-to done by this university or by this college. So that's my contribution to the Japanese language.

So anyway, I managed to do opera highlights with them and sometimes only for the students themselves, but at least they got the experience, you know. They are very strict there; the universities will not allow the students to go out and perform publicly until they have graduated from school. So I only received permission to do that in very unusual cases, like for the British-American Club. They wanted an evening of opera, and so I was allowed to take them out. Of course, in Japan, all performances start

at six-thirty--it's very early--and then by nine o'clock, you are through. And of course, the British-American Club--they had first dinner. And then, when the performance started, which was around nine o'clock, I had to use all persuasion to keep my singers awake; they were half-asleep. You see, that was the time for them to finish a performance, not to start. So anyway, you see, then, these side jobs came along as part of my Fulbright scholarship.

The other thing that happened was that the United States Information Service--or the cultural center in these various communities (Tokyo, Osaka, and Kyoto)--became interested, especially when they heard that my wife was a singer, and [that] we did programs together of both the classical repertory (anything from Schubert to Brahms's *German Lieder* and French--Debussy Fauré, etc.); and then, in the second half, we did folklore of Europe and America. And so they became very interested, and they tried us out in a big concert in Tokyo, at the Asahi *Shinbun*, Asahi newspaper auditorium, which was successful. And after that, they toured us throughout Japan. So USIS supported that, and we were toured in twenty-seven concerts in Japan itself, but all the way down to Hong Kong, Bangkok, and even Saigon, where I gave lectures on American music and American opera, and my wife illustrated those lectures.

GREER: This is while you were over in Tokyo on your Fulbright?

POPPER: All during that one year, you see. It was really a busy year, but it was marvelous to do both the work at the university--at Geijitsu Daigaku--and at the same time, work for the professional opera company, the Niki-kai Opera Company. And needless to say, that has established a relation by which I have been called back, as you see from my records, several times to go there and conduct opera. So I have done, with them, anything from, well, most of the Mozarts I've done--*Don Giovanni*, *The Marriage of Figaro*. I've not done *Idomeneo* yet, even though they are planning on that. And I've done romantic opera--*Tales of Hoffmann* and other works. And then, contemporary works. I've forgotten to mention that at UCLA, we did Britten's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and so they asked me to do *Midsummer Night's Dream*. That is now all in Japanese, of course, because all the operas professionally are translated into Japanese. So *Midsummer Night's Dream* [is] in Japanese, as well as *Figaro* or *Don Giovanni*. It's really fun to listen to them in the Japanese language, because the Japanese language is very euphonic; it is full of vowels--you know, every syllable practically ends on a vowel, so it's the closest to Italian you can come. And their singers are being trained by Italian vocal teachers, though some go to Germany.

TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE ONE

DECEMBER 29, 1978

GREER: Okay, we are talking about Japenese opera in Tokyo.

POPPER: We were just in Tokyo now. So, not only did I have the pleasure to do some of the conventional operas there, but we ventured into Kabuki opera, which is a new development. In other words, it is really opera in what you might call the Western style, the Occidental style, but based on Kabuki plots. Some of the age-old plots they use for their Kabuki plays and some of the outstanding composers along that line are Osamu Shimizu or Ikuna Dan, who have studied opera and now try to apply it, just as Gershwin applied it to the American field with *Porgy and Bess* -- to apply it to the Japanese cultural background and surrounding. So I have been fortunate to do some of these works, but also in America. Now in Tokyo, not too long ago, I did a work by Shimizu, called *The River Ikuta-Gawa*, which was a most interesting work. It actually was done by the Japanese Choral Society, which is a marvelous choral group of people who are outstanding musicians. Every one of the members of this chorus has absolute pitch. So this work is written basically for chorus, and out of the chorus come the soloists. In other words, when the curtain rises, the entire ensemble is seated on the stage--there is a

similar thing (I might digress briefly) by Frank Martin, the Swiss composer, called *Le Vin Herbé*, which is his version of the Tristan story--[and then] the soloists now come out of the chorus, do their solo things; there is a narrator who sings and narrates. And it all is done in a very Japanese-type of style. That means the melodic line really imitates Japanese folkloric music. But they are clever enough not to use Eastern instruments for the orchestration because they feel there is a possibility that these works could also be done outside of Japan. So that means that the orchestration will imitate the sound of the shamisen, or of the koto, or of some of the more archaic, gagaku instruments, but it *can* be played by Western orchestras, you see. So doing this, I also thought I would. . . . First of all, we brought a shimizu opera to UCLA. We did *The Mask Maker* in the Japanese language. We decided, why not do it completely in the original? Shimizu, the composer, came over here, and the stage director--Professor [Hiromitsu] Naganuma, from the Tokyo University of Art. And we brought [the] entire costuming over from Tokyo. As a matter of fact, it came from the Kabukeza, from the famous Kabuki Playhouse in Tokyo; so it was as authentic as you can possibly make it. The opera is called *The Mask Makers--Shuzeni Manongator* in the original Japanese title. And now the interesting thing is that part of the

students were, of course, UCLA opera students--American boys and girls--and part of them were those Japanese graduate students I had brought over here. And so the Japanese instructed our students now, not only in the language and the meaning of what they were singing--so it was really a community effort--but also in the typical stylized Kabuki acting; so even before the stage director, Naganuma, arrived, they had a pretty good conception of what this was all about.

And one incident I will never forget. There is, of course, like in most Chinese operas, or in Kabuki opera, a moment where there is some sword fighting among the shoguns and noblemen and what have you. So the sword fighting came around, and, you know, those swords sent from the Kabuki playhouse were not make-believe swords--they were the real things. And if you have seen any kind of Oriental sword fighting, you know that they lash out wildly at each other, and the person has to duck just in the right moment, and the sword goes over his head. So we did rehearse that with dummy swords. But then the stage director insisted that in the performance the real things be used. And when I realized the way we had cast it--all the sword fighting took place among the American students of the cast, while the Japanese safely sat by and judged how good or bad they would be. Well, I must say, every time this happened, I

strenuously looked at my score and not on the stage. But, thank goodness, we got by not even with one [scratch]. Yes, it was really a very exciting thing, and I think it was very successful.

And later on, I also brought over a company, a segment of the Tokyo opera company of Niki-kai. They came to California, and we did a Japanese comic opera called *Muko Erabi, The Marriage Contract*, with dancing and--[a] typical Japanese Kabuki opera. And that toured, went around the campuses, to Zellerbach Auditorium in Berkeley and various other places.

GREER: Did you go with them?

POPPER: Yes, I conducted the performances. The entire cast was Japanese from Tokyo; the orchestra was a Los Angeles professional pickup orchestra. That was all part of the. . . . You see, we called it the UCLA Opera Theater, which had been established by Chancellor Murphy, by which the university supported some of the semiprofessional productions which then toured even as far as Alaska, where we did for the Alaska music festival *Cosi fan tutte* and *The Secret Marriage* (*Il Matrimonio segreto*), by Cimarosa. So I say, the university has been very kind and very supportive of these efforts. And I hope I've done my job to pay back, because the workshop grew from practically nothing to--well, a workshop which had become known nationwide and was

to be reckoned with. Of course, we could never rival these tremendous big opera schools like Bloomington, [University of] Indiana, and places like that, where an entire opera house was actually built--a $4 million opera house on the campus, for opera only. We never got to that point. And in a way, I'm glad we didn't, because I think opera in university should be integrated; it should be part of the musical, dramatic, and cultural offering, and it should never overshadow other activities, like band, orchestra, or the chorus, which we, of course, had under Roger Wagner, so that we could advance equally on the various fronts, which I think we did.

GREER: Did you have problems working out your rehearsal schedules with all the other groups that are on campus, and the quality of groups? Did you have people that overlapped?

POPPER: Yes, putting the rehearsal schedule together was one of the major crossword puzzles, because we had, of course, two types of rehearsals. Some were just class exercises. There was, of course, training in drama and acting; we had the dance department help us by stage movement, body training and dancing; and we even had fencing--we had a fencing master come over and teach fencing to the students. We were always cautious not to let sopranos fence against sopranos, but we mixed them. But nothing

ever occurred in that way. But you see, they had their class lessons, their regular class hours--certain nights in the week. But then, of course, we had to prepare two types of productions: the large-scale productions for Schoenberg Hall if we did the entire opera, of which we did two a year when we were on the semester system (every semester we did one, either an opera one semester at Royce Hall and one at Schoenberg Hall, you see; later on, when we went on the quarter system, that would not work); then, we usually just did one full-scale opera in the spring quarter and the others were, again, opera highlights--Hi-li-to. They were highlights by which, again, the opera workshop students could try themselves in excerpts from repertory opera in foreign languages. I usually narrated those, and they had two-piano accompaniment, so that they would acquire repertory--when they went out to Europe and other places, they knew their *La Boheme* and their *Madame Butterfly*, and their *Marriage of Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*, etc.

So that, of course, caused rehearsal problems, because while a big production was going on, there were, of course, quite a few members of the workshop who could not be in the production, because the cast did not call for so many voices; and even if you double-cast, there still were quite a few left over. These people must not feel that they are now useless, so we had to keep opera excerpt rehearsals going

for them as well. And that is one pledge I had made--that full productions must never overshadow--they must be an outcome of the training, but not overshadow the training programs. We put our honor at stake by keeping rehearsals going. And so, needless to say, some students, if they were working people--if they came to us through extension--could not rehearse during the day; some of the regularly enrolled students would rather rehearse during the day and not in the evening, when they had other commitments and had to study for their exams. So it was a real crossword puzzle, and it usually took a day--a weekend and a whole night, mostly--to put that schedule for the coming week together and to publish it, so that there would be no double-castings and no mistakes made. Miss Limonick helped me a great deal in this, but sometimes I did it all myself. So you learn to administrate; that was part of the administration of the workshop.

GREER: We are going to talk now about some of the special programs, operas, that you did here at UCLA, and some of the first premieres and things.

POPPER: Well, that leads back to the raison d'être. What is really the reason for opera workshop on a university campus to exist? We can understand that opera could be connected with a conservatory and so on, but why in a university? Well, there I feel I have a special approach

and philosophy which is not unique to me at all, but which, say, for instance, the books by Herbert Graf would bring out just as well. Opera on a campus must be designed like everything else--as a research, as widening the horizon of not only the students but maybe even the public that might frequent performances of that type. Filling in on neglected works, master works, that ought to be known--the whole era of baroque opera would come under this. Of course, now baroque opera is flourishing, but think of twenty years ago. Who spoke about Cesti, about Cavalli, about, well, even Handel operas or Monteverdi, you know, Scarlatti? People just would have said, "Well, that's not repertory opera. It doesn't belong." Or then we have the contemporary works, twentieth-century works, or in some cases, even forgotten but interesting works by nineteenth-century romantic composers.

So I think the object of an opera workshop is twofold, at least. Number one, of course, to give the student the training. That's why students come to a university--to learn. And in this particular case, a singer must certainly get instruction in repertory opera. That is number one. And we feel, by doing these excerpts from Puccini, anything of French, Italian, German, and American opera--Menotti would fall into this category, or Gershwin--that is repertory, and the young singer-actor must know that.

But then, there is also these works which will help promote an understanding of what opera really is, which will help the suffering underground American opera to come to the fore and to be heard, which will help some of the latest developments in Europe to be heard in this country, because professional opera companies--even though they are making a real effort now, with the help of the National Endowment for the Arts in Washington, to bring out unusual works--still are relegated to do the bread-and-butter work that will bring in audiences and bring in some of the money. Because opera is very, very costly, and a professional opera house, like the San Francisco Opera or the Met or the Chicago Lyric--they cannot experiment. Such experimentation would be very, very costly. And so it is up to the universities to do the experimentation.

So we've done quite a few of these experimental performances--some of them of great masters. For instance, it was my pleasure at UCLA, together with Milhaud's *Malheures d'Orphée*, *The Troubles of Orpheus*--a modern version of the Orpheus legend--to also do the first American performance of his one-act opera *Fiesta*, by which Milhaud was present at that. It was quite an occasion at Schoenberg Hall. And I think also his appreciation for college opera rose greatly through that.

But the greatest surprise, of course, came to Luigi

Dallapiccola, the outstanding Italian contemporary composer --a tonal composer, a twelve-tone composer--who was guest professor in Berkeley. Both Stanford and UCLA decided to honor him with productions of opera. Stanford did *Vollo di notte, The Night Flight*, and we at UCLA prepared his extremely difficult *Il prigionero, The Prisoner*, with very few people in the cast--actually only three leading characters on the stage--but a huge symphonic orchestra underneath. So we prepared that; we did it at UCLA and took it up to Berkeley, where the composer saw the performance. When we discussed that with Dallapiccola, he said, "Yes, I think maybe it can be done." But he was very dubious that any university could put this extremely difficult work on its feet. And he said, "Especially the first flute is so difficult. I hope you will find a good professional player for that." I said, "Well, Master Dallapiccola, please do not worry--we will do it." So, after the performance in Berkeley, I introduced the flute player to him. She happened to be a high school girl. She was sixteen years old. She then went to UCLA, but she had not been to UCLA yet; and Dallapiccola has never stopped, during his lifetime, to tell the story of that little sixteen-year-old girl that played that first flute. So I guess somehow the respect for music-making in America rose among these foreign visitors, who had not dreamed that such a thing can be done.

So among such interesting productions, we did some baroque operas, like *Orontea* by Cesti; we did Scarlatti's *Gli Equivoci nel sembiante*; we did, of course, Monteverdi's *Orfeo*; and several smaller works of the baroque age. Among the more contemporary works, we did *The Mines of Sulphur* by Richard Roger Bennett--again, a very demanding work which was done during the most trying time at UCLA--the student revolts--and some of the rehearsals were interrupted by rioting students.

We did *The Mighty Casey* by William Schuman. The composer was not present but heard about the success this baseball opera had at UCLA. We combined it with *Trouble in Tahiti* by [Leonard] Bernstein. And the stage director, Mansouri (about whom I've spoken earlier) had the brilliant idea of involving our UCLA baseball team, which then was quite successful and prominent, into the opera production. And of course, it was most exciting to have these baseball players on stage. At first, they were very shy about it; they didn't want to participate. Then they started padding their parts, so that we had to curb them a little bit to keep them down. But the audience, of course, at that time contained many sports fans that otherwise would never have come near opera. And for years to come, we had some audiences from the sporty side invading Schoenberg Hall.

Then among other things, we did *The Mother of Us All*,

again a West Coast premiere, with Virgil Thomson present at that time. I believe we did six performances of that at Schoenberg Hall, and they were sold out. It was a real exciting work. At first, I was not enamored with this opera, which musically tries to be as elementary in its statements as Gertrude Stein's libretto. But, as we grew into it, I realized that this is really a masterwork of American opera, and so the success was great on that score, too.

The UCLA Opera Theater, which I mentioned before, had been established by Chancellor Murphy (unfortunately, it is nonexistent anymore; overheads just became too great and money became too short). But, while we had this support, both from him and from a private foundation in Los Angeles matching funds, we were able to put on its feet some productions, such as *The Good Soldier Schweik*--actually the real pronunciation is "Osudy dobrého vojáka Svejka"--by [Jaroslav] Hasek, a Czech national poet. And this opera, this play, this famous national play--antiwar play of course--showing this Bohemian private, this soldier, à la Wozzeck (only he is a comic figure, the poor fellow--he just is so dumb; at least he claims to be terribly dumb, but he's *awfully* smart, and he knows very well, as the Czech soldiers knew out in the field, that they had to go to war for the Austrian-Hungarian army, but their heart was not in it, and of course they ran across to the enemy

wherever they could). So anyway, this *Good Soldier Schweik* treats this whole thing in a comic fashion. It is a very exciting production by [Robert] Kurka, an American Czech who, unfortunately, also died. So we could tour this work also to the various compuses, or play it in San Diego at the Globe Theater. And again, this all proved to be successful pioneering for opera.

On more conventional operas--I would say, operas that ought to be repertory, but hadn't been before that time--I mentioned *The Huguenots*, by Meyerbeer, which most opera companies shy away from, thinking of it as a super-production that needs seven stars in the leading roles--at least, that is the gossip and fifth-column work that had preceded this work, so that even the leading Los Angeles critic [Martin Bernheimer] looked very askance at the idea. In the Sunday paper, before even the production took place, he practically tore it apart, because he felt a university should not do such a stellar work. Well, the truth lies there: that while two or three of the roles, like Raoul (the tenor part), is of course extremely difficult (for which we got the same tenor that did the *Passion of Oedipus* by Roy Travis--William Du Pré; he sang that), many of the roles can really be sung just by good wholesome singers like in any other opera. So we revived this colossal work by Meyerbeer, which also unjustly had been condemned as an unoriginal, imitative

work, because what did Meyerbeer do? He just imitated Wagner, Verdi, and sort of went around the audience in intermission, asked what they liked and what they disliked, and then changed it--at least, that's what the history books tell us. Well, the contrary is, of course, true. It's exactly the opposite. Meyerbeer preceded Wagner and Verdi. *Huguenots* was performed in 1836, when Wagner did not yet dream about writing his grand opera, *Rienzi*. And also, Verdi took a great deal from this great composer. So, we were able to reestablish the true meaning of Meyerbeer; and lo and behold, several opera companies here and in Europe, after reading about the work (even the *Los Angeles Times* tore it to pieces very unjustly, so it was really a very nasty, ornery, action of the critic in this town) picked it up, and the opera--well, I was called to Belgium, for instance, to conduct the work there, and it is being done by various opera companies in America. So you see, even there a university can put a little adrenalin into the veins.

The same is true of a production of Mozart's *Idomeneo* in 1969, for which I was called to UC Berkeley as a guest professor to conduct this work. Daniel Harts of the Berkeley music faculty had researched the opera as it was originally done in 1781 in Munich and also received the grants to have the work performed. And I will never

forget the excitement! Again, we got ourselves in the midst of the student rioting and revolution. As a matter of fact, there was curfew on the Berkeley campus when the work was to be presented, and it was even a question of whether it could be done or not. In the last minutes, the people who worked the lights in the Zellerbach Auditorium, and who threatened to go on strike about fifteen minutes before the curtain was to go up, decided to stay on their job, because several people in the orchestra said, "All right, if you don't do it, we know how to do it. And we'll step in and we'll run the show." So they decided it is hopeless and stuck with it. And I made a short speech before the curtain went up on the stage and said that music, Mozart, is winning out over all the political faction, which some day will be forgotten, but Mozart is here to stay. And we did *Idomeneo* with a marvelous student orchestra at Berkeley. There was not one outsider in this, only students and faculty: a very large orchestra of seventy-five, which had been beautifully prepared by their orchestra conductor, an excellent cast, a chorus of 100. We did the first American performance of Daniel Harts's original revamping of the original production in Munich under Mozart. Several of these singers, again, have gone out to make good. Olivia Stapp, who was our *Electra* in this performance, sings all over Europe, and

just last year, we heard her at the Munich Mozart Festival sing the same role under [Wolfgang] Sawallisch's musical directorship.

All these things might be of interest some day and might lead to the fact that there have been pioneers at work who did not get the glamour that our great glamour conductors get, or directors, yet who feel that their life was very, very worthwhile spent doing the groundwork that had to be done. It brings satisfaction to a person--and I think, in the long run, that is the most important thing.

GREER: Because of your groundwork and because of things like that, you were invited to do a lot of guest professorships, including the Fulbright, and things like that. Why don't you talk about it.

POPPER: Yes, well, as a guest professor, I went to several places. For instance, for two summers, I was called to a university in San Diego--United States International University. A president of this university [William Rust] decided to do two summers of an opera festival, with students from all over America and even Europe; some came from Vienna--different places. So we did opera there with orchestra. We did *Don Pasquale*, *Marriage of Figaro*, *The Turn of the Screw*, and *Ariadne auf Naxos* by Richard Strauss, in twelve consecutive performances. And I think, with all the records achieved, I don't think

Ariadne has ever been given twelve times in a row. But since the auditorium was a small one, we had to do that to earn our living, right? So, that was an interesting thing to do.

And then, I was called to Tanglewood one summer. (I already had mentioned that.) The University of British Columbia in Vancouver wanted to run a summer opera workshop, so I did not have to neglect my work during the academic year. And that was the summer before we went to Japan. In other words, in '59-'60, I was at Berkeley doing Bloch's *Macbeth* and several other productions, and then went up to Vancouver for the summer, and then we were headed to go on the Fulbright ship from Seattle to Tokyo.

Unfortunately, something happened there that makes me remember that summer in Vancouver forever. I was doing *The Secret Marriage* by Cimerosa--and excellent young singers, but I was a one-man staff. I did not have a stage manager; I did not have a stage director, and was my own conductor; so I had to do it all by myself. So the furniture, the rococo furniture, arrived at the theater and I had to unload it myself. I like to do things like this--good for your muscles, and you keep young that way. But anyway, one thing--not being too well seasoned in this particular type of work, I made

the mistake--after the truck had backed up, I thought that was it, and I started unloading the furniture. But the truck driver, on the other hand, thought he had not yet quite backed up enough and took another step backwards with the truck, and of course, it pinned my ankle between the tailgate of the truck and between the stone landing of the stage door. Well, that was disagreeable because it squashed the ankle.

Now, here we are ready for dress rehearsal. So they quickly put me in a car and took me to emergency--to the general hospital in Vancouver. The doctor looked and said, "It has to be operated immediately." I said, "Well, terribly sorry. It cannot be done immediately, because I have a show coming up, and please, if you just would put that in a cast. As soon as we are through, in a week, I'll come back and then you can do anything that is necessary." He said, "Well, you are a fool because if we don't do it now, gangrene might set in and you might lose your leg." I said, "Well, I don't think it will, and I've got to do the show, so please, will you do what I say and send me back?" So he said, "Well, Mr. Popper, now, what is more important for you"--I never will forget that--"your leg or the opera production?" I said, "Well, this week, the opera production, and next week, the leg." So, he knew he was dealing with a fool, and he put me in a

cast and they sent me back.

It wasn't exactly pleasant to have a squashed ankle in a cast, and, of course, my poor wife always suffers with these things much more than I myself suffer; but I managed to do it. The leg was elevated, and I could do the performance. And then, the operation took place. It was a perfect operation; I've never had any problem with this leg, and I've gone skiing many times after that. So you see, there is always a happy end to these things if you think it that way, and know, and you are optimistic, and it will come out right. But I did have to make my appearance in Tokyo on crutches, unfortunately, and they are very sensitive about that. But very soon, I could throw the crutches away and do my job over there as I was expected to do.

Well, other guest professorships, of course, included Berkeley. Then, when the UC campus in Santa Cruz opened in 1965, I was called in to help build a music department. As a matter of fact, there was the thought of staying in Santa Cruz for good and becoming part of their faculty. And having been chairman of the music department [at UCLA] the previous two years, I sort of flirted with the idea. It was good to get away from UCLA for a while. But then, as I looked at the situation at Santa Cruz, with mostly freshmen, there wasn't very much that I could do in my

particular field. And so I returned to UCLA the following year--criminals always return to the place of their crimes.

Then, of course, I had been. . . . I probably am forgetting a few of those now. Well, yes, for some time I had a chancellor--President [Clark] Kerr--bestowed an all-university professorship on me by which--I mean, he felt clearly that I'm in a very specialized field in opera, and just how many of the campuses can afford an opera workshop? So it might be wise if I looked in on various campuses and tried to spark opera there. Now, as you know, Santa Barbara does not need that, because Cal Zytowski there has done a beautiful job with opera. Berkeley didn't actually ever have opera and so I actually spent then different quarters--one in Berkeley (as a matter of fact, two at that time, I believe), then one quarter at Irvine, one quarter in Riverside; and then, of course, Santa Cruz was also part of this. So that is where I could lecture on opera on these various campuses, and found the students most interested in opera literature.

Since I only was for one quarter on these various campuses, I just took a segment of opera, like only romantic opera, or only classic opera, or Richard Wagner or something like that, by which I did not have to skim over it, but could go deeper into. I still remember the Verdi. I did a Verdi class at Riverside, and the excitement of the

students! The papers, I still keep today. They were excellent papers because they were very fine students and very, very interested.

Besides running small opera workshops on these campuses, to show opera in a small way--chamber opera--can be done without all the paraphernalia of large costuming, staging, and lots of expense.

Now I will again be called back once more to UC Davis this coming spring (the spring, in case this gets lost somewhere, it will be the spring of '79), where I am scheduled to do a contemporary work by Jerome Rosen, a longtime chairman of the music department, now a professor of music there. The opera is based on an old Spanish romance and is called *Callisto and Melibea*. I know Jerry Rosen doesn't want to hear that, but it *is* a difficult work. Again, it will be an experimental staging. I am in charge, not only of conducting the work, but staging it, too. So I'm looking forward to that; and it is another great challenge to do that as a double bill with Haydn *La cantarina*, *The Songstress*, which I did recently up in Alaska for the music festival, together with Foss's *Jumping Frog*--which, by the way, the Alaskans loved. It just had enough of that western pioneer spirit that they could relive their pioneering up there. So it is fun to see how opera, depending on the locality (where you do it), finds very

different reactions from audiences. This, in Alaska, was a real, real great success. And I hope that Haydn and the Rosen opera--he refers to it, jokingly, as the "Rosen"-*Kavalier*--will also be a success up there.

So then, of course, I had been conducting as a professional guest conductor here or there. Especially exciting [was] the work in Taiwan when I started an opera workshop at one of their universities, called the Normal University. That was the only abnormal thing they ever did--starting opera. And then we were in Taiwan earlier this year (this is, of course, '78), not realizing that this may have been the last time we had been there, due to the political developments. But again, I don't feel pessimistic at all; it might clear up again, and they may be willing to continue their cultural relations with the United States. I found excellent singers there and a very devoted public.

A few years ago, I did the first opera production in Taipei, which actually, again, were just highlights: one whole act of *La Boheme*; one act of *Traviata*; one act of Wagner's *Tannhäuser*, with a full municipal orchestra and Chinese singers on stage--fully staged and fully costumed. It was such an exciting event that firecrackers were let off all over Taipei; it was like Chinese New Year. That was really fun doing. And now, I had been asked back (I'm sorry to put that in the past)--to come back in

November '79 to do the first full production of classical opera in Chinese. I was supposed to do *The Magic Flute* in a Chinese translation. The translation had been all worked out and the singers are looking forward to it. But politicians say one thing, while musicians would like to say another, because people are people. We got along with them famously, and it is a shame, really, that these people now feel they have been let down. But I know there are needs for all these things.

So anyway, this and the work I did in Belgium--I did *Peter Grimes* there in, I believe, '73, with, again, excellent cast and orchestra, for the Royal Belgium Opera Company in Ghent--Gand, the French call it--in the Flemish country. Then this production was taken and toured within Belgium to Antwerp and to Liège, and we even went to the little charming town of Brugge, which, of course, is the setting for Korngold's *The Dead City*. It is anything but dead. It's a charming little town, as many of you know, and to do opera in this archaic theater, with a very small pit. . . . But you really feel that you are back 100 years or so. Those are exciting things to do--to perform in theaters of that type. And then last year, I did *Huguenots* for them, as I mentioned, *Les Huguenots*. And so, maybe there will be other opportunities to tour and conduct.

Again, we've lost one field, at least for the moment

being. We were invited to come to Tehran, where I did *Faust* in the French language at Rudaki Hall, which is their very, very fine theater. The shah and the queen especially like opera very much, so they have a regular opera season there. (Again, I have to put these things in the past now--past tense.) But I did some of these productions. The orchestra consisted entirely of East[ern European] bloc players, which were contracted by the shah for one year--players from Rumania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary, who were all seasoned players and just played beautifully. At first there was a little suspicion of an American conductor coming in, but then this was very quickly straightened out and alleviated, and they became devoted people with whom I still correspond to this very day. And of course, money played absolutely no matter, you see--no difference. The brother of the shah, who is the minister of culture there, told me, "Well, Dr. Popper, you go ahead, and if you need more chorus or more orchestra, just let us know. Money makes no difference." That I never heard any operatic organizer or director say.

And then I returned not long ago and did *The Bartered Bride* by Smetana, in German, with mostly German singers. The Stuttgart Ballet was flown in--of course, money makes no difference--and that was an exciting work. It was televised; it was filmed and televised throughout Iran--

the first opera ever to be televised. And of course, when I think of the distant regions of Iran, of which we had seen some traveling up to the Caspian Sea, and to the eastern part of the country where the nomadic people live, I don't really think that *The Bartered Bride* by Smetana has made a deep influence on the nomads of Iran. But anyway, it was another thing to do which was of interest.

And there, of course, I have to return once more about the USIS trips that Mrs. Popper and I have taken. One was very interesting--our first visit to Burma--because Burma was practically closed to American visitors. The flights were--you may remember that. Those that tried to get into Burma--you could get a forty-eight-hour visa to stay there, but the flights were arranged so that you could not make it within forty-eight hours. You couldn't get in and out within that time. So the connecting flights didn't work, so nobody could go there. But when it finally opened up and you could stay a week, we took the opportunity, and on a trip around the world, where I had worked in Iran, we continued then to Burma and did some goodwill concerts there, by which we performed for the Burmese musicians and they performed for us with their little Burmese hand harps, etc. It was, again, most exciting and most interesting and so I feel that music can spread a lot of goodwill. The politicians get into that once in a

while and spoil it all. But musicians and artists all over the world seem to understand each other just after a couple of chords. We don't need big speeches or anything of that sort. So does that answer your question?

GREER: That certainly does.

TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE TWO

DECEMBER 29, 1978

GREER: We are now going to talk about Mr. Popper's contribution to the enjoyment of opera and the many activities he participated in, in that instance.

POPPER: Lecturing on opera is great fun if you don't take it too seriously. In other words, you have to make a difference between an undergraduate class in a university or a graduate class. For instance, I did graduate lectures at UCLA on the *Ring* cycle by Wagner, which we really analyzed and took very seriously, and we came up with some very interesting discoveries. But if you do opera literature and opera appreciation for undergraduate students, I feel--besides giving them the absolutely necessary knowledge in the way of data and composers and important works in literature; and, more than that, the differences in styles, which they ought to know to distinguish romantic from classical, and contemporary from romantic, or French romantic from Italian and German romantic--once you have done that, the most important thing is that you have stimulated their interest in opera, by which you have a fair assurance that they will continue and not say, "All right now. I have taken my one and only course on opera, and I've done my duty." Right? So this is then very rewarding when I meet people

at the San Francisco opera house at intermission, and they rush up and say, "I took your course here, there, and there, and not only did I get interested through that, but I also managed to corrupt my husband to like the same thing." So that makes one feel a little better about the situation.

And then, of course, there are the public lectures on opera, which are apparently needed in this country. I would never have dreamed in Europe to have to lecture about opera because, as you know, the operas there are done mostly in the language of the country in which they are performed--except lately, at some of the festivals or some of the larger opera houses, such as Munich or Hamburg or Berlin, they decide to now present opera in the original languages. But most of them are still done in translation, and so, if the diction is halfway good and if the synopsis mentioned in the program is adequate, there is no need to give any introduction to the opera. However, here, where we do opera in foreign languages, it is, I think, necessary to not only go into the plot involvement, but it is interesting to see where the plots have been derived from, discuss the difference between the original plays and the plot based on these plays, and how did the librettist and what did he do--was he intelligent about it, or did he ruin the original play? All this is of great interest to intelligent

operagoers in this country. And then, of course, the difference in styles, and to see the opera within their own framework, by which you want an earlier work really presented the way it should be, within the style--not only musically, orchestrally, or vocally, but hopefully also stagewise.

This is where I'm fighting a losing battle, I'm afraid, against a new element in opera that has invaded opera, known as the stage director, of which many of them have taken it upon themselves to rewrite the operas to give them a different setting and to provide them with all kinds of--well, we Germans call it *Kinkerlitzchen*--shenanigans and tricks, apparently to keep the interest of the audience alive. I think a good masterwork by Verdi and by Mozart will keep the interest alive without the additions of any stage director. Of course, there are some excellent ones, but some who greatly overstep their calling and feel that they really are the producers and directors and tell the conductor what to do and so on, which is very deplorable, because I do feel opera--I mean, you would not look at a Renaissance painting or at a baroque painting and want it to appear like a modern painting. You would not want a Shakespeare done as a play by O'Neill done. So I think this is belittling an audience. You must see a masterwork within its own framework, with its own period. And there

is still plenty of opportunity, with modern stage techniques and lighting, to make it interesting without overstepping, without changing, the style of the period and distracting from the music. I mean, a typical example of that is a recent performance of Verdi's *Otello* at the San Francisco Opera House, by which the stage director, in the first act, this marvelous *fòco di gioia*--the joyous chorus of the Cypriots, where they now know that the Turkish fleet has been conquered and they light a bonfire to express their joy. And Verdi has written the most joyful music he can write, and graceful, and the sparkling of the flames is described in the music, and it nearly has a dancelike character. Well, the stage director decided this would be a good time to bring one of the Turkish prisoners in and immolate him and burn him right in front of the eyes of the audience. So it became a burnt Turk instead of a *fòco di gioia*. I mean, these are crimes committed against opera, and I'm amazed that critics and the general public do not stand up and speak up against such encroachments against the style and the spirit of the music and the composer.

But as I say, it is a losing battle I'm fighting. But I still want to go on record as having stated this for future times, when I'll be long dead and gone. And maybe opera audiences feel they do not have to be clubbed by stage directors who are interpreting the thing for them

that the composer and the librettists did enough to put a masterwork across. So, what were we speaking about?

GREER: Well, I'm interested in finding out about your series, "Spotlight on Opera," and how that came about.

POPPER: So then, I am doing these opera preview lectures--some of them for University Extension, like University of California. I've been doing this for several years now. And of course, it was a little difficult while I was teaching at UCLA. My poor wife would rush me to the airport right around five o'clock, where I would hop on PSA and rush up to San Francisco and do the lectures on 55 Laguna for the Berkeley extension in San Francisco, and then catch a mid-night plane to go back and to be at my nine o'clock rehearsal the next morning. That was a little trying.

Well, now that I'm retired and we have made our temporary home in San Francisco Bay Area, it was a little easier for me, because I did not have to have those plane rides involved. However, then I was, well, I wouldn't say stupid enough--I let myself get talked into doing these lectures in various communities, starting with Santa Cruz, a series of ten lectures; San Francisco, a series of ten; Sacramento, a series of ten; and in such widely varying communities, by which we had to cover quite a bit of mileage to get there. And besides that, using more and more singers for musical illustration, I had to prepare the

singers also, in various communities, to help me, to assist me in illustrating the lectures. Well, I did forty-nine of them in conjunction--consecutive forty nine lectures this past fall of '78--for the San Francisco Opera company. And I think probably next fall, I better take a sabbatical, because it got to me. It just was a little too much.

But I do enjoy speaking to the general public about opera and trying, to my best knowledge, to bring out the meaningfulness of the opera, or at least the style, or maybe the meaninglessness of the opera. If a composer did not intend to make this a deep work--if it is just a work written for the moment, for the time--as long as an audience goes there prepared to what they really will see and hear, and to appreciate what they will see and hear, and not expect something that is not in the opera, you see. That is where likes and dislikes are developed, because people go with the wrong anticipations.

So that is part of my work and I believe, in the early fifties--1955, middle fifties, right?--I was asked to do a series of ten half-hour television films, sponsored by the Ford Foundation and by UCLA, which were called "Spotlight on Opera." And they were filmed in a professional studio in Hollywood. Again it was a little difficult for me, because I was teaching at the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara--a very beautiful spot--during the summer. I assisted Lotte Lehmann, the very famous opera singer

(again, one of the great memories in my life) in her opera classes. And so we had to drive in--it was an especially hot summer--at nighttime to make these films during the night, because that was the only time the studio was available. And at one time, my voice left me completely and had to be propped up artificially; so if I don't sound too good in some of these films, you know the reason why. It was so beastly hot under the lights in the television studio that when I was aware that they were only taking a shot to the waist, that I was permitted to put my swim trunks on and tuxedo, or jacket and tie over that. I was always afraid they might dip a little lower with the camera, but they never did. So these ten films, again, which I believe are still available, were played over most educational TV stations in this country, and dealt with opera, starting with Mozart, to contemporary opera--again, very freely improvised in many ways, but with lots of pictorial material to illustrate the lectures. So they were quite popular and actually were run as an extension course by UCLA Extension, with the textbook written by Natalie Limonick, who provided the text to go with this. So you see, I have to be doubly grateful to this lady.

GREER: Tell me something about Lotte Lehmann. What were your experiences with her, and how did you get to meet her?

POPPER: Lotte Lehmann, as a singer. . . . Many of the older people have experienced her marvelous performances in opera, especially the Marschallin in the *Rosenkavalier*; but of course, we also saw her as Arabella in that Richard Strauss opera. She had a special liking, I think, for Richard Strauss. She knew Strauss very well personally and vice versa; she had a great dislike of Richard Strauss's wife, Pauline Ahna, who was a singer also. But I'm afraid, being a daughter of a general, she tried to run the life of Richard Strauss as you would run, well, army personnel, and that didn't go too well with Strauss. The *Intermezzo* by Richard Strauss pokes fun of their domestic situation, as well as the symphonic poem, the *Symphonia domestica* by Strauss--that all deals with the strange private life he was leading. But Lotte Lehmann, of course, had a deep, deep respect for Richard Strauss, not only as a composer, but also as a conductor and as a recital accompanist, because Strauss played some of the lieder recitals of his own music for Lotte Lehmann. And so, on one of the films of that series I just mentioned, "Spotlight on Opera," it was my privilege to interview Lotte Lehmann on her experiences with Strauss as a conductor and as a director in rehearsing the singers. Of course, in the *Rosenkavalier*, this wonderful person, this woman, has sung all three leading roles--not at the same time. But she started as Octavian, then she sang the role

of Sophie (a high soprano role), and then she ended up as the famous interpreter of the Princess of Wedenberg--the Marschallin, as she is called in the opera. So she certainly, having done this and several other Strauss works, had a great knowledge of the Strauss work and tried to impart those to the students.

Of course, the student material at the summer academy in Santa Barbara was of a highly professional nature. That means many of the singers--like now Norman Mittlemann is one of the leading baritones in opera in Europe, as well as in America. They all were students--Grace Bumbry--they were students at that time, and many others, names I do not want to bore you with.

So the way she explained the roles--but more than that, the way she was able to get on that stage and illustrate the roles without being able to sing, but just very softly singing, but the way she sat, her facial expression, her body attitude--everything about her was better than a long lecture on the particular role, like Eva in the *Meistersinger*. When she sat next to Sachs, in that dialog between Sachs and Eva, and the way this woman--that of course had retired from active singing, especially from her beautiful recital work of German lieder, for which she was so famous--sat there and knew, of course, all the text perfectly by heart and mimicked the role, is just unforgettable. And of

course, as a human being, as an artist, she was not only a great singer, as you may know, but she also did some fine art works--some mosaics--which are still available. And I believe much of it is preserved in the UC Santa Barbara Library, because there is a special room, for which I was honored with Lotte sitting right next to me, to make the dedicatory speech. And many of her manuscripts, pictures, and so on, are available there and can be seen there. But the fact that she could impart her knowledge and her experience in this particular role--so many American and foreign students came from all over the world to Santa Barbara to get her instruction. That, of course, is another unforgettable moment in my life.

GREER: When you reflect back at your times at UCLA--I hate to go back to UCLA, but I think that's a good focus point for part of these speeches--is there anything you remember especially about it, or about the climate? I don't mean the weather climate. I mean the attitude on campus about opera, about your roles.

POPPER: As I mentioned before, the attitude always seemed to be a very benevolent and beneficial one from the higher administration, as well as from my colleagues on the faculty. As a matter of fact, I must honestly say, when Professor Walter Rubsamen became chairman of the department, of course one expected he, being a very well known musicologist,

would favor the musicology side of the departmental offerings and neglect performance. Exactly the contrary was true. Walter really helped the performance organizations as much as he could. And the orchestra flourished at that time, and the opera did, too, and really, as far as participation in the operas were needed--not only faculty participation in the music department, but, as I mentioned, the dance department helped us a great lot. During one time when I was away (I believe I was doing *Idomeneo* at that time in Berkeley), Natalie Limonick directed a Rameau opera, *Les Indes galantes, The Gallant Indians*, and that was practically a 50-50 participation--being an opera-ballet, ballet-opera--of the dance department at UCLA. The drama department helped whenever they could. The first production we did, which I mentioned--*The Beggars Opera*, in Britten's version--was staged by Henry Schnitzler, the famous son of Arthur Schnitzler, who is now directing, has been directing for many years in Europe. He left UCLA.

Well, it worked and it didn't work, you see, because the times of the singers did not always coincide with the times available; there was unrest. The drama department--the theater arts department at UCLA--works under special military law, you might say; they are very strict with their students, and a student in that department is supposed to be dedicated to that and just about nothing else. Now, you

can do that with students in your own department, but once you get students from another department--some of them were actually only extension students. . . . For instance, rehearsals were called for Easter Sunday. Well, Easter Sunday is one time when singers make a little living; they earn singing. And that, of course, was a nasty thing to do.

So anyway, it just never really worked out. But that again, you see, [is] where the UCLA administration came in very helpfully. They allowed us to employ our own stage director through the music department, which very few other colleges will do in that way. The various young directors who joined us, or guest professors like Professor Strickland, who was with us and staged a West Coast premiere of a composer, who since again has become very well known in America. Again, read the contemporary write-ups in the *Los Angeles Times* and you will see how little-known these composers were. I speak about Leoš Janáček and his opera *Jenufa*, which again was done for the first time on the West Coast--actually, probably the first Janáček done on the West Coast. Professor Strickland came to us as a guest director from Washington, D.C., to direct that. You see, they allowed us to do that, seeing the problem we had with a very busy drama department--one of the largest in the country, who for its own sake, is very famous and does a marvelous job.

Well, you see, how can they spare time to have sets made by their students for opera performances? I can see the point very clearly. So we had to engage central stage for that, and actually paid, of course, for the sets which were made by them, by the hour. At first it was not terribly expensive, but then, as prices went up, it practically became unbearable as far as the expense was concerned, with the costumes having to be designed and made. Archie Sharp was our stage designer--maybe he still is--an excellent young man, who was a drama student, graduate student, at UCLA and now is a very, very famous designer. So many of the big productions, like *The Huguenots*, were designed by him. But of course, all of that had to be paid for. It made opera a costly thing. And then, of course--I wouldn't say the last straw, but something that I never could quite understand--was the fact that we had to pay for the use of the hall on our own premises in the music department, that we had to pay an hourly rate, which went up and up, to use the stage of Schoenberg Hall for rehearsals--well, that made it prohibitive. And again, I could see the hand-writing on the wall. And frankly, I am glad that my retirement came at the time when it did, because I was able, during the seven fat years before the seven lean years set in, to be able to do these large-scale productions. And the overhead wasn't terrible. It was too big yet, but it

was not outrageous.

Well, I don't know how the workshop is doing now, but I see they are concentrating on one big annual production, like *La Boheme*, or *La Traviata*--a full production. And of course, Mr. Krachmalnick, who has followed me in the job, is a very fine orchestral conductor who has been able to whip the symphony--the university symphony orchestra--into shape and build it. And the fact that he is now in charge of both the opera and the symphony is in a way a great advantage, because, when opera time came around, I always had a bit of struggle to get players for the opera, even though the symphony was supposed to be turned over as an opera orchestra at this quarter when the opera took place. But then, of course, there was the chorus who needed the orchestra; there were band concerts (rightly so) in which some of the players, the wind players, were involved. And so, it was really difficult at times, when we came up to production, to get the pit filled with the right players. There never was any problem on stage, but the pit was the problem, and is a story in itself. So this now, I believe, has been settled by the one and the same conductor being in charge of orchestra as well as opera. I only hope that the experimental spirit of the workshop, which has been established over the years and which I have described in its function within the university, will not change too much, because,

even though I feel that opera singers must know their *La Boheme* and must know their *La Traviata*, they can learn that also on the side, so to speak. And yet, there is a function for a university opera workshop, not only to duplicate professional productions, which can be seen and heard by major opera companies, but to be creative--creative in filling in the lacks that we have still in opera understanding and appreciation in this country. Well, that is my philosophy, and it is good that other people have different outlooks. You see, that makes it very interesting and very varied for the public, for the students, for the university itself. So all my good wishes go with the workshop, whichever turn it might take.

GREER: There is a collection in the music library at UCLA on Venetian opera librettos, and they have a very excellent opera score series. Did you have much to do with getting those in there?

POPPER: No. That was mostly Professor Rubsamen's work, who specialized in this field. He collected librettos--opera librettos--and, as you know, also was a specialist in ballad opera, in *Singspiel*, English ballad and German *Singspiel*. There is a fund of excellent material there for somebody who would wish to exploit it, you know. There is practically a complete collection of the operas of Grétry available there. There is just no end. If I were thirty,

forty, fifty years younger and could turn the clock back, there would be a whole lifetime's job for somebody to again bring these works to life in excellent arrangements, or translations, or even in the original that people would learn to get an entirely different face of opera literature that they are not acquainted with at this time. And again some of these works. . . . You see, who would have believed that something like Monteverdi's *The Coronation of Poppea* could ever open the season of a highly professional company like the San Francisco Opera company? Exactly that's what happened--last year, I believe. So we've gone a long way. If the universities, again, would not have shown the beauties and the excitement of baroque opera, and established a definite style for the performance of baroque opera, and if the musicologists would not have helped to do that--you see, the role of the music historian and musicologist in this connection is invaluable as far as performance practices are concerned--no professional company would dare do such a thing. And yet the performances were sold out; the excitement was high. And you see, these are the changes that have taken place even within the few years, within a lifetime, that I have been here in this country. Nobody would have dreamed about that in 1940.

GREER: You've had a lot to do with what has happened, too, because of your pioneering at Stanford and UCLA.

POPPER: Well, not only I, Leslie, I dare to submit here, but--we are only one of at least 140 college opera workshops throughout the country. So we have contributed to that, especially on the West Coast, of course, but there are various other colleges who have done exactly the same thing. So it has been a concerted effort without organization. In other words, we haven't deliberated with each other what we are going to do. We have watched each other; we have seen what one does--well, what he does, maybe I can do, or what he hasn't done, maybe I should be doing. You see, so we inspired each other. It has been a rivalry--for instance, USC and UCLA opera workshops have been a very healthy rivalry, I believe. USC has suffered under the lack of physical facilities until recently, you know. They did not have the performance opportunities we had at UCLA with Royce Hall and with Schoenberg Hall, which is an excellent stage for chamber opera. And yet, they have put up a brave fight. They ran, and still are running, an excellent program. And so, this has made it more exciting and more interesting for all of us. The same is true of Los Angeles City College, which I mentioned, under Strelitzer, and some of the other colleges in the Los Angeles area.

GREER: We are going to close this tape with talking about the various recognitions Dr. Popper has received from the nation, and from the world, about his work in operas.

POPPER: Well, as I said before, the main recognition and reward lies in the work itself. And the reverberation we get from the students all through the world, whether they are in Germany, or in the Orient, or in Switzerland and in Austria, where they are singing now at the Graz opera house. A young lady that sang the lead in *The Huguenots*, Sue Patchell, is one of the leading sopranos in Graz, Austria, and writes enthusiastic reports about it. I mean, this is recognition in itself. Of course, there have been some awards--the National Association of American Composers and Conductors honored me with a Western Los Angeles award (I forgot what year that was).

GREER: It was 1966?

POPPER: No, before that. [It was awarded in 1958. The National Award for "Distinguished Service to American Music" was given to Dr. Popper in 1966.] Well, Leslie, I'm sure you will look it up; it is really no problem. But I also received a national award from them in 1966--I remember that because I was teaching as a guest professor in Santa Cruz at that time, and so we drove to New York to receive that award. I also received a strange award that I guess I also should be proud of, and that is (now, don't laugh please) that on the day of the last production of the UCLA opera workshop, this day was declared by Mayor Bradley Jan Popper Day in Los Angeles. And of

course, the mayor received me, and there was quite a festivity and celebration, which I gladly appreciated. I still remember that our picture was taken together; but if you know Mayor Bradley--he is such a giant tall person--they put me on three Los Angeles telephone books so that I would somewhat come up to his height. Well, I don't know whether this particular day means that there is free drinks and food for Mrs. Popper and me annually in Los Angeles, but anyway, it was a real honor and I did appreciate that very much. I also received some award, the name of which I have forgotten (Leslie, promise you will look that up) [The Peabody Award] for this television series "Spotlight on Opera," which was broadcast by KNXT, Los Angeles, and which received the first award in its own category.

By the way, we also did later another television series in Los Angeles on KNXT, and that was called "Opera Workshop," and that really, in a way, was very interesting--more interesting than the first one--because we showed an opera workshop in action. Together with stage director Robert Mesrobian, and with me as music director, we showed how students are being trained in acting, how this acting is just applied. Now, that wasn't filmed; that was just a one-time broadcast. But those who saw it really expressed great admiration for the planning of this series--

how dance intrudes into opera; how the students go through their training in body movement, in fencing. And then we had, say for instance, excerpts from Shakespeare's *Othello* enacted by the students, and showed how that would differ from Verdi's *Otello*, and what are the similarities and where does opera differ from the play. I guess I really think that also has done a great deal. Usually the broadcasts were at a very good time, when a lot of people could watch it, and the response in letter form was very great--even more to the second series than I think to the first, because it involved the people more and it showed how we trained the students.

GREER: Although the first series was a blessing for a lot of frustrated students living at home!

POPPER: The first series was shown nationwide while this was just shown in the Los Angeles area. And of course, it was really fun somehow to become a television celebrity. Wherever I went, people would say, "I saw you on television," regardless whether it was in California or in the East or anywhere, because apparently people became addicts--once they had watched one of the films, they reserved the time to see all of them. The illustration, the vocal illustration, was very well done. People like Hans Blankenburg, who later on became a *Kammersinger* at the Hamburg opera house, was my baritone who illustrated. And there were several others,

including my wife, who did some of the Wagnerian mezzo roles, like Erda in *Rheingold*. And I marveled at the ingenuity with which the television people--for instance, when Erda makes her appearance in *Rheingold* in the famous warning, Erda's warning for Wotan, the "Wache, Wotan; wache," they arranged it so that the face of Erda appeared practically behind a smokescreen and that you, for a moment, really thought this was a full-stage production. And when I saw how they did it, by just attaching one cigarette to the left and one to the right of a music stand which was invisible, and the face was showing above it, I really marvelled at the ingenuity with how little great effects can be reached.

So again, you know, these things are all in the process of learning of a person, and so that's by what I have learned and by what I was allowed to develop and to grow, because, in my humble opinion, even at this advanced age, once you stop and you stand still, you are done for. It is always looking for the new and for the interesting, and most of all finding all the exciting things that surround us. Now, I don't want to go into general and human philosophy here, but it is so deplorable to see young people, who have the life before them, who are surrounded by the beauty of nature and by all the accomplishments that modern technology is offering us, and still

running around with a lot of weltschmerz--with the burden of the world on their shoulders, instead of taking a more optimistic outlook. I could never do that. I am excited by meeting new people. We love people, Mrs. Popper and I. We find the most interesting--especially people of various nationalities and color. Differences, of course, have never existed for me. As a matter of fact, I made one pun in Berkeley which came just at the right moment. I was teaching a Mozart class in the music department at Berkeley--as I mentioned, it was during a time of great upheaval and the shouts could be heard from Sather Gate, and the national guard was up. I talked about Mozart's operas, and I mentioned Ella Lee, who was an excellent performer--she was, at that time, with [Walter] Felsenstein in East Berlin, doing Pamina in *Magic Flute*, and got marvelous reviews for that throughout Europe. So I mentioned, "And then, there was this student at UCLA--the Negro soprano, Ella Lee"--and I heard a voice from the back saying, "Black soprano, please." You know, everybody was on edge at that time. I said, "No, actually, black voice means something else. A black bass is a special timbre, a special quality and color of a bass voice." And I said, "Besides," (I don't know why I thought of this pun) "besides, I think it's just a pigment of your imagination." Well, the class broke into laughter. I never had a problem ever since that time. So I think, with a bit of good humor and goodwill,

all of our differences could be resolved if we just keep an optimistic outlook. I think that is so important, and that helps you through some sad stages in your life. Sometimes I think that some of the problems that my colleagues and I have gone through in Europe, and the things we have seen, and the machine guns that were pointed in our direction, and yet, we took it as a way of life, just as the people are taking it now in Iran, or here and there. You cannot help that. Human friction always take place. As long as we don't let it get to us too much. I mean, these things come and go; history shows us that. Just think of Mozart--the young Mozart, traveling as a child prodigy from court to court, from Austria to Germany and here and there. You know, it was at the time of the Seven Years War. It was a terrible war--there was shooting and massacre, and we tend to forget that. Do you ever see, in any of Mozart's letters, any allusion to war and violence? He speaks about music, about the arts, about the people he met, about the pianos and harpsichords he played. That is the thing that will prevail; that will last; that is here to stay. The other things come and go, and hopefully, someday will be resolved, God knows in what way, because human smallness and pettiness and hatred just knows no end. But I think, if we can overlook that and see the good elements in human beings, and the good elements in the development

of the arts, and the marvelous things that have happened in technology, and if we appreciate and love it, I think that the world would look entirely, entirely different. And I hope that's not my last message.

GREER: I think that's a good note to end on.

POPPER: I hope I have--I mean, last message in my life--I hope I have just a few more years to go to do some more interesting things. And the moment I do nothing, I hope that I join my ancestors, because then my youthfulness has outlived itself.

TAPE NUMBER: IV, SIDE ONE

FEBRUARY 27, 1979

GREER: We are going to talk primarily about Dr. Popper's chairmanship of the music department, beginning in 1963, and some of the experiences he had with the people he was working with there on the faculty on the campus at the time. Maybe you'd like to, first of all, talk about how you got the chairmanship.

POPPER: Yes. Indeed. Well, first of all, Leslie, I had been away on a sabbatical leave. My Fulbright scholarship came in just about before that when my wife and I went to Tokyo to start an opera workshop for the Tokyo University of Arts. And I had messages from the dean, from Dean [William] Melnitz, that he hoped I could return after my Fulbright year was over, even though the Japanese wanted me to stay on. I started the job there, and I would have loved to stay another year, which would have been very helpful. But Dean Melnitz gave me to understand that the Opera Workshop had suffered with my absence, which is only logical. When the director is away for any length of time, you cannot expect the organization, which is entrusted to him, to continue with the same effectiveness. So I did return, and I do remember, at the same time, the offer from the San Francisco Opera company came in, right after my return, to be one of the guest conductors of the San

Francisco spring opera season at the War Memorial Opera House. So I was in the midst of rehearsing *Madame Butterfly* up there when Professor Robert Trotter came up to see me--to San Francisco--and said that actually, they did need a chairman, a new chairman at that time, and that it was my duty not to say no, but to take over. Well, I must say, Leslie, that I am used to administration, of course, from running an opera workshop and building it and working rehearsal schedules and all of that, but I was reluctant to accept this honor, because I knew it would take me again away from my work, and I had returned just for the purpose of activating the Opera Workshop again. But the way Professor Trotter put it, there was an absolute need for me to take over at that point, because apparently no one else was available at that time. And so I said yes.

I must say, I have not been sorry because, despite the hardship of the chairmanship, which I will outline maybe from my vantage point--from my viewpoint--in a moment, one learns a great deal. And actually, the rotating chairmanship is wonderful in that sense that many members of a faculty learn to grasp the entity of the whole thing--what all is involved--the controversies going on in a department, which, to a certain point, are healthy. You see, what would you do without various opinions? Only when they clash too badly, and when personalities get involved,

then, of course, that is too bad and disagreeable; but as long as they are kept on a purely academic level, they are healthy, and they certainly propel the department. So I accepted it, and I threw myself with 100 percent vigor into this new job, learning as much about it in a short time as I could during the summer before the academic year would start.

Well, I really didn't have great difficulties there. I'll tell you, the chairmanship (and I think most of my colleagues will support this opinion) is frustrating in that sense that you can see what changes ought to be made: you would like to improve; you would like to balance; you would like to redo the curriculum to a point where the training is more effective. But it is a slow process. With our democratic process, you must bring all of that before the faculty. There are usually long discussions; and by the time you get through with this, your original goal and your original ideas have been whittled down to a point where they may have lost their effectiveness. So many people have said that. Actually, the way it's at USC, for instance, where my friend Raymond Kendall was dean of music for a long time. We discussed that in the past many times, that a long-range dean, who is in for many years and who can develop a long-range program, in a long sense, would be more effective from the standpoint

of building a school of music or a department of music. Right? While you get a try of it, and by the time things might come to fruition, it is time to go and [time] for someone else to take over. So what I want to bring out is, there is great merit to the rotating chairmanship, because people with different opinions and different outlooks on music take the steer--the steer and the rudder, as we say--of the department after a three- or four-year period. But there is also the fact to deplore that there cannot be really a long-range development and planning built up, which is very helpful.

Now, when we speak about departments versus schools of music--and I was faced with this problem, not as a chairman, but as a member of the faculty from the moment I came to UCLA in the fall of 1949--there is, of course, the basic philosophical issue (or whatever you want to call it) of an academic department versus a school of performance to build musical performers. Now, in Europe, as you see from my own background, this problem is easily solved because the same school doesn't do both things. You go to the university for your theoretic, your historical, your musicological training; and you seek either a private teacher or a conservatory, which are excellent in Europe and of high standing, to accomplish yourself as a performer. Now, here in America, we're trying to do both under one

roof. And necessarily, it is a near impossibility, if I may put it that way. Unless a genius is at work, who balances the curriculum so that the student has access to performance. . . . One thing that is overlooked by the academicians--of course, you might not put is so boldly--is that not only instruction in performance has to be given, but it takes time to be a performer. A good pianist, a good violinist, must study two or three hours a day to get truly proficient on his instrument, and that is never taken into consideration. And the program is worked tightly--which, I would say, from the standpoint of looking on the paper, looked fine. In other words, there is a balance established with the academic background, which is very important. By no way, even though I tend toward performances because of my career, I would never belittle the academic side.

Now, for instance--just to deviate a moment--while teaching at the Tokyo University of Art, I found that the stress is so heavily on performance, and they bring out some marvelous performers. Every year the school spits out, so to speak, hundreds of performers, and you wonder what will happen to them. But when I talked about historical matters with them--when I would go back to Renaissance or baroque, and so on--I found that there is very little background and very little knowledge. Well, again, it's

imbalanced the other way. So, needless to say, a musician would love to see both these areas satisfied. And that, to me, of course, takes two things: number one, it takes a faculty that is capable of teaching master classes to the performers; but also, it takes the understanding of the--what would I say?--may I say, the more academic side of the faculty, that a student does need time to develop as a performer.

GREER: I think that's also reflected in how many units they give you for performance classes versus academic classes. You get far less units, most places, for performing classes, for some reason.

POPPER: Right, you see, that is still a misunderstanding because, let's face it, Leslie, I think most people would agree to that, that music is basically a performance art, you see, that it's meant to be done, it's meant to be performed--to be sung, to be played. So that is the ultimate objective of music. Needless to say that the historical background, the theoretic background, the training of composers, the training of historical musicologists and ethnomusicologists, is a very important one, and nobody can deny that even. You see how our knowledge of styles and performance--and I think I mentioned that once before--has improved over the last fifty years, and this is mainly due. . . . Listen to one of the earlier

violinists playing Bach, like [Bronislaw] Huberman, who was a marvelous violinist, but he sounds like a gypsy violinist. And no one today could get up on a concert platform and do that.

GREER: He'd be laughed at.

POPPER: Right, he would be laughed off the stage. In other words, knowledge of styles--and that all was really done by our historians and estheticians, and so on. So we know of the importance of both, and we deplore that it is not possible to train that miraculous young student musician, who would be equally proficient in both fields, if I may put it that way. Now, as a chairman, I tried, of course, as much as I could, never to slight the academic side. For instance, I remember one thing I did is, I managed to get some money to have regular lectures--lectures by interesting musicologists from all over this country and Europe to come here and talk about their specialty--about their special subject matter--which worked out very nicely. I tried, of course, also to increase and lift the level of performance, and I tried that in different ways. For instance, one thing I established during my chairmanship, with the help of University Extension--especially Professor Robert Haas, who then was the head of the humanities side of University Extension here at UCLA--to put in master classes. Unfortunately, it had to be done during the summer, because that's

when the halls were available. That is where students who took these master classes could work throughout the day for morning classes, afternoon classes, and devote themselves completely, concentratedly, to this study. Now, I brought out the first summer, for instance, Rosina Lhevinne, a very fine piano pedagogue. The late Joseph Schuster, who was one of the outstanding concert cellists and virtuosos here in this town (and, of course, internationally known) gave a two-week master class for cellists. We brought Martial Singher, who later on became practically the head of the Academy of the West in Santa Barbara, as the vocalist to teach voice and to teach interpretation of, especially, French songs, in which he is a specialist. Well, there is also Mildred Dilling for the harp class, which I believe she's still giving, although most of these classes have been abolished, probably because of lack of funds, or maybe because they were not considered essential enough. But Mildred Dilling for harp, and then later on, the very fine vocalist who is now guest professor at USC at this time, Horst Gunther, a very fine singer and vocal pedagogue from Freiburg, Germany. So I managed to bring these people here.

Well, you will say, what was the value? Actually, what can you teach in a two-week period? Well, Leslie, the problem is, you really cannot teach an awful lot. You can inspire; you can set standards; you can see what could be

achieved if such training would be prolonged and you would not have to cram it and crowd it on a short two-week period. But it did a lot of good, you see. Now then, how could we possibly have master teachers of that sort on the faculty? This is now a pro and con, you see. You may say, we should have great virtuosos and outstanding artists like Heifetz, who, as you know has the master class at USC. We should have them at UCLA--or similar great renown, world-renowned artists. Well, it's a two-faced and two-sided affair. These men, of course, are in the midst of concert life. They have to play all over the world; they have to tavel, unless they feel their main performing days are over. Like Lotte Lehmann, for instance, who was one of the great, great lieder singers and operatic performers of all times, when she felt singing time was over, then she could turn and devote her entire knowledge and resources and energy to the teaching of young people. Well, that is ideal. When you find an artist who has a lot to give, but feels my traveling and performance days are now diminished or are over, so I can stay, I can teach, I can develop a continuity of some sort." When this is not so, and the teacher is here for a week or two and then gone for three or four weeks, again I wonder what is the benefit that students can derive from that?

Now, as far as our own faculty at UCLA is concerned,

I think really we have tremendous potentialities. Look, we have Aube Tzerko, an excellent piano pedagogue who is really the trainer of many great pianists. Does he himself perform? No, I don't believe so. But that is in no way a detriment. You know, very few people know that actually some of the great teachers of all times were not performers themselves. That should be brought out. There is, for instance, Otakar Ševčik. Well, you mention that to any violinist of the last generation--I think there was just no great violinist that did not pilgrimage to Prague, to Bohemia (it was not yet Czechoslovakia) to study with Otakar Ševčik, who was a specialist in violin techniques, who had really made scientific research of the technique of violin playing, but never gave a concert. He was not a concert violinist; he was purely a pedagogue. He was a coach. There is that kind, too, which we have to keep in mind. When we think, "Oh, we must have great master teachers," that is in a way deceptive, because the great performers are not always the great teachers. This is very true of singers, for instance. You have God-given voices of great singers who have toured the world and sang in the greatest opera houses of the world, who would know less about really imparting vocal technique to younger people than many a high school teacher would know, because they have never worried about it; they have never thought

about it. You see, it's a special thing to be a pedagogue and to be able to impart this knowledge on other people. So all of that has to be kept in mind. And of course, from that standpoint, even despite the fact that when you look at the roster of our UCLA music faculty, you do not have world-renowned musicians, that really doesn't mean too much, I feel, as long as they are good in their field and effective in their field.

Now, as far as the instrumental training is concerned in our music department, you do know that we now have switched (that was after my departure here, so that happened during my retirement), that we do not have group instruction anymore, but really solo instruction. And when you look at the instructors, they are the top players, either of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, or Sidney Lazar, who is an outstanding trumpeter and an outstanding man in the field--his name is very well known. So you do have good people. If these people really--and this I cannot say, because I've not been around lately--if they take their job seriously and really feel that this is the only chance for the student to gain knowledge as a performer, if that is taken seriously. . . . I know we had, for instance, Jeffrey Solow for cello here, who is, by this time, already a renowned musician. Of course, in my humble opinion, it takes not only being a good musician

and performer, but maturity and the experience of teaching. I want to bring that out over and over again. And I think, in a future revision that may happen in our department, that should be kept in mind. I mentioned Horst Gunther, who can be found on many recordings. He has been with the Hamburg opera house, with Munich, with some of the great opera houses in Germany, and is a very renown baritone, very renown performer. Well, today, Professor Gunther decides, even though he does give recitals--lieder recitals--that the time has come for him to teach. Now, there is an ideal person, with the complete professional background, the knowledge of the repertory, an outstanding pianist as well as an outstanding singer--transposes anything in sight you might put before him, really a 100-percent musician. Those are ideal people to teach in their respective fields. Now, as we switch to the other one, to the musicological field, you might divide it into performance, into historical musicology, ethnomusicology, and then, of course, theory and composition. Well, I do feel we have outstanding people, very effective people on the faculty. Maybe we're a little top-heavy now. You see, that is one thing . . .

GREER: In musicology?

POPPER: In musicology, and maybe theory and composition. You see, that is a thing that happens, and that is where

the long-range planning would come in. What actually, practically, happens--a chair becomes free; you need, say, a young composer; you hire a young composer. All right. The young composer goes to work and teaches quite well. Now he goes on towards the professorial rank, and soon he has made friends in the department. They feel, well, maybe he's not the most effective person; maybe he could be replaced by somebody who is more outstanding, more gifted, better teaching, more inspiring. But now, the habit of, as the Germans say, *gewohnheit* comes in. You've gotten used to that person; maybe you've made friends with him. And the faculty starts voting, and before you know, you have such a person move into tenure, which I personally despise. Frankly, I know I would make thousands of enemies, but I think tenure is one of the great damages to the university.

GREER: Why? Because it makes everybody stagnant in their places?

POPPER: Right. There is no need for it. And in this field, like in any other field, as long as you can work and you are able to do your best, you should be teaching. But comes the time when you either get tired, or you feel you ought to be doing other things. You see, tenure is, in a way, a blessing; it protects the professor from political aggression and what have you. I know there are hundreds

of arguments on the other side. But it also--what would I say? The cubbyholes are then all occupied. There is no way of rejuvenating and vitalizing a department, which I think is so important. And so, we may be a little top-heavy at this point. I don't know. A lot of younger people have come in whom I really do not know yet, or not anymore. I hope they are all effective; I hope they are all doing their duty and, most of all, realizing, in teaching general theory courses (which is a special art), you teach theory not only to composers, you teach it to the general music student. You do it in an effective way, so that instead of saying, "Oh, my God; we have to take that theory course," rather say, "Isn't it exciting?"

I still remember as a young musician how exciting it was not only to learn the principles of harmony and counter-point, but to trace those now in those masterworks, and to make discoveries on your own: "Aha, here's that Neapolitan sixth. I see how he uses it, how the other, how . . . " And you make discoveries. It becomes an exciting thing--from the very beginning, it should be. If you teach it just as a routine, and you teach it every year exactly the same way and in the same form, it becomes a humdrum thing. So I do hope most of our professors do not belong to the latter type, but rather to the inspirational type, because, in those formative years for the students, that is so

important--as much as, say, what we used to call, music appreciation classes. For the general student, the young medical student, science student, maybe gets one class in music. Sure, you never want to talk down to them; you never want to make it just a purely superficial thing. But on the other hand, you cannot start teaching them all the modes and all the things that really have no impact on their appreciating music. So that is the problem, and I'm sure it doesn't exist only in music; it probably exists in art, in drama, in all of these fields, you know.

GREER: Probably in science for the laboratory people and theoreticians.

POPPER: That you, as a teacher, must know to whom you are speaking. You know, what class are you addressing? If I give a general opera preview to people who have never heard about opera, my talk would be very different from addressing a graduate class on the philosophy of the *Ring of the Nibelungen*, or something of that sort. That is, then, a fact where the teacher has to have enough background and maturity to cull from his own knowledge those things which are best needed for that particular group of people. So these are all matters.

GREER: Well, who did you bring in during the regular year? What faculty do you remember hiring when you were chairman? That would be interesting.

POPPER: When I was chairman, I know I hired a young composer who then became the head of the music department at Tehran University--I've no idea where he is now--Hormoz Farhat, a very fine young musician who, at the same time, could do a good job in Persian music for ethnomusicology.

GREER: Try to get both sides. . . .

POPPER: So, it was a good double function. Well, let me see. Then I believe at that time, it was also that we needed a new choral man, Donn Weiss, who was certainly a very dedicated person, joined us.

GREER: Was that before Roger Wagner, or was Roger Wagner there already?

POPPER: Roger Wagner was already here, of course, but you see again, it is evident that Wagner, who is, of course, one of the internationally renown choral conductors, would again handle the more advanced choral groups. But there is always somebody needed to roll up the sleeves and work hours for hours. And I think our choral organization at UCLA has been very effective and very good. You see, especially as far as organizations are concerned. When you pin it right down, where the lack might exist is in the solo performance training, because the organizations are good. Look, the bands--Sawhill was still there--Clarence Sawhill--who certainly was one of the country's outstanding band conductors and more than that, he had

all these band clinics all over the country, and to this very day, Clarence travels from town to town, which means he's one of the respected band men in America. Choruses are well taken care of. In the Opera Workshop, as I mentioned in our previous discussion, Leslie, it, of course, meant to me training not only large groups of opera singers, but really working with them individually. And unless you are willing to do that--which, by the way, suffered very much during my chairmanship, because I did not have the time to do that--but to really work for hours and hours with a gifted one, and with a *less* talented one, because, much my surprise, very often, like at the horse races, the less talented one is the one that finally prevailed, and those are some of the people who have leading positions now in Japan, in the Orient, in Europe. People who, at first, seemed not exactly the career person. I mentioned Judy Beckman--I think I mentioned that already--who was not really one of the most talented students in our Opera Workshop, but being worked with, overcoming inhibitions and anxieties, and you make them comfortable on the stage, so that they become true performers and can give of themselves. Before you know it, some people like this may be important singers, and Judy Beckman today is one of the top singers in Germany. So that means the Opera Workshop was quite effective at that time. I hope it still is, even though, you know,

Maestro [Samuel] Krachmalnick, of course, has a double function, and that's dangerous. It's marvelous, in a way, to be head of the orchestra and the opera because the two work together. Then, when it comes to performance, you don't have to beg to get the orchestra for those few rehearsals--you have full command over it. But, on the other hand, doing two jobs at the same time means that you cannot devote as much time to each one of them, which is only logical.

GREER: Did you bring any musicologists in at all when you were there? Charles Seeger, I understand, was on the faculty at one time. Was that during your [tenure]?

POPPER: He was already on the faculty.

GREER: He was already there.

POPPER: Yes, oh, yes. I had a chance of bringing in a very fine Byzantine scholar, but that was towards the end of my chairmanship. But again, there I was a little frustrated by the faculty as a whole, who wanted long deliberations and so on, and I lost that find. And well, then, during my time, I did not bring in Henri Lazarof, but I think he started on his tenure professorial ladder, on the rings, so that was right at the outset of my chairmanship. I really would have to look that up, Leslie. I'm sure that there were others, but these things, unfortunately, I have no record in front of me here.

GREER: I have a few things that I'm just curious about.

POPPER: Yes, all right.

GREER: Feri Roth--were they quartet-in-residence when you were there?

POPPER: Yes, that was already before my chairmanship. They were the quartet-in-residence, I'm sure.

GREER: And how did that work out with the department? Was that a good idea? Do you agree with the idea of having people in residence?

POPPER: Of having a quartet-in-residence? Oh, that is wonderful, if it can be done--if we can afford it. All these things are excellent, you know. They give some noon concerts. They give afternoon recitals. How wonderful for the students to not have to listen to recordings of quartets, or not to have to pay the high prices of the admission fee of the concerts, which students are, anyway, rather reluctant to do--but offer this kind of thing to them in a more relaxed atmosphere. And of course, that's where our noon concerts really were very beneficial, because the students did come in, even though they had to bring their luncheons at times. But just to be exposed to music--that is very important in this country, especially in the age of records and television and so on, [to] hear live music. The impact is much greater, of course, than mechanical recorded music.

GREER: I was reading through the list of faculty and

Mehli Mehta was on the faculty at one time. Did you bring him in at all?

POPPER: Yes, yes. That was, for instance, during my time. You are very right.

GREER: What was he--the orchestra director when you were there? What did he end up doing in the department?

POPPER: He was immediately brought here as the conductor of the university orchestra--that was his function. On the side, he also taught violin, I believe. And, if I'm not mistaken, it was a chamber music class, too, that he handled. But his main function was to bring up the University Symphony Orchestra, which is, again, a problem here at this university, because, at schools like University of Southern California, every music student is called upon to play in the orchestra--graduate or undergraduate; it makes no difference--which means they were capable; they were able to develop such a fine orchestra through the years. The USC orchestra is known for its excellence. So Mr. Mehta tried to do the same thing here. I understand that Mr. Krachmalnick really has brought up the orchestra very well. It is better than ever before. But you see, again, the orchestra conductor faces those tremendous difficulties. When I personally got on the phone and called some of the graduate students, of whom I know that they are very fine violinists or viola players or cellists, and appealed to

them because legally, there is no way to bind them to play in the orchestra, for some special occasions, I had to take so many refusals, saying, "Sorry, I'm in the midst of writing my thesis," or "I'm on my dissertation," or "I'm making research. I don't have the time." And that is deplorable, because I do feel every experience playing in an orchestra--some fine masterworks and under good leadership--is an additional important experience for every musician, you know, whether it's solo or orchestra, if it's well handled. Yes, but Mr. Mehta came here at that time. That's right.

GREER: So, you brought him in. Was Arnold Schoenberg around still, or was he just emeritus?

POPPER: He was emeritus at that point. I still heard him, you know, when I first came here, in a very fine lecture at Royce Hall. But, no, that was all before my time.

GREER: Okay.

POPPER: Before '63, '64.

GREER: And Mantle Hood and the ethnomusicology department was going strong. Did you have problems at all handling that faction of the department? Was it a faction?

POPPER: Not at all.

GREER: Not at all.

POPPER: I never had any problems with them. Mantle, in the first place, was a friend of mine, and we saw eye to

eye on all of the issues. There was no tension there, or any problem. I have great respect for work in ethnomusicology. Just imagine, again, what it has done. And a man like Mantle Hood, who, for instance, you know, in his work in Bali, in Jakarta, in Indonesia, has helped me so much to actually bring back and write a theory for gamelan music. Anyway, that is where research has done something very practical and very, very effective. The fact that our American students, composers, and players alike got interested in Indonesian music--just to mention one--or in African music has had a profound effect on our thoughts in twentieth-century composition. Just look how Boulez, for instance, very often uses Far Eastern music effects--bell effects, percussion effects--in his music. I feel that the mixing of Far Eastern, Mideastern and Western music is one way out of the dilemma, you see, in our musical composition in the twentieth century. There is still a great deal of inspirational material and actual musical material that can enrich music. So I feel all of that is of great importance.

I think the most important thing, Leslie, to bring it down to a very simple statement, is to have respect for the other field. This is one thing that, unless we consider our own field the most important, you know--if I were an opera man to say, "Oh, opera is the one and only thing"--how foolish, you know. I mean, you respect what other

people do in other fields and realize that all of this pulls together and makes for the eventual entities. And if all of our faculty members would have this respect for the other field. . . . Now, for instance, you take Walter Rubsamen, who followed me as a chairman. Now, Rubsamen was known as a dyed-in-the-wool musical historian, who would have no other interests, and there were certain misgivings when Walter came to the chair. And did he surprise us all. He suddenly showed his great respect for performance. He bent over backwards, as you might say, to establish balance in the department. Those are wonderful things when that happens.

GREER: I heard there was a reaction to the music library being named after him at one time. Was that during his chairmanship, or after his chairmanship?

POPPER: I think it was after his--well, was it not after his death, maybe, to honor him, because he really turned out to be one of the. . . . Well, he was an excellent member of the department, even though, you know, his field of research was somewhat limited. But I think the crowning achievement of his was the chairmanship, because everybody loved that man, while he did not get along too well with students before that. There were many cases where students came and complained and felt that he was too dogmatic and too one-sided, and demanded too much--too much from them,

especially if they were not professional musicology students, but general history students and so on. All of that changed the moment he took over the steering wheel of the department. So that was a happy end, if I can so say. You have any other questions?

GREER: Yes, let me see. I want to talk about Dean Melnitz and how you did with the upper administration. Was that something foreign to you when you were working with the upper administration on campus--working with the deans and stuff when you were chairman?

POPPER: Well, Leslie, you must not forget that I had ten years of Stanford experience behind me, you see, where I had to do the same thing--except that at Stanford, as I mentioned once before, it was a cooperative venture of music and drama, which did not work out at UCLA. I mentioned that before, I believe. I was faced now with a complete organizational directorship of both the dramatic and musical side of the opera workshop. And there, all the deans--I mean, before that it was Dean [David F.] Jackey, then there was Dean [Abbott] Kaplan for a short time, I believe; and Dean Melnitz; later on, Dean [Charles] Speroni--they all gave me complete support. I never had any problem. Needless to say, opera is not an inexpensive art form, and especially the fact that we were not allowed to construct our own set, you know--that it could not be student-made--

that, of course, made the opera so expensive.

GREER: That's amazing.

POPPER: And that is where the deans showed great understanding, because they realized [that] unless I did opera in concert form, without sets and without costumes, that this was a necessary expense and there's nothing we could do about it. So it then really became one of the most expensive things in the music department that I was always very sorry for, even though gradually we accumulated quite a fund of costumes which could be used over and over by alteration. But, then, sets still had to be built. You know, you cannot keep those sets forever. We had quite a few in the basement of Schoenberg Hall--and still do, I believe. But they had to be redone, rehammered, refurbished; and so, that's where the great expense came in.

GREER: And you collaborated with Dean Melnitz on his work of *Faust*. He was talking about a production of *Faust*, where you collaborated in the music? Do you remember anything about that?

POPPER: Yes. Well, I also had done that all my life--to write incidental music for plays. I forget now, Leslie, whether we discussed it also in our previous dialogues that one was called upon as a young conductor-coach to write music, whether you were inspired or not inspired. It was on order and had to be ready next week. So I did the same thing at Stanford University, where I wrote

stage music for *Marco Millions*--O'Neill. I haven't done too much here at UCLA, because much of the music here was recorded music. But when Dean Melnitz approached me and asked whether I would write some music for *Faust*. . . . You see, there are many *Faust* musics. There is the music by Richard Wagner--the overture. But all of that would have meant records have to played, and frankly, I never have consoled myself to a beautiful play, heavens! a classical play, whether it's Shakespeare, whether it's Goethe, Schiller, or even a contemporary play, you see, whether it's Maxwell Anderson or O'Neill, and suddenly you have a record coming in. Live music is very helpful. And so he gave me all the spots he needed set to music--the dance under the linden tree; of course, Mephisto's song in the cellar; and various things. And we found young drama students who had lovely voices. And so we could put the whole thing together very quickly. At that point, I had many lectures up for KQED in San Francisco, so Dean Melnitz always joked about it that most of the music was written on the airplane. You see--on the trip up, when I was undisturbed for fifty minutes or an hour, I could set one number to music, and then, on the trip back, I did the next one, so that we could do it in a very short time.

GREER: Did you enjoy doing that for him?

POPPER: Very much. Very much. And he was most appreciative.

GREER: He talked about how he really enjoyed working with you on his play.

POPPER: Which is half of the fun, you know. When I submitted the music to him--"Is that what you really wanted, or what you needed." And it was written, of course, in a medieval, but popular, vein so that the students could learn it quickly. So he was very appreciative of that.

GREER: Did you have any students--I know you worked with a lot of them in the Opera Workshop--but did you have any that worked under you for masters or doctorates at all that specialized in opera and had you as a chairman for their committee?

POPPER: Not in the Opera Workshop, Leslie. Those were really just truly performers who were only interested in gathering repertory. No, but I was on many committees, on masters thesis, on doctoral committees, and some of them dealt with opera, you see. Some of them dealt with baroque opera and so on. Again, I would have to look up my record on that line, but I've tried to be helpful to them as much as possible.

GREER: Did you enjoy doing that? Did you like that?

POPPER: Very much. And, again, you learn by it, Leslie. The most wonderful thing is that, as a teacher, you learn.

GREER: Like *The King and I*.

POPPER: No, it's so important, really, that you do not just do it as a humdrum, matter-of-fact thing. Very often, the teacher is inspired by the student. You know, very few students know that, that the teacher inspires the student, but it works the other way just as well. When you see a student who is excited about his subject matter, you see, and you yourself . . .

TAPE NUMBER: IV, SIDE TWO

FEBRUARY 27, 1979

GREER: Okay, we were talking about working on committees for doctoral theses.

POPPER: Yes. Yes, I did quite a few of those--as much as my time would allow me. And I think the chairmen usually knew that my time was limited because of the many hours that go into the Opera Workshop training. But I think I did my committee duty as well as I could. I was on many performance committees. I was on the Committee on Fine Arts Production for some time as an advisor-representative of the music department, and countless others. I think that would have to be looked up. And then, when we finally got around to work out a performance art degree--that was just about at the very end of my active work at UCLA where we tried to work out a performance art degree in opera--I collaborated with the chairman, Tom Harmon, at that point to work out all the details and requirements for that. I still claim, Leslie, that sometimes we are a little too much degree-conscious here in America. We are so worried about the various degrees. Just how meaningful they are, I don't know, how much these things are being respected by other organizations. To me, the most important thing still is the knowledge to really not just study for the sake of points--of papers of degrees, which is very important, I

know. But, if you do not end up knowing as much about the subject matter as humanly possible, you still haven't achieved what you want to achieve.

Well, as we were talking, some other things came to my mind. I'm not too much of a money-getter, which I think would be very helpful, too. But we had some marvelous donations during my chairmanship. We got a beautiful donation of $56,000 endowment, I believe, which I immediately tried to turn, with the assent and approval of the faculty, to its violin scholarships, because we were especially weak in the strings at that time.

GREER: Who gave the fellowship? Or the money for that?

POPPER: Oh, a very wonderful lady who had admired us from afar and whom I had never met again. I'm sorry, the name escaped me, but that would be easily looked up. And that is, by the way, where Barbara Bevis would be most helpful, because she was in on all of that. She took the records. She could put her finger easily on all of these things. But they became important violin scholarships by which we would attract violinists to the university. You see, we have a tough job here, Leslie; you must realize it: that with USC across the town, which favors performance so much, that many performers would take the easy way out and rather go to USC. And so, it is rivalry. From my standpoint, it always was a very healthy rivalry, because Mr.

[Walter] Ducloux, who was the head of the opera department at USC, and I saw eye to eye on all of the things we were doing, and there never was any rivalry from the standpoint of . . .

GREER: . . . negativity.

POPPER: Yes, not at all, not at all, because we both wanted exactly the same thing. And I respected him greatly for the fact that he was not only a fine coach and conductor, but at the same time devoted a lot of time to translation--opera translation--many of which are published, by the way, and printed, and similar things which he did. And how this man had the capacity for doing all of it is beyond my understanding. I thought I was very dedicated, but when I saw what he did, it was even more.

But to attract good performers to UCLA. . . . We've had some outstanding ones. And by the way, one thing that I thought I should mention is that we, of course, always ran this musical comedy workshop, and I think we still have that, connected with the Opera Workshop, which meant that many of the drama students--theater arts students--came over to the music department to take that course in musical comedy which Alan Gilbert handled in the music department. And one of them, of course, was Carol Burnett, who was a theater arts student and got her musical comedy training there. And she came to many opera rehearsals

probably to study the behavior of the animal called opera singer, you know--to see what they do--for parodistic purposes. But the thing that might be of interest, and Carol has stressed that in many of her interviews, is the fact that once we took the Opera Workshop to San Diego to a very beautiful outdoor garden party, with hundreds of people, at this lovely estate. And so we had various scenes from opera, including musical comedy towards the end. And Carol Burnett and Latfi Mansouri, who also was very good in musical comedy, and Carol's fiancé, Mr. Saroyan, did a scene from *Comic*--a musical comedy--and when she had left and she was out of earshot, I said, "Now look, isn't it a shame? Here is a girl brimful of talent and ready to step in the profession, but she's working her way through school and she has no way to get started." And apparently this remark fell on fertile grounds, because one gentleman asked both--well, all three performers, as a matter of fact; Miss Burnett, Mr. Saroyan, and Mr. Mansouri--to come to his office the next day. And Mansouri didn't go, but the other two did, and he offered each $1,000, under the condition that they must not divulge his name, and that after they arrived at their goal, they would again do the same to some unknown young singers. And that is how Carol Burnett got her start and went to New York. So, you never know; a little remark like this might do a lot of good. And so, in

a way, I was able. . . . Of course, sooner or later, Carol, anyway, would have made that big step.

GREER: There's always going to be somebody at the beginning.

POPPER: Right, but it helped in the beginning.

GREER: Who is the gentleman? Do you know?

POPPER: Yes. Well, he's not alive anymore, in the first place, and then he didn't want his name divulged. He was just a businessman in Los Angeles.

GREER: And did she set up a scholarship fund for singers?

POPPER: I'm sure she's done it. Apparently, she is now also contributing here quite a bit to this--whether it's Opera Workshop, or whether it's theater arts, or whether it's just an award. Again, Mrs. Bevis could tell you who is involved with this. But she is contributing here towards the advancement of young talent.

GREER: I guess that your chairmanship was before the big changes in the colleges. Did you have any pressures from students to make more relevant courses when you were there, like more jazz courses, or anything like that? Was that any problem when you were in chairmanship?

POPPER: No, because we always had the wonderful jazz appreciation course that Paul Tanner taught, which was very satisfactory and very well attended. I don't remember any pressures. There always was this--what would I say?--

a certain split in the department. And certain animosities there, which I mentioned before, were not only of a philosophical nature but, unfortunately, also frequently degenerated in personal strife. I remember right when I came here, John Vincent was the chairman, who actually brought me here to this department, and Mr. Vincent, of course, was very much in favor of converting the department into a school of music, you know. He wanted more performance, and so he found. . . . You know, it's also the way you do it. I think he was quite aggressive about what he wanted to do. He was eager, during his chairmanship, to see it done. And so chairmen do become more aggressive than they maybe otherwise should. And there he found great opposition from other members of the department, who were strictly on the academic side. And you know, it is very embarrassing, because you, as a faculty member, somehow become embroiled and enveloped into a thing like this.

GREER: Everybody ends up taking sides, and making it difficult.

POPPER: You are forced to take sides, not only when you vote, but also, you see, then both parties vie for your favors. And really, I personally was never interested in this sort of thing. Leslie, I loved to teach, and I loved to devote myself to the students and the rest of it. Sure, one should take a hand in the shaping of the department. I

never quite thought that this was my main obligation. I always felt, more or less, that I was a guest here, that my main job was really to do the best by the students I could--whether they were large appreciation courses; or whether they were small professional courses for graduates, of which I taught quite a few; or whether they were in my special field, that absorbed my full attention. Of course, one thing I could never, never understand, and never will: that men of academic background, high training, and a noble attitude, which one should have in this particular field, very often would belittle themselves and lash out in personal attacks. Well, I've nearly witnessed fistfights in some of these meetings. And that is distressing, because you say to yourself, "Well, if they do it, if they feel that way about it, how can you expect the students to . . . "

GREER: ". . . develop a mature attitude toward the whole thing."

POPPER: ". . . develop a noble attitude," you see. As I said before, controversies of a pure philosophical nature are fine and they are logical; they must be in every field, whether he is in a political field--on the floor of the Senate, or. . . . Clear, that is the *um und auf*, as the Germans say--the essence of our life in America and our approach to life in America, as long as they don't become personal. So there we have suffered a bit in the

department. It's well known that there were certain people who were fanatical and nearly agitators about that. Of course, some of them are now retired, or retiring, and hopefully, the situation is more peaceful now.

GREER: If you were going to summarize your chairmanship, what would be your main accomplishment?

POPPER: Well, Leslie, that really is not exactly easy to say. One, my greatest effort, as I just said, was towards a greater balance to have those fellows shake hands and see eye to eye and respect each other. In all of my meetings, in the faculty meetings, I tried to do that, and even when under attack, I tried to keep my cool and never try to be cynical or belittle other people. Whether I achieved that--whether I succeeded--is not for me to say. But I will say that after two years of chairmanship I felt that I am really neglecting my work so badly, and that so much time went into this, that I resigned as the chairman, because I really felt it was too time-taking and demanding.

GREER: It's really not your forte.

POPPER: It was not my forte. Besides, you know, you are so right. It is not that I feel that I'm bad as an administrator because, basically, I'm a rather organized person. You know, I never forget anything; I keep things clear and on record. And I'm not--at least, I see myself not as--one of the head-in-the-cloud artists, you see. That again

(we discussed my background in the way of schooling) to a great degree, I credit my business school work.

GREER: That would help.

POPPER: Very much so--to be able to take shorthand and to do these things and to keep things clear and not get them confused. So that was very much to my advantage and to my help. But I could see where the performances, the level of opera performance, did not improve by my being away so much, and even though I had very valuable help at that time from Natalie Limonick, who is now the head of the opera department at USC, who took over whenever she could, but then, she also had her obligations. And we started feeling the lack of training there among the singers. And there were complaints about it, too, you see, that the singers were not adequately prepared. So the wisest thing for me was to bow out, really. Otherwise, I would have to give that more thought. See, also during that time, I remember we had some money available to bring outstanding composers-in-residence--internationally known composers-in-residence. And there, the contacts I made were very interesting: contacting Orff, for instance (the famous Orff School in Munich); to get in touch with Chavez in Mexico City, who then, later on, did come to this campus as an artist-in-residence. It could not be achieved in these two years, because the people had to make their

plans. I even was in touch with Nadia Boulanger for a possible guest professorship here. But there, it was very interesting. (And those letters are existent--they must be in the files--that I received from like, Nadia Boulanger.) Her demands were so tremendous: whether she was serious about it or not, I don't know. But she not only wanted quarters for herself and a salary, but she wanted to bring a whole entourage with her--servants and what have you.

GREER: Oh, my!

POPPER: And needless to say, that could not be done. That was not in the academic budget to do something of that sort. But that was a very interesting thing, which I enjoyed very much--to be in touch with these very important composers in Europe and here on this side of the world.

GREER: How did you hear about the different people that you did bring in?--like how did you hear about Hormoz Farhat and people like that? Where did you find them?

POPPER: Mr. Farhat came to my office. At that time, he was a graduate of UCLA, but he was at that time at Long Beach State College. And he presented his credentials, which were flawless, and I realized there was a very intelligent young man, and the marvelous double function that he had. And he really fulfilled that. He did excellent courses in Iranian music and Persian music,

and then he was a very well liked instructor of theory and composition. So, that was a lucky choice. You know, you never know, Leslie; you see, you never know. It's like auditioning singers in an important audition. You hear them; you meet them; you have really no idea how they will work out. And so a good deal of luck goes with that in accepting a person. But I don't remember now that I accepted any other faculty member during my time.

GREER: You didn't actively recruit anybody, then, to come into the department, other than your summer programs?

POPPER: No. That's right. Because there was no opening at that time. We did not need anybody at that time. Maybe if there's another session we can have, I will just speak to Miss Bevis and have her read the record and see, because it is now some time ago, you know. How long time is that ago? When I spoke about my education and the background in school, I thought afterwards, Leslie, do you realize that this is now nearly half a century ago? It must seem awfully strange to you, as a young woman, to have people talk about half-centuries back.

GREER: It's very interesting.

POPPER: Because things do become a little blurred in your mind. Life goes on with a steady, constant, day-by-day challenge. And so some people are very systematical about it; they put things down and they are their own

recorders, so to speak. I've never done that because, to me, the daily and weekly and monthly excitement is so great. By the way, I believe, in previous discussion, I mentioned that I had this engagement, this contract, to go to Taipei in November of this year to conduct *The Magic Flute* in Chinese. Well, I joyfully must report here, that is coming through. In other words, I received a letter last week from the director of the opera group in Taiwan; he happened to be in Tokyo at that time, so he could speak freely. So he said, "Even though we do have a kind of a police government in Taipei now, and all the letters are censored and, well, there is a lot of secret police and so on, because of what has recently happened, you do not have to be afraid. We will uphold our contract, and our cultural relationship stays intact, and we expect you here on the fifteenth of November to start rehearsing *The Magic Flute*."

GREER: Great. Is that the farthest ahead you've planned? Do you have anything past that, that you are thinking of doing?

POPPER: Yes. Past that, I am engaged in Tokyo from the second of January, 1980, on. I will be, for three months, guest conductor of the Tokyo Opera Company. They have not yet told me what works I will be conducting. They love to spring surprises on you. Some, maybe, just repertory

operas, which you have to have in your repertory with very little preparation. Others may be new works. I don't know. And then, three months after that (that means about from April 1, 1980, on till the end of June) I'm supposed to be, again, guest director of opera at the Tokyo University of Arts, the same school that I mentioned where I went as a Fulbrighter in 1960. So that we are actually booked up to the end of June 1980.

GREER: That's amazing.

POPPER: What happens afterwards, I cannot yet tell. But you know, Mrs. Popper and I never had an agent; we never have worked through any agencies. So people just contact me directly--if they can find me, that is.

GREER: That is a problem. Well, that's great. I think that would be a good closing.

POPPER: All right. The look in the future. Thank you.

INDEX

G

H

U