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ALICE EHLERS:
HARPSICHORDIST

Completed under the auspices
of the
Oral History Program

University of California
Los Angeles
1968

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Illustrations.....	vi
Introduction.....	vii
Interview History.....	xi
Tape Number: I, Sides One and Two (October 20 and October 30, 1965)	1
Vienna--Berlin and Landowska--Association with Hindemith--Development of concert career--England and America--Russian tour	
Tape Number: II, Side One (October 30, 1965)	59
Russian tour--European tours--Israel tours--Association with Schweitzer	
Tape Number: II, Side Two (November 15, 1965)	86
Harpsichords owned by Mme. Ehlers--Israel tours--Vienna, England and Scotland	
Tape Number: III, Sides One and Two (November 22, 1965)	117
Association with Schweitzer--On teaching-- Wolfgang Graeser and the <u>Art of the Fugue</u>	
Tape Number: IV, Side One (November 29, 1965)	158
South American tour--Commentary on language--Life in Italy and Berlin-- Landowska--America--USC appointment	
Tape Number: IV, Side Two (December 6, 1965)	184
Teaching at USC	

Tape Number: V, Side One (December 13, 1965)	209
Teaching at USC--Performance in Europe and America--Early training	
Tape Number: V, Side Two (December 20, 1965)	238
Teaching baroque style--Commentary on harpsichords	
Tape Number: VI, Side One (January 3, 1966)	268A
Discussion of Bach's <u>Chromatic Fantasy</u> and <u>Fugue</u>	
Tape Number: VI, Side Two (January 10, 1966)	299
Program building--Teaching baroque style and the harpsichord--Performance in Europe and America	
Tape Number: VII, Side One (February 28, 1966)	331
Performance in Europe and America	
Tape Number: VIII, Side One (May 16, 1966)	361
Interview with Alice Ehlers and Malcolm Hamilton	
Addenda	405
Schweitzer Ehlers correspondence-- Ehlers' notes on Schweitzer-Wauchope meeting	
Index	415

Errata: There are no pages 95 or 344.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Alice Ehlers, 1962.....	Frontispiece
Alice Ehlers and Marietta and Marta Amstad, Pitti Palace, Florence, late 1920's....	following page 41
Alice Ehlers and Albert Schweitzer.....	131
Rehearsal at Idyllwild Music School, c. 1964; Alice Ehlers at the harpsichord; Michael Thomas, far right.....	206
Alice Ehlers, late 1940's.....	300
Citation from Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors.....	404

INTRODUCTION

Alice Ehlers, concert harpsichordist and baroque music specialist, was born in Vienna on April 16, 1887, the daughter of Ignatz and Caroline Pulay. There, in the rich musical environment of Vienna at the turn of the century, she studied piano with the well-known teachers Richard Robert and Theodor Leschetizky and harmony in the class of Arnold Schoenberg.

While still very young she felt herself particularly drawn to the music of Bach, an affinity which did not find full expression until some years after her enrollment as a student at the Hochschule für Musik in Berlin in 1909. In 1913, Wanda Landowska joined the faculty of the Hochschule and thus Mme. Ehlers heard, for the first time, the keyboard music of the baroque played on the instrument for which it was composed, the harpsichord. From that time forward she devoted herself to its study under Mme. Landowska, while other classes at the Hochschule under such professors as Curt Sachs and Johannes Wolf continued to increase her understanding of eighteenth century style.

This manuscript, a transcription of tape recordings made by the UCLA Oral History Program with Mme. Ehlers, is a description in the artist's own words of the development of the career which grew out of these early and formative

associations. Mme. Landowska left Berlin in 1918, bringing to an end Mme. Ehlers' period of apprenticeship as her student. As Mme. Ehlers' repertoire and reputation grew she became widely known throughout Europe as a concert harpsichordist, her tours also taking her to Palestine, Russia, the British Isles, and South America. With composer Paul Hindemith she performed many of the Biber Biblical Sonatas for which Hindemith had realized the figured bass. Some years later, in 1936, she played for the first time in the United States at the Library of Congress.

One of the important relationships in Mme. Ehlers' life, greatly influencing the growth of her understanding of baroque music, was her close friendship with Albert Schweitzer who introduced her to a new concept of articulation and phrasing in the performance of Bach. There were many meetings between them at Dr. Schweitzer's home in Gunsbach, which became a frequently visited haven for Mme. Ehlers after she permanently left Nazi Germany in 1933. For five years she lived in London, playing concerts and teaching, and continuing to visit the home in Gunsbach even when Dr. Schweitzer himself was in Lambaréné. Through the years there was a considerable correspondence between the two; Mme. Ehlers has kindly allowed much of it to be photographed and housed in the UCLA Library's Department of Special Collections. A sampling from it is contained, in translation, in the addenda to this manuscript.

In 1907, shortly after moving to Berlin, Mme. Ehlers married Alfred Ehlers, an artist and sculptor. Of their two daughters, Maria and Christina, Christina had already moved to the United States and become established in the Los Angeles area at the time when Mme. Ehlers came to teach a summer class at Juilliard in 1938. Continuing to the West Coast to visit, it became apparent to her that with the deterioration of world conditions she would be unable to return to Europe and so, inadvertently, this journey became a permanent move.

Southern California has remained Mme. Ehlers' home since that time. The harpsichord was then virtually unknown as a concert instrument in this area, and her performances and teaching have contributed greatly to the renaissance of interest in it and the music of its period. In 1940 she joined the faculty of the University of Southern California's School of Music where she has remained active to the present date as Professor of Music Emeritus, teaching classes in the history and the interpretation of baroque music, as well as working with many individual students in harpsichord technique.

Among the honors and awards received by Mme. Ehlers are the following: Mendelssohn Prize, Berlin; Honorary Doctor of Music degree from Lewis and Clark College, 1949; Walker Ames Professorship, University of Washington, 1954; Honorary Doctor of Law degree, University of Cincinnati, 1958; and the first Brittingham Professorship of Music, University of

Wisconsin, 1961. In 1967, the year of her eightieth birthday, she received a merit citation from the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors; a special merit award from the University of Southern California School of Music Alumni Association; and the distinguished service medal of the German Republic, which was presented in Los Angeles by the German Consul. In addition, the Alice Ehlers Young Musicians Performance Fund was established under the auspices of the South Bay Chamber Music Association.

All of these aspects of her career -- her memories of those people most formative in her life; her comments on Bach, the music of the baroque period and the instruments on which it is performed; her opinions on the art of teaching and performing -- are given by Mme. Ehlers in the following pages. Her views have been further expanded by the inclusion of an interview with one of her former students, Malcolm Hamilton, who discusses with her their mutual experiences in the student-teacher relationship and as co-performers in works for two harpsichords.

Records relating to this series of interviews are located in the office of the UCLA Oral History Program.

INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER: Adelaide G. Tusler, Oral History Program, UCLA. Age, 42. BA, Music and History, UCLA; MLS, UCLA. Graduate work toward the MA in Music, UCLA.

TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEWS:

Place: Mme. Ehlers' home, 416 Calle Mayor, Redondo Beach, California. The interview including Malcolm Hamilton was held at Mr. Hamilton's home, Garden Grove, California.

Dates: From October 20, 1965 to February 28, 1966; at basically one-week intervals, occasionally longer intervals. The Ehlers-Hamilton interview was added May 16, 1966.

Length and total number of recording sessions: Each session produced one hour of recorded tape with the exception of the second session in which two hours were recorded and the fourth session, one and one-half hours. The manuscript represents a total of thirteen and one-half hours of recording time.

Persons present during interview: Ehlers and Tusler; Ehlers, Hamilton and Tusler in the last session.

CONDUCT OF INTERVIEW: The interviewer encouraged an autobiographical approach within a chronological framework, introducing questions freely. The general topic of each session was planned in advance but detailed preparation was impossible because of the lack of written records, and chronology is frequently interrupted. The sessions were usually preceded by some discussion though, generally speaking, the accounts given on the tape by Mme. Ehlers had not been previously narrated to the interviewer. The atmosphere of the sessions was informal and often conversational.

EDITING: A verbatim transcript of the tapes was edited by the interviewer, who primarily introduced punctuation and proper spelling and slightly emended syntax. The rearrangement of material to provide continuity in chronology was done only with both sides of Tape I; all others have been left essentially as they were spoken, with only minor deletions. Subheadings have been provided to identify passages on similar subjects. Some dates have been supplied by the editor when it was possible to establish them through correspondence, which has been footnoted. The use of brackets in the manuscript indicates words not actually spoken by the interviewee.

Mme. Ehlers carefully reviewed and approved the edited material, adding short passages, deleting or changing occasional words or phrases, and verifying names and spellings. The edited manuscript preserves these changes, showing Mme. Ehlers' marks in pen and those of the interviewer-editor in red pencil.

The index was compiled by the interviewer.

TAPE NUMBER: ONE, SIDES ONE AND TWO*

October 20, 1965 and October 30, 1965

Vienna

Ehlers: In a way I'm delighted to do this, and in a way I'm hesitant to do this, because I never wrote anything down during my lifetime or, let me say, very few things. And so it might happen that I will make some mistakes, especially concerning dates.

I was born in Vienna in 1887 [April 16] and grew up like any normal child. I can't remember that I showed any special talent, only I very early felt very attracted to music. I had what every child from a better family had: piano lessons, which I loved, but I don't think I showed any great talent in piano playing. I remember very well when I came to the same teacher [Professor Richard Robert] who was the teacher of George Szell and of Rudy Serkin, I felt the outspoken difference between their great talent and mine. What really guided me was a great love for music.

Also I was blessed at this time to live in Vienna. It was the town of music. I have never in my life encountered anything like this. You needn't have much money to be able to attend concerts. At this time, Gustav Mahler was the conductor. All the young people who later became famous, like my dear friend Alban Berg, were in the same boat that

*Material taken from both sides of Tape I has been considerably rearranged to provide a better chronology.

I was. We loved music, none of us had any money, so what we did was stand through a whole opera on the farthest balcony, taking for granted to have the score with us and reading it in a snobbish way, not looking at the stage any more because we knew it so well [with humorous sarcasm] that we didn't need the stage any more.

Tusler: How old were you then? in your teens?

Ehlers: Yes, fifteen, sixteen, probably. I remember Alban Berg very well from coming to my house and bringing all the modern music; we played it four hands on the piano. I didn't have a great interest or understanding for it, but he brought it, so I played it. I heard modern music, I didn't hear any old music. I heard the great piano virtuosos, of the time, and the great string quartet of Vienna, the Rosé Quartet, and of course, Gustav Mahler, whom we all adored. He was a great fascinating personality, and a great conductor.

Tusler: Did you know him at all personally?

Ehlers: No, never. I heard him. I was of course a nobody.

Then I attended the class of Schoenberg in harmony.

Schoenberg at this needed money badly, and the private school I went to was owned by a very generous broad-minded woman.

She gave one of the big classrooms in the evening for Schoenberg to lecture in. Any young, very modern, advanced composer at this time needed help, and this was the help she gave him.

So we had lessons. Why he ever accepted me, God knows alone, because I had no talent for learning all the important things in harmony and counterpoint. I just slipped through, and I

guess my friend Alban Berg, who was in this class helped me a great deal to do this, because my talent was never in this direction.

At the same time, von Webern was also in this class. All the later famous Schoenberg pupils joined this class, and many other people who shouldn't have been in it like myself. Doctors, medical doctors who were interested in music and wanted to have the experience of listening to Schoenberg, took this harmony class. It was very interesting and for me wonderful, because here I met people whom probably I would have never met.

I didn't know anything about the harpsichord at this time.

Tusler: Was the harmony class taught from a modern point of view, or was it traditional?

Ehlers: This I can't judge at all. I didn't know what the modern point or any other point was at this time. I think it was just ordinary harmony, and probably those with great talent like Alban Berg and von Webern had their private sessions then with Schoenberg. But this is how I met Alban Berg and how I came in contact with Schoenberg. How he could stand my work I don't know -- he was always very kind to me. I still was -- what do you call it? -- groping around [to find] where my way would be. I knew one thing, that I couldn't let music alone, that music would be my field.

The great love of Bach was almost born with me. I know that when I had to play the Inventions as an educational

piece of music, as it was really originally meant by Bach to be, educational not only for the fingers but for composition technique too, I was moved and I can't tell you why. From then on, Bach was the greatest challenge.

I changed piano teachers quite a great deal but the only two I remember are Professor Robert, who really didn't achieve anything with me (which was not his fault, as you can see, by the success he had with Serkin and Szell), [and Leschetizky]. I didn't take to the music which I should play. I loved Brahms but not enough to work on him. I loved Chopin and of course I adored Beethoven; I had even my young girl's "crush" on him. I went every year on the day of his death to the cemetery, and brought flowers to his grave. My poor mother was always asking, "Where did you disappear for almost all day?" And I never would say where, because it was a holy secret for myself -- nobody knew about it. He was for me the greatest, the ideal, and I had this great love and pity for his unhappy life. I was a really romantic child. All the things the young enthusiastic emotional person feels without knowing really where to turn.

But one thing was constant with me: I practiced Bach. When I came later to [Theodor] Leschetizky he said to me, "What did you bring today?"

I said, "Bach."

He said, "Leave Bach alone. You know it anyhow."

Well, I know now that I didn't know Bach, but I loved him, whereas an old great teacher couldn't show all his piano

tricks and techniques in teaching Bach with me -- they were all out of place.

"Why didn't you bring Brahms? Why didn't you bring Chopin? Why didn't you bring Beethoven?"

Well, I played them, but I played them in a not very talented, not very important [way]. I loved Beethoven, naturally; I loved Mozart all the time; but my greatest love from childhood was Bach. I think now very often, "What was it?" and sometimes come to a very funny explanation, you will think, very stupid even. I am by nature a very unordered person. This order in Bach, which is not a little bourgeois order, putting things in their place, must have attracted me subconsciously. Goethe has a wonderful saying -- he calls Bach "the harmony of the world." Everything is balanced, and I being a very emotional unbalanced person at this time must have felt this without knowing why it attracted me so much. This love really has gone all through my life.

I think I was born at the right time. This music means so much to me. If I had been born a little later or a little earlier, I wouldn't have known what to do with myself. It's not only my great love for Bach, naturally; but I had to play very much Italian music here, mostly Scarlatti, who was a genius, and French music. It broadened my outlook, because in my piano study I never did this. I played some Bach, because my love for Bach always gave me the courage to come again with a Bach piece, you see? Old Leschetizky always said, "Again, Bach?" He didn't see what I wanted, and if I had at

least played an edition with lots of octaves in my left hand where I could profit something and make enough impression and noise...but no, I played plain Bach and this was something he couldn't quite take.

Tusler: Could you say something more about the musical life of Vienna in those days? Was it an interesting place to be, musically?

Ehlers: Very interesting. My whole life was blessed with a musical life. What was going on in Vienna is unbelievable. It was the time of Gustav Mahler and the period of Richard Strauss and this young generation of students, like Alban Berg and von Webern, who were under the influence of Schoenberg. As I told you, I learned harmony [with him]. The whole atmosphere was constantly like champagne, bubbling. And to all this came the beauty and charm of "old" Vienna. I don't know if it's the same today; I never want to go back, but in my youth it was blessed.

I remember, for instance, the excursions we took. You know, the surroundings are so beautiful. All the mountains like Kahlen and Leopoldsberg. You didn't have a car; only the enormously wealthy people at this time had a car. We went by streetcars and we walked, and it was heavenly. And then we went to a little gasthaus on the top of the mountain, and mostly one sat down at this miserable piano and played, and we had some singers who sang; this is how I heard one day the whole Winterreise for the first time, in a little gasthaus on the mountain. The boys were probably not

wonderful pianists, but they knew their music and we were full of enthusiasm. I can't tell you how grateful I am to have had this.

And then the constant flow of artists to Vienna. The Opera House. At this time I was an ardent Wagnerian, on top of it. I stood, because I never had the money to buy a really good seat, in the last balcony with all these young people, and criticized that Mahler took the Meistersinger overture this time too fast, or so. It was wonderful. I pity all my students, you can believe me or not, the way they have to grow up. We were surrounded by music and musical events, and it meant so much to us.

Tusler: Did you live right in the heart of the city?

Ehlers: Ja, ja, I mean there were bezirk [districts], you know, like Redondo or Santa Monica: erste bezirk, zweite bezirk, dritte bezirk, vierte bezirk. Some of these were more populated by working people, some more by very wealthy people, some by people in between, to which I belonged, neither poor nor wealthy. But this made no difference, you know; we mixed a lot, especially in the musical field. We came together in the Schoenberg lessons, we came together in rehearsals. Only a few were allowed to come to rehearsals, and one had to be very careful not to be seen. Mahler was very nasty if he saw somebody in his rehearsals, but we somehow found a way to come in, and of course one always had a score and criticized afterwards. All the first performances like the Sinfonia Domestica and all these we attended at the dress rehearsal,

because none of us had the money to buy a ticket for the evening. We got sometimes one as a present; this was something else.

Tusler: Was this music accepted then, or was it considered very avant-garde?

Ehlers: It wasn't, or I mean, the public was polite. After all, if a Mahler symphony was performed, he was the director of the State Opera and an important man, you know. I had no contact with society. I had only contact with this young group of people, and of course we were for it.

I remember a few things, like the Sinfonia Domestica. I remember this so well because the day before it was performed Alban came to my home and said, "Let's play it four hands."

I said, "How, where's the music?"

He said, "Mahler forgot it in the hall." (Or who conducted it? I think Mahler did, the first performance, not Richard Strauss). "I got the score, and I have it for an hour. Come -- play." I did all this at this time (I couldn't do it today), probably not very well.

Tusler: You were taking the whole orchestral score?

Ehlers: Ja, ja, the whole orchestral score. And Alban could do all this. I could do it at this time, too.

Tusler: Was he a well-known pianist?

Ehlers: Absolutely not. But he, like all musicians, can play a score better than a good pianist can, because they see the essentials. In one way I'm really ...what should I say? I have deteriorated, you know, by my concentration on one thing. But I believe, also, that you can do well only

if you concentrate on one thing.

I haven't mentioned much [about my family] because there was nothing special. We were an ordinary bourgeois family, and we were three children. I was the oldest.

I think I told you before that from childhood on, I had a great love for music. I don't know if I had great talent, if I think back to all of the child protégés I heard later. I was no child protégée, just an ordinary talented person, but not very talented, I wouldn't consider myself very talented. So I got private lessons -- nobody had ever to tell me to practice, this I remember, because my love for the keyboard instrument, for music, was such that nobody had to care whether I practiced or not, I did it.

I wandered around between good teachers in Vienna, but I never was very happy with my piano playing, nor was my teacher, and mostly because I tended already then to play only Bach, and Bach is not a prominent composer for the piano. They wanted me to play real piano music, Chopin, Beethoven, Mozart.

My one brother became a very famous medical man.

Tusler: What was his name?

Ehlers: Erwin Pulay. It's a Hungarian name. My father was from Hungary -- my mother was from Czechoslovakia. A very interesting mixture.

My youngest brother [Lothar Pulay] had great talent for acting, and was given a scholarship at the Academy. When he was finished, he got immediately an engagement at one of the provincial theaters which we had so many of in Austria; he

preferred this to a bigger one because he hoped to get very much more experience in a small theater than in a big one. I remember it so well because on his way to his engagement he came to Berlin where I [then] lived and was married, and visited me. Then the First World War broke out (it was in 1914) and he had to go back and was taken in the army. I never saw him again. He was killed in one of the first battles, near Lemberg--I think it's now Poland, but at this time it belonged to Austria. So this is the history of my family.

Tusler: What was your father's name?

Ehlers: Ignatz [Pulay]. He was a businessman and loved music and paintings. There was not one Sunday where I had not to (I say had not because I disliked it) go to the museum and look at pictures. He loved pictures. If we had any money left he brought home, to the desperation of my mother, another picture. He didn't even know where to hang them any more. She had no sense for it. She was a wonderful, sweet mother, but she didn't have sense for these things. My father loved music, and I remember from my childhood that one of his favorite violinists was Bronislaw Hubermann. Later on in my life when I met Hubermann in Vienna, and then here in America, I was thinking how my father would have been thrilled to know that his beloved great Hubermann came to visit me and had dinner with us.

Tusler: Surely that had some influence on you, then, in your musical development.

Ehlers: I don't know. I only remember vividly that he once

gave us the honor to visit us. At this time Hubermann was one of the great violinists, compared with our great violinists of today, Heifetz and Stern, for instance. He was the idol in Vienna and in Budapest; his concerts were always sold out.

Hubermann was the great violinist of the time as Artur Schnabel was the great pianist (I never heard anybody play Schubert like Schnabel did.) But when he came to America he could not make a success, because the technique here was so fantastically advanced. (The wonderful things Schnabel did, didn't count here.)

Tusler: People wanted to be dazzled.

Ehlers: Not only this--you had such great pianists here.

Rubinstein, for instance, and his fantastic technique. Schnabel never was a fantastic technician.

Tusler: That doesn't speak so well for America, does it?

Ehlers: Well, they are very young, they had to learn. And also, the pace is different, not only became different but probably it's a national--what should I say? National characteristic, that's different; they like different things. But I must say, America knows how to appreciate great artists.

Maybe Schnabel was not any more so good when he came here.

I remember one concert here at the Philharmonic Auditorium. We didn't talk about the program before--I had great respect [for him] and I was younger, quite a bit. I used to look very much up to him. He played the Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue. If he had asked me, I would have said, "No, Schnabel.

Do what you do so beautifully, like nobody else--that's Schubert." And of course the critics pounded him on this, you see? And rightly; it was no Bach. Schnabel was never a great Bach player.

A great musician, he loved Bach. I remember in London (we were at the same time in London) one day he called me and said, "Would you do me the favor to come over here? My son wants to play the 'Capriccio on the Departure of My Beloved Brother' by Bach, and he wants you to hear him."

I was puzzled. I said, "But Mr. Schnabel, you are there."

He said, "First of all, you know it's never very good if father and son work together; and then, he doesn't believe in my Bach."

So I went over and had this one sitting with the boy. But Schnabel was a great musician.

My father took me sometimes to concerts. He loved it. My mother didn't care at all.

Tusler: Music was not actually made so much in your home?

Ehlers: Not at all. Not at all. I had my piano lessons; but gradually I got many people to come [to my home] to make music with me.

My harmony lessons, as I said before, I had with Schoenberg in a class. Schoenberg at this time was not so well known and needed classes, so my schoolteacher, who was a very advanced woman, one of the first women to get a doctorate, [gave him a classroom to use.]

Tusler: What was her name?

Ehlers: Dr. Eugenia Schwartzwald. She was educated in Zurich. It seems that Switzerland was very advanced in education. She was one of the first women to get a doctorate, and she founded this advanced school. You know, we had five years to go, everybody had to go; then if you wanted to do more, you could go three years more in an advanced school, all public schools. But then you were finished. If you wanted to study something [else], you had to go to a kind of private school. So she founded this private school and it was filled up with people, some whose parents had lots of money and could pay. I remember my parents couldn't pay and she took me; she was interested in me because of my musical interests. She was a very wonderful woman, warm heart, great spirit, kindness, whatever you want she had. She offered in the evenings her rooms, without being paid for it, to Schoenberg for his lessons, and he accepted everyone who wanted to come. Otherwise, if he would have really discriminated, he wouldn't have accepted me, for instance. I was very stupid when it came to harmony and counterpoint.

Here I met many of his students, and here it was where my friendship with Alban Berg started. Alban was a wonderful person--the talent I couldn't judge, but Schoenberg believed very much in him. I owe to him much in this respect, (that) he brought me all the modern music which was performed in Vienna. He just took the score and came and we played it with four hands.

Berlin and Landowska

I think I was about eighteen years old when I got an invitation to visit some friends in Berlin and my parents were kind enough to let me go, with some misgivings. They felt it would do me good, and it did in a way, because very soon I left the house of my friends, took a little room for myself, and earned some money by giving piano lessons, still groping my way musically. I took lessons with people there who had a good name as piano teachers and helped me, but still, still, I was looking, I was seeking for something.

I was married very young [to Alfred Ehlers]. I was eighteen when I was married, and soon afterwards my oldest daughter [Maria] was born. I had to give piano lessons and accompany singers a great deal to earn money, because my husband was a sculptor and you know what this means, earning no money and spending on material. But we were very happy and it didn't really matter.

Then came the greatest excitement of my life. Wanda Landowska [the harpsichordist] came to Berlin and played. I said, "This is my instrument. This I am going to study." In 1913, she was engaged by Hermann Kretzschmar, the great musicologist. He was responsible for many things, for the Denkmäler [deutscher tonkunst]. He of course being a musicologist more than a musician, was very interested in what Mme. Landowska did. I was no musicologist and at this time didn't know anything about when and where and what, but I felt, this is

my way. This is the way I want to play Bach. This is the way I want to study. Kretzschmar engaged her to the Hochschule für Musik. He was the head of the school. [Mme. Ehlers had become a student at the Hochschule].

The war broke out and so Landowska was not able to travel much in concertizing, which was good for us students. We were not many students, and certainly not very many talented, I must say. The only one who was promising was a young organist, Dirschmer because you know the way of thinking for an organist is very natural afterwards to apply to the harpsichord. What is different is the technique. I have in my pictures this young organist with [Albert] Schweitzer together--Schweitzer liked him very much. He was the only one who showed any talent.

Landowska, as I now see (I adored her, naturally, as an artist, as a person, I adored her), but as I now see it and understand it after so many years of teaching myself, she was no teacher. [About] all the untalented students, she said [to me], "My child, work with them," because she didn't know where and what to say. Musically, she could, but they were not even technique-wise prepared to deal with the harpsichord. I felt honored, as you can imagine, and did as much as I could to help them along, but there was not one talent.

She was with us from 1913 until after the war. The moment the war ended she left Berlin and went back to Paris. But these four or five years with her were very precious to me. She was very good and very kind to me, even lending me

sometimes her harpsichord. I remember she played in Budapest, Hungary, and I had a concert very shortly afterwards, so she left the harpsichord there for me. I could use it. I didn't own a harpsichord at this time, and I couldn't visualize how I ever would own one because it was so much money needed for it, which we didn't have.

I had more students, naturally, but in between I had two daughters. The expenses for a house and for living became bigger and bigger. But anyhow, it somehow worked out. I gave lots of private piano lessons and accompanied singers also, and worked my way through the Hochschule für Musik.

At the end of it, I got the Mendelssohn Prize, which I had to share with a very highly talented pianist at this time, who I think is coming this year to play for the first time in the States, [Wilhelm] Kempff. We had to share it, which was in a way sad but in a way good.

Tusler: Did this mean quite a help to you financially?

Ehlers: It was not so much, but it helped me. I remember it very well, because it was a sad incident. The same day I played for the Mendelssohn Prize I got a telegram from my parents that my youngest brother was killed in the First World War. I still went and played. The telegram came in the morning and I was shocked, as you can imagine. He was young, a very great talent, and had just finished the Academy in Vienna for acting. He got immediately a position, came to me in Berlin and stayed with me, and wanted from there to go to his new position, when the war started. He was very young,

eighteen or nineteen, and he had immediately to go back.

I brought him to the train, not realizing really what a war means, at this time, you know, and said, "I hope you come back soon, dear," and he said, "Of course, I will." But later I heard that he had told my brother in Vienna, "I feel I will never come back."

He was killed, and the same day when I had to play for this competition, I got the telegram--and I played, because I needed some money to go back to my parents in Vienna, which I wanted very badly; so I had to just have some discipline to play and not mix one thing up with the other. And I won with Kempff together.

Tusler: Were you playing the harpsichord?

Ehlers: Ja. This was all on the harpsichord, after the study with Landowska.

Tusler: What did you play, do you remember?

Ehlers: Ja, the C Minor Fantasy by Bach. It is still one of my favorite pieces.

Tusler: How much other performing did you do in connection with your work there at the school?

Ehlers: Not at all. I started to perform in the last year of my study with Landowska, outside the performance that we had to do for school, you know, when there were school concerts.

Tusler: Oh, there were concerts there.

Ehlers: Ja, one or two in the Hochschule, student concerts. We had to perform.

Well, anyhow, this was the end of [my association with]

Landowska--she left Germany very gladly; she disliked the Germans, she disliked Germany. What is now sometimes publicized by her or by her secretary [Denise Restout] that she was "under control," is not quite true. It was just the order that all foreigners should appear before a certain police department every two or three weeks, which I think is in order, if you are living in a foreign country, that the police have some [right to keep track of your motions.] She made a big story afterwards because everything German she disliked. I can imagine and understand this. She was Polish-French, entirely different in everything oriented. Her husband was a Pole, too, but they spent all their life in Paris, and really through this, through their living in Paris, the harpsichord came into being. Her husband, [Henry] Lew-Landowski liked me very much, and he told me many things. He was a great walker and sometimes he didn't want to walk alone, so he'd say, "Alice, do you want to go and walk with me?" I did it not always because I liked it, because I really needed my time, but she [Landowska] wanted peace at the house to practice, and she never could practice very well when he was at home. I adored her and I would have done anything for her, you know, so I walked with him, and there I learned many things.

He told me that when they married in Paris, both very young and having no money at all (he was a writer, but not under steady employment--he wrote here and there), he said to her one day, "My dear, you can't compete with the great pianists." She loved the piano, and if you have read her

book, you will find a sentence where she says, "Now I am old enough to return to my first and greatest love, the piano." But he, being a very wise and objective man, said, "You will never be the first one, with Rubinstein, Rosenthal, Schnabel, all these great pianists; you can't compete, you have to find your field."

They were very friendly with Mr.[Gustave] Lyon, the owner of Pleyel in France. (I think one Lyon is still the owner.) He had an old harpsichord there, and Landowska sometimes tried it. Her husband convinced her that if she would make something out of this instrument, for which all the baroque music has been written, she would be the only one in the world. She saw the point, and they decided to reconstruct the harpsichord, with the help of Mr. Lyon who was very interested in creating something new, and the then engineer whom even I knew--strangely enough, I met him a few years ago when I played at Pomona College; he was an old man then, and when he saw me he said, "You know, we met once a long time ago. I was the builder of your Pleyel."

The harpsichord wasn't used then; it was an instrument for a museum.

Tusler: An antique.

Ehlers: An antique. It didn't have any value. I don't know if Pleyel had built one before, this I don't know; but anyhow it was in the house of Pleyel that Landowska first encountered the harpsichord. And the inspiration of her husband, who was a very clever creative person in this way, not a

great writer, but who had ideas, pushed her on the way to the harpsichord.

Now they started from the technical angle to create an instrument which really has a sound that would carry through a hall, because the old harpsichords which you found in the museums, I know from my own experience, couldn't give you any idea. You could look at them. In the Mozart Museum in Salzburg one is standing, but there is no sense in trying to play it. One note goes, the next key doesn't work. Mostly the strings are broken; nobody has looked after it.

So they, from old instruments, had learned at least the construction. Under the guidance of a good technician, Mr. Lyon and Lew-Landowski created the modern Pleyel instrument. How long it took them, I don't know; Landowska never talked about it.

I remember when I started out to concertize and didn't have a harpsichord, I was desperate because I depended always either on her to lend me hers, which she couldn't because she needed it, or on the Hochschule für Musik which of course wouldn't lend it, the institution couldn't give out the instrument, or on a personal friend of mine who built his own instrument, a beautiful instrument but very impractical to travel with because he followed the old original pattern of the harpsichord which didn't have any metal frame. It was all wood so it gave a fantastic resonance, you know. But if you look here in mine [a Pleyel], you will see there's a metal frame in it holding the things together. I praise the

Lord we have it, because [without it] we couldn't do all the traveling we have to do now. All wood expands and--what is the word?

Tusler: Contracts.

Ehlers: Contracts, according to the temperature. Even this [instrument] does it, but to a minimum. All wood-constructed instruments have a wonderful advantage of resonance and vibration all through, but also this disadvantage. I'd rather have it with the metal frame! Also, wood cracks, [creating a] danger for instance which I have gone through, traveling in all the different climates. I don't think an instrument built in the old way could have taken it.

So Pleyel came to the conclusion to build an iron frame, and the harpsichord as we know it now, at least my Pleyel, came into existence.

Well, to come back to my own career: you can't make a career without having an instrument. And there was none. Then a friend of mine, one of the players in the then very famous Rosé Quartet from Vienna, said, "Listen, dear, in the cellar in the Opera House in Vienna there stands a funny instrument, it must be a harpsichord. I will inquire about it--maybe you can buy it. It's better than nothing."

And really truly it was an old Pleyel, and I will tell you how it ever came to be in there. Mahler learned (how, where, I don't know) that Mozart played the recitatives to his operas on a harpsichord, as it should be. He wanted to be correct and ordered a harpsichord, and when it came he hated

the sound so much that he said, "I never want to see this instrument again -- away with it." So it came in the cellar of the Opera House. It had no 16-foot, but even all the other registers were miserable. But I was happy to have one and believe it or not, I started my career on this sad instrument. And people not being used, anyhow, to what a harpsichord is, they accepted it.

Tusler: Did you buy the instrument?

Ehlers: I bought the instrument, and later sold it to one of my students when I got my lovely one. But this was much later; for quite a few years I had to be grateful for this instrument. I can't now visualize how I was ever accepted with this instrument. It was a harpsichord, it was original, but people hadn't heard a harpsichord and they probably thought this sour tone belongs to it. The plucking anyhow was the thing, was the difference [to them] between it and the hammerklavier; if there was a difference in tone quality they wouldn't be able to understand. And I was very grateful to have it.

Tusler: Had Mahler ordered that instrument to be made?

Ehlers: He bought, he wrote to find out where and how he could get it, and he bought it. I don't think he bought it from someone, I think he ordered it from Paris.

Tusler: And they built it then.

Ehlers: I don't know. At this time when he bought it and used it, I was not interested, I didn't even know what a harpsichord was. This probably all happened even after I left Vienna; as I told you, I was so very young when I left, eighteen, I

think.

I remember I had to go to the police with my father and he had to give permission that I could independently sign things, because in Austria it was the age of twenty-one when you became independent. Sometimes I had to sign something, a check when I got paid for piano lessons which I gave; he had to give his okay that I could sign this. So I must have been about nineteen when I went to Berlin.

In Berlin of course I took piano lessons to improve my technique, which never pleased me very much.

Tusler: With whom were you studying?

Ehlers: Nobody of name. Being a Leschetizky student, I had lessons with one of Leschetizky's students who lived in Berlin, who was very good to me. I didn't have much money. I don't know if I ever paid for a lesson with him. Gottfried Galston was his name. He never became a great pianist; he was of the generation of [Artur] Schnabel and [Rudolph] Ganz.

I had contact with all these people in Berlin who partly were Leschetizky students; but I felt this was not for me. The same thing happened: I always wanted to play Bach, but (this is not really pianistic music). They always wanted me to play Schumann and Chopin. I loved Chopin, but somehow I was not able or ready or devoted enough to play it.

I remember once a lesson in Vienna with Leschetizky when I was still living there.

He said, "What did you bring for the lesson?"

I said, "Bach."

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He said, "What did you bring for the lesson?"

I said, "Bach."

He said, "Always Bach! Why? You know how to play it."

Of course, when I studied with Landowska, I understood I didn't know how to play it. I played the notes. It was the great period of romanticism.

And also, when I came to him [Leschetizky] he was an old man, you know? Even Brahms was for him too modern. I remember one incident when Schnabel, who was a student of Leschetizky, came to the lesson and brought Brahms. Schnabel was young and enthusiastic for Brahms. I don't know which piece it was, I wasn't there, but Schnabel told me about it later when we talked about the change of tastes in our generation.

He said, "I remember very well when I brought a Brahms piece to the old master and he took it, threw it on the floor, and said, 'In my lesson we play music!..'" [laughter]

It seems incredible today, but this is what Schnabel told me and I'm sure it was true. So you see, I was out of place there, I was out of place everywhere. I loved this music, but it was not for me.

Tusler: What was Leschetizky like as a person?

Ehlers: I can't compare him as a person. I was in awe of him as we all were, but he must have been a great teacher because he brought out so many great pianists.

He was very good to me, because I was really not the most talented of his pupils. Schnabel was quite a bit older than I. But still it was more or less the atmosphere that we lived in. And it was Vienna! Brahms was the god of the young generation, you know.

Landowska didn't talk much, as I come to think of it.

She never sat down and explained things--maybe one can't explain certain things. But I listened, I listened, not with two ears but with ten. I observed her, and felt very honored when all the untalented students she gave to me and said, "Practice with them, my child," because she didn't know how to cope with them; she was no teacher.

Tusler: Did she teach in a class situation?

Ehlers: No. We all had private lessons. The pianists were very much against Landowska as well as against the harpsichord. (I know one piano teacher who liked me very much and said, "I hope, my dear, you won't stick with this instrument." I don't know what it was; she [Landowska] was also a little aloof, and I can't put my finger on it. I adored her. I would have gone, I don't know where, for her. I felt what she was giving me, not by saying much--she talked very little and now being a teacher myself, I must say she was not a good teacher. Only if you could observe her and take in her own playing, then you learned something.

Tusler: Of course, she was young then, wasn't she?

Ehlers: No so young. But probably very inexperienced in teaching.

Tusler: Perhaps later she developed into a better teacher?

Ehlers: I don't know, I didn't hear any one of her later students who developed. The only one who seemingly became great I know only from records, [Rafael] Puyana. He was taught mostly by her secretary and friend [Denise Restout] who sat in on all the lessons Landowska gave.

Years ago I sent one of my students, before he got his doctorate, to her. I insisted; he didn't want to go. I said, "I insist that you go. You needn't study Bach with her;" because I felt in my own development I have removed from her interpretation of Bach very much, and I think probably it's natural. I think nationality has something to do with this. I mean, being Polish-French, she thinks differently, the temperament is so different, no? When I studied with her I never felt it; when I hear her records now, which I admire immensely, suddenly I get a shock. These rubati, they are out of place.

Anyhow, this boy studied, and he is now a professor at the University at Eugene, Oregon, an excellent player.

Tusler: Is that John Hamilton?

Ehlers: John Hamilton, ja. He studied with me for years. I said, "I insist that you go to Landowska."

He said, "Why?" We had just studied intensely the Goldberg Variations.

I said, "You should take advantage of studying with her."

Well, he took ten lessons, and he came back very disappointed; he wrote me already, "I get something from her secretary and friend," (Denise, the one who put the book out), "but I hardly have a chance to hear her or to talk to her".

Now, I don't know if she felt ill at this time already, or if she was not interested because he was coming from me. She never could forgive me, that I made a success. It doesn't fit in the picture of this great woman. But I understand it.

Up to this time, she was the only person in the world. Now came a young nobody, and really I couldn't compete with her, not compare, with her at this time. I was just her student, and everything I did I imitated. I didn't even think independently at this time. But I had success, and she could not take it gracefully. I learned a great deal from this, her behavior, for my future life with my students.

Just to tell you one incident. We worked very long on a program before I appeared before the public and critics in Berlin for the first time, and I remember the piece. It was the Bach F Minor Concerto and the C Minor Fantasy, which were my big pieces on the program. She worked with me wonderfully, really, not holding back; I had no feeling of her holding back anything at this time. The day before, or two days before, she gave a concert with somebody, I think with a singer, and naturally I went. When I got the program, her main piece was the Bach F Minor Concerto.

You know, I nearly fell from my chair. I had tears in my eyes, and I had to use all my control, because how should I cope with it two days afterwards before the press (it was my first appearance in Berlin) if this master played it before me? I must have shown it in my face, because her husband, who liked me very much (he was a difficult man but he liked me), said afterwards to me, "Why were you so pale? Why did you become so pale after Wanda had this great success?"

And I had tears in my eyes, I remember, as I told him the story. He said, "This was not right for her to do." He

didn't know about it.

It was these little tricks that she played on me, which she needn't do, she was such a master, such a lovely player. None of the living ones could compare to her, even if musically now when I have thought out things independently, I can't always say "yes" to her, especially not to her treatment of Bach.

Tusler: As you say, she'd spent so many years trying to find her own niche.

Ehlers: Naturally.

Tusler: And her own little coterie.

Ehlers: She was the only one.

Tusler: Suddenly she was threatened by somebody else.

Ehlers: Ja, ja. But then you shouldn't be a teacher. But then, as I said before, I learned a great deal as a teacher from her--not how to teach; no, I teach entirely differently; but I learned from the beginning to face that one day there will be competition. It is not easy. When I came to Los Angeles, nobody knew what a harpsichord was. Now look around. I don't say even those, like Malcolm Hamilton, who really have a right to play the harpsichord; but anyone who can afford to buy a harpsichord and is a pianist, now plays the harpsichord. Piano playing is built on a constant emotional up and down, crescendo and diminuendo, and the harpsichord is almost static like an organ. It's an entirely different way of thinking, not only of playing.

Tusler: Probably they'd like it a great deal better if they did understand the differences.

Ehlers: Well, of course if they would understand it, they would understand the music, and they would understand that just playing on the harpsichord up and down and changing registers doesn't make good harpsichord playing. With my students, for instance, at the beginning there were a few who were very serious, mostly organists. This is the same way of thinking. Organ can't change, as you know, ad lib, making crescendos and diminuendos; the sense must come from the music, the same way you approach the harpsichord. Only the literature is naturally different.

But at the beginning here, it was only me. So this has grown enormously, and all of it really started with Landowska. Her greatness is undisputed.

So you see, my influences came from many sides. But my way was cut out for me in me, you know? I knew I had to do something with Bach, but I didn't know quite what. Then came this great thing for me to hear Landowska, and I said, "This is it. This is the instrument which I will play and [on which I] can play Bach the way I want to. I studied, as I mentioned, from about 1913 to 1918 with her.

Tusler: I want to ask you about Berlin. You talked about your work there at the school, but I don't believe you mentioned anything about the musical life of the city. What was it like there then?

Ehlers: The musical life there was wonderful. We had Furtwängler for the Philharmonic concerts; we had the Opera House which everybody could go to because you could buy very cheap

seats, which we students only could afford.

The Hochschule für Musik had very conservative teachers and very great teachers. Among the pianists, there was not one great performer, but good teachers were there. I took interest only in Landowska, naturally. I don't know who came after I left the Hochschule, but later they also engaged great performers. I don't know if later Schnabel taught; this must have been, if he taught, after I left Berlin. Of course in the other fields were very famous people. I had Curt Sachs, who was one of the great historians of my time, as my teacher in instrumental history and music history and he was the only one; he was a wonderful man, and he was the administrator of our collection of old instruments at the Hochschule für Musik. All the names that you see now printed in books.

Tusler: They had a very illustrious faculty there then.

Ehlers: Ja. Johannes Wolf was one of my teachers. Curt Sachs was the only one who wasn't boring, by the way, I must say. He was not boring because he was also a great lover of painting and he brought things together, he was not one-sided. But all the other great teachers were really very uninteresting; we have to have great scholars, but this doesn't always mean a great inspiring teacher.

And I had good old [Max] Seiffert--you know him probably from his figured bass; all the editions of old music probably have the figured bass done by Max Seiffert. He made most of the editions that came out on the figured bass, which I didn't know at this time that he had made. Anyhow, we learned about

figured bass and how important it is that everybody can sit down and play figured bass even without preparing it, by just knowing the harmony and seeing the upper voices and seeing the line of the bass, and so on and so forth. Then he gave us one of his books, which I didn't know was his book. It was the harmonization of certain songs, very primitive, you know; I had the feeling that anyone who knew harmony, any harmony, dominant, sub-dominant, tonic, could do it, it was so primitive.

As an example he put it before us and said, "Sing."

~ And I said, "Is this all?" without thinking.

And he said, "If it's not good enough for you, here is the door."

I didn't understand, I didn't know what I had said. So I became quiet and depressed, because I had to finish the class at the Hochschule.

After he left, my colleagues said, "Don't you know what you said?"

"I said, 'Is this all?'"

"Ja, but don't you know that he did the book?"

You know, it seemed so primitive after he gave a wonderful speech about how Bach improvised and that figured bass is not just harmony--of course, the harmony is the foundation, but you have to do something, imitate sometimes the upper voice, and then I got only "klink-klink-klink," you know? I really didn't want to be fresh. He was a very boring teacher with a good knowledge, I mean. But he made us aware of how we should not play, which I wasn't taught before. I wasn't taught anything

before about the performance practices of old music, and I should have known because I had had all these lessons on harmony. But the time was not yet ready for a revival of baroque music.

Association with Hindemith

But later I learned how right I was with my instinct, when I saw a figured bass by Hindemith. I was honored with Hindemith's friendship, and I learned a great deal from him, really. This was later in my life. Hindemith wanted somebody to play with him who played the old instrument, and he liked me personally. [Hindemith] made the figured bass for [some of the] Heinrich Franz von Biber [sonatas]. Very few aside from musicologists know of Biber. He lived long before Bach (1644-1704). He wrote violin sonatas and one cycle especially is on the life and suffering of Jesus Christ. I think there are twelve; six of them which were the best, Hindemith prepared for performance. Instead of naming each sonata like I, II, III, etc., Biber chose Durer's etchings to indicate the meaning of each sonata, like the "Geisslung" or the "Resurrection" and so on and so forth.

Hindemith was always looking for old music and knew about old music [in a way] more after my feelings than any of all the historians I have met, because he knew it not only by books but by looking at the music, by being able to go to the black-board and write down something in the style of the old master. Hindemith wrote the figured bass to six of the best [Biber] sonatas,

and he honored me with playing them with me. He played violin. Voila was his instrument, but he also played the violin, but not like a violinist, you know.

I remember when we went to Vienna which was on our tour-- it was such a snobbish town in a way, you know; if it was not Heifetz, it wasn't good enough. Of course, from the violinistic point, you can't judge Hindemith. He just, as I lovingly say, fiddled. But the great musician came through. If I play it now with Eudice Shapiro, it's a master who plays it. But anyhow, he loved these sonatas and we played them.

We traveled quite a bit just with these sonatas. We went once to broadcast them from England, and I feel very tempted if I would know to whom to apply to find out if they have made a recording of the broadcasts, because I would love to have it as a memory of Paul Hindemith.* We played it in Vienna, too. In Vienna, of course, if there hadn't been the respectable people like Berg and Webern and many others who all came to the concert, the public would have said, "What kind of violin playing is this?" But those people knew it was not the violin playing which counted here, it was the music.

Tusler: Did he live in Vienna?

Ehlers: No, no. I lived at this time in Berlin, too.

Tusler: You were both in Berlin.

*A letter from the British Broadcasting Corporation, dated 7 March 1966 and addressed to the UCLA Oral History Program, states that no recordings are available. A list of Mme. Ehlers performances with the BBC is given, but does not indicate which may have been with Hindemith.

Ehlers: But he came one day and said, "Let's play together," and this was the greatest honor which could have happened to me.

Hindemith was a wonderful balance to Landowska to me. When she overdid things, which I felt I wouldn't do but I wasn't sure, because I admired her so much and it sounded good, he was on the other side, you know? Very much so. He couldn't stand her playing. He felt she handled Bach, and he couldn't have this. He was too--what should I say?--too little a performing artist. For a performing artist, I think the projection is the main thing, and even if sometimes you know probably you shouldn't quite do it, I try to balance. I try very much. How much I succeed, I don't know. But for Hindemith, the outside didn't exist, the projection. When I play I want to make people love the piece, so maybe I do something which Bach wouldn't have done.

Tusler: But that's probably the very approach which Bach himself would have used.

Ehlers: I don't know, I don't think so.

Tusler: He also was a performing artist.

Ehlers: Ja, performing, but not going on tours and playing for the public. He performed for his students and for himself.

There's a great difference. I hope I don't do it, but one never knows, what one really does. Hindemith was never thinking of projecting something for people. Probably he couldn't, because he was [only] on the side a violinist; he was a composer first.

But now I am playing [the Biber] with Eudice Shapiro--- three years it took me to make her interested, she was so afraid of it; you know, she has to have three and four different violins in one evening, because they have to be differently tuned. You can't do this with one violin; she can't just play in the conventional tuning and then de-tune it and expect it to hold the tune. The violin has to be tuned weeks ahead of time.

Tusler: Oh, in order to keep the pitch. I see.

Ehlers: Ja. Well, now she plays it magnificently. It took me years to get her, because she was so afraid of it. Now she loves it. She has a terrific success with it, people just eat it up. We have played so far only two, but yesterday I gave her three more which I have from Hindemith. I have only five, but probably he took only five because they were the best ones. Five or six, ja. It's strong music, wonderful music.

So, you see, I was blessed with [influence] from the other side. It was a balance to Landowska. Landowska was a wonderful musician, I must say, but very much working with the idea of (what should I say, not to give you a wrong idea?) projection. Every performing artist should have that feeling of projection. Otherwise, they should stay home and play for themselves. But it can be too much. And sometimes now (not at the time when I studied with her--then I didn't understand enough, and I adored her too much to have any criticism, even thinking critically) but now, listening to her recordings, I come to the conclusion that it was overdone sometimes. Just thinking of our mutual friend, Malcolm Hamilton, how he played the Forty-Eight, and

how he brought everything out but never too much, [compared to] Landowska's overdoing, gives me the right to think that I was right; it can be done with a minimum of effect. Hindemith didn't do any effects; he just fiddled, he played, but it was a great musician behind it.

Tusler: Was it well received when you did it?

Ehlers: Enormously. But now I can't tell you if it was for the music's sake, or for the sake that Hindemith was there. Vienna was very snobbish, as I said; it had to be, Heifetz or Erika Morini or one of the top people.

My brother, who was a doctor but in love with music, and like these amateurs always full of criticism, said after the dress rehearsal to me, "Well, I hope the people don't run out of this--this is fiddling, this is not violin playing."

In a way, he was right. But he wasn't able to understand the concept of this, the musical concept of Hindemith. It was fiddling.

Tusler: But this was a style that people weren't familiar with.

Ehlers: I don't think it has only to do with that. At that time, the performing artist alone didn't exist. The composer played his things, like Hindemith played his music, and so he played the Biber. We always had great success, but as I told you, I don't know whether it was an ovation for Hindemith or for the Biber.

I love the sonatas. It is wonderful for me to have his figured bass to it; it would be very interesting to compare it to the Denkmäler der Tonkunst. These [in the Denkmäler]

are done like by a good student who knows the right harmony and the right places without any imagination. But Hindemith has imagination, naturally, and brings sometimes the motif of the violin in the right hand, you know, and so on and so forth.

Anyhow, it was a great experience for me, and I'm very happy that I could persuade Miss Shapiro to do it. Now she loves it. She has an enormous success with these two sonatas. Now I hear it for the first time played by a great violinist. I already did it in Los Angeles years ago with a former student of mine, who is now a professor in the east and has made a great success, and later I played it with Adolph Koldofsky, the husband of Gwendolyn, our lovely teacher and accompanist of Lehmann. He was very good, much better than Hindemith, but too sensitive, he didn't have the force. Eudice Shapiro has both, has everything.. But it took me time to persuade her, partly because of the difficulty of traveling with four violins.

Tusler: Are they modern violins?

Ehlers: Of course. It makes no sense to play on an old violin which doesn't carry through the hall. I know my beloved Dr. Schweitzer was sometimes interested in the old violin. I am not a bit interested in the old violin.

Tusler: There's no advantage to be gained by going back to that.

Ehlers: We play in big halls, now. Why go back? Now, you can say, why do you play the harpsichord? This is a different

matter.

Development of Concert Career

[After Mme. Landowska left Berlin, Mme. Ehlers concertized in the area until she had exhausted her repertoire.]

I [finally became] desperate and said I couldn't accept any engagements any more; I had played everywhere and I didn't know another piece. [My husband] couldn't understand, and he just asked a naive question and put me on the road with saying, "Well, can't you read music?" because he didn't know how you proceed to learn a piece of music. He was utterly unmusical, and this was a field outside his knowledge. This was not an ironical question of his. His question was really and sincerely meant: "Can't you read music? How does one learn music?"

And I said, "By reading the notes."

He said, "Can't you read notes?"

I said, "Naturally I can read notes."

He said, "Why can't you learn a piece for yourself?"

This was my first idea. I thought, well, maybe I should try?

It taught me something for my teaching, not to make students too dependent. You can criticize them afterwards, you can guide them, but you have almost from the beginning to try to make them listen to themselves, see for themselves, and then act for themselves. You are there as a guide to say afterwards, when they come to the lesson, yes or no, and why yes and why no.

In this sense, Landowska was not a good teacher, and if I hadn't listened so very intensely, and observed so intensely, I wouldn't have gotten so much from her. I was one of her very first students. All the students at the Hochschule were her first experience with teaching.

You have to understand the psychology of the one who listens and who is not informed; you have to talk to this person [for them to] get something out of it. This is what she never did, and I learned only from listening to her and from observing technically. And as I told you, all the students who were not very talented she didn't know what to do with, and she said to me, "My child, practice with them." I felt very honored. But now I understand she didn't know what to say to them; they were so much lower, and she didn't know how to handle this kind of a personality.

Tusler: Perhaps she wasn't deeply interested in the teaching process.

Ehlers: This I can't answer, I don't know. I learned enormously from her, but I developed quite differently. For this I am grateful, because otherwise I would be a bad copy of her. Her technique was phenomenal and her personality was phenomenal. I loved her dearly, and I regret every minute, when I think of it, that she didn't feel this love and devotion which I kept and still have. But somehow, somehow, she rejected me, because I had so much success. It was not that I was so good, but I was the first person, outside her, who could do it. You see, I was the first after her.

Now, after my students have achieved a certain, not only technical knowledge but also musical knowledge, I suggest pieces which they then bring to me. Then I start working from what they have brought me, trying to point out the importance of certain things, how to approach a piece, and so on and so forth, because especially in Bach you have no tempo advice, you have nothing. You have to use your own taste, your own judgment.

I had been never taught [this], and I behaved so stupidly that I felt, well, I have played all my things everywhere, and I can't go on. The naive question of a nonmusician like my husband, "Can't you read music?" woke me up. I said, "Why don't I try?"

From then on, I walked my way alone. It went all right. And then, as I mentioned, I had the great fortune that Hindemith took an interest in me. This was a great help, insofar that he developed my thinking: not systematically--he didn't work with me as a teacher; but when I played something, I said, "Paul, can I play this way?"

He said, "Miserable."

And I said, "Why?" Through his criticism, I learned to look at things differently. But altogether, he liked my playing very much. He liked especially my playing of Bach, which was for me a great, great support.

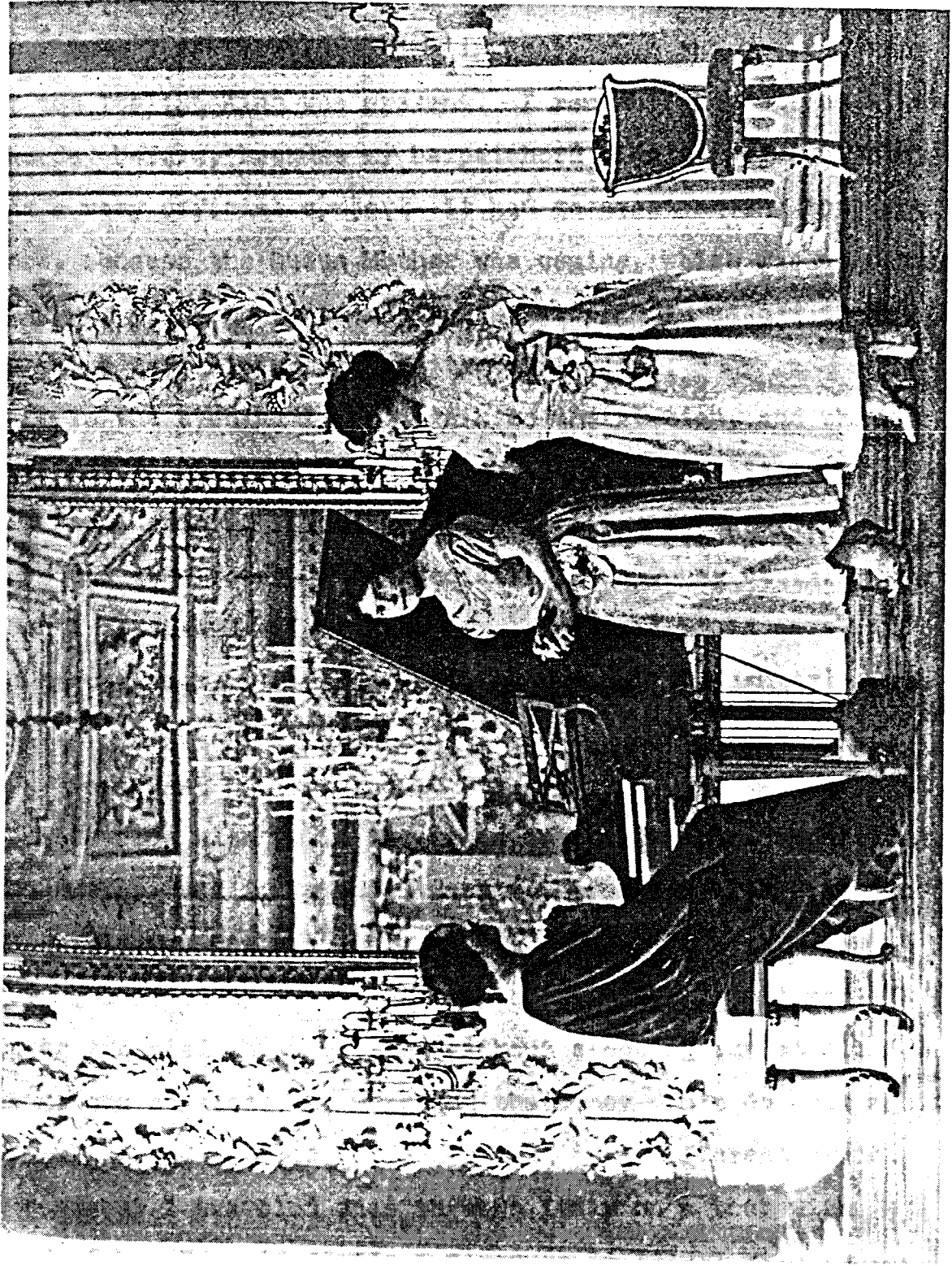
Tusler: Did you continue then to play concerts around Berlin?

Ehlers: Oh, constantly, Ja. Not only around Berlin, but all over Germany.

During the First World War, I met two Italian girls, singers, who played quite an important part in my life [Marta and Marietta Amstad]. The one [Marietta] was a high soprano, a small voice but wonderfully schooled, and her sister [Marta] had a dark soprano, almost an alto. They specialized in chamber duets. With them I gave many concerts, because the literature of chamber duets was not opened. Ludwig Landshoff put out a book of chamber duets (I don't know if there was more than one), and they had great literature of old Italian music.

Anyhow, it was a new thing altogether, this field, and we had great success, so much success than Hurok, when he heard us in a small hall in the Bechstein Saal in Berlin, was so enthused that he gave us a contract to come over here. But when was it, '32? when we were supposed to come here-- I don't know the date any more, he cancelled the contract. We were heartbroken. He was very much taken by the culture and charm of it, but he realized that the halls in America then [were too big for] these miniature voices, wonderfully trained by a great Italian singer.

But in Europe we had enormous success. With these girls I traveled. I came to Italy for the first time and played a great deal there. I was engaged to teach in Italy for quite a few months, which was hard work because I had with my stammering Italian to teach in Italian. I taught about three weeks. I gave a lecture class at the Milano Conservatory. They [the sisters] had many connections because they lived in Italy and were Swiss-born, so they had many connections in Switzerland



and in Italy. We concertized as far south as Palermo, in Sicily.

Then I remember one time in Rome, when the Queen Mother of the Italian King was present. I remember how excited I was the day before, because my harpsichord didn't arrive. This was a very official concert--it had to start on the dot, you know, because the Queen Mother was coming, which was announced. It was a great honor to us--and my harpsichord wasn't there. So I was terribly upset, and the girls, too.

In the evening I went again to the station, and the man who [was in charge of] the freight department said to me, "Don't be upset, senora," (You know, the Italians are so very sweet when one is a woman, and especially I was young at this time). "Don't be afraid--it will be here, and if I could carry it on my own back, I would carry it for you." [laughter] With all the enthusiasm!

So I went home hoping it will be true. It was supposed to have come with us in the train in the luggage compartment. When we arrived in Rome, it wasn't there--they forgot to load it. This was Italy at this time.

I learned my lesson from this one time, I tell you--I never traveled through Italy without stepping out at all dangerous stations and watching that they don't do this again to me, forget to load it, or load it on a different train. I remember I traveled once through Italy on a tour with Hindemith. He said, "It's a pleasure to travel with you--always when I am asleep you jump out in the midst of the night

and run after your harpsichord." [Laughter] But I had my lesson then.

Well, anyhow, this man telephoned to the last station and they said, "It will be there, and the concert can start on time." But I didn't trust him.

I think it was midnight when the train was supposed to arrive, so I went to the station. What came out first, where supposedly the harpsichord should be, were hundreds of little pigs. [laughter] Hundreds of little pigs! You can't imagine. The harpsichord was kept warm, but the smell inside was unbelievable!

Well, anyhow, I was relieved and I thanked the man, which ended in him asking me if I wouldn't consider marrying him. This happened quite a few times with this kind of people-- if they would be able to take care of the harpsichord from now on, and I wouldn't have to do it. [laughter] So this was one of the many things which happened.

But through these girls, who had many connections in Switzerland, we traveled all through Switzerland, Basel, Zurich, Winterthur. We gave concerts [there] and all through Italy. They are still alive. One accepted a position in Portugal, where she teaches at the conservatory.

Chamber duets were absolutely unknown at this time. They were written in the Italian baroque, a number of wonderful chamber duets.

Tusler: Who were some of the composers?

Ehlers: Pergolesi, Paisiello, Stefani.

Tusler: Scarlatti?

Ehlers: Scarlatti didn't write so much for voice; he was a keyboard composer. You will find one or another piece. Then we each one had a solo, too. I think I was the first one to bring out this year the great solo cantata by Handel, Lucretia, which I gave years ago to Marilyn Horne. She was then not interested in it, but a few years ago she asked me [for it]. A very wonderful solo cantata by Handel. So each one of us had a solo too. We performed literature which was never heard before.

Tusler: Was this the first time you had traveled around extensively?

Ehlers: I really can't remember. I know I traveled in Germany without them. I played at the Beethoven Festival in Bonn, and I played in Germany without traveling much. But from then on I traveled a great deal.

I know I came back to the Beethoven Centenary. It was in Vienna [in 1927]. Casals played at the concert, and I played. I don't know how I ever came into the Beethoven Centennial. They said Beethoven was very impressed by Handel and they asked me to play some Handel. I played the famous Variations by Handel and I don't know what else I played.

But this concert was a great honor for me. Casals was on the same program, and it had a very interesting influence on my future, which I didn't know at this time. Carl Engel was in the audience.* He was the head of Schirmer's and a great

*Carl Engel was U.S. Delegate to the Beethoven Centenary.

close friend of Mrs. [Elizabeth Sprague] Coolidge. She was a great music lover. The next year I got an invitation to play at the Library of Congress, and I couldn't understand why and how: this was due to Carl Engel, who heard me at the Beethoven Centenary.

Tusler: Did you accept that engagement?

Ehlers: Of course, of course. I just came. This was a great honor, and a great and wonderful thing for me, to be able to come to America without spending a fortune to be heard.

Tusler: Did they pay for your transportation?

Ehlers: Ja, they paid this, and I got a wonderful write-up from Olin Downes, the famous critic from [the New York Times].*

England and America

So a little door was opened for me to America. At this time I didn't know I'd ever need it, but when Hitler came and I went to England and stayed, I felt that though England is wonderful and I loved it (I had great success and many chances to play there), it probably wouldn't do for the future, because I would not be employed in one of the big conservatories or the place which Sir Hugh Allen was the head of, the Royal College of Music. He was very good to me and he let me play. You couldn't give, as a foreigner, a concert without permission. I got all the permission I wanted. They were very good,

*Letter dated May 15, 1968, from Harold Spivacke, Chief, Music Division, Library of Congress, to Maria Ehlers, encloses copies of programs played by Mme. Ehlers, the first on March 6, 1936, and two later in 1937 and 1939, not further dated. Reviews appear in the New York Times in 1936, 1937, and 1938.

generous to me, and I traveled all over England and I traveled to Scotland, but then I was finished, you know? So when I had this invitation to come to Washington, it opened a little door.

Then in 1938, I came to America to visit my younger daughter [Christina, also called Christel], who lived in America. When she left Germany she went first to Spain and then saw that there was not much possibility [there]. My husband left for Spain when he left Europe. He needn't have left because he was not a Jew, but he hated the idea so much to stay that he said, "Thank you," and resigned [from his position] at the Academy for Sculpture and Painting where he was professor. Why he went to Spain I don't know, to Mallorca, to an island. He loved it there. He hoped that I could build up in Mallorca something like a Salzburg, you know? that people would come to. I never could agree with him when I visited Mallorca later. It's a lovely place, but I never thought it was a place where you could build up a music center like Salzburg became in the summer. So my daughter lived first there and then immigrated to America, because her first husband was an architect and there was no chance there in that small place.

In 1938, I think it was, I felt that there was no future for me in England. I had played everywhere, and even for private lessons, I had to ask permission there. So I came here, but I didn't intend to stay here at all; I just wanted to visit her [my daughter]. I considered I could visit her because Juilliard School had engaged me for a summer class,

and being in New York, I thought I would take the opportunity to visit her here.

Tusler: Where was she, here in Los Angeles?

Ehlers: In Los Angeles. Ja. I had to be very careful with my money and I came the cheapest way, I remember, from New York here, also with the wish to see something of America.

When I arrived here, I was happy to be with her and see my first grandchild. And things turned up. She was very, very well known in the film colony; she had made one or two films in Europe but had never thought of it as a career. She had this certain education--she went to a professional dancing school in Europe, and I don't know if she had some education in acting, this I really can't tell you; but anyhow, she was in a picture in Germany, Menschen an Sonntag (People on Sunday), showing two young girls, what they do. This picture seemingly was played here too, and then they became interested and gave her small parts. When I came she had a few small parts.

Then some of the picture people came to our house, [among them] a very famous man, William Wyler. Christina, my daughter, was friendly with his wife. When they heard I was here and had brought my harpsichord along, they were interested to look at this instrument, and he was very impressed. When he did Wuthering Heights [in 1939] he had me play in it.

Tusler: Oh, you did the music for that?

Ehlers: Ja, you see me in the picture. Of course, this made me very popular. So the next one was Bing Crosby. He had an hour, the Bing Crosby hour, on one of the radio stations.

I played twice there. It was a great success. This brought my name to the public, without my doing it.

I remember just before the war (it looked very dangerous already, but as I never read a newspaper, I didn't know what was going on in the world; I was still only interested in what I was doing and what my children were doing), my agent [Van Wyck] came from London.

I said to him, "When are you going back to England? Maybe we could go back together, I hate to travel alone."

He said, "You stay out! Thank God you are here. Don't you read the newspaper?"

I said, "Probably not the pages I should read."

And so I stayed here. Then came one day a call from the University of Southern California. It was the dean, Dr. Max Krone at this time, asking if I would visit him. I couldn't drive at this time, so I said, "Christina, you have to drive me; probably they want a concert there."

I had an interview with him and he offered me a position. I said, "I have never taught at a school, I don't think I can do it." In a way, I was very naive. I wonder now why I behaved so stupidly.

He said, "You will learn how to teach." And he offered me a position.

I came out. It was a very hot day, and I said, "Christina, I have a position."

She didn't react. She said, "Mother, come and have an ice cream."

I said, "Christina, I have a position." As I say, she didn't react.

After while I asked, "Christina, aren't you happy I have a position? This means I will stay here."

She said, "Really, Mother?" Afterwards she confessed she thought I had a heat stroke, you know? She couldn't take me seriously and she just said, "Come and have an ice cream."

This is when I started at USC. It was in 1940.

Tusler: You've been there for quite a few years, haven't you?

Ehlers: Ja, twenty-five. We had my Silver Jubilee at the concert for the four harpsichords. This was one of the reasons we gave it. So this is part of the story of my life.

Tusler: It all fits together marvelously.

Ehlers: Ja, wonderful, really. But you see I was always very narrow-minded, in a way: always my work, my work, and not looking at what is going on in the world. Europe would have been entirely closed to me; England was very strict. I had to announce every concert, they wanted to keep track of your income, you see; and I had to ask for a permit to give lessons. They were good to me, especially Sir Hugh Allen who was the head and had to say yes or no. He liked me and invited me to give a concert at the Royal College of Music. I will never forget when he came out, the huge man he was, and embraced me before the public and said, "I learned a great deal from you." He was very good to me, I will never forget it, because most people had difficulties in getting a permit to teach. You see, England is small and their teachers have to be provided for.

But I was at this time the only harpsichordist. [There are other] harpsichordists now, like Thurston Dart, whom I respect highly; I have never heard him in person, never met him. His books are brilliant and his records I like very much. I think he is arrogant, but this doesn't matter; he is a great player. I know him only from records. The "other Malcolm" [George Malcolm] is an excellent man, too; so since then, they have their own people. But at this time, nobody was there. Harpsichordists were utterly nonprofessional in every way. I was the first professional.

I had a good time there, especially in, I think it was 1935, when I had to play fifty Scarlatti sonatas, in three or four evenings. It came out to be fifty, I think, because I had to play so-and-so long, each time, and make a choice. I will never forget the difficulty in making a choice, to bring variety, and to study. Bach, Handel, and Scarlatti, all three are born in the same year, 1685, so in 1935, it was the two hundred and fiftieth [anniversary]. So I was engaged and it brought me a lot of money.

Tusler: Is that why you happened to go to England in the first place?

Ehlers: No.

Tusler: How did that happen?

Ehlers: It was the only place where I felt I could start. Where else should I have gone? There was nothing left in Europe.

Tusler: At that point, you were really leaving Germany because you had to.

Ehlers: Oh, I knew I had to. Ja. I am Jewish, and I knew I had to leave before something happens to me. I had given concerts [there] years before with the sisters Amstad, and I knew a few people. The criticisms I got in England were good, so I said, "This is a place I could start." On top of this, there were very many wealthy Jewish families who opened their homes, and I was lucky enough to be invited [to stay with] one wonderful family who became very dear friends of mine [Martin and Ethel Solomon]. She visited me two or three years ago here in America; I was then teaching at Madison as a guest professor, and she came to Madison to be with me. We became close friends.

And so she invited me first, trying [it] out. I remember so well, they had a big downstairs. After six weeks, her husband came and said, "I want you to say how you want this room fixed." I looked at them astonished. He said, "This will be your home, if you will accept it." It was twice as big a room as this. I had my piano and I had my harpsichord, and in they got. They were people with good means, you know; they could afford it; they had a butler, and a cook, and a helper for the cook--something we don't know here, you see? And so, from the financial point of view, I was no burden. But they were very reserved: only after they felt that we could get on very well, then we became close friends. The children liked me very much and I liked the family, and I had a wonderful life there. I stayed there till I decided to live in America.

Tusler: How many years then was that, approximately, that you

were at their home?

Ehlers: Between '33 and '38, five years. Quite a time. I traveled very much, as much as I could; the summer I spent with my singer friends who had a house in Beckenried on the Vierwallstaedter See, studying new programs. I played a great deal in Switzerland; I played in Italy; I played in all the countries which were still open.

But then, through this visit here, and through these lucky things which happened to me, you know--Wuthering Heights which made me kind of popular, and the Bing Crosby hour, which made me popular, and then the offer of Dr. Krone, [I remained in the United States].

Tusler: These things that you did, the Wuthering Heights and the Bing Crosby hour, came before you'd actually made up your mind to stay in the United States?

Ehlers: Ja, ja, just visiting. Just visiting. And then, as I told you, when my agent came from England and visited me, I said, "When are you going back? I want to go with you, I don't like to travel alone, it would be so much nicer," and he said to me, "You stay where you are and thank God."

You know, I was very naive, politically. I never looked at the paper. I looked for the articles on music. He said, "Don't you know what's going on in the world, don't you know we will have a war? Be grateful and thankful to God you are out here, and you stay here."

I said, "What about the contracts I have for next year?"

He said, "You can tear them up. They won't happen."

I remember now an incident with Dr. Schweitzer.* I was visiting him in his home in Gunsbach, which was on the borderline of Germany and France. You know, they all speak very funny French in this town, but it now is France. After the war I think it became Strassbourg. Gunsbach is very close to Strasbourg. The train goes to Strasbourg, and from there on you have to take a little tiny train to Gunsbach where Dr. Schweitzer lived. I spent, I think, the summer of 1932 (was it 1932? really, my feeling for dates is terrible, but I think I was 1932), going to him. But anyhow I would spend the summer with Dr. Schweitzer always when he was in Europe in the summer. He liked to have me in Gunsbach, and I was happy to be around him.

I got a contract, I think it was for Dusseldorf, Germany. And I said, "Doctor, this contract is so different from all those others I got, what is it?" It said, "What is your religion?" and so on. You never got this on an artists contract before.

So he took it and tore it up.

I said, "Doctor, why did you tear up my contract?"

He said, "Because you won't go, anyhow."

I said, "Why shouldn't I go, it's a good fee?"

He said, "Didn't you read the sentence, 'What is your religion?'"

I said, "I read it, I wondered about it, but it's probably the way modern contracts are."

And he said, "No. This means something else. This means

*Mme. Ehlers had a close friendship with Albert Schweitzer, which is discussed at length in later interviews.

something else. This means that Mr. Hitler has already his power everywhere, and you will never be engaged here, because you are Jewish." Then he opened my eyes for the first time.

Tusler: You really hadn't ~~been~~ aware of this.

Ehlers: I had heard the name Hitler.

Tusler: But you didn't realize...

Ehlers: No, and I remember that I once came in a terrible crowd of young people, all dressed in a certain way and taking the whole street. I didn't know where to go because they didn't make room for me. I said, "What menace is this, not making room for a woman?"

I came home and said to my husband, who was not Jewish, "This and this happened--young people have menace nowadays, it's terrible."

And he said, "You'd better keep quiet when you're on the street; it's not safe to talk and make any remark."

I was so, I don't know, stupid. This is the only word I can use. I was interested in my music, in my programs, in how I played; but politics, this was a different world. I didn't realize at this time what part politics can play in a person's life.

Russian Tour*

Tusler: I know you did a lot of touring in many other places; you were in Russia, and twice in Israel, and a number of other

*Letter from I Mironov, Committee on Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, USSR, dated May 20, 1966 and directed to the UCLA Oral History Program, states that no archival records of Mme. Ehlers' stay in Russia could be found.

places.

Ehlers: I mentioned before the Beethoven Centennial, where Casals was on the program and where Carl Engel heard me and later opened, without my knowledge, my coming to America.

After the Beethoven Centennial, I went to Russia. I was invited to play there, and I remember the great excitement for me. How will I make it with the harpsichord? I don't know the language at all, I'm absolutely helpless; but it was so fantastically organized. Never in my life has a tour been so well organized. On the Polish border were officers standing, with everything in hand: my name, their orders to reload my instrument, because I had to change trains. The tracks are different in Russia than in Poland, a different width, so we had to change trains. And I, neither speaking Polish nor Russian, just a very stammering French, wasn't afraid, I thought it would work out. Never was the harpsichord treated with such care and precise order as it was loaded in the train for Russia.

I arrived in Leningrad and was received at the railway station by the impresario who spoke hardly any German, he understood a little bit, and spoke a broken French; my French was broken, too, but we got on quite well. He brought me to the hotel where I was supposed to stay. Fabulous room. It hadn't a smell in it because the windows weren't opened for months; they had no heating facilities and so all the windows were closed so that they kept drafts and air out.

I wasn't afraid; I didn't feel happy, exactly, because

of the language barrier, you know, but in a short time the Austrian ambassador called. He knew I was coming, and he spoke naturally German and French and Polish and Russian. We became close friends, so I didn't feel lost any more.

The young people in Russia at this time were wonderful. They came around me and we somehow, somehow, understood each other. I felt their urge to go out of the country; they were so closed in. The young people came all around, very discreetly, because they were not supposed to, you know; they wanted to know what is going on musically, what is going on in the world outside, and I made good friends and they liked my playing very much. It was a new approach for them with Bach.

This was the first appearance of a harpsichord in Russia. It might be that Landowska, on her visit to Tolstoy which she talks about in her book, had played a public concert, but it was never mentioned by her in her book or anywhere else. I know she visited Tolstoy and played for him. Poland and Russia were not on friendly terms, you know, so I don't know. But anyhow, for Russia, from my experience, it was the first time for harpsichord.

The reaction was very strange. The concert was a great success for the public, for whoever was there; but they were ordered to be safe. It was a great success with the musical people, but for days nothing appeared in the paper. My friend the Austrian ambassador was on very good terms [with the Russians]; he spoke Polish and Russian and French, and was a very cultured, broad-minded man.

Tusler: What was his name?

Ehlers: Otto Pohl. I said to him, "Isn't this strange?"

I saw him very often, and whenever I had difficulties I asked him for advice. For instance, one of the difficulties was that I couldn't read the card when I went in a restaurant--it was in Russian, so I always tipped it with my finger and it always came out the same thing. [laughter] For days I ate the same thing.

I said, "Otto, please." (No, I said not "Otto" at this time, but later when we became friends and he was not ambassador any more). I said, "Your Excellency, I eat every day the same thing; it's wonderful, because caviar I love, and I ate as much as I never could have in my life before afterwards, but something else!" So he explained to me a little bit what is wrong.

But no press, no write-up. I said, "Your Excellency, what's the matter? Why didn't I get a write-up? I had so much success, really an ovation."

He said, "I will tell you the story. After your concert there was a meeting of the critics and they all praised your playing, but you play music of Bach, and Bach was employed by an emperor, by Frederick the Great, and it doesn't fit in their philosophy at all." He was very much in knowledge there because he spoke fluent Russian and was on good terms with all those there. The famous education man at this time in Russia, Lunacharski, said, "Our colleague is right. We make ourselves ridiculous with not writing about it."

So it was really a great success. I was engaged by the government, but the government probably had a vital viewpoint and the critics were afraid they might overstep their line. Bach was, as you know, court harpsichordist with the Prince of Köthen at one time.

TAPE NUMBER: TWO, SIDE ONE

October 30, 1965

Russian Tour

Tusler: After that concert, did you play more in Russia?

Ehlers: Ja, I was in Leningrad, and gave concerts in Leningrad. There I met Otto Klemperer, whom I knew, naturally, from Europe. He conducted the Missa Solemnis, and I stayed. It was a great event, it always was when he conducted, but strange we should meet in Leningrad. Then I went back naturally to Germany, but it was a great experience.

Tusler: Was it difficult getting your harpsichord around in Russia?

Ehlers: No, not at all. Never in my life had I to worry so little--not at all, in Russia. Everything was organized, perfectly. The order came from up, not from me.

All the concerts at this time were government concerts. There was no agent involved. They approached my agent in Germany. This great agency (I don't know if it still exists), Wolff und Sachs was very famous. All the great artists were with Wolff und Sachs. They called me and said, "Russia wants you for concerts." So everything went through Wolff und Sachs. But in Russia it is the government who asks for the artists. Now it might be different; now they might have agents there, but at this time it was only the government who invited artists.

So this was my experience with Russia. On the way home, I stopped in Riga and gave a concert there. Where I landed I really don't know, but it was a very great experience. I remember I went straight from the Beethoven festival because I remember the excitement of my brother bringing me to the train, the last minute before going to Russia, and my excitement over having the harpsichord taken care of. But it was wonderful-- I had nothing to fear in Russia; everything was under government order. t

Tusler: How many other cities were you in?

Ehlers: Moscow, and Kharkov, a smaller town, but I can't remember anything about this.

Tusler: Were you impressed with the atmosphere of the country?

Ehlers: I really can't tell you, because with the barrier of language, you can't talk. I had a close contact with the young musicians; they all came around and wanted to hear what is going on in Europe. They were so closed in, and I felt a great longing, which they didn't express in words, to know and if possible to have contact and get out. It is all different now, but this was very early, if you can imagine. I was one of the first visitors, Klemperer and myself, and I don't know who else. How it ever came that they just wanted harpsichord, I don't know.

European Tours

What I did then after I came back from Russia, I have not the slightest idea. It was a great event in my life.

Tusler: You went from Russia back to Berlin.

Ehlers: Ja, I came home.

Tusler: You were in Russia alone? Your husband did not travel with you?

Ehlers: Alone. He never traveled with me for two reasons: I had the children at home, and even if I had somebody for them, it was not right to leave them alone; and it would cost too much money. I didn't travel and concertize just for pleasure. I wanted to bring some money home, too. So he never traveled [with me], or very seldom.

He came once [with me] to Vienna because it was my home town, and he wanted to see my family again. It was even, I think, my first concert in Vienna. I was so very nervous, more nervous I think than any other time.

Tusler: So many people knew you there.

Ehlers: Ja, and I grew up there, and Vienna was very snobbish in its taste, you know. I didn't know how they would react to the harpsichord.

Tusler: Was that the Beethoven Centennial, your first concert in Vienna?

Ehlers: The Beethoven Centennial was not any more the first. I was by then introduced. My first was a solo concert. Then the second concert was with Hindemith. This was the second concert in Vienna.

Tusler: How did you get to know Paul Hindemith?

Ehlers: I don't know really how I came to know him--not through his music, because I never understood it and never liked it.

He was generous and kind and never took it out on me that I had no relationship with and love for his music.

I think it started like this. Hindemith loved old music and understood old music better than anybody else I know, and he wanted to perform [it]. He wanted to perform it the way it should [be done], with a harpsichord. Being the only decent player in Berlin, he approached me. I never played Bach sonatas with him, as far as I know, but he came with some sonatas by Handel and Franz von Biber, who was a name for me at this time and nothing else. He fell in love with these sonatas, the Biblical Sonatas by Biber, and he wrote the figured bass to it, a wonderful figured bass. You would appreciate it if you saw the printed Biber sonatas, with an everyday figured bass, just the "right" harmonies, without any imagination. He said to me, "Would you play it with me?" Of course you can imagine how honored I felt.

We had a trio for a time, with him and his brother Rudolph Hindemith, who played the cello and the gamba. But this didn't hold very long because he and his brother didn't get on too well, so it was Paul and me.

We traveled quite a great deal. We played the Biber sonatas, for instance, in England at the BBC; we traveled to Italy, which was terrible, because Italian taste in music south of Rome at this time was terrible. They liked very light things. They could cry ten times, for ten times my playing, "Il Coucoulo, il coucoula, coucou," by [Louis] Daquin.

Finally Hindemith said, "If you play once more 'Il

Coucoulo,' I take the next train home." [laughter]

So I said, "Well, what should I do?"

He said, "Come out and smile and bow and go back, but don't play another 'Coucoulo.'"

You see, I didn't like it myself, but this was the Italian taste when you came south. Rome was strict, too strict, you know; to get a good criticism in Rome and Florence was something. Turin, Rome and Florence. Milano, too. They were strict. But when you went into the other places down south, it was as I said: the brilliant pieces, and "Il Coucoulo." I was always very nervous how it will end--that Paul will take his fiddle and return probably without me one day. But he didn't do it.

We traveled together. We played in Winterthur, which was a kind of a highbrow place. All the modern music. There was one man, I forget his name, a very wealthy man, who loved music and especially modern music. Almost all the modern people were first performed in Winterthur, which was not far from Zurich, but a smaller place. This one family, and especially the one man in this family, I forget the name of the family, carried the whole cultural interests of Winterthur, the musical interests. Almost all modern compositions were first performed in Winterthur. We played there. Then I was invited once to give a class in the interpretation of old music at the Zurich Conservatory. Traveling was so easy--the distances were not like in America, you know?

I remember one time, I don't know when it was, when we

had the first performance of The Musical Offering in Berlin. After the concert, I took the train to Zurich to play in the St. Matthew Passion under the conductor Volkmar André. I stayed with wonderful people who had an open house for all artists, so open that once we were together Richard Strauss, Alban Berg, and somebody else, three or four artists in their big house, open for artists.

I remember dear Alban Berg who was so naive and so sweet, said, "Alice, after dinner we go to Zurich, and you show me the night life." I had no idea!

Then I said to my friend afterwards, "Alban wanted me to go and show him the night life in Zurich."

She said, "There is no night life." [laughter] "Or I would have known of it." Such a lovely person. But here we met all in the same house, everybody having his guest room.

This was Europe at this time, you know? Families were happy. The lady of the house knew exactly [what to do]. She said, "One of the most difficult guests to have is Richard Strauss, but his wife sent me the menu, what he should and what he shouldn't eat." They had enough help at this time, especially the wealthy people.

Tusler: Did you know Richard Strauss well?

Ehlers: Not at all. I just met him in the same house: I know the lady of the house was concerned before he came, because he loved to play cards. I don't know the name of the game he played, but it needs so-and-so many people, I think four, and she only had three, from the orchestra; of course, they were

honored and couldn't say no.

The night before he came she was terribly upset.

I said, "What's the matter with you?"

She said, "Strauss is coming and I haven't got the fourth person to play cards with him, and this is unbearable."

You know, he came home one night and I met him in the corridor; I came home late, too. He had conducted Tristan.

He said to me, "Feel my shirt."

I was very astonished. I felt his shirt, as he wanted.

He said, "Is it dry or wet?"

I said, "Absolutely dry."

He said, "And this is after Tristan." [laughter]

He was one of those conductors who somehow managed not to sweat, you know? It was a wonderful performance, I am sure; I was not at the performance. But he was so proud of this. It showed in a way his mastery of the baton, that he could get the music, that he could get everything without being all disheveled.

This was very interesting, and this house was wonderful. When the old couple died, it was gone, you know? But they were open for all. Reiff was their name. Very wealthy people, with their wonderful house on the Zurich See, and we all knew this was our home. It was the same kind I had in Köln, where the mother-in-law of Feuermann had the open house for all of us. It was wonderful. There were few houses which could afford it, because it means you have to have enough servants, and some of the people were not modest enough--it was not

immodesty, but they had certain [requirements about] what they ate. This lady in Zurich, I remember, had absolutely written down what Richard Strauss ate, what he doesn't eat, what he shouldn't eat, and so on.

The same with this lady in Köln. I remember when I was once there she said to me, "Alice, would you give me your one cover--it is the one Furtwängler loves so much, and he comes tomorrow."

I said, "Take it, I don't care which cover I have."

But you know, it was so wonderful--we knew where we were at home when we traveled. Something maybe like it exists in America, but I don't know of it if it does. It's too large, the distances are too big. [In Europe], it was so one came almost every year to certain places. Probably it's not any more in Germany, I don't know, but it was a wonderful country at this time before Mr. Hitler came, for art and for everything.

So really, I have to be grateful for my past. The moment Landowska left the country, then there was for me the harpsichord, it was on me, which was in a way a very lucky incident. And so I had the chance to travel around.

Israel Tours

Tusler: When did you go to Israel, or to Palestine, as it was then?

Ehlers: If I would know the date I would be happy. This is one of the ~~great~~ shortcomings that I regret more now than ever, that I never kept a diary. But I was twice there. The first

time I was there Steinberg was the conductor, and he left when I came. And Hubermann was there. So through Steinberg, with whom I am on very friendly terms, I could find out [the date].

It was my first visit to then still Palestine, not Israel. I was not there since it's been Israel. I had great success, and the High Commissioner--you know, it was first under the protectorate of England--the High Commissioner was a great music lover, and he liked me very much, and he liked my playing very much. I think it was probably through his influence that I came a second time. He was a man of great culture, a military man.

Tusler: What was his name?

Ehlers: Arthur Wauchope. He was a very great lover of art and especially of music, a very sensitive personality. You wouldn't have expected it from a military man. Very often he wanted me to come up to his residence, which was on top of a mountain, to play for him and a few friends. He did this not only with me. Hubermann was there, the violinist, and he played also at the High Commissioner's residence.

It was through him that I never went back to Germany. He was the one who opened my eyes, because, you know, I had no idea what was going on. I was traveling, and I heard there was a Mr. Hitler, but so what? I thought, there are crazy people from time to time; what have I to do with it?

The first inkling came to me, as I think I started out telling you, when I was with Dr. Schweitzer and I got this contract. He tore it up and I said, "Doctor, why did you

tear it up?"

He said, "You wouldn't go there anyhow."

I didn't quite understand. He said, "Didn't you read what it says? 'What is your religion?'"

I said, "I wondered about that." This was the first contract I got where they asked for a religion.

He said, "Well, this should tell you enough."

I was very, I can't call it even naive, uninterested, outside of music, what went on in the world. I had the feeling this has nothing whatever to do with me. I realized later how much it had to do with me, breaking up homes, and so on. But at this time I didn't.

Well, anyhow, the High Commissioner was a military man, with great sensitivity and great love for arts, and quite an unusual man. In '35, Schweitzer came to England, and it was the High Commissioner's wish [to see him]. He telephoned me and said, "Do you think Dr. Schweitzer would receive me?"

This is one of the very few things in my life where I wrote something down when I came home. It is in German, so I will have to translate it.*

I took it down on October 28, 1935, just when I got back. I know I was deeply moved by the conversation, because the High Commissioner and Schweitzer were about the same age, and the simplicity and modesty of the High Commissioner was

*Mme. Ehlers is referring to the notes she made on the meeting between Dr. Albert Schweitzer and Sir Arthur Wauchope, at which she was present. Another translation is included in the appendix.

touching to me. He sat there like a little student who asked questions very modestly, and thank God, I had refused to translate because I knew my translation would not be adequate. Dr. Schweitzer had his translator to translate it into German, and a woman secretary who spoke English very well translated Sir Arthur Wauchope's questions to Schweitzer.

Now I will try from my sketches to give you some idea. Sir Arthur asked the doctor a question. First he asked, "May I ask a question?" or "Would it tire you?"

The doctor said, "No, it wouldn't tire me. Please ask whatever you think I can answer."

And so Sir Arthur started to ask questions, and the doctor answered so patiently, and so concentratedly--I was sitting there really breathing it into me.

Now this is one question of the High Commissioner. "Do you think mankind has developed in the sense of religion?" "Developed in the spirit," I should probably say, not "religion."

Schweitzer's answer was, "I think we have. We have tried to realize ethics in religion, because it is not enough to teach ethics--one has to live ethically. The basis of all great thinkers is the same. Love is the best"--how can you translate Vernunft? "intelligence," it's not quite right. "Love is the best Vernunft."

The High Commissioner: "Please don't be angry that I ask so many questions."

And Dr. Schweitzer's answer was: "When serious people meet in a limited time, it is the only right and natural thing

to do, that the one who has questions to ask [should] do so, if he has the belief the other person can answer."

The question was expressed by the High Commissioner, as much as I remember: "Have we progressed?"

Dr. Schweitzer's answer was: "We have progressed, but the last hundred years have thrown us back again. This is what I can't understand, that what we had once"-erkenntnis, "knowledge" is not the right word--"the wisdom which we had once gotten, that we again forget it and fall back again."

The High Commissioner: "What do you think of the North German religion which one tries to recreate in Germany?"

Schweitzer: "I don't know this religion, this is no religion." You know, Hitler tried to go back to the German religion, God knows from where.

Tusler: The Teutonic mythology.

Ehlers: Ja, ja. One remark of Sir Arthur moved me personally very much, because I know how much love and thinking he put into his time in Palestine to make peace between the Arabs and the Jews. He said to the doctor, "Palestine is full of hate; it needs love more than any other country. Where have I failed? Why could my tree of good will not flourish in Palestine?"

This touched me very much, because I know it was something which moved the High Commissioner deeply. It was his intention to bring peace. Schweitzer didn't know Palestine, and he couldn't answer the question. But he said, "I think my work in Lambaréné is much easier than yours, Sir Arthur, is in Palestine."

As we left, Sir Arthur asked me to translate his words to Schweitzer. He said, "Sometimes it takes a whole life to make friends between people, and sometimes it takes a minute."
[with strong emotion--pause]

The doctor asked me to thank Sir Arthur and tell him it was a great pleasure, a real pleasure to have met him and talked with him, and Sir Arthur asked me to thank the doctor and tell him how much it meant to him that the doctor spent some of his precious time to answer his questions.

This was a great moment in my life to see these men, the modesty and wisdom of Schweitzer, and the modesty also of the representative of the British King in Palestine. He had urged peace between these Arabs and Jews, and always this falling back, this hatred of the Arabs against the Jews. There were moments there when he sent me his adjutant and said, "Please don't leave the house, or don't go on a tour to the smaller places," the kibbutzim. I went around playing as much as I could. He never let me travel without a car behind me with some military people in it, not during the unrest.

Tusler: It was that unstable there at that time?

Ehlers: That unstable during my first visit in Palestine. The High Commissioner was very, as you see from this, concerned about it, always feeling that he had failed somewhere. It was wonderful to [see the] two men, almost the same age, and he, in this high position, he sat there like a student in his admiration before Schweitzer, who was such a simple and wonderful man. He was so impressed and admired the wisdom and goodness

of the man so much that he felt really like a student.

I felt very privileged to go there. I am glad even to this minute that I refused to translate. I said, "No, Sir Arthur, this must be translated well, your questions as well as Schweitzer's answers, not just approximate, coming close-- it should be correct. Please bring somebody along who knows [the languages] perfectly." Schweitzer's secretary knew German but not enough English, so he brought somebody who was in perfect command of German and English.

Association with Albert Schweitzer

And coming to Schweitzer--I want to stay a little bit on this, because this was one of the greatest events of my life, I must say, to have met him and been honored with his love, because I know he liked me very much. He was good to everyone, but he was especially good to me, like a father, strict and good. He came to Berlin. Berlin was still very poor, and he gave a lecture. He didn't ask entrance fees for this lecture because he felt nobody could afford it, which was not true because there were also then people with money, but it was his way of doing things. I was fascinated by the lecture and by him.

I was with a friend of mine and he said afterwards, "Now just don't tell me you're going to give [up] harpsichord and go to Lambaréné to Dr. Schweitzer."

I said, "This is just the way I felt. But I know I would be a miserable nurse, so I won't go--I'd better stick with the harpsichord." But this friend of mine who knew me very well

must have seen it from the expression on my face.

Dr. Schweitzer, in his very kind and human way, said, "I'm going to this-and-this coffee house afterwards. Whoever wants to meet me is welcome."

Now, he knew Germany was poor; most of the people couldn't afford to go to a better place. He chose the cheapest place in the neighborhood, a place you could walk to, where everybody could pay ten cents for a cup of coffee, because he wanted everybody who had the chance to come, not only those who could spend money. This was Dr. Schweitzer.

I was sitting there with this friend of mine, close so that I could see. Suddenly, one of the ladies who sat with him, whom I met later very often, his faithful, true secretary, Mme. Martin, came to my table and said, "Are you Alice Ehlers?"

I said, "Yes."

She said, "The doctor wants to meet you."

I fell nearly from my chair. I was young enough to be enthusiastic enough and devoted enough, so I went [over] there. He took out of his pocket a letter from one of his friends, and in this letter he read a passage. "There is a young woman here who seems to love Bach very much. In all her concerts she plays Bach, and she plays it on the instrument which Bach knew, the harpsichord." And his note on this letter: "Want to meet her when I next come to Berlin." So this was the reason he wanted to meet me. How she, Mrs. Martin, thought I was Alice Ehlers, I don't know. Maybe somebody told her. Then Dr. Schweitzer said to me, "I would like to hear you."

I said, "Do you mean what you say?"

~ And he said, "I always mean what I say."

Then I said, "I will bring the harpsichord wherever you stay."

He said, "Well, I stay with friends, but it is on the fourth floor."

I said, "This doesn't matter. I will bring the harpsichord to you, and I will also bring a young cellist with whom I work now, and we will play for you."

I remember what I played, still. I played the C Minor Fantasy by Bach. It is still a favorite piece of mine. (Here you have, not the first autograph, but Max Friedlaender had the autographed C Minor Fantasy, and just before his death he had it photographed for me.) Then I played a Bach gamba sonata with the cellist.

The doctor said, "You are on the right track. Keep going, and never forget that also keyboard music has to breathe. Keep this in your mind, and you can't fail. With this in your mind you will always get the right tempo, and this is the most important thing."

So this was our beginning. Then [later] in Frankfurt am Main [where he heard me play a concert], he invited me to visit him [at his home in Gunsbach], and I visited him. This was a wonderful time I had in Gunsbach, my first visit to him.

The next time I came Mr. Hitler was already in power, and he gave me the key to his house and said, "This is your home. You have no home now. I want you to have a home. When you leave England (you can't stay always there, [though]

these are friendly, wonderful people), if you don't know what to do with yourself, I must have the feeling in Africa that you have a home. Here is your home."

And I used it. I was very often there when nobody else was in the house, just myself. Next to his house--it's a little village, a very little village--was a carpenter's house. They had orders to look after me.

Then the blacksmith, with whom he was in school together, because he was educated in a little village school first, you know, had orders to see that I had vegetables and fruit. I had so much vegetables and fruit as I never had in my life before, because he brought me basketsful and put them before my door. Being a favorite of Schweitzer, this was enough, in this little village, for the people to look after me.

The blacksmith loved to have conversation with me. He said, "You know, one thing I will never understand in my life. I was with Albert in school, and he always said, 'Das Schule'" (you know, we in German have [the different] articles) "instead of 'Die Schule,' or he said, 'Die Haus' instead of 'Das Haus'. I always used the right article, and see what became of him and what became of me?" [laughter] He couldn't understand that Schweitzer was always using the wrong article and became such a great man, and he, always using the right article, became only a blacksmith. [laughter]

So I stayed for a month there, just before the big year for me, [1935.] Bach, Handel and Scarlatti, all three were born in 1685. The BBC in London was giving a big Scarlatti,

big Handel, big Bach festival. I played in all of them. I thought, there's no better place for me than to go to Gunsbach. No distraction, you know? No concert-going, no friends, all by myself, to make this enormous amount [of preparation]. I had never played all the suites by Handel before, because with all my admiration for him, I was never so much attracted to Handel. I had a number of Scarlatti sonatas in my fingers, but not fifty. And then I had to choose between them so that there was a certain variety. This kept me busy. I learned the music on the piano--I didn't take my harpsichord along to Gunsbach, but [used] Schweitzer's piano.

Every day the blacksmith as well as the carpenter next door looked after me. They had their orders from the doctor. One day came a letter. It said, "At cherry time, my dear, don't eat too much." It was too late, already. I ate too much, and I felt the results of my eating too much. This letter came two days too late, I told him later. [laughter]

Well, anyhow, it was a wonderful feeling to have a home there. When I was in Europe last time [elsewhere in the manuscript this date is given as 1959], '58. I was in England. I visited Schweitzer, and this was the last time I saw him. This was the last time he was in Germany. In his last letter to me before his death, he wrote, "I don't have any longing to go back to Europe, and I won't go any more." This was before he became sick, you know.

So I had a wonderful time preparing this enormous program in Gunsbach at this time. Sometimes friends of his came. The

brother of the conductor Munch was a close friend of mine, Fritz Münch. He was the head of the Strasbourg Conservatory for a long time before he retired, an organist, and a very intelligent and very attractive man. We were together at the Hochschule für Musik; I studied with Landowska and he studied cello with [Hugo] Becker. Already at this time we were very good friends. Then later, when I came over to Gunsbach, I spent time with him and his family in Strasbourg. He had a lovely wife and two daughters, and this poor man has gone through a terrible tragic event. During the last war, he came home and found his daughters and his wife dead on the floor, killed by a bomb. Since then he was not the same person any more. He kept his position at the conservatory.

I saw him in '58 the last time, and I had the feeling I wanted to bring him to life again. He was not any more alive, and the next year he retired to a very little village. I am very sorry, because he was a very fine spirit, not a great conductor, not a very outgoing person, but a very fine brain and a very great intellect. I loved him very much. We were very close. We are still in correspondence once a year.

Just a few days ago, when I went through all my unorderedly papers trying to check some dates, I found, for instance, that the first performance of the Art of the Fugue was in 1928. I found also some letters, and there was one from Münch, too. I took it out to write him again, because he is one of these people who lets himself go, disintegrate. But he was a very fine spirit. He came very often to Gunsbach when I was there

without Dr. Schweitzer, and I spent days in Strasbourg with him and his family and practiced, and we had a wonderful time together.

Even when Dr. Schweitzer was not there in person, his spirit somehow was around me and helped me in many ways. When I felt I should go away from England and be by myself, I had always a place to go which I could afford, because it didn't cost me anything. Food was nothing.

Tusler: You were actually there quite a few different times.

Ehlers: Oh, very often. I was there when he was there, and I was there when he was not there.

Tusler: Did you ever hear him play?

Ehlers: Yes, I did. About this I don't know quite how to express it, because I shouldn't judge a man who had a chance once in three years to touch an organ, you know? He had a kind of organ-piano with him [in Lambaréné] to keep the fingers going, but still, so little time to work with it. In his really good time, when he was still an active organist, I have never had the chance to hear him. I think it wouldn't be fair to judge his playing in a time when he was so much out of practice. I know his ideas and I know his approach, and I learned a great deal--I think in my approach to Bach I learned everything from him, not in detail, but the general idea.

But I know also that he was not always pleased with my playing. My tempi were almost always too fast for him, but I couldn't change it, I couldn't change. I can only play what I am convinced of, and compared with other people of today,

my tempi are slow. I think I come to the conclusion that it is a matter of generations. I think probably Schweitzer's playing would be much closer to Bach than my playing. With all my understanding and love of Bach's music, I don't have the illusion that Bach would say, "Yes, yes, this is what I demand." Because there is--I don't know what to call it, a natural phenomenon, that the feeling for time changes in a generation.

Tusler: The tempo of life itself changes.

Ehlers: This is it, the tempo of life changes, and this is not the only thing. I said the other day in my Bach class, "Imagine that it took Bach twenty-four hours to travel from Leipzig to Potsdam to play with Frederick the Great, which now takes by flight I think about thirty-five minutes." Then it is only natural to feel that we are geared to a different tempo.

Tusler: Another aspect of it might be that Schweitzer's instrument was the organ, where yours, of course was the harpsichord.

Ehlers: I don't think this matters so much. If it sounds right on the organ, it's right for the organ. If it sounds right on the harpsichord, it's right for the harpsichord. It's the right sound even if it's one metronome or two metronome beats faster because the sound quality's so different. You can't play a theme blindly with one metronome set, this is it. Even the metronome beat between piano and harpsichord is different, because the tone quality, the function of the single tone is different. The harpsichord tone goes away

very quickly; the piano tone has a wider--what do you call this?

Tusler: Staying power.

Ehlers: Ja. String instruments again are different. I think to put on an edition a metronome [marking is wrong], if it's not by the composer himself--then you can't help it, but even then it would be wrong. Also, I think even if it would be a hundred percent true on the same instrument, we couldn't take it any more. We live faster. Our whole existence is geared to another tempo. Subconsciously.

Tusler: I'm sure that's very true.

Ehlers: You know, for instance, all my students play too fast because they don't hear the intricate pattern and design. The moment they hear the design in Bach they can't play so fast, because they want to hear. But they don't know what to listen to. They are used to hearing a main theme and a second theme, but they are not used to hearing lines any more, lines which lead from one end to the other and still have their moments of relaxation and new impulses, too.

This is probably the point where I feel I am of great value to the keyboard student, because it [causes] troubles only with the keyboard. The violinist has to change bowing, and if he is a thinking and good violinist he will think. The cellist the same. The singer has to breathe. It's only the keyboard player who goes on and on and on. This is why Bach sounded in my youth, whenever I heard it, like a fast etude, whatever I heard. It was Schweitzer who opened my eyes

to phrasing, much more than Landowska. He overdid the phrasing probably, a little bit, and he had a different feeling for tempo. I don't know if it's the difference in our age or the difference in instruments, harpsichord and organ. I think it might be both.

I think that every age has a different imagination of tempo. I think if Bach heard me, he would be terribly upset. and I might think I had played well. I make him understood to our generation. They suddenly feel he is not a dead composer. I talk not about that genius or those very musical people who feel it, but about the general public [from whom] I have this reaction: "Oh, it's not boring at all when you play Bach!" I say, "Bach isn't boring." Yes, up to now I played it always very boring, because I played like an etude all those sixteenth-notes. If there is no breathing, if there is no phrasing longer or shorter, it doesn't live.

And this is what I am thanking Dr. Schweitzer [for teaching me]. He brought my attention to this phrasing. The tempo I couldn't quite agree with, even for his organ playing. I heard him once in Strasbourg, and I nearly cried. I was with my dear Fritz Münch, and he looked at me and said, "Don't be so sad." I didn't say even a word. Afterwards he said, "Don't forget, the man hasn't touched an organ for years." He had a little instrument in Africa, but he hadn't touched the [organ itself.]

Then again I heard him play for recordings in England, and I was there during the recording. It was all for me too

slow. But I see now that the feeling for tempo has also something to do with age. I think so. Maybe certain wonderful youthful people, like Rubinstein, for instance, don't show their age in playing, and I don't mean in facility but in tempo.

So I don't know. Was it with Schweitzer only his conviction, or was it also age? It was terrible, it was too slow for me.

Tusler: As you suggest, he simply wasn't in practice, he didn't have the technique.

Ehlers: But it was his conviction, too.

Tusler: Both.

Ehlers: Both. I know that everything I played for him was not right, and he liked my playing [as a whole]. When I played a concert in Edinburgh, I had great success and I felt it was good. Then I tore [myself] away and braced myself. It was so sad. Schweitzer stood next to me and made a movement with his head--he couldn't understand, he pitied me so much.

I said, "Doctor, how was it?"

"Much too fast."

Two days later, I played in Glasgow. He was there and gave a lecture, and he came to the concert. I played on purpose slowly, and I thought it was not good, and it wasn't good, because it wasn't natural. And he said, "Much too slow" to me. I never could play really to his liking, and he liked my playing, but in tempo we [disagreed]. I feel this as a matter of generation, somehow.

But anyhow, the value is that he put our attention on phrasing. I see it in my teaching. The students play brilliantly.

I don't remember that the average student in my generation had the kind of technique the students have today. Yesterday I had a boy playing the wonderful Partita Number Four, one of my favorite pieces with a heavy long [phrase], and nothing was planned. To take it apart and not discourage them is very difficult. Only their trust in my honesty and my love makes them see sometimes that I might be on the right track. In this is the great influence that Dr. Schweitzer had on me.

Tusler: Do you agree with his ideas on the musical symbolism in Bach?

Ehlers: Not at all. But I don't know that I am right. It is not in my way of thinking. The symbolism--I don't know how Schweitzer really came to it. I avoided it because I didn't like to contradict him, and we had already a few things [we disagreed about], for instance, about tempo. Especially when he was in the house when I practiced in Gunsbach. He came suddenly in in the midst of his work and said, "Much too fast." Then I tried it slower, and then he came in and said, "Much too slow."

But anyhow, he made me think, and the idea of the phrasing of the line came from him, from nobody else. Now, what I do with it, and what tempo I feel is right to do this, is my doing. But he opened my eyes much more than Mme. Landowska ever did. What I admired in her was her masterly, wonderfully lively playing. Nobody else since has had this command of the instrument. But she handled the music sometimes, and this I didn't like so much, and like today even less.

So you see, I was really blessed with two great influences: here the great virtuoso and the great player of the instrument, and here another man who came from another angle in every respect--as a person, as a thinker, as a player. I think all I can do is to try to make the best out of these influences and give them on to my students. This is one reason I love so much teaching. I don't know how much it will live in them. This I never know, you never know; but I have already proved with some of my students that the idea goes on.

But I come more and more to the conclusion that tempo [changes]. Yesterday this question came up in class. Somebody asked me, "Do you think they played at this tempo in Bach's time?"

And I said, "It's a guess, but I think not. Their life tempo was slower, and so I think their playing tempo must have been slower, too."

But as we have no records, it's all a guess. If Bach would live today (this is of course nonsense to say), if he would play it through, he would play it probably [faster]. Well, [but] he wouldn't play his music--he would compose something big and up-to-date, you know. This is a question which one can't answer. One has to follow his conviction, and as I was having results...and [by] these results I don't mean to impress, I mean to convince people to Bach who have never been convinced. My students say, "We thought we have to play Bach because he was a great composer, but we never knew there was so much in it," is their expression. "So much in it." So

I think sometimes I am on the right track.

Tusler: It has to feel right to you.

Ehlers: It has to feel right to me, ja. And I have to do [it] justice--with so many lines, how can I develop the feeling for the line if I race about? I can't understand great talent, so much greater talent than I am, for instance, Glenn Gould, who sometimes hits it so beautifully and then plays Bach so beautifully that you have no wish left, and then sometimes kills the whole piece by tempo which is out of the [style].

TAPE NUMBER: TWO, SIDE TWO

November 15, 1965

Harpsichords Owned by Mme. Ehlers

Tusler: Would you like to begin today by telling the story of how you got your second, and your present, Pleyel instrument?

Ehlers: This is quite a nice story. I think I mentioned before that I always depended on an old friend of mine who was a lover of harpsichord and built harpsichords, Mr. [Johann George] Stengräber in Berlin, [to let me use his instrument.] Originally, his firm I think made pianos, but he as a young man became interested in the harpsichord and started building. He had the means to do it, and a little workshop and one workman helping him, and the instrument he had in his house was a beautiful-sounding instrument. For years before I could afford to have my own harpsichord, I practiced and worked for hours in his house on his instrument. It was not a big-sounding but a very melodious instrument. He was against metal frames because the original old instruments did not have metal frames, they were all wood; and as you know, wood vibrates entirely differently, and much more than metal frames. After all my experiences traveling, I thank God that Pleyel built mine with a metal frame. It holds the sounding board together, and being exposed to the different climates, as my had to be, and going as I did from Italy to Russia and from Russia to God knows where, it was a blessing I had the metal frame.

But Mr. Steingräber, who was very orthodox if I may say so, kept to the measurements, design, and idea of the original instrument, and refused to do anything with a metal frame. His instrument sounded beautiful, especially in a room. As I never listened when I played, I can't tell you how it sounded in a hall, but it mixed with strings beautifully. As long as I couldn't afford one (by the way, I never could afford the harpsichord), but before I got my harpsichord, I was almost every day in his house and worked on his harpsichord. So now I forgot what you really asked me?

Tusler: How you got your present instrument.

Ehlers: Oh. When I traveled, things were different. I had nobody to lend me a harpsichord, and I played on a very old Pleyel. Did I tell you the story about this old Pleyel that came to me?

Tusler: Yes, the one that you found in the basement of the Vienna Opera.

Ehlers: I didn't find it, actually, but my friend, who was a member of the Vienna Philharmonic and later on with the famous Rosé Quartet, did. They told me when I once was so desperate because I couldn't find a harpsichord which I could afford, "Well, we have one standing in the cellar of the Opera House and nobody looks after it. I'm sure you could buy it very cheaply." And so I did.

Then I found out the story of this harpsichord. Gustav Mahler learned that Mozart accompanied the recitatives in his operas himself sitting at the harpsichord, and to be true to

the work, Mahler ordered from Pleyel a harpsichord. When it arrived he hated it, because he had never heard one and he was not used to the plucked, thin tone which never would carry through the Opera House in Vienna. So he said, "I never want to see this instrument again," and down it went to the cellar. And there it was standing.

But for me it was a God-sent thing when one of the members of the Rosé Quartet told me, "Alice, there is one, and I'm sure you can have it cheap." I don't know how much I paid for it--I could afford it, so it must have been cheap, and I bought it. But I can only say it sounded sour. It was a harpsichord, but nothing that you fell in love with.

Now, this instrument which I have now, I fell in love with, I love it, and I love it every year more, the nuances of tone and everything. But anyhow, I was grateful I had the one which I could afford, and I traveled with this [first] one.

Tusler: How big was it?

Ehlers: It was almost as big as [my present one]. It was not the size which made it [good or bad.] I don't know, I don't understand anything about measurements and designs. It was not a real good-sounding one. I sold it later to one of my students, and she [sold it] when she could afford a new Pleyel.

You see, Pleyel made progress. When he started out the instruments were crude, and he had to get experience. He got experience through Mme. Landowska who played his instrument and told him probably this should be changed, and this should

be done this way. So I got one of the very first ones, and, as I told you, sold it then to my student. Where it is now I don't know, but at the time when I got it nobody had a comparison because the harpsichord was hardly heard.

Tusler: Of course, Pleyel had been manufacturing pianos for centuries.

Ehlers: Pianos, mostly. It was Landowska and her husband who gave the owner of Pleyel the idea to build harpsichords, because she wanted to play the harpsichord. It was her idea to be a pianist, as her husband told me once; but he was very down-to-earth, and having all the great pianists around who of course covered the Romantic-Classic period, he said, "It doesn't make sense with your love for old music that you concentrate on the piano. Play it on the side, but your maininstrument should be the harpsichord." And it was a wise idea, which she followed. By the way, I haven't heard anybody ever play Mozart more beautifully than Landowska on the piano. Beautiful Mozart.

Tusler: Did she ever play Mozart on the harpsichord?

Ehlers: She might have done one or another piece, the March alla Turca from the A Major Sonata, but on the whole, I can't remember ever hearing her play (with the exception of this March alla Turca, which is really meant for the harpsichord with its sonorities), anything else by Mozart [on the harpsichord].

I loved her Mozart playing and so did a few of my friends, but the public in general were criticizing her Mozart playing, because they were used to the thick, juicy piano tone. She

She tried to produce on the piano a more harpsichord-like tone, the clarity, you know? I loved her Mozart, really, and I didn't find among the pianists any one whom I preferred. I heard in Amsterdam in two evenings, so there really was the chance to compare, [Walter] Gieseeking play a Mozart concerto, and the next, Landowska. Landowska's had so much spirit and pace on the piano.

But nothing else [of hers] was good on the piano, you know? If she had played Brahms...but she didn't. She was wise enough [not to.] Even her Chopin, whom she adored, being a Polish woman, and whom I adore, too, was not as [good because of] the piano. Here the harpsichord touch interfered; but not in a Mozart sonata, not in a Mozart concerto. The clarity came out without being dry and so on. But the public didn't react like I did. They were used to the juicier Mozart that they always prized, and were bothered that the typical piano tone didn't come out. This is my thesis: typical piano tone is not the most becoming one for Mozart, you see? Pattern of design and sparkle--this is it, and she brought it to it.

So first I traveled with this very poor instrument, which I don't know how I could have done. As I say, it had a sour tone. Still, people weren't used to harpsichords, and the whole tone production was so new to them, the plucked tone, that I got away with it. But I felt this was not for the future. I had to get a bigger instrument, and my student was ready to buy it as soon as I got a new one. But I had no money.

In between, Pleyel got more and more expensive, and I

couldn't see my way to ever getting a harpsichord of the quality I wanted. I had a very dear friend, a very wealthy lady, who sang. She sang for her own pleasure, and I accompanied her to earn money; it was good for me musically, too. I found out later in my teaching days that hardly any of my students can accompany. They are not used to listening to and going with somebody. So I am very glad I had this experience. On top of it, this old lady became a very dear friend of mine.

Tusler: What was her name?

Ehlers: Levisons. She grew older and older and her voice crackier and crackier, but she sang with great enthusiasm and she knew what was right. She liked me very much.

One day I came to her and said, "I have to have a new harpsichord. Would you ever help me with it, and I will pay it back?" I accompanied her always three times a week, and I thought if she didn't pay me gradually I would pay it back.

When I was touring, I think it was in Turin where I stayed for a few weeks and with my little broken Italian gave a class in the Conservatory about the performance practices of eighteenth century music, there was a representative of Pleyel, Chiapert.

The young Chiapert said to me, "Listen, you have an instrument which is no good, and you are a good artist--you should have a better instrument."

I said, "I know, but I can't think how."

He said, "I am going in a few weeks to Paris--I'll look out for what I can find." They were the representatives in Italy for pianos by Pleyel, so they had good contact with

Pleyel.

I will never forget (it was in Florence on tour; we had our headquarters in Florence and visited all the smaller places around) that one day a telegram came, "Found wonderful Pleyel. Just right for you."

And I, without thinking where the money would come from, cabled back, "Buy it." After the telegram was gone, I said, "Oh, God, what did I do? What did I do? I said, 'Buy it,' but I have no money." I was desperate.

My friends came home, the singers with whom I [was touring] with and said, "Alice, what's the matter with you?"

I said, "Imagine what I did today. I cabled 'buy,' and now where does the money come?"

They suggested I should write Mrs. Levisons, which I did, and she graciously said, "Good, and you will give me back as much money as you can." This is how it happened.

Then one day the harpsichord arrived. It was a great day for me, as you can imagine. I was still in Italy. They sent it from Paris to Florence. I was on a long tour, and Florence was just headquarters. There were so many small towns which wanted concerts. We had to have somewhere our headquarters. Also, one of the singers was educated in Florence. She knew people there, and had many friends, and had her voice lessons there, and the most wonderful place on earth to ~~say~~ is Florence, you know? We lived in an old palazzo; the count [needed] money and he had to rent half of the palazzo. So the upper part of the palazzo in San Domenico was where we stayed.

Beautiful, just beautiful. It was one of the happiest times of my life, I must say.

And so the harpsichord arrived. I was very excited, you can imagine, when it was unpacked. I started playing and not much tone came out, so I was desperate. I thought, "Now I've bought something, gone into debt, and it doesn't sound."

But one of the sisters was a good technician. She looked into it (I am absolutely puzzled when it comes to those things), and she said, "Alice, I think there is nothing wrong--I just think the registers don't move in enough."

You know, the different registers have to be put in by the pedals or by handstops, and they have to move in a certain [distance] so that the plectrum can pluck the string; if there is too much plectrum on one or the other side, they can't move in enough. So I had to cut off a little bit so that it moved in better.

So she did it. My heart was throbbing, but she did it with great courage--I would never had dared to do it. And suddenly it started to sound.

After this was settled I sat down and thought, "Now, how am I going to pay, how on earth?" But I was able to pay for a time, as I promised to pay every month. Then suddenly my faithful [old friend] came to me and said, "Forget about it. I will forget about the rest due." It was really marvelous. So I [paid] more than half of the price, and she gave me the rest.

And this is how I got my beloved old instrument. I must

must say it has really traveled all the time. It has had its ups and downs, sometimes, and naturally you have to look after it, but not more than you have to do with any instrument. Still it's one of the most lovely instruments I have ever heard. It has a sonorous tone. Did you ever hear it?

Tusler: Yes, I heard you play it at USC when you played the four harpsichord concerti [of Bach].

Ehlers: Ja, ja. You heard me in the solo concerto, too.

Tusler: Yes.

Ehlers: And it carried.

Tusler: I thought it was beautiful.

Ehlers: It has a round tone. Some instruments have a sour tone. You know, it is like this with every instrument. Not two instruments turn out the same, even with the same maker. It's true with violins, with pianos, with every instrument. It's natural. Wood itself has to do with it. And I love the instrument, which I hope I have never to part with as long as I play.

Tusler: Does it look now just as it did when you bought it?

Ehlers: No, it was real mahogany [the natural wood]. There's a critic near Carmel who can't get over that it's [now] green with red inside. I don't know if she hates it or likes it, but in every write-up, it's, "There was Alice Ehlers with her green instrument and the red inside." [laughter] She must hate that; I don't know if I ever would dare to ask her.

I'll tell you how it became this way. I don't know even if it was a good idea. The green outside was my husband's

idea. The red inside was my idea, and this came [about this way].

Curt Sachs gave a kind of party for different people when he was professor at the Hochschule für Musik, to introduce his collection of old instruments. Curt Sachs was of course [in charge of] the old instrument collection.

Tusler: He was the curator?

Ehlers: Ja. It was under his supervision. He had the chance to bring Bach's own harpsichord from Köthen for this occasion to Berlin. I don't know if it was really bought for this collection or just for the occasion. Anyhow, he gave me the honor to invite me to play it, and all the diplomatic corps was invited. I don't know if they enjoyed it, I doubt it; but anyhow it was a great affair and I felt very honored that I was allowed to play.

I made Sachs very, very impatient. He was the most patient and sweetest person you can imagine, but I was able to make him impatient. I got, suddenly, when I should put my fingers on Bach's instrument... such, I can't tell you what. I couldn't put my fingers, my hands [on it]. Suddenly the idea that great Bach had played this instrument, and now me, Alice Ehlers, should put my hands on it--can you understand?

Tusler: It was too much, you were overwhelmed.

Ehlers: It was too much, ja. He said, "Start, start."

He thought I had forgotten. So I played.

When I came home I said to my husband, "I want a red inside like Bach's instrument."

Then he said, "If it's red inside, you can't keep the mahogany outside because mahogany is a reddish-brown, and one would kill the other." He was a sculptor and painter and had much more taste than I had.

So he painted it green, and I have nothing against it. Only this one critic near Carmel. Before she starts talking about me, she says, "Alice Ehlers with her green harpsichord." [laughter] So it became green outside, but it was really, like all the instruments, mahogany.

Tusler: Is that one of the best woods to use?

Ehlers: Seemingly. I don't understand anything about it.

But I know Landowska's was mahogany--all the Pleyels are mahogany, and it is probably; it is mahogany below.

Tusler: It's a marvelous color combination, very rich and baroque.

Ehlers: I like it. My husband was a painter, of course.

He loved this color scheme. I don't know how it looks on the stage.

Tusler: Beautiful.

Ehlers: I love the red. But the red inside came, as I told you, because Bach's was red inside. And so he said, naturally, red and mahogany don't go together. So he put the green outside and I don't mind at all.

Tusler: It's not a hard bright red or a hard bright green. They're soft and antique.

Ehlers: No, they're wonderful together. But anyhow, I am used to it, and it's only this one critic in Carmel who

can't get used to it and always mentions this especially.

But I paid for a time [on my harpsichord] and then my old dear lady said, "Now it's enough. I saw you were trying." So half of the instrument I'm sure she gave to me.

Tusler: What kind of an instrument was the instrument of Bach's that was brought from K \ddot{o} then?

Ehlers: His own. I don't know the names of this time. Everybody built. You see, now we are conscious of this; but at that time it was the instrument of the time, and as today everybody builds pianos, every firm at that time who built instruments built clavichords and harpsichords.

Tusler: How old is your Pleyel? Do you know the story of it?

Ehlers: Well, I really don't know. My memory is very bad. When I came back from Italy, it must have been around '28.

Tusler: That's when it was built, you mean.

Ehlers: Ja. It was just new.

Tusler: It was a modern instrument, then.

Ehlers: It was a modern instrument. The man who was a representative of Pleyel in Italy sent me the telegram, "I'm in Paris, found a wonderful instrument, should I buy?" This was, in Florence, I think it was in '27 or '28. There it arrived, in Florence.

Tusler: Had it been built, do you know, just to be sold?

Ehlers: Oh, only to be sold. Pleyel is like...what do we have in America? Steinway. Pleyel sells piano and sells harpsichords, but pianos naturally much more. That he has harpsichords he owes to Mme. Landowska, because she, and

especially her husband, helped reproduce after old instruments and old designs the modern instrument. Some people, who naturally are very scholarly, say this didn't exist in the old harpsichord and that didn't exist; but I don't care if they alter them today, because we [don't play] in small rooms any more, as Bach did, so the whole sonority has to increase. Probably this demands a different kind of construction.

I just heard from my former student who is coming this week [to USC] for his doctorate, John Hamilton, that they have bought a new harpsichord [at the University of Oregon], and he wrote in his enthusiastic way, "You have to come up as soon as you can. It has the most wonderful tone, the closest to the quality of the antique instrument as possible, but even richer."

Tusler: What brand is that?

Ehlers: Dowd, I think. I think Dowd is English. In England they are very conservative. All these excellent players like Thurston Dart, they wouldn't touch a Pleyel.

Tusler: Why not?

Ehlers: They want to be authentic. They have arranged it to be as close as possible to the old instrument, and probably most of the music they play is English virginal music--it's better for them to, I don't know. But I am not so--what should I say, "historical." I know what was, but I am not so history conscious; maybe I should be, but I think what I want is to attract people, not [just] to have a full house, but to attract them so that they start to listen and start to appreciate

the music, not only the instrument, but the music. I have the satisfaction [of hearing] people who always said, "Oh, Bach-- I am so bored with Bach," say when they hear Bach played on this instrument, "I didn't know it could be so exciting." Of course, something has to do with the playing, too, but part is also the instrument.

Why the dead-sounding, original-sounding instrument? They always forget that the situation had to change--we don't play in small rooms now any more; we have to play in big halls. The smallest hall, like Hancock [at USC], is just right, but often we have even to play in bigger halls.

Last week, for instance, when I played with a former student of mine who has an orchestra here in one of the colleges I had to play in the gymnasium. They didn't have a concert hall and they didn't have a large enough room because there were very many people. We used very little amplification, hardly any, and everybody told me (I had my students sitting around in different places because I was interested), "It carried wonderfully." Of course, you reduce the orchestra, naturally, which you have to do anyhow, and he has a great sense of style. He studied for years with me, Dr. Hans Lampl, and is now teaching himself; I was sure he would do the right thing. Everybody in the audience told me it was very well heard. This is what counts.

Now, also, our ears listen differently. We are not used to listening to fine sounds any more, and as it is, but it is the truth.

Tusler: Yes, we're used to the big sonorities.

Ehlers: Ja, and if I give a concert, I want to reach the people. I want the satisfaction that they should go out and say, "Well, I never knew Bach could be so exciting or so interesting."

Tusler: And why not incorporate all the new things? It seems logical.

Ehlers: The ideal would be to give concerts in a small room, really, if you want to reproduce the exact tone.

Tusler: But we don't do that with the piano. The early pianos on which Mozart played--they play Mozart now on a modern instrument.

Ehlers: Quite right, quite right. We do it sometimes as a [curiosity], let the people hear the historic [sound]. But I don't want to look at Bach historically. For me he is as alive today as he probably was in his time, even more so. So I don't care [if I am] not historical with my instrument, as long as I bring Bach to life and have the satisfaction that people go out and say, "I never knew Bach was so exciting."

Tusler: Did you naturally turn to a Pleyel because that was Mme. Landowska's instrument, or had you ever considered another type of instrument?

Ehlers: What happens now didn't happen in my time. There was hardly any [other harpsichord] firm. There was one firm in Germany, Neupert, which produced instruments, but at this time they were in my judgment not sounding enough. I didn't like the sound very much. There was my old friend Steingraber from

an old piano factory family; generations of his family had produced pianos, and he loved the harpsichord. But he wanted to keep to the old version to be close to [the original], and his instrument sounded beautiful in a small room. It was all wood, no metal frame. But traveling [as I have] with an instrument with a metal frame from one climate to the other [was bad enough]; you can imagine what would happen with a wooden frame, expanding and contracting. Maybe the sounding board would have gotten a crack, and all kinds of things. I played very much on Steingraber's instrument before I had my own, and it sounded beautiful in a small room, and it sounded beautiful with string instruments. He was a sweet old gentleman who didn't understand anything about music, but all about tone. Of course the sound of a Steingraber was beautiful. I think one is in the Munich museum. Munich has a museum of old instruments, and he gave one as a present.

To travel with this instrument would have been impossible. I played before I had my Pleyel always on Steingraber's, and this good old man traveled along with me because he didn't allow anybody to touch his instrument. For instance, when we did the Art of the Fugue in Düsseldorf, I remember. He always traveled with me, and I was happy because I had no responsibility; he tuned, he put it in order, and I just sat down and played.

Tusler: After that you had to arrange for your own tuning and maintenance work?

Ehlers: Oh, every time I had to teach the tuner. Sometimes

very unpleasant, very touching things happened. One place sent me their best tuner, and he was blind. You know, blind people are sometimes the best tuners, because every faculty of theirs is concentrated in the ear; but with the harpsichord you must see--if he touched a wrong thing, a string [might] break. My heart really broke when I had to tell him, when I explained the instrument was so delicate and so difficult and had so many screws. I was hurt for him. But you have to know what you are doing.

Tusler: You never attempted to keep it in tune yourself or do the maintenance work.

Ehlers: I am absolutely unable to. I have no talent whatsoever for mechanical things. I wonder that my good instrument is as good as it is. I know his sicknesses are mostly the same kind of sicknesses, and it has to be attended to. I have a good man now who is a harpsichord builder himself, Bjarne B. Dahl. He has another profession but harpsichord is really his love; I think he does his other profession in order to allow himself to retire and build harpsichords.

There's a man now in England, whom I met on my first Palestine tour, it must have been in '32, I think; he at this time was a flutist in the Israel orchestra. I arrived when Hubermann left and Steinberg left. When I arrived there, this flutist became very interested in my harpsichord and took measurements of my instrument and all kinds of details. When I was a few years ago in London, I found out that he gave up his flute playing and is building harpsichords. I played one

of his harpsichords last spring in Stanford--quite a good instrument. It's almost a copy of Pleyel, not quite; a few things are rearranged. Partly it was his conviction it should be different, partly he is not allowed to copy absolutely. But he took a few good things, and it's quite a good instrument.

Tusler: What is his name?

Ehlers: [William] de Blaise.

Tusler: And he came into this through his contact with you, when he saw your instrument.

Ehlers: Ja, ja. When I was in Israel and I played, he was very interested and fascinated by the tone. So he took this up, I don't know how successfully, but they are good instruments and I would recommend them everywhere really. Very good instruments.

Tusler: Of course, nowadays, as you were saying, there are so many different harpsichord builders.

Ehlers: But you know the taste in instruments is different, too. I like a brilliant tone, and still a singing tone, and some are more orthodox in their likeing. Also, I think in a way I am very realistic. The concert is a relatively new invention. I play in big halls and I want to be heard. Now, I'm sure this Dowd is beautiful in a small room, full of sonorities. I have another student I promised to visit and give a lesson on her instrument. She brought one from Germany, and told me her eight-foot sounds almost like a sixteen-foot, so rich.

Tusler: Malcolm Hamilton's harpsichord is what kind?

Ehlers: Wittmeyer. It doesn't carry in a big hall.

Tusler: It doesn't have as brilliant a sound as yours.

Ehlers: No, no. But it's wonderful for records, ideal for records. Clear and not brittle.

Tusler: But he has this problem, then, about where he can play it, in how large an auditorium.

Ehlers: It wouldn't carry in a large hall.

Israel Tours

Tusler: Just a moment ago you mentioned being in Palestine for the first time. You were there twice. How did it happen that you went the first time? Did they invite you to come?

Ehlers: Ja, ja. You couldn't go otherwise. I mean, they had to invite me, and what a risk it would have been to go there, the expense, imagine, without knowing what will happen to you. I had so-and-so many concerts guaranteed, and of course I played a great deal without being paid. They have these little kibbutzim. You must for a moment think back. The young people who came to Israel tried to make this country lucrative. They had to make their living and they made their living, and they made their living on the land. People who had never thought to work with the soil had little kibbutzim and an establishment they had to work, you know? The big town was Jerusalem, and the other town Tel Aviv. These were the two cultural centers. But all the young people lived on these kibbutzim where they had to work with animals and with the soil to make their living if they didn't have a special profession.

I really don't know how it came that I was invited, but the first time I came these concerts were arranged between my agency in Berlin and someone in Israel. This was an expensive journey, for me and the instrument [to go] there. But it was a great success, and then they asked me back, I think one or two years later. Hubermann, the great violinist, was the first, and Steinberg. Steinberg conducted the orchestra; Hubermann was the first violin soloist. Steinberg built, really, the Palestine orchestra, which I have heard is now excellent; they draw every visiting conductor. But at this time it was nothing, only with all the emigrated [musicians] from Europe who came there, first-class musicians and players. When I came, many were already emigrated there and many visiting people came to help. Hubermann was the one who helped to build the Palestine orchestra. He played for it, he made money for it, he gave money for it. It was the only place [many] could go, because England was very strict; you could come probably into the land, but you were not allowed to play and not allowed to teach. For every concert I gave I had to have a permit. For every lesson I gave, I had to ask for a permit. It's a small country, and they had to protect their own musicians. They were very-generous to me. I played more at the BBC than I did after I left England anywhere.

In 1935 [I played for the] two-hundred-fiftieth [anniversary of Bach, Handel and Scarlatti] I don't know how many Scarlatti sonatas, and almost all Bach and all Handel. I am glad I played Handel because I never took to Handel, I don't know

why. I try again, now. Probably Bach filled up my mind so much and my heart so much that not much was left for poor Handel. But at this time I just had to practice Handel, and I experienced something which I almost shouldn't mention on the tape, but I still mention it. I got a little bit bored afterward, playing one suite after another by Handel, [but I] never get bored when I play Bach. Either it's me or the music, I don't know.

Tusler: How long did you stay in Palestine the first time you were there?

Ehlers: Not long; just my tour and a few weeks longer. Probably two or three months. I took it easy the first time because I loved to be there, and the second time I think I was there [for a shorter time].

Tusler: That was about a year later?

Ehlers: Two years later, I think. I regret now very much that I never kept a diary, really, because I'm sure numerous things have slipped my mind. I am a person who lives very intense for the moment, you know? I think, "I will never forget this," but of course I forget.

Tusler: Did you meet Steinberg then in Israel for the first time?

Ehlers: Oh, no, I knew Steinberg from Europe, and in Palestine we met more often. No, he left when I came to [Palestine]. I knew his wife in Frankfurt am Main, and we became close friends through a very funny happening. They wanted to spend a summer in California. My daughter had a very wonderful house

in Palos Verdes and she wanted to spend the summer with her husband in Europe. I was all alone in this big house, and so the Steinbergs moved in and we had a very good time together. I kept out of his way because he was studying and conducting concerts in the [Hollywood] Bowl, but I was a great deal together with Lotti Steinberg whom I knew from Frankfurt am Main in Europe.

Tusler: Was she a musician also?

Ehlers: No, no. She loved music and knew a little bit about it, but she was a wonderful wife for him, wonderful housewife, what a conductor needs.

In Israel, I hardly met him. I never played under him there because he just left when I came.

Tusler: I see. Who was the conductor then when you were in Israel?

Ehlers: I have no idea. I don't even know if they had a steady conductor. There were only two places to play: Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. I know they had many guest conductors, but who became their steady conductor I don't know. I know they built a conservatory with very good teachers. All the good people, or many of the good people from Europe, went there. I'm sure it has built up enormously since then; I was there at the beginning, when just the first rush of the Europeans came over.

Tusler: But you didn't take your harpsichord around to these kibbutzim?

Ehlers: No. I only played in Tel Aviv and I played in Jerusalem quite a few times. I played, as I mentioned, privately for the

High Commissioner, and I played public concerts a great deal. Ja, I was in one or two kibbutzim. I remember that I was rejected in one, not for my playing, but because I couldn't talk in Hebrew. I was so astonished that I wasn't nicely received because I was used to a warm reception. Then a man, the manager of this kibbutz went on the stage and said something in Hebrew which I didn't understand. He said to me, "Explain to them that you are [going to have some trouble], and they can't expect a person coming from Europe, speaking German and English and probably French, to suddenly talk in Hebrew to them." So I explained to him the harpsichord, and he explained in Hebrew. What he said, I don't know. But this was the only time when there was a little...

Tusler: Coolness?

Ehlers: The young people [seemed] dejected, that I couldn't speak the language, you know? Otherwise, I was very, very warmly received there, especially through the High Commissioner who was very fond of the harpsichord as an instrument. A highly cultured person. At his home I gave quite a few concerts with other artists together. I think with Hubermann I played, and alone. As I said, I regret that I never kept a diary, always thinking, "I will remember this."

Tusler: This was the same Hubermann whom you had heard as a young child in Vienna.

Ehlers: As a child, quite right, and whom my father adored. For him, he was the greatest violinist; he loved his tone quality. When I later met Hubermann I told him the story,

my father and all. He went only for concerts [to Palestine]. I think Hubermann then had his headquarters in London, too, because I met him there; he was still traveling to France but never to Germany again or never to Austria. No, he bought a house in Switzerland and retired there; from Switzerland he traveled. Ja, I remember this.

Tusler: The second time that you were in Palestine, it was right about the time when the Nazis were assuming power in Germany, and you told me before that Sir Arthur warned you against going back to Germany.

Ehlers: Ja, I owe it really to him that I didn't go [back], to him and to the German consul. The German consul couldn't expose himself too much, as you can imagine; but his tale about the wolf and the fox gave me [insight]. (The story was that the wolf invited the fox, but there was only one entrance and the fox hesitated and became doubtful and did not go in, because there was no exit.) For once I understood what he meant, and so I never went back.

This is the reason that I lost so many things. My poor husband, who was not in any danger because he was not Jewish, but who felt so disgusted with the whole idea, didn't know what was of value to me, and all my music [was lost]. He was very fond of our library; we had probably a whole wall full of books. This was first on his mind, and his sculpture. This is why I lost so many things, all my music. I had to buy everything new, and I had some very beautiful old manuscripts. Everything. I can't even remember what there

was, because I wasn't there.

Tusler: Then it was a rather sudden decision on your part to not go back to Germany from Palestine?

Ehlers: Very sudden. I thought people were exaggerating as they always do, and that there were a few crazy people, but there are always a few crazy people. Just through Sir Arthur and through this nice story the consul told me I was aware it would be foolish.

Vienna, England and Scotland

I went to Vienna, where my brother still was. He left a few weeks later because Vienna became [impossible].

Hindemith always said that. I remember Hindemith telling me, when he came to America and showed me his new book on harmony, "You can't come back."

I said, "Well, I'm not going back to Germany, but I can go back to Vienna."

And he said, "Austria will be even worse." And he was absolutely right. Hindemith hated this whole thing, which I did, too. He moved out, and he had no reason to move out -- maybe a very, very far reason because his wife, I think the father of his wife, was Jewish, though I'm not even sure about it; but it was in his nature to hate this whole idea, you know.

Tusler: So you went to Vienna, but you didn't actually stay there; you just visited.

Ehlers: I just decided what I should do. I had concertized

in England before and I knew people; they were gracious and kind, but I didn't know anybody intimately.

Then I heard about a great comité in England helping the Jewish refugees. I write to them. The secretary I think I knew before. I said, "What do you think--should I come?"

And she said, "There's a wonderful family [the Solomons] here who have offered their home, and I think you would be the person to fit in."

This is how I came over there. I was invited for two weeks, and when the two weeks were over my friend, because she became my dear friend, said, "Just tell me which room you want to have, and stay with us--you are one of the family." I spent all the time there, five years, till I came to America.

Tusler: That was right in London, I suppose.

Ehlers: In London, ~~ja~~. But they had the means, you know, a very large house. My harpsichord was an asset to their music room, and the children were all growing and having music lessons--none was very musical, but they had a certain respect for art and music. It was a very wonderful time for me to be there, under the circumstances, really.

Tusler: You had a friendship, a connection with Sir Hugh Allen, you said.

Ehlers: Well, a friendship is too much, but he was a most important person there. He had the "yes" or "no" for all of us musicians. You know, they were very rigid in one way: you were not allowed to teach to earn money in England and you were not allowed to play without a certain permit, so whatever

I did I had to ask for a permit. The person to give it was Hugh Allen, the head of the Royal College. (I could find the house if it's not bombed--I think it's still there.)

I was lucky--he liked me and he liked my playing. He said, "The least you should do is give a concert for the Royal College." So I gave a concert and I played well. He came on the stage (he was a huge man), took me in his arms and kissed me before the public, and said, "Thank you. You gave me a great lesson."

So I had a really easy time with him. Whenever I came and said, "Sir Hugh, I have an engagement to play in Birmingham," he'd just say, "Go," or if I said, "This student wants to have a lesson, may I?" They had a wonderful system, they were informed about everything. I wouldn't have dared to give a lesson or a concert without a permit. But I had no difficulty, and I think they were very generous, considering the smallness of the country and [the number of] their own musicians in the country.

Tusler: You really went all over the British Isles, didn't you?

Ehlers: Ja.

Tusler: You were in Scotland.

Ehlers; I was in Scotland, too, ja, in spite of the freezing in certain places. Scotland was so cold, you know? I dressed before the fireplace. To have the courage to put a concert dress on, I had to be almost in the fire. Either they don't feel the cold any more or they endure it.

Tusler: Where were you staying there?

Ehlers: In Edinburgh I stayed with friends of the singers I mentioned [the Amstads]. He was the head of some regiment. I had a good time, only with the regiment starting at five o'clock in the morning marching in the court where we lived, we were [awakened] every morning like the soldiers themselves, by their trumpet call. [laughter] This was the only drawback. Otherwife we had a wonderful time there.

Tusler: You did a lot of concertizing there.

Ehlers: Ja, in Edinburgh itself, and around Edinburgh. This was when (I told you, I think) I met Schweitzer twice in a row. He lectured first in London and then in Edinburgh, and then this strange thing happened when he criticized my "Italian Concerto." Once I played it too fast, and then in Edinburgh, knowing he was there, I tried to play it slower, and as it was not natural to my conviction, it was too slow.

Tusler: During the time you were in England, as you mentioned before, you had the key to his house at Gunsbach.

Ehlers: At Gunsbach, ja, which gave me a wonderful feeling of security. Sometimes [I felt] now they have had enough of me here [in London], but really this was not the case because we were so separate, you know, in that large house, and the children liked me very much. But sometimes I felt I wanted to get away, as I said before, that year when I had to play the enormous program on the BBC and be constantly concentrating. Of course in England itself, the people were very nice. I was constantly invited, and my friends had great social things always going on.

I felt I wanted to be alone with myself and face these threesmen, Bach, Handel and Scarlatti, and try to do justice to them. I just really heave [a sigh] when I think what I did in this short time. Bach, fine. Bach is my home town, almost. Handel not so much. And Scarlatti, fifty sonatas! And make a variety, too; because if you go through all this volume--he was a genius, absolutely, I'm more and more convinced, but there's a certain similarity in all these things, and to play them in three or four evenings (they are so short), and try to bring variety was not so easy. I found the other day the old book which I worked from, and I saw which I played-- I made some corrections on it. But it was a wonderful experience and great publicity for me in England.

At this time they didn't have one good harpsichordist in England. But the harpsichord became a serious instrument [in England] and played by marvelous players, much better than France's and I think much better than Germany has, too.

Tusler: Did you have a reputation in England at all when you first went there?

Ehlers: No. First I came with the two sisters. We had concerts and write-ups in the press; I don't know if they were good or not, I really don't know. Probably quite good. It was a new thing, and I played quite decently. The duet literature was unknown, beautiful literature for two spranos. Nobody sings it, you know; you hear solo arias, but you don't hear duets, and there are wonderful duets. There's a whole album put out by the German scholar, Dr. Landshoff, a whole album

of chamber duets. And also, you know, voices are not trained for this kind of [singing]--I didn't need big opera voices for this, it would be dangerous, you see? These very, very trained Italian voices were just the right thing to bring these duets to life. My first visit to England was really with these two sisters who had many friends in England. This opened the door for later.

TAPE NUMBER: THREE, SIDES ONE AND TWO

November 22, 1965

Association with Schweitzer

Tusler: Last time we were talking about Dr. Schweitzer, and you remembered a couple of stories that you haven't put on the tape yet, particularly the one about fetching the medicine for him one night.

Ehlers: Well, this is a very funny story for me. Dr. Schweitzer felt miserable one day, and stayed in bed.

I asked his friend and secretary, Mrs. Martin, "Is there nothing which could be done so that the doctor doesn't suffer so much?" You know how men are when they are in pain, and he was no exception. [laughter]

She said, "Yes, yes, there is a medicine which always helps."

And I said, "Well, why doesn't he take this medicine?"

"We are out."

I said, "Where did he get it?"

"Oh, we got it in the next village."

I said, "Then let's go and get it."

"No, the doctor has forbidden it. It's after seven o'clock and the pharmacy is closed and he has forbidden [us to go]--otherwise, one of us would have gone."

I said, "This seems to be absolutely senseless to me and I am going. The only thing why I hesitate is I have to go through the forest, and you know I am not a hero. I don't

want to walk alone through the forest--get me one of Dr. Schweitzer's friends, Dr. Minder, who is also my friend."

She said, "But the doctor has forbidden it."

I said, "I know, and still I consider it nonsense that he should suffer all night, and I'm going to go."

So I went, and I knocked at the pharmacy. Of course, it was closed. I went next door where I knew the owner lived and told him what I wanted. He naturally opened immediately his shop and gave me the medicine, and back I went with Dr. Minder at my side. We arrived back home in possibly one and a half hours--it took us altogether not even two hours. Mrs. Martin went into the doctor's room and gave him the medicine. He didn't ask where suddenly the medicine came from, but he felt better and had a good night's sleep.

The next morning he asked, "Where did this medicine suddenly come from?" He couldn't figure it out.

And she, very much afraid to tell, said, "Well, Cembalinchen went and got it."

He said, "Didn't you tell her that I forbade it?"

"Yes, I told her, but she went still."

So for twenty-four hours the doctor ignored me completely. [laughter] He didn't give me a speech, he didn't say anything; but he ignored me. After this we were very good friends again. But he was so stubborn in certain ways that the only way, really, to make sense of it was to go and do what my instinct told me was good, because he had a wonderful night and was in good spirits the next day. Otherwise he would have fretted

along for days.

But he was absolutely against doing the slightest thing against his will and order. I think this must have been always partly in his nature, but has developed very much with his being in Africa, working with those uncivilized, uncultured, uneducated people.

Tusler: They needed that strong authority.

Ehlers: Ja, ja. There was only one way: to say "You can't," or "You mustn't," or "I forbid it." Of course this became his second nature, and he applied it to all his nurses even when he was on vacation in Gunsbach. But this didn't fit quite well with my nature. It was amusing how he ignored me for twenty-four hours. [laughter] He didn't scold me, he didn't reproach me, but after twenty-four hours he talked to me.

Tusler: That was his way of punishing you.

Ehlers: Ja, ja.

Tusler: What was the name that you referred to yourself as-- was this some nickname that he called you?

Ehlers: Cembalinchen? Yes. Well, you know the instrument that I play, the Italian name is cembalo; it was never called in German (maybe after Hitler, but not in my time), Kielflügel which is the German word. Cembalo is Italian. Clavecin is the French. But he preferred the Italian name, and so he called me Cembalinchen. All his letters to me are inside "Dear Cembalinchen." He really played with this.

Tusler: What's added to the end of it is a sort of diminutive or a form of endearment?

Ehlers: Diminutive, ja, ja.

Tusler: Did anybody else ever use that name for you, or was that his special name?

Ehlers: Well, I don't think so. Here, sometimes Dr. Lert called me Cembalinchen. He liked this. He knew about this story. But no one else. I wouldn't have accepted it from anybody else. Dr. Lert sometimes called me Cembalinchen because he liked the name so very much.

Tusler: What was the matter with Dr. Schweitzer? What kind of illness was it?

Ehlers: It was not an illness--it was just an ordinary toothache or something. He was really, as far as I remember, never ill when I was in Gunsbach. He was overworked, for which I can't blame him; what was going on during his presence in Gunsbach was unbelievable. People came from all over the world. Sometimes I was sitting in on some of the conferences, boiling inside because he had so little time for me. Sometimes when I wanted to ask him [something] I waited a week or longer, because I loved him and I didn't want to interfere with his time.

There were constantly the young men coming from America--maybe one conducted a cantata club, asking the doctor with which cantata he should start. You know? Such really ridiculous questions--every thinking person can make up [answers] himself. Then lots of ladies came there who wanted to help the doctor; I forgive them because they were mostly very wealthy and helped him financially to keep Lambaréné going, buying medicine

and so on. But also they took his time, and he was patient like an angel. Then sometimes the patience ran out, against us. He could be very, very--what is it?--heftig [violent], you know. Very much so.

Especially the first years when I came there, '33, '34, '35--no, before this even, the house was constantly full. They took notes of what he said, and of course they didn't understand half of what he really said. It was just probably the attraction of a great personality and also some sensation for them, visiting Dr. Schweitzer. His patience was endless.

He was not patient with me, for which I was very glad because this let me feel that I was closer to him. He sometimes gave me very direct and not very patient remarks. I remember once I was working on the Chromatic Fantasy in his house. Next to his room was the music room--I couldn't help it; he insisted that it didn't disturb him and I had to practise.

Tusler: On what instrument was that, your instrument?

Ehlers: No, on his piano, just learning the notes, the music, and so on, which I mostly up to now do. I never study a piece directly on the harpsichord. I don't want to be influenced by sound colors, by changing registers. First I want to create the picture of the music in my mind and let my fingers know what they have to do. I want to establish a tempo which is not even one hundred percent the same on the harpsichord, but comes closest to my idea of the piece. So this was no hardship to me to practice on the piano: at least I learned the music and I memorized it. He sometimes gave me his ideas and advice.

I was working on the Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue, and suddenly the door opened and the doctor came in and said, "If you end this fantasy piano, you are absolutely wrong."

I was furious. I said, "I never intended to end piano!" I hate this romanticizing which I heard all these pianists do. You know, this wonderful big ending--"da-da-da-DA-tum"--going down step by step, not letting down the intensity. Bach keeps the intensity to the very last moment. And that he even suggested I could have [ended piano]--oh, it made me furious. I think it was the only time I screamed at him. "I didn't intend to end piano!" I intended to end forte because there is no reason to end piano. But I was always amazed how in the midst of his bookwriting and philosophical thinking, he listened with one ear to what I did in the other room, practicing.

Tusler: He was too much of a musician to just turn it off--naturally, he had to hear what was going on.

Ehlers: Ja, probably subconsciously he did it. I went very often with him to the village church because he used to practice every day two or three hours on the organ. He had a kind of organ equipment in Lambaréné, but it was not really [an organ], just to keep the feet used to the pedal work, you know. The last time I was there, which was summer '59, he didn't take me to the organ. This was the very first time that I didn't ask him to take me, because I felt that he feels he is not in power any more. But every time I came I put my luggage down, washed myself, tidied myself up a little bit, and he took my

hand and said, "Let's go to the church," and played for me.

Of course I had to leave all my remarks and criticism, which I had, closed in myself, because I felt I had no right. He hadn't asked me for my judgment, and even if he would have asked me I wouldn't have told him what I felt, because I felt sometimes it isn't worthwhile to be a hundred percent truthful if it hurts somebody, and I'm sure I would have hurt him. My ideas of tempi were entirely different from his. I think I mentioned before that I played always too fast for him. Well, if I compare my playing with other harpsichordists, I know that I have the slowest [tempi] of all of them. His playing partly was influenced by the instrument he played, and also I think by the losing of the technique. This had something to do with it.

An organ player sees and feels the tempi slower than a harpsichordist. I think mixed together with [the difference in] the quality of tone, the organ tone takes a longer time to sound and a longer time to disappear. The harpsichord tone, being plucked, disappears immediately, and so you can, or you have, even, to keep the tempo a little livelier or faster, but never so fast that you can't phrase. Dr. Schweitzer's fundamental idea was wonderful, but then applied to harpsichord playing, or harpsichord tempo, it was always for me too slow. Even when I play his organ records, his old records, which were primitively done, you know, (it was the beginning of organ recording), the tempi are always too slow for me.

In my classes on Bach, I avoid Schweitzer's recordings

because I don't want to have long discussions--or maybe I shouldn't avoid it, I should face the discussions with my students. This is another point, too, you know: to make them aware that the instrument he played as well as his approach to Bach made him use this slow tempo; and then play a modern organist, and let them hear what a first-class organist of today does.

But whatever the differences in the feeling for tempo are, the main thing which Schweitzer did for organists and harpsichordists and everyone who loves Bach was to bring in the idea of articulation and phrasing, which was in my youth absolutely neglected.

Tusler: And you got a great deal more, along that line, from Dr. Schweitzer than you did from Mme. Landowska.

Ehlers: Well...yes, in a way. She was a master player. I am glad you mentioned her, because I don't know if I talked enough about her in the beginning of our conversation. I still think at the moment there is nobody who can compete with her. Maybe one day there will be somebody, but at the moment there is nobody to compare, even if I can't go along with everything that she does. From time to time I again hear her recordings, and I am enthused about the command of the instrument, about the command of her technique, about the command of the music. Only, and this is the principal thought, she handled the music, and I have the feeling Bach should handle me. She does with the music what she thinks is effective, and for me sometimes it disturbs the musical line. But it is a matter probably of viewpoints, of personality. Also, she was the

first to create this, to create listening to Bach on the harpsichord. Maybe this has something to do with it, too.

Tusler: She was feeling her way.

Ehlers: She was feeling her way; and you know, one has to be convincing when one is on the stage. If you play for people you have to be convincing, right or wrong. In her way, she was convincing from the playing point of view, but for me not from the point of view of Bach's music. I say this only in respect to Bach. Her interpretations of French music and of Scarlatti were wonderful--even of Handel; even [her] Handel was grandiose and wonderful. But in Bach, her handling of Bach's music was not quite the way I saw it, and now I see it even more so. I'm more and more convinced.

Tusler: Is that so, do you think, because Bach is so much more contrapuntal than the other composers whom you just mentioned that she played better, or does this have something to do with it? All the different lines?

Ehlers: Well, I don't quite know how to answer this. Bach is unique, as you and I know. His writing has everything there that is necessary. I have the feeling he needn't be handled, you know? He has just naturally to flow along, and you have to have the feeling where to breathe and where a new initiative starts, I mean where a new phrase has its beginning and rolls along and is replaced by another phrase. Just leave it alone, I have the feeling. Of course, saying "leaving alone" is not enough, as you know. But she handled Bach.

Now, as to the excuse, the explanation [for her approach],

I must say one thing. Up to when Landowska started to play Bach on the harpsichord, Bach was only heard on the piano and on the organ, on the organ mostly very indistinctly, very muddily. I never could listen to an organ piece and really find the musical line. Or it was done with all the virtuosity and spirit of the Romantic era, which was not becoming to Bach, either. So maybe--and not only maybe--I'm sure what she did was great for her time. But I see the reaction of my very talented students, who really are individualists, and see things not [just] with my eyes but from their point of view. They all agree with me. They go even farther. They say, "I can't listen to Landowska play." I don't go so far, because there is always this masterly playing which enthuses.

I don't think I would take from anybody [else] this kind of interpretation of Bach because I don't feel it's right, but her marvelous, what should I say, command of the instrument, the playing itself, always made you think twice before you said "no." But I very often had to say "no" to her Bach. In listening to her recordings it's even more obvious, because recordings somehow always underline certain things I feel. When I heard her in a live performance, I was very much younger, just finding my own way and not being [yet] so convinced of what I want in Bach and what I see in Bach and what I wish to hear in Bach. But if she was a great teacher I really don't know. Tusler: In Dr. Schweitzer's performances, you disagreed with the tempi. However, the other aspects of his performance, the articulation, the breathing, are there, are right?

Ehlers: Well, it was clear; but the tempo was for me always too slow and, of course, this influenced the whole piece, you know? For me tempo is the pulse; it kills or makes a piece. I think I said it before. Play a wrong note or miss a phrase, but if the tempo is right you forgive it--the whole picture is there.

Tusler: That's even more important than the phrasing, important though the phrasing is. But the tempo is absolutely essential?

Ehlers: The tempo allows you phrasing or doesn't allow you phrasing. All this came to my mind much later, after I left Germany and was standing on my own feet. But as a player I haven't heard anyone as brilliant, and probably never will, as Landowska. As a teacher, I don't quite..I teach differently. I try to open the minds of my students and their understanding, and then I let them handle it. Everybody handles it in his way. Whereas I remember I imitated Landowska, because I didn't quite understand why and what and when, but I heard and saw and listened, and I imitated her. So I had to go the whole way of finding my way after she left, after she left Berlin. This is when I asked myself if I called this good teaching; but she was young and it was the first time she had taught, taught in a school. I was five years with her.

Tusler: That's quite a long time.

Ehlers: Quite a long time. I from the beginning try to point out to the students what to aim for, in their [own] way of thinking, listening, doing. Sometimes the thinking can't always be realized in doing, as through the limitation of the

technique of the player or even of the instrument. But then you have to think: how can I bring this and this out in spite of the limitations? I try very much to make the student independent in his thinking and approach, though keeping control of the student constantly. Whereas she [Landowska] played for us, and this is where I learned, from her wonderful playing.

Of course at this time I didn't have my own opinion. My opinion about Bach developed much later--opinion is not the right word, but my [feeling of] what to do with Bach. Then I said suddenly, "No. This is not in the music," even if it sounded good when I heard it from her.

Tusler: Was it many years later, as you think back over it now, that you made this personal discovery?

Ehlers: Well, you know how it is--you don't know that you are growing. As I told you before, when she left I thought I'd have to give up playing because I had played all my pieces I has studied with her. And suddenly, after years, you feel, "Now I [can] go alone my way, right or wrong."

But it might be that she has changed in later years-- I have no idea. It would be natural. Intelligent as she was, aware of all the things, it would be only too natural that she would have changed. But I don't know how much she wanted to give.

Tusler: Some people are just more temperamentally suited to being teachers than others, perhaps.

Ehlers: I think she could have been. She probably didn't realize how much we needed to be guided in every respect,

technically; and then, what is almost as important or more important, how to look at the music and know what to do with it. I remember, and I still have the music, that when I started a new piece, here was her pencil and she wrote the register in, instead of stimulating me to think, you know?

Tusler: She just told you.

Ehlers: Ja. She told us what to do. I don't know if she did this in later years, because as I said before, teaching is also a kind of art. It needs experience plus talent. When she came to Berlin, she had very little teaching experience. But after her years in Paris, I'm sure she got all the experience she needed. She still, from my taste, has no rival on the harpsichord from the playing point of view. From the musical point of view, I mentioned in one of our first conversations, I think, that I prefer, for instance, Malcolm's [Malcolm Hamilton] playing of the Forty-eight Preludes and Fugues very much to Landowska's. Modestly he stands behind, and the music comes first.

But anyhow, we owe her very much. It needed a personality of her caliber to bring the harpsichord to life, and I feel I haven't mentioned this enough in our earlier conversation. So with all our differences of temperament and [ways of] looking at music, I know what the world owes to this, I would say, great woman. Having the courage to go along in a new field, this is quite something.

Tusler: Of course, Dr. Schweitzer, being a native-born German and hearing Bach, I'm sure, all of his life as he grew up,

perhaps more than Wanda Landowska did, was temperamentally more suited to Bach?

Ehlers: Well, may I say before I forget, there is another, what should I say, way of thinking behind it. First of all, I believe very much in the national temperament. I don't know if I said this before.

Tusler: You mentioned it once before.

Ehlers: You see, the French see Bach entirely differently, according to their temperament. And still, Schweitzer spoke with the greatest reverence and admiration of his great organ teacher, Widor, in Paris. But afterwards, when the Bach edition came out, Widor asked Schweitzer for his help. Widor felt that Schweitzer had a better understanding or insight of the music, and probably Widor was the better organ player. I believe this--it has something to do with a speech-music connection. Have you ever thought of this?

Tusler: No.

Ehlers: I believe strongly in this.

Tusler: The language itself?

Ehlers: The language itself is an influence. The German language, with its long winding sentences which are the despair of every foreigner who has to study German, don't you see the similarity to Bach's long winding on-and-on-going phrases?

Tusler: Yes. And French is so classic and crisp.

Ehlers: Crisp, short. Look at Couperin, look at Rameau. Of course, everything has its exceptions, but I speak in general.

Tusler: Then you could carry it further and say that the

Italians, who were such masters at bel canto and the melodious sound, have a language like that too, very fluid.

Ehlers: Ja. Absolutely. But I don't want to imply that no foreigner can play Bach well. By saying this, I think it shouldn't imply this. But thinking it over, I haven't heard a foreigner play Bach well.

Tusler: The great Bach performers are Germans?

Ehlers: I think so.

Tusler: Or Northerners, perhaps you could say?

Ehlers: I don't know. You say Bach performance; I just don't know anybody at the time. The only one coming to my mind whom I have heard is Walcha, the great organist. [side two begins here].

Tusler: When was the last time that you saw Dr. Schweitzer?

Ehlers: The last time was the summer of '59. I spent part of the summer, after finishing summer school here, in Gstaad, Switzerland with my daughter and her children; and on the way back I stopped naturally to see the doctor in Gunsbach. He looked wonderful, and was in good spirits and good health. He was very happy to see me, and as I could only stay for one or two days, I don't recall, of course I stayed in the little house in the room I always had. This was already made ready for me.

He spent much time with me. I remember very well that we talked about ornamentation. We had a great difference in opinion. You know, the trill sign with Bach is a "TR", but very, very loosely written down, and if you did this in a hurry, it could look like "M" or like "N."



I said, "Doctor, I don't believe there is a difference if Bach writes 'TR' or 'N' or 'M'. It's all the same move of the hand--I don't think that a man who wrote so much music as Bach did took the care to write 'TR' carefully, or 'N' and 'M'."

And the doctor, it made him furious. He said, "Don't talk nonsense. There is a difference."

I have still a photo where he and I sit close together with music in the hand, and he looked furiously at me that I could dare to mention that there is no difference between "N," "M", and "TR."

And still I believe it. I believe that the man who wrote so much music didn't think it made this [much difference] and left it to the player to make it long or short according to tempo, according to the note. Now, of course, we see in all the Bach editions which are very good and call themselves Urtexts, the signs "N" and "TR" and "M," and I have always to explain to my students the same thing which I believe: there is no difference. The difference is given by the tempo for me, and by the length of the note. You can play more trill movement or less according to the mood of the piece, or to the tempo you are in.

But it made the doctor really furious! [laughter] And he could be very angry, very easily angry. It was very strange with him.

To come to a very nice little story, I knitted a sweater for him which took forever and ever because he was a very tall

and very broad man. If you see his last pictures, he looked so tiny and so skinny; but at this time he was really a very strong man. He liked the sweater and he used it very much.

When he saw me, he went into detail about the sweater, what was good. "But you see, " he said, "Cembalinchen, the ends of the sleeves are probably one inch too short. Do you think you could repair this?" [laughter] And I was so amused that a man who lived in Lambaréné, you know, with all the discomforts there, was so sensitive to this one inch and thought my sweater sleeve should have been longer. Well, it was very strange.

In many ways he was a contradiction. He could be very, very--what do you say, heftig, violent. He told me that this was a great danger when he was young, that he had to work on this. I saw him once or twice violent, but very seldom, very seldom. I think this came up one day when I reacted violently against what he told me, and then I apologized. He said, "Well, I understand this very well, because I was violent myself till I taught myself control, if I want ever to go anywhere in life and achieve what I want."

On the whole, he never talked much about himself, and what you learned from him was only by living next to him.

Tusler: Observing him.

Ehlers: Observing him. The endless patience he had for people; and by nature he was very impatient, as he told me. And he was. I took this as an example, because I'm very impatient by nature and I learned to be patient in my teaching. It's one

of the most important things not to frighten the student; then he can't do anything. So I saw what Dr. Schweitzer was up against in his own temperament. I learned many things.

Tusler: Why did he come to Gunsbach? Was it in the nature of a vacation for him to come up from Lambaréné?

Ehlers: Always. First of all, it was physically necessary to leave that terrible climate every two years. He sent his nurses home every two years. It was a rotating kind of thing, two years in Lambaréné, then at least one year in Gunsbach. He had either his house at their disposal, or they built their own houses. I know two nurses who bought a house together. This was necessary for their health.

Tusler: It was so damp and hot, I suppose.

Ehlers: Ja. Of course it was necessary.

Tusler: So when he came up, he actually stayed there for quite long periods of time.

Ehlers: Almost a year, not quite. It [required a year] to get used to this climate of Gunsbach again till it really profited anybody's health. All the nurses came back and had their rest there. How it will be now, I have no idea. I haven't heard from his daughter so far and I don't know, I have no picture; I have the feeling Lambaréné was the doctor, and after he has gone I can't see [how it can go on]. Maybe it will. It was his dream and it was his wish, and maybe his daughter, who has experience about what to do, and his assistant doctors might help.

Tusler: The village of Gunsbach was a very small one, or course, in those days.

Ehlers: Small--now it has changed so much. The last time I was there, I could have cried, really. All the intimacy and niceness had gone. It's built up, and really I hardly could find my way from the train to the house, there were so many houses built and so many big streets. The street to Colmar was always a good street, but now it has become a big landstrasse, really. Like everything else, it has changed.

Tusler: Was it a typical little German village?

Ehlers: Ja, a village. Not so picturesque as Rothen burg ob der Tauber, you know, that very famous old city, not so picturesque; but it was old and natural. Now they have built (I think partly for all the visiting people who came to visit Dr. Schweitzer in the summer) a big hotel which didn't exist before. They had a little gasthaus, you know, and it has changed, as everything has changed. This is the way we go.

For me, it is of course of invaluable importance that I had this close contact with the doctor, not only in my approach to Bach, because this of course was partly through his influence.

Landowska never talked. She played, and what I learned I learned from her playing. As a teacher, I feel that sometimes talking is very important. I spend sometimes a lesson with a student hardly playing, talking with him, explaining things. She never explained--she played, and I learned from listening and looking. But I find as a teacher you have sometimes to talk and not feel that the hour is wasted, because it is not wasted.

I love my teaching very much, and I dread the moment when I will have to stop teaching. I love the contact with the

young people. I love being of use to them. Here is a spark which I can develop, and here is something else which I can develop, and seeing them now, going their own way, is a great satisfaction.

I always was wondering how I would take it when it comes to the point that my students in a way [become] my rivals. But thank God, I enjoy it. I am proud of them, and they feel they can still come with their questions to me and play for me, and that what I have to criticize is of value to them. Tusler: Malcolm, for example, didn't want to record the Forty-Eight without your listening to it and criticizing everything.

Ehlers: Ja. This is true. He wanted your husband [Robert L. Tusler] and me in the picture, and I was very happy that I was not the one alone to decide yes or no. Sometimes, if you have a certain picture of a piece and you hear something else, you are not objective because you have this vision of a piece, and who says that the other is wrong? It's only that you didn't see it this way. Having a neutral person, in a way, like your husband, was a great help to me, and astonishingly we always agreed. Never having met before, we agreed in every detail. So I felt that my reaction was not influenced by anything else, [the fact] that I had played the piece before differently. Your husband, who had neither a relation with me nor with Malcolm, had the same reaction, so this made me feel good, I must say. You never know how it will be, if you have always played [a piece in one way] and were convinced

of this, and suddenly comes a different tempo. Your first reaction might be "no," and then you ask yourself, "Well, why 'no'? Because you played it differently?" But mostly when I said "no," your husband said "no" too, so this was a very good thing.

What worries me now a little bit, let me say, is that everybody calls himself a harpsichordist who has acquired a harpsichord and plays on it. So everybody who has a harpsichord and can play calls himself a harpsichordist. Well, it won't do any harm, I guess but being educated on the high level of Landowska's playing, I get very sensitive.

I have now, for instance, six harpsichordists, and I don't know if any one of them should be. They are intelligent and they play quite well, but I don't know if any one of them really should be a harpsichordist. This will have to be proven in years to come. But when I look in the newspaper and [read of] a harpsichordist I never heard, [I wonder] where their training comes from, because it's not a training only for harpsichord playing, it's a training in the style of the baroque. This is what they don't get if they don't have a good teacher. There are good teachers, good players in the east; maybe they bring out some good students; but up to now I haven't found anyone whom I really, with the exception of Malcolm Hamilton, I enjoy listening to and believe in his playing. But what we forget really with Landowska, and this is something we should never forget, was her unique personality and her unique way of playing. I still haven't heard anybody

play Scarlatti or Couperin or Rameau the way she did, and I only hope her records will never disappear from the market.

Tusler: I want to ask you one more question about you and Dr. Schweitzer. Did you ever perform together?

Ehlers: Never. Because in what way could we?

Tusler: I thought maybe there was some literature for organ and harpsichord.

Ehlers: I don't think there is any literature I know of. And I am glad we didn't even try, because as I told you, his ideas of tempo were entirely different from mine. What I don't know is if his ideas of tempo, if he had kept practicing, would have been the same here as they were when he was reduced to a little pedal piano in Lambaréné, practicing for years on it. I don't know. He felt we all played too fast.

On Teaching

But now there comes to my mind a very interesting question which we probably won't solve. Has not every piece its tempo? We had a great discussion in my last interpretation class where I have a few brilliant students, future composers and so on, and they said to me that they adjust the tempo-- we talked about the courante which is fast--to the room they play in. Well, I said I couldn't. For me, a piece has its tempo. Maybe one should arrange it according to the place where you play, but I can't. For me, the piece is always the same piece, and I play it the same way in a big hall or a small hall. We had a great discussion.

One of the things I love most in my classes is this

intercourse of ideas. And I being what I am, the age I am, hearing the young people of today and having this kind of exchange of ideas--I think it's a very healthy idea. I'm also sure that feeling for tempo changes with the generation, not only with the young and old people, with with the generation. A generation like ours which lives so much faster has a different feeling for tempo. Maybe this was the reason that the tempi of Schweitzer seemed to slow for me.

Tusler: That could very well have something to do with it. Yet, as you say, if each piece does have its internal right tempo, then maybe he was just plain wrong about it.

Ehlers: I don't know. I don't know what makes a tempo right or wrong--our reaction to it? Every person can have a different reaction to a piece.

Tusler: Maybe the reaction of the performer, if the performer himself feels so completely that the tempo he's playing in is right, maybe this feeling transmits itself to the audience somehow?

Ehlers: Well, I don't know. I am sure every performer thinks at the moment when he performs his tempo is right. This is my [belief.] If he starts by mistake a little too fast or too slow, he will in the second or third measure have adjusted to his tempo.

All this comes up in the class, and I love these classes for this reason. I have the feeling they wake up these young people, you know? Either they have an edition with the metronome [marking] on it, which I forbid (in Bach, of course)--

I want them to establish what they feel is right, and then we have discussions about it, or they (what I hate, and they do it all the time), they go to the record library and come back and then say, "Glenn Gould plays it this way." I forbid it to them but they still do it. They are so afraid to face music themselves, and I haven't got them yet so far that they still face [it] better. I have to face pieces which I have not played for years, which I have played probably or looked at twenty years ago, and I have to face it. It's every time a new challenge. I am grateful for it because it shows that I am not starting to be--what do you say...

Tusler: Too set in your ways.

Ehlers: Set in my ways, or stagnated.

But the students are afraid of it. I don't know why. You know, in a class you face many different talents, many different temperaments, and you have not time to go into detail with each of them. I try to have them face the tempo and not go to music recordings, but they do it all the time. I think, listen to recordings after you have made up your mind, but don't start with that, with listening to recordings. It influences them. I don't know why these young people are so frightened.

Tusler: Do you think this is more true today, as you observe your pupils, than it was when you yourself were a young student?

Ehlers: Then there were no records, and probably I imitated what I heard from my teacher, which is natural. In a way, you imitate what you [hear, and then] you feel, "Now I am free."

Now I do what I want. You have to see with the eyes of your teacher; otherwise you don't believe in him and then there is no good working together.

I'm sure that all my students develop gradually differently. This week, my first doctoral student is coming down from Eugene, [Oregon], John Hamilton. I had him the longest: I think I had him for five years. He has developed beautifully, after very many crossroads we passed together. He is one of those students who go in the deep, deep end, creating complications where I can't see any. But he came out of this, and his playing for his last doctoral recital was really beautiful, moving, and made me very happy. It also encouraged me to go my way in teaching, encouraged me that if they have a talent, my great impact on them [is good.] You know, I am quite aggressive and not at all on the "sweet side;" I go with the whole impact of my temperament on the student. When I heard him [John Hamilton], and Malcolm [Hamilton] too, I said, "Well, if there is anything there, my impact doesn't matter. On the contrary." It would be fatal if I changed, you know. And I think I won't be able to change.

But this is a great, great comfort to me, to see this young generation of [students]. I have some of course, who never will carry on any tradition or any of my ideas, but as a teacher, this happens. If you have two or three, you are very, very grateful. I have two [now] and maybe in a few years even three, because I have quite a few promising students right now.

I think I love teaching so much because I learn so much myself, still, and hope as long as I teach I will always learn. The moment I don't learn from their mistakes and from their possibilities, I'd better give up teaching.

Tusler: Then there's no more interaction going on and it's not an alive relationship.

Ehlers: Ja, quite right. Then also, it would show that I get tired of seeing the piece again new, you know? And if I don't see the piece again new, it will show in my playing. So this is a good thing for me, this contact with the young people, with their ideas. Of course, I mostly insist on my ideas, but sometimes it makes sense, what they do, and I am glad that I get sometimes from the other side some ideas, too.

Tusler: Don't you think that for all students in music, or in anything, for that matter, when they're in those early formative learning years, they have to do a great deal of imitating? That's part of the learning process.

Ehlers: Ja. Absolutely. I tried to copy Landowska as much as I could. Subconsciously you do it, till you find your own way. But both have to be in a way wise: the student, who has to want to copy because he believes in what his teacher does; and the teacher, who must find the point where the student shouldn't copy any more, and let him go his way. Which either fate, or I, was able to do with my best students.

The students I have now are good, intelligent, talented; but I can't let them yet go alone. They have played. One has studied three years in Germany, and one, who is a very

intelligent boy, will take a double doctorate in performance and in, I think, history. They are bright. The least interesting of my students, and I don't know why, are mostly the organists; you would think they would be closer to the instrument [the harpsichord] because they work with registration. But I have one explanation: I think it is the music they mostly play.

Tusler: You mean so much poorer music?

Ehlers: First of all--ja. I don't mean the great talents, you know, but the average organist. He doesn't bring any life to the harpsichord and probably not to his organ playing, either.

With the pianists there is another problem, but an interesting problem: to make them aware the crescendo and diminuendo doesn't exist, and still make the music alive by other means, by phrasing and articulation. This is what the modern pianist does not enough consider. He works with dynamics, so you have to get away from dynamics and into phrasing and articulation on the harpsichord.

In my interpretation class I have all kinds of students, you know--too many kinds: horn players and bassoon players and, as I told you, marimba players. Last year I didn't even know what a marimba was. But believe it or not, they played a few weeks ago in the class the Double Concerto by Bach on two marimbas, and it was absolutely enjoyable. I would never have thought it in my life! I would never have thought this possible. It went excellently. It doesn't hurt them to know this music, so I have changed my viewpoint. First I

was absolutely upset. Why should I have a marimba player, why should I have a horn player? What have they to do with Bach? Now I take it from the other side. They learn something which enriches them, so why not?

Tusler: They become better musicians.

Ehlers: Maybe. The marimba player loves his Bach, so why shouldn't he play it? But it was a great surprise for me, and they all insist they learn something. I don't know if this is just politeness, or if they really learn something.

Tempo is such a vague thing, in a way. It is for each instrument a little bit different. An allemande, for instance, has its tempo, but I would have a different tempo [for it] on the piano than I would on the harpsichord where the tone disappears so quickly. Fundamentally, you know, it's not a fast dance, but how much slower you will take it on the piano than on the harpsichord is left to the intelligence and taste of the performer.

Tusler: Bach never made any notations on his music, did he?

Ehlers: In the Italian Concerto he gave indications, but this is one of the very few pieces, and I think in one of the French overtures he did. But even this wouldn't mean anything, because their feeling of tempo would be entirely different.

So all you can do as an educator is make them think, and this is what I try to do. This is always to their astonishment, because they think when they come into my interpretation class that they will be taught how to interpret. I don't teach this. I teach them, or try to teach them, to see, to see what is

in the music. First of all I say, please sit. This is very true with Bach. Bach's picture of the music gives me the entire idea of how to play it. Not in detail, you know, not with fingerings and that sort of thing; but the picture of the music is so alive.

Tusler: You mean, just as you look at the score.

Ehlers: The graphic picture. Ja. I don't know if this is true with all the composers--I never went into it, but with Bach it is very clear to me.

Tusler: Does this have anything to do with the number of black notes that appear?

Ehlers: Ja, it has, and with the flow of it. It impresses me very much when I look at the picture. For instance, the sarabande, we know at the time of Bach, was a dignified dance with a slower tempo. Still there is a difference [between them]. You can't say a sarabande has such-and-such a metronome [marking]. If there is much more motion, or rich ornamentation, one plays slower, like in the E Minor Partita. You see the picture of the music. You will have a different kind of tempo.

This is one thing which I want to get over to my students, but it is difficult, believe me, because they come from other music having just had a piano lesson on a Beethoven or Brahms sonata, where the metronome [marking] is even indicated--in Beethoven not so much, ~~but~~ in Brahms and Schumann; and now they see here music without any indication of anything, just a picture of the music itself, and they have to establish a tempo. I don't even say "establish," but get a faint idea

of it.

For instance, the other day I had an experience with a very talented girl. She played one of the most embroidered sarabandes of Bach's partitas for keyboard instrument, and she played it much too fast. She said, "Well, the other day, somebody played a sarabande and you said it was much too slow."

I said, "It was because nothing was going on. You can't go metronome-wise on the sarabande. You see your sarabande is richly embellished. The listener has to have time to get all this in his ear, and you have to have time to play it without being rushed."

This is very difficult, to make them feel that there is no set rule. We know a sarabande is a slow dance, but how slow will depend on the music. So it comes really to [the fact] that you have to make them think independently and this is what I am trying to do. As pianists (mostly I have pianists in the interpretation class) they are all good. They have better fingers than I have and have had wonderful teaching.

2 But Bach they haven't heard--it's played less and less.

Look at the programs. Pianists are afraid nowadays, thank God, to play transcriptions. The last I heard was Dame Myra Hess, years ago when she was here and played one of the beautiful organ preludes in her own transcription, I don't know which one it was, and even if I am not for it, she played it beautifully. But it has gone out of fashion because the musicologists attack this kind of thing; it's an organ piece after all. Pianists, with the exception of a few, don't tackle

the problem because there are too many who play this music now on the harpsichord. But I still don't see any reason why one shouldn't play it on the piano if you do it the right way.

Tusler: Is it enormously difficult, do you think, for a pianist to learn how to play Bach properly on the piano? They already have so many notions in their mind about crescendo and decrescendo and the pedal.

Ehlers: Well, I would say you shouldn't exclude crescendo and decrescendo a hundred percent, because you have also to give the instrument a little bit what the instrument demands.

If you do it in good taste, I am the last to say you shouldn't do it. This would be stupid and like teaching a live subject after the book. I would miss it. But it is the amount of it. I have heard Glenn Gould play on one of his good days (I have heard bad days, too) such beautiful Bach on the piano that I have no wish for better Bach playing. If he made a little crescendo and he made a little diminuendo it is because the piano demands it.

Also, I am sure that all instruments, with the exception of organ and harpsichord, could do it in Bach's time. Why shouldn't a violin not have made a diminuendo? Only the difference was in the amount, I think. Today they [go] from a three ppp to a three fff---this is not [in the style]; but the light undulating tone which could have been on a flute or a stringed instrument, I am sure that they did it, only it was not aimed as we do it now, building up so to speak

from a nothing to a forte. It was the natural undulation of the tone, but the inner longing for this kind of [romantic] emotional expression was not there. They were used to longer lines, especially in German music.

Tusler: And a contrapuntal approach to music.

Ehlers: But also again only in German music. Look at the French--Rameau and Couperin, for instance, how Rameau or Couperin said "for flute or violins or for the harpsichord." This mixture of instruments. It seems that it was not so much the color--the instrument itself didn't mean so much to them, if they could exchange between violin and flute or harpsichord.

Just the other day I had one of Couperin's trio sonatas in my hand--I gave it to some of my violin students. There is an amusing piece on Lully, L'Apothéose de Lully, where Lully and Corelli have a musical fight. One solo is played by Corelli and one by Lully, and then they both are visiting Apollo and Apollo makes peace between Italian and French music. [laughter] It's very amusing. I let them play this because I want them to get an idea of French and Italian style. This I do in the interpretation class. I want them to feel that baroque music is not dead music, that it shouldn't be played in a dead [way], and that a little natural crescendo, which is given by the violin naturally and by the flute naturally, is no sin. But building up as some pianists do (not any more, but in my generation) from a pianissimo which you hardly could hear to a fortissimo, this was against the line or feeling of the baroque.

These things are interesting for me because I am a passionate teacher. I want to awake [something] in the students who go out later--I am sure they will forget three-quarters of it, but something might register with them, and when they go out as teachers something might be carried along.

Tusler: Didn't Bach, too, write many pieces that weren't just particularly for one instrument or another? I'm thinking about the Art of the Fugue.

Ehlers: Well, this was, I would say, an abstract piece for contrapuntal writing, which with Bach's power never really became abstract. Everything he did had life and power, was full of meaning and could be played. But it was really meant, I think, as an exercise in counterpoint, to show what could be done.

Wolfgang Graeser and The Art of the Fugue

Tusler: Would you like to pick up on the Art of the Fugue subject and tell on the tape the story about Wolfgang Graeser?

Ehlers: Well, Graeser was a young man, a student of Professor Johannes Wolf at the University in Berlin. He came to me, attracted by the programs I did. I was at this time the only one who played old music, either solo or with Hindemith in the trio we had. First Paul was the viola player and his brother Rudolf was the cellist. Then the brothers didn't get along very well and we separated, [performing] with another cellist; but Paul and I stayed together.

At about this time there was an interest in bringing the

old music back to life. You always read about it in books. Hindemith, thank God, was very interested in old music. As you know, he wrote the figured bass for the Biber sonatas which were known to musicologists, but never heard before Hindemith did this marvelous figured bass writing and we performed it.

Well, Graeser was a scholar who wanted to be a musician, but his violin playing was just average. His brain was over average, bright and logical and of high intelligence. But he didn't find his niche, his way in life. As a performer he was out. As a scholar, he was not, I don't think, interested enough, to be a musicologist; he was very impatient with himself, and aiming high.

So when he brought out [his orchestration of] the Art of the Fugue it was a great sensation; everybody had read about it, but very few people [had heard it] or had read [through] it; they had no way of judging it because it was never performed. Graeser, with the interest of youth and the conviction that what Bach wrote was never a piece just to be read dry on the table but should be heard, because Bach was a practical musician, started to orchestrate the Art of the Fugue, using a full orchestra sometimes, sometimes just part of the orchestra, sometimes two harpsichords, and in one [section] one harpsichord.

Of course this was very interesting and it was performed. The first performance was in Leipzig under [Karl Straube] in 1927. I'm sure it was at the Thomas Church in Leipzig, which was very natural because it was the last place where Bach

worked and lived and died. I was there but I didn't play in this first performance.

The second performance was at the State Opera in Berlin under [Erich] Kleiber who was then conductor of the State Opera. In this performance I played. I played the one for the one harpsichord and the one for two harpsichords--I don't know any more who was on the second harpsichord. From then on, I played most of them wherever it was performed.

But anyhow, it was a great sensation that one work of Bach has existed and has never been heard, you know? But like all sensations, after it was played in a few places and conductors had shown their interest, it died out. Suddenly Graeser was left in a void, you might say. The sensation was gone. He had traveled to all the places where it was performed [all over Germany].

We were on very good terms; he was so much younger that he could have been my son--as a matter of fact he was very friendly with my daughter Christel. She was very brilliant, not musically, but otherwise; Graeser could have been a top mathematician. It was not only in one way that his talent was.

Well, suddenly he felt lost. The sensation had died out.

"What should I do?" he said to me.

Well, I couldn't advise him. I couldn't understand even. I know now I could have been more of a help to him if I would have understood. I said, "Well, go on with your music history."

"No, I don't want to. It doesn't interest me enough, and I don't want to be a teacher." This was for me very new

and I couldn't understand, because I love teaching.

Johannes Wolf, one of his teachers, was very worried about him, and found a way out. He said, "Listen, a friend of mine," a professor (of I don't know what), "is going to Egypt for certain research. Would you accompany him?" He wanted somebody to help him.

This was a wonderful outlet for Graeser and he went. I think he had a good year. He came back full of experiences; he brought me a wonderful scarf; I still have it, a white scarf, hand-embroidered, which he brought from Egypt. I thought it was touching because he really didn't have much money.

Well, but now he was back again, and he came to me and said, "What shall I do?"

I said, "First, kindly finish your Art of the Fugue. You know Peters is interested." (Or I don't know which big company was.)

"Well, I can't do it. Will you help me?"

I said, "I can't, I wouldn't know how to do it."

Johannes Wolf called me and said, "I'm worried. Graeser doesn't find his way. Now he has been gone a year, had this experience, and he is back--he doesn't want to be a musicologist and he has not enough talent to be a practical musician. What are we going to do?"

He came very often to my house, as I said before, partly to see me, and if I wasn't there, he talked to Christel about non-music matters. Christel always told me how brilliant

he was; she was much younger than he was and she felt flattered that he came to her.

Nothing changed. His professors--Max Schneider, such a lovely and good person--they all had love for him and at the same time didn't know what to do, how to advise him.

I remember the evening, I will never forget it, when he came to my house. It was late, and got later and later, and I got very tired. He lived in a suburb which the train went to at a certain time and stopped for the night.

I said, "Wolfie, you will miss your train; please go, it's late."

He said, "No, I have so much to talk to you about--one thing especially. If I can't finish the Art of the Fugue, will you do it?"

I said, "Certainly not! What nonsense! Why shouldn't you finish it? You have not so much to do. You can finish it and I am not able to do it. I don't know what you want and I don't know what you wish--don't think of it, even." And I became a little...not unfriendly, but impatient. I was very tired.

I said, "Listen, in ten minutes, your train is going, the last train you have." He didn't move and he didn't move, and finally I said, "Now I have to go to bed, Wolfie."

I should have felt something strange in his behavior. I should have said, "Stay the night here and make your bed in my music room." But I didn't.

This was the last I saw of him. The next morning the

telephone call came from his brother. He hanged himself the same night. It was that he didn't find his niche--he didn't find the way, and he didn't have the patience to wait.

Johannes Wolf, who was deeply shocked, sent me a message that he couldn't attend the funeral, that there was an important meeting which he couldn't leave, [and asked] if I would read what he had written, the last speech.

And I said, "I can't. I just can't."

So he said, "I will give it to one of my best students, Dr. Hans Theodore David."

David read it, and this was where I met Hans David. He came to me and apologized, saying "I should have not been chosen [to read it] because Graeser hated me; he knew I was working on the Art of the Fugue at the same time he worked on it, but you couldn't read it, and Johannes Wolf insisted that I do it."

Later I became a very close friend of Hans Theodore David, who is a one hundred percent scholar. [He had no problem] between being a mediocre performer or a scholar--he always was a scholar and always wanted to be a scholar, and he has been a professor at Ann Arbor, Michigan, for many, many years. This was the sad story of Wolfgang Graeser.

Tusler: Do I understand you that Graeser never did actually complete the transcription of the Art of the Fugue?

Ehlers: Well, I really can't answer this, what was left.

On that last evening he asked me, "In case I am too busy or I don't have time, would you finish it?" I don't know what was

left to finish. I really think it was finished, because we had played it already everywhere. Probably he wanted to make some changes--I don't know.

Tusler: Was it at that time published?

Ehlers: Ja, it was published. I think Peters published it. I have still the Graeser edition which I got from him, and much later, David's came out.

It is just a sad incident, that this Art of the Fugue was lying there for hundreds of years; nobody cared about it; nobody looked at it; and just at the same time two talented people, had the same idea of just bringing it out.

Tusler: How did Graeser happen to get into this work with the Art of the Fugue?

Ehlers: He was a student of Johannes Wolf in musicology. He was not good enough to be a performer, so the only way to keep in contact with music was musicology.

When Schweitzer heard of [his death] he was deeply distressed. He had met Graeser once, I think through me, and he wrote me, "I could have helped him. Why didn't you send him to me?"

And he would [have helped]. I am sure, because the great vision Schweitzer had, not just in connection with Bach or the Art of the Fugue, but from the human point of view, would have broadened Graeser's viewpoint. He would have gotten him away from the ego. He wanted to be something, especially since he was so successful with the Art of the Fugue.

I once said, "Wolfie, you behave as if you had written

the Art of the Fugue." You know? He was young and it went to his head, this sudden success.

It was a very sad story. I think probably there was no other way out for him. He didn't want to be the second one anywhere, and he wasn't big enough to be the first one.

Tusler: Did he play, himself, in the performances with you?

Ehlers: No.

Tusler: Did he conduct it?

Ehlers: No. He couldn't conduct. He came to the dress rehearsal and probably gave the conductor, who had not much experience with Bach, some advice.

Tusler: How does it differ from Hans David's?

Ehlers: I can't tell you in detail. You know, Bach left it without saying Number One, Number Two, Number three, for first of all [it would differ] in the arrangement, what comes after what. Also in the orchestration, because it was a two or four-staff composition with no orchestration indicated. So each one had a different kind of orchestration.

We did our own [version], by the way, at USC. The counterpoint class of Ingolf Dahl did it. I thought it was a wonderful idea. He gave each student two fugues to orchestrate, and we performed it once. It might have not been very good but it was a wonderful exercise for the students. Only a person like Mr. Dahl, who is so creative in his teaching, could have thought of this.

But we did the performance in many places: in Vienna, in the Berlin State Opera, in smaller places like Dortmund

and Essen. It was suddenly the fashion to do it. Leipzig was naturally the first place to do it.

Tusler: It must have created quite a sensation in the musical world in Germany at that time.

Ehlers: Ja. All we learned in school was that there is a work which Bach started and never finished--that's all we knew about it. And the theme is beautiful.

Tusler: The Swingle Singers do it, did you know? One movement of it. [laughter] *

Ehlers: Ja, ja! They do it very, very well, I must say. I am very amused about it, really. On my birthday, four of my favorite students called me very seriously into a room(I didn't even know that they knew about my birthday) and played it, without telling me what it was. They were doubtful how I would react, and when they saw me smiling and being delighted, they said this was meant as my birthday present, but they didn't know how I would take it. [laughter] They are wonderful, wonderful musicians. I am sure Bach, who had a great sense of humor, would have enjoyed it.

*The Swingle Singers have performed and recorded jazz versions of Bach.

TAPE NUMBER: FOUR, SIDE ONE

November 29, 1965

South American Tour

Tusler: I believe you did quite a long tour in South America one summer.

Ehlers: Yes, I did, but don't ask me right now which year.* I lost so very many of my things by this moving which I wasn't prepared for; as I told you before, when I returned from Israel, at that time still Palestine, I didn't expect not to go home. Instead I went straight to England and all my things were left in Germany. I never returned to Germany. That is why I can't recall exact dates.

It was naturally a great sensation for me, and I'll tell you now how it came about. I was giving one of the many concerts [I did with] the Amstad sisters, the two singers from Switzerland with whom I toured. As I explain again, they were not great singers but very cultured singers; and for the music we did together, chamber duets, big voices were really not requested. They would be in the way. I gave a concert in Berlin in the Bechsteinsaal. This was an intimate little hall.

The day afterwards I got a call from a gentleman whose name I remember, which is very odd for me, I must say, Sossini. He said, "Could I have the pleasure of meeting you? I would

*A letter from Domingo Santa Cruz, dean of the Facultad de Ciencias y Artes Musicales in the Universidad de Chile, dated March 31, 1966, establishes the time of Mme. Ehlers' visit there as September, 1929. Therefore the entire South American tour was in 1929.

like to talk to you about something which might be of interest."

I felt immediately this might be a professional talk and I said, "Let's meet with my agent," Luise Wolff of the great agency Wolff and Sachs in Berlin. It is central in Berlin and I lived outside a little bit. I made some excuse why I thought we'd better meet there, and it proved that I was right; and as I never was very clever in business arrangements, I was very grateful that my agent, Luise Wolff, took over. [She had an] enormous capacity as a woman, in the right way, to attract artists and to attract managers and to handle this business. All the artists were under her management there.

So he offered me a tour to South America. I was naturally delighted and afraid, both at the same time. I felt my program was not large enough at this time, and anyhow, going to a country where one doesn't speak the language, you know, was difficult. But he was a very cultured person himself, spoke a little bit of German, was partly educated in Vienna; he was a throat and nose specialist and had his education in Vienna. With him I felt at ease, and I felt that it would be a sensation, because never had the harpsichord been heard in South America.

Tusler: His home was in Buenos Aires?

Ehlers: Ja. He was one of the most well-known medical men there, with connections in Rio de Janeiro and so on, and belonged to the high society, so to speak.

Tusler: What was he doing in Europe? He just happened to be there traveling?

Ehlers: Traveling, and heard one of my concerts with these two

singers and felt immediately it might please the public in Argentina. Of course, he didn't want the singers, which was sad for me because we were a very good ensemble; but he explained to me, and afterwards I felt how right he was, having heard South American singers, that they went for big voices. Those intimate, small voices, even if they were very lovely and cultured, wouldn't have had any appeal, or only for very few people.

So we made a contract that I should come. When I was on the steamer, I think, in the midst of the voyage, I got a telegram from him telling me that Mme. Landowska would come too and that I should arrange my program so that we didn't play more or less the same pieces. Well, this was impossible, because I was not informed what she would play. But I got a great shock, because to compete with such a great artist and master, and I was pretty much at the beginning of my career, was not an easy thing.

After I arrived in Buenos Aires he told me, "My dear, you will have to work up a big program because Mme. Landowska cancelled her tour."

So I felt very much at ease. But again, she changed her mind, and having heard that I was coming, she accepted.

So this was a very difficult thing for me to do. First of all, she had this tremendous name; she was an experienced great artist, and I was not exactly at the beginning, but just making my career. I was only glad I would start before she arrived. I had press notices, very good ones, and I played well and

it was a good success.

But from then on my life became very much more difficult. She knew how to handle the press and she knew how to meet the right people, not forgetting she was a great experienced artist.

She gave her first concert and I went with my manager, Dr. Sossini. After the concert it was natural for me to go and greet her, and here she ignored me completely. I left with tears in my eyes.

Sossini said to me, "You have no reason to cry. She should cry for her bad behavior." But this was easily said. I felt very deeply hurt.

After two weeks, I got a call from an Austrian writer, a woman. She said she wanted to visit me. I thought, well, this is a nice idea--I am from Vienna, I knew she was from Vienna, she wants to give her opinion. But here she came very aggressively and said she felt she had to talk to me. I had to go and ask forgiveness from Mme. Landowska.

And here for the first time in my life when it came to Landowska, I said, "No. Why should I ask forgiveness? What did I do to her?"

"You had no right to appear in a country before Mme. Landowska."

I said, "This you have to talk over with my manager, Dr. Sossini."

But she said, "Also, even if you are right in your feeling and the facts speak against Mme. Landowska, it doesn't count. You were her pupil and she is older than you and a great

maestra. You have to go and ask forgiveness that you dared to appear here before she came. She brought the harpsichord to life."

I said, "I don't doubt this; but this was a business offer I got and my agent accepted and I was very happy to come."

She said, "Well, you go and beg forgiveness." She left, and I was ready to go.

When I told Sossini he knew about her visit to me-- he said, "You are not going. You are not a little girl any more who goes and asks for forgiveness, and you haven't done anything. You don't go."

So the whole time in Buenos Aires was just terrible for me because of this feeling. Here was Landowska whom I admired, whom I adored as an artist, and I couldn't even see her and talk to her.

Well, in between, I got an offer (Sossini got the offer for me) to go to Chile from Buenos Aires. I was snowed in on my way up, which I have to tell you, and I was scared to leave Buenos Aires.

Tusler: How long were you in Buenos Aires? Was it a matter of several weeks or so?

Ehlers: Ja, several weeks.

Tusler: And you played a number of different concerts.

Ehlers: Oh, yes, quite a few concerts in Buenos Aires, and then [quite a few later] then in Santiago where I felt very happy. The musical atmosphere was much better. In Buenos Aires there were mostly wealthy people, musical or not musical, who went

to the concerts; but in Santiago there were real musicians.

Tusler: Were these concerts in connection with any universities, or were they general public concerts?

Ehlers: Public concerts. But I was asked (I don't know the background of how Sossini got me this) to play for the opening of the Conservatoire in Santiago, Chile. * My stay in Santiago was sheer happiness because there was no conflict with Landowska and a very musical atmosphere not always built on society, but with really good musicians like Domingo Santa Cruz [head of the Conservatory] and a young generation of good musicians. I felt very happy there.

But my traveling to Chile was something really which I will always remember. It started out wonderfully, but moving north, we came to a point where we were so snowed in that the train couldn't move any more. We were told we would have to get out and spend probably two or three days till they would be able to remove the snow from the tracks till we could go on. So we all had to get out. Of course my harpsichord couldn't be carried out--it stayed on in the baggage car.

I wasn't prepared for this. I had only light summer dresses because it was warm in Buenos Aires, and the only way I could cope with the cold was to stay in this little hotel in bed all the time. Thank God I had some books with me--otherwise, I couldn't have survived. I had even the meals brought into my

*Letter from Domingo Santa Cruz, March 31, 1966, states that Mme. Ehlers played "one year after a reorganization, not 'foundation' of our National Conservatory (actually it was established in 1849) and she gave the first series of concerts of harpsichord we had ever heard in Chile after the disappearance of such instrument around the time of our independence."

room because I wasn't prepared for the cold; it was heated, but still...

Tusler: It must have been very high up in the mountains.

Ehlers: Ja, it was high. You have to cross the Cordillera, you know.

After three days, I think, we could move. All the big luggage arrived in Santiago about three days later. Well, I was sure the harpsichord was on the wagon still and would follow a few days later, but I was not quite sure--should I go or should I stay with the harpsichord? Then my manager telephoned from Santiago and said, "Please come, because we have to postpone the concert and it would be wonderful if you would appear and explain why we have to postpone the concert."

So I came there, arriving with a little suitcase--this was all. But I felt at home immediately. First of all, the location of the town is so beautiful, all snow mountains around; and then I felt immediately at home with the musicians there. It was something entirely different than Buenos Aires which was built on the wealthy society. I never fitted in there very well. But here I felt at home, interested in what they were doing, how they were building up with almost no means, just this enthusiasm.

Tusler: Was the language a problem?

Ehlers: Well, I don't know how I managed there. I think some of them spoke, like Domingo Santa Cruz, a little German, and my Italian at this time was quite good, which helped a great deal. Also there is a big German colony there. But I liked

the teachers, and I liked their ideas and their approach and their enthusiasm, building up just out of enthusiasm a good school. I felt very much at home. I don't know how many concerts I gave.

I went then to another place in Chile, a very fashionable place, where the German consul lived; he didn't live in Santiago. I don't know where this other place was, but very close. All my correspondence and all my programs from this time I have not any more. There were only two places where they really cultivated music, but Santiago was the main place, and I had a very happy time there.

Tusler: Was it much of a town in those days?

Ehlers: Well, I don't know the town, but the location, was so beautiful. There I would have stayed immediately, if I hadn't had a family to return to. But Buenos Aires I would have not liked. It was a much wealthier town, of course, but everything depended mostly on the wealth of a few people. [In Santiago] there was a big crowd of young musicians who all started out in a way and did everything out of love for the music and for their idea of building up a good Conservatdre; I don't know if they got paid or if they did it for a very, very modest salary.

Tusler: What sort of living arrangements did you have there? Were you taken into someone's home?

Ehlers: No, no. I didn't like this. I did it once in Buenos Aires, because there was an enormously wealthy family whom I had known on their visit to Berlin--they had visited Berlin, and I don't know how we met, but anyhow they invited me. But

this is not a happy arrangement--I never did this again. One has to be independent, traveling around, and it was good at the beginning till I was accustomed to the language and to everything in Buenos Aires, but in the long run this is not [good]. They were very nice people and tried to fit in, you know, and this is not always the right thing. I wanted to practice, but no, there was [always] something and I couldn't and so it's no good. They were trying, really, to arrange things the best they could, but you don't feel at ease.

But there I had my harpsichord I think in the Conservatoire and lived in a hotel--it was utterly free. I liked the people and I liked the musicians and I liked everything. It was built up slowly with great love and thought and of course help; from somewhere there had to come help, but I don't know how it was done there.

Commentary on Language; Life in Italy and Berlin; Landowsk

I am now astonished and a little bit upset at myself how little interest I had in anything outside my playing and anything in connection with music. Maybe also the barrier of the language [had something to do with it].

Tusler: This must have been a constant problem to you everywhere you went.

Ehlers: Well, in Russia I couldn't cope at all. I just had my friend, the Austrian ambassador, and when the situation became too difficult he acted as translator. As for the press interviews, I gave to him I think in German, and he immediately

translated into Russian.

Tusler: You learned Italian, I suppose, by the travel you did in Italy.

Ehlers: Ja, only by traveling, and by being quite a great deal with Italians. Italian somehow is so familiar, being with singers who sing so much Italian music. Probably these are the most popular words like amore and so on, but at least your ear accepts the inflections of the language. This is so very important. I never talked Italian well. Far from it, but I felt never lost in Italy. Somehow [there were] always some words you knew from the song literature, or something.

Tusler: And what about French?

Ehlers: My French was always very poor.

Tusler: You didn't learn those languages in school.

Ehlers: I learned them, but I just made it, so to speak. I have no talent for languages, and the only language which came to me easily was Italian because I also lived in Italy quite a time.

Tusler: Actually you never spent very much time in France.

Ehlers: Never.

Tusler: You were in France, of course.

Ehlers: Well, if you count Gunsbach, which belonged after the First World War to France, but I only spent a few days in Paris in my traveling and never felt at home because of the language.

Tusler: You never concertized in France.

Ehlers: No. There is only Paris where you could concertize.

Tusler: And then Landowska was living in Paris, wasn't she?

Ehlers: No, not at this time.

Tusler: She had her place outside Paris.

Ehlers: Ja, but this was after the war, after she left Germany in 1918. After the death of her husband she built this wonderful place outside Paris.

Tusler: What language did you speak with Mme. Landowska, German?

Ehlers: Oh, she spoke quite well German. If she said some words in French, my French was good enough to [understand], but I couldn't carry on a conversation. I spent a few months, as I told you, in Rome, and I still admire my courage to give a lecture class in Turin in Italian. I think I did something in Milano, too, at the Conservatoire.

Tusler: Your command of the language must have been very adequate, then.

Ehlers: No, it was not adequate, but they accepted it. Don't forget, if you talk about certain things, about the harpsichord and music, there is a limited kind of expression. It's quite different when you carry on a conversation which touches on different subjects.

Tusler: Since we're on the subject of language, when did you learn your English?

Ehlers: I never learned it, and it shows. I came, as I told you, back from Palestine to England where I was received by this lovely family who became close friends of mine, and of course in their home nobody spoke in any other language than English. So I had to learn it.

Tusler: And was it easy for you?

Ehlers: Well, I just went along.

Tusler: You picked it up by ear.

Ehlers: Only by ear. I hoped people would forgive me, and they did; they were very generous, and I picked it up by ear. This is the same thing with Italian--I picked it up by ear. Don't forget, the two singers with whom I traveled spoke perfectly Italian. When we stayed for months in Florence, we rented a house there and made our concert trips from there, and I was surrounded by Italian. Our domestic help spoke Italian, and if you wanted something you had to talk [in it].

Tusler: How much problem did you have with the everyday business of life?

Ehlers: I never had any. My two wonderful singers were not only good singers but they all the, what do you say, eigenschaft [qualities] which I lacked. They were excellent cooks, both of them; practical; everything I was not they had; so our living together was wonderful. They accepted me the way I am, without any "why don't you do this, why can't you do that" --they knew I couldn't and let me go my way.

Tusler: You never liked the business of taking care of a house and the chores.

Ehlers: Well, you see, at the time when we lived in Germany you had helpers. I always had when the children were small somebody to take care of them, in the daytime at least, and I always had a housekeeper. Otherwise I couldn't have earned money, and at this time it was [expected] in Germany that you had to go from house to house to teach your students. Of course,

when I became known, then they came to me. As I told you, I married very young, had to earn [money] from the beginning, had my children immediately after I was married, and so at this time I had to go [out to teach].

Tusler: You literally just didn't have time for the everyday household chores.

Ehlers: And I had no great likings [for them] either; I wasn't trained for it. So I had helpers in the house, and I preferred it later on when the students came to me. I had to have helpers because I had no time for cooking. I was attending the Hochschule and had to work hard. I didn't own a harpsichord at this time. I had to go to the Hochschule and practice-- we had a practice time [set] for us, and this was quite a way from the house where I lived. And then the students came to me, whom I taught in piano.

Tusler: Getting around must have been very difficult, too.

Ehlers: Not in Berlin. No. We had all kinds of transportation. It is not like Los Angeles. Here you are lost [without a car]. Absolutely nobody except my very, very wealthy friends had cars. Nobody had a car. There was a street car, an omnibus that went every few minutes, and this was no problem. I taught very much in Berlin pianists, because there were no harpsichordists and the few who were there--I think besides me three--were at the Hochschule with Mme. Landowska.

Tusler: What sort of living arrangements did you have in Berlin?

Ehlers: We all lived somewhere which was easily accessible

from all sides. I lived very close to Mme. Landowska, and very close to Busoni.

Busoni was, strange as it might sound, a lover of the harpsichord. He had a small harpsichord in his house and sometimes called me to come over and play for him. I felt so stupid, me, nobody, going up to play for Busoni. But he couldn't handle the harpsichord with his big hands, and being used to the sound of the piano, he wanted to get the same sounds out of the harpsichord. He was a wonderful man. I was too young to appreciate all about him. It didn't take me even more than ten minutes to walk over to Landowska from my place, or ten minutes walk to Busoni. A different kind of life from here.

Tusler: How did you get to know Busoni?

Ehlers: I don't know any more, really I don't know. He lived a long time in Germany. He became famous in Germany, and he belonged really to the culture of Germany more than to Italy. He was born there.

Tusler: Well--let's see. You were still in Santiago a moment ago. [laughter]

Ehlers: How fast I travel. [laughter] You can't avoid that when you talk about something; at the same moment another picture comes to your mind.

Tusler: What happened, then, after you finished your concerts at Santiago? Did you go somewhere else in South America?

Ehlers: Ja, I think to Valparaíso. From there I came back to [Berlin]. So this tour I made, and I think this was another thing which made Mme. Landowska very angry, because I was asked and not she. It is not because I tried, but probably my agent

tried, and also my demands were much lower than hers. So probably this was the reason. I am sure they would have been happy to have her, but my agent probably acted faster than hers did, so this she hold against me, too.

I don't know, in connection with this, if I ever told you about when I met her again, after this incident in [South America]. I came back from my tour in Israel, and in Cairo, I think, the ship stopped. Who came on the ship but Mme. Landowska.

Tusler: She knew you were on the ship?

Ehlers: Oh, no. She didn't but she saw me. This I found out later.

When I saw her coming in, I immediately sent a note to her cabin that I had seen her and that I was delighted, how wonderful she looked, and that I was on the ship, too. I expected to hear from her. I think I bought flowers on the ship and sent them with my letter to her cabin. I didn't hear a word from her, and she never appeared at the meals--she must have been served in her cabin. Probably she was tired.

Well, when we stepped out, it happened in Marseilles that I stood next to her; not that I tried, but suddenly I looked up and she was next to me.

In her sweet voice that she could have if she wanted she said, "My dear child, where have you been? I looked for you all the time on the ship."

Well, I couldn't answer this because I knew she wasn't looking, she didn't even answer my letter.

Then she said, "And where are you going now?"

I said, "To America." This was my first trip on the invitation to come here and play for the Coolidge Festival. This was the last word I ever had from her. She never forgave me that I came to America before her. In a way I can understand it now. At this time I was only hurt, but now I understand. It was she who brought the harpsichord back to life, and it was really she who should have come first to America.

Tusler: I didn't realize that you came and performed here before she did.

Ehlers: Yes. I don't know if she was here before; I don't think so. Otherwise she wouldn't have been so hurt. I think even if she was here, the time was not yet ready in America to accept the harpsichord. I came at a time when it was ready. The write-up I got in the New York Times by Olin Downes (not the Downes who writes now, but his father who was very famous) was fantastic, much better than I ever deserved, because it was a sensation. So probably she wasn't here before, and this she never could forgive me, that I was the one who brought the harpsichord to America.

[Ralph] Kirkpatrick's appearance was later, much later. He is much younger than I am. He went to Landowska, but as I heard only took three lessons from her and returned. They didn't get on at all. He was already a mature musician, and probably couldn't agree with everything. I heard it directly from him and indirectly from some of his friends. When I said once, "He is a student of Landowska," I got the answer, "You can't

call a person a student who takes three lessons."

I never had a chance to talk with him. I met him very often but never had a chance to talk to him to find out why he really left her so early. I could figure out certain things, knowing him now, his playing, and knowing her, that the two didn't get on well. He was a scholar, at least as good as Landowska, but very honest and straightforward, and I can imagine that he couldn't take many things she did, the way she approached music, the way she wanted him to do things.

Tusler: He's a very fine performer.

Ehlers: Excellent, excellent, and a very good musician, at least as good as Mme. Landowska was. Probably her musical approach in certain things must have nottbeen to his liking.

America

Tusler: When you came to play at the Library of Congress, was it just the one concert that you played?

Ehlers: Ja, ja, and then I went back to England.

Tusler: Did you meet Mrs. Coolidge at that time?

Ehlers: Yes, naturally.

Tusler: She was the one who was responsible, of course, for having you brought over.

Ehlers: Ja, ja. Well, responsible was Carl Engel. He was the contact.

Tusler: Financially she made it possible?

Ehlers: Probably. Ja. I am sure. I was paid such a fee that I could do it.

Tusler: Was it a solo recital?

Ehlers: No, I played only one solo number in a big program. Somewhere I should have this program. I was so careless in all those things, you know? I was always interested in playing, and in playing the best I can, never thinking "keep this, or keep that," which I regret very much. I have an excuse for the things which I left behind me in Germany because, as I told you, I was not even back then when things happened in Germany, so I couldn't take anything with me which would have been probably of importance.

Tusler: Your husband had already left Germany at that time, also?

Ehlers: He left it, but he wouldn't have known what was of importance to me. I think probably he took some of my music out, but certainly no letters, reviews, and so on.

Tusler: What were the circumstances of his leaving Germany?

Ehlers: He detested the idea of Hitler, although he himself was not Jewish. When his close colleague and friend, the head of the academy for painting and sculpture, offered him a position, he refused it. It was the end of their friendship, too.

Tusler: And when he left, he went where?

Ehlers: To Mallorca, Spain. He had an ideal. He always loved the south. He went once when we were not long married. He got a prize, I don't know which prize it was, and lived one year in Rome. Since then, he was sold on the south. Italy was then later Fascist, so he wouldn't have liked to go back, but he went to a little island in the south of Spain, Mallorca.

It was famous through Chopin, which he didn't know because he had no connection with music. But he loved Mallorca.

Tusler: Did he stay there all through the Civil War period in Spain?

Ehlers: All the foreigners were for weeks interned, and then sent over the border. He had to leave everything behind him. This was the second emigration for him, and when he went to Mallorca he had our very beautiful library which he took because he was crazy about books. The whole library went to Mallorca. Everything was lost during the Civil War in Spain. Mar

Tusler: He went across the border into France?

Ehlers: Ja.

Tusler: Did he stay there for some time?

Ehlers: I really don't know. I don't remember this very much. But he went to England later.

Tusler: When you were in England?

Ehlers: I was already in England. He came later, and bought something out in the country to follow up his ceramics idea.

Tusler: Where were your daughters during this time?

Ehlers: I don't recall, really. They ~~were~~ both married.

Christina came to America. This is why I came to America, because I wanted to visit her. Maria came much later. She lived through the war in Germany and had a miserable time, a very hard time.

Tusler: So you ~~were~~ in America for the first time for the Library of Congress concert in 1936. Then you were next in America in 1937 when you came here to visit your daughter and stayed

on?

Ehlers: When I visited my daughter, I had no intention to stay. I taught that summer at Juilliard. I still have somewhere a nice letter from Professor Hutchins who wrote and thanked me for the course I gave. This gave me the chance to see Christina again. Then I came here and stayed a little longer than I intended to, because my intention was still to go back to England where I always had concerts, all over Europe, with the exception of Germany. But later came this wonderful offer from USC and I never went back, thank God. God was very good to me.

Tusler: That was when you had the performances with Bing Crosby. What sort of thing did you play?

Ehlers: I have no idea. You can be sure it was no Bach. I don't know what I played, probably some Couperin, some Scarlatti. I was very thoughtless in all those things. I took everything as it came and enjoyed it, and never thought to collect [anything]. I was interested in what I was doing and I didn't think that this would be of any value for anybody than myself. It is really true.

Tusler: When you were on the Bing Crosby show, the harpsichord, and especially out here in Los Angeles, was really a novelty, wasn't it?

Ehlers: Ja, it was, absolutely a novelty. I think through the Bing Crosby show, other people became aware of it, and this is how I came into Wuthering Heights. I am in it--you see me play. It's my only appearance in pictures where I've been

seen.

Tusler: Was this the version of Wuthering Heights that Sir Lawrence Olivier made?

Ehlers: Ja. This is where I met him, through this performance. A few months later I was in New York for recordings for Decca. Sir Laurence--not Sir at this time, just Laurence Olivier, was playing in New York, I don't know in which play. When he left here after Wuthering Heights, he told me when I ever came to New York as long as he is there I should make myself known. He liked me because he could talk hours about his love at this time which was his wife he divorced later, Vivien Leigh. He talked to me off and on, all the time. And so for this, for being a good listener, I think he liked me.

When I came to New York I sent him a message that I was there and would love to see him. I don't know which play it was. I immediately got a ticket with the remark, "See me after the show is over."

After the show was over I came, and he let all the elegantly dressed ladies stay there and he came to me and greeted me very warmly. The looks I got from these ladies I will never forget. I was neither elegant nor anything.

And not only this. He said, "I'm walking you to your hotel." On the walk I understood why, because he could open his heart about Vivien with me again. So this was how we met.

Tusler: Did you keep up a friendship with him after that?

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Ehlers: Yes. Many years ago. Some recordings of old dances.

Tusler: Were you already at that time working at USC?

Ehlers: No, this was before, because I couldn't have been weeks away in New York.

Tusler: But yet you were living here with your daughter.

Ehlers: Ja.

Tusler: Is that the only recording you've ever done?

Ehlers: No, I made recordings in Germany.

Tusler: You don't like to do it?

Ehlers: I don't like it. I get terribly nervous; and every new take makes me even more nervous. So I learned to say "no" because I am not good at it. I'm much more nervous to play a recording than when I'm playing before the public, and it's just stupid, because you always can take this little bit where you made a mistake out. I know it's stupid but it doesn't help me to know it. I am not myself when I played [recordings]. I didn't feel I should go through this.

I tried years ago again with a friend of mine, who could be blamed a little bit for having developed this attitude in me. He had wonderful equipment but he was not the right man to do it, psychologically. He didn't let me play to the end. After the slightest slip of my finger, instead of letting me go to the end, he said, "Now, we do this again, otherwise it was good." I got such a complex that I gave it all up.

He did the same with my dear friend Eva Heinitz, the very famous viola da gamba player. We wanted to have our playing together of the three Bach gamba sonatas recorded, and

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after the Carmel Bach Festival we stayed at his house in Carmel to do the recording. But she became so upset that we had to give it up. In a way, it was a consolation for me because I saw somebody else getting as upset as I was. Then I made up my mind I am not going [to do it any more]. I did recordings for a company which doesn't exist any more, Allegro recordings. To my astonishment the other day I played in class one of my suites and it wasn't bad at all. Maybe a few wrong notes but a very lively performance. So my friend has ruined me for recording with his unpsychological behavior.

Tusler: Maybe there's something, too, to the fact of having the stimulation of an audience.

Ehlers: I don't know. Probably if I made a mistake [in a performance] it is for eternity, so to speak. If he wouldn't have made such a big affair out of it [it would have been better]. A little thing can always be corrected.

Tusler: Was he doing this for a commercial company?

Ehlers: No. He is a very wealthy man, loves music, has excellent taste, has a fantastic ear.

Tusler: He felt that he could just turn you on and off like a piece of machinery.

Ehlers: Ja, quite right. If he had said, "This was good but let's make another take." But he gave you an inferiority complex. You can't make records or tapes with an inferiority complex.

Eva Heinitz and I were a very good ensemble, and she is probably the best viola da gamba player I ever heard. She is much younger than I am, and she will make recordings maybe with

Malcolm [Hamilton], who is so fantastic on recordings, really.

Tusler: He apparently does not have this fear of doing it.

Ehlers: He has it, but not to the degree that it disturbs his playing. I listened yesterday to the first part of [his recording of] the Well-Tempered Clavier. There is no recording I've ever heard that I so wholeheartedly can say is beautiful. I think Bach himself would have loved it if he could have heard it.

USC Appointment

Tusler: What were the circumstances of Dr. Krone, who was then head of the USC Music Department, asking you to come and teach there?

Ehlers: I don't quite know. I don't know if he had heard me, or if he had heard about me. But I remember very well that one day I got a call, and he asked if I could come down. And so we did. My daughter Christina was driving me. It was a very hot summer day.

Tusler: You told the story about how, after you'd accepted the appointment, she didn't believe you.

Ehlers: Ja. So he called me, and this was when I went down.

He said, "Would you like to teach?"

I was very doubtful, not if I would like to, but if I could teach. Of course, I had taught private students; I never had classes.

But in spite of my so much poorer command of the English language, it went very well. The students were ready to take

what I had to give, and I was without any inhibition. I told them from the beginning that I would have difficulty in expressing myself in the English language, but they were very interested and helped me out. As I think back it was a very happy time for me, this beginning.

Gradually more and more of the faculty was involved in broad duties, and I had more and more students. I got the idea to create the Collegium Musicum which still exists, now under the man who really should have had it from the beginning, but I think he wasn't at the school at this time, Professor Ingolf Dahl.

Tusler: What is the Collegium Musicum?

Ehlers: We met and we made music, because I'm a strong believer in doing music and not only talking about it. I talked about baroque music a great deal in the baroque class; I had the history class; I had private students in piano and in harpsichord. Then I thought, this talking about music doesn't make any sense. We will make music ourselves, and we made music.

I had enough good singers at that time. We didn't have an opera class [then], so good voices turned up in the Collegium Musicum. Marilyn Horne was one of the students. She sang in the class when we performed wonderful things which I have never heard afterwards done.

I know when Professor Westrup from Oxford, England visited us, on one of his first visits, we did Saul and the Witch of Endor, and he said to me, "Where on earth do you get all the good singers?" I said, "They were in my Collegium Musicum." We

did all the music which was never done.

Gradually the Collegium Musicum grew, and I felt it grew over my head. After all, I wanted to be a player and keep some time for practicing. So I had a long talk with Ingolf and he took it over. He is the right man for it. He was a few years on the faculty before this transition took place. I felt I got more and more students, private students, I gave the baroque class, and it was too much. I knew also that my possibilities in this respect were limited. I had to conduct. If I had a talented student I gave it to him.

Anyhow, I started it out and Ingolf took it over and developed it wonderfully.

Tusler: But it was your idea, to start it.

Ehlers: It was my idea. Ja.

Tusler: How did Dr. Krone react to it?

Ehlers: Dr. Krone was ready for anything which I suggested to him.

Well, I brought the harpsichord to USC, I must say, to California, really, and I introduced the Collegium Musicum, which now is really in the right hands, and the special performance of baroque music here. So that, if I think back, I'm quite grateful I started out in quite a few directions which have developed wonderfully.

TAPE NUMBER: IV, SIDE TWO

December 6, 1965

Teaching at USC

Tusler: Last time we were talking about how you first came to USC and started teaching there under Dr. Max Krone and started the Collegium Musicum. When you went there, of course you'd never taught in a university situation before.

Ehlers: No. I had only taught privately, and this is of course an entirely different situation. I was very much afraid I wouldn't be able to cope with it, but it was easier than I had imagined. It is in my nature, somehow, as a performer, to give out, either in talking or playing. Also, there was the eagerness of the students to be introduced into a world which was never mentioned before. At this time the era of the baroque was neglected, though of course every student had to play Bach. If they were very brilliant, they played Bach in the version of Busoni and of Emil Sauer from Vienna, and of the great virtuosos. If they were not very brilliant, at least they had to play the Two-Part Inventions. The Three-Parts were never touched, as far as I remember.

Tusler: Why is that?

Ehlers: They are very complicated. I found this out later. They look easy, but they are very complicated to make music out of. But they are wonderful pieces of music. I can't mention the time exactly, it was about ten or fifteen years

ago, I played them all over America, the fifteen Two-Part and the fifteen Three-Part [Inventions], just in order to make known that this is music. They were also--what do you say, didactic?

Tusler: Yes, exercises?

Ehlers: No, not exercises. Exercises has a bad smell. But teaching material. That they were good, excellent music nobody had [fully realized]. Even I didn't realize it when I was taught them, till I got them myself in my fingers.

I gave many lectures at musicological meetings about the Inventions and the Sinfonias, which are the Three-Part Inventions, and I warned teachers, and still do, not to start to give this to young children too early. It was the habit. When you start with Bach, you give them an Invention. Mostly, this was enough to scare a child away from Bach for a lifetime.

Tusler: They are just too difficult for children to grasp?

Ehlers: Quite right. They are hard to play, with the exception of one or two, I think it's Number Eight in F Major which every child loves, but this is probably the only one. I know it from my own students, not at the university here, they behave more maturely, but when I was teaching children in Europe. "Oh, Bach again!" with a certain expression of annoyance. But I was always able to break through with talented students.

My advice to piano teachers is "Don't give them the Inventions." After all, it is didactic material, and you don't conquer with didactic material if you can't see what is behind it. So my advice for the piano teachers to whom I had the chance to speak

quite often on invitations especially here [in Los Angeles], but also in Chicago and Cincinnati and many different places, was "Avoid the Inventions," which in my [experience] were used as a kind of educational material like etudes. The scared [student] runs away from Bach. Give them minuets, gavottes, anything with a rhythmical impact which a young person gets some joy out of and knows what they are playing.

Well, now, I don't know how I ever came on [the subject of] the Inventions.

Tusler: You began to speak about how you were left to your own devices when you came to teach.

Ehlers: Ja. Quite right, thank you. I had to find my own way, and I was very stimulated. First of all, I learned there is not one method which works for all people. You have to learn to treat individuals. One has very good fingers and that's all. The brain is left somewhere else. Another person is all brain and no fingers at all, and you have to find the balance. You have to awaken the student, his vitality, for himself, so that he tries to find out the sense of a piece of music by himself.

Gradually I felt more and more secure in my teaching, and in the classes also, because I was carried very much by my own enthusiasm for baroque music and by having young students before me for whom all this was a new field. They knew the name of Bach, and everyone has played one Bach piece to fulfill his duty, but this was it. There was no warmth between the player and Bach's music. I succeeded, I think, in opening some doors and windows, and even made some of the students, and not

only harpsichord students which I had one or two of in the beginning, to open their hearts and understanding to the music of Bach.

In the Collegium Musicum, of course, we did all kinds of music from the [era] which I worked in, the baroque. But soon I felt this field should be given over to somebody who is not only a great musician and has knowledge, but who is also a good conductor, and so it came into the hands of Ingolf Dahl, who does a marvelous job. He is a first-class musician, and he has knowledge, love for the music and understanding for the style. I think it couldn't be in better hands.

Tusler: Was he enthusiastic about taking it over?

Ehlers: Ja. He was at the beginning a little doubtful because he is a very modest man, not overrating himself but greatly underrating himself. But since he has it, the Collegium Musicum has grown immensely in numbers; it is not now a matter of liking to attend it, they have to attend it, and I think this is a very healthy attitude. You don't learn about music through books and through the preaching of a teacher--you have to do it. You have to be exposed, singing and playing it, and you have to have discussions about many things, like tempo, for instance.

I found this is one of the most difficult things to develop in a student: independence from what is written on top of [the music]. The older [composers], including Bach, didn't write, or very seldom wrote, tempo indications. It was left to the performer. But the performer of the eighteenth century

had the style, understood the tempo. We don't. We have gotten faster and faster.

Also, if you are playing an old instrument, this indicates tempo. too. There is a difference if you play a piece on the piano or on the harpsichord or on the organ. You could play the same piece, and I think as a musical person you could have three different tempi, within limitations, naturally. A minuet will be always a minuet, and should sound like a minuet, but it will be different [according] to the tone quality of the instrument. All this was new to the students.

Tusler: Did Dr. Krone hire you with the specific purpose of teaching baroque style?

Ehlers: Yes. But I had piano students, too. I had piano students, I had a few harpsichord students, and this was all not new to me, because I had taught in Germany and in England. But new to me were classes, and they scared me to death in the beginning. I didn't even dare to start out.

Of course, my guide was Manfred Bukofzer's book. At one time he was a guest professor at USC for a few weeks, and we were good friends. I said, "Manfred, I am scared to death to teach baroque."

He said, "Don't you have my book?"

I said, "Naturally I have your book, but that's not enough!" I had to explain, "Your book is not easy."

It's not an easy book, and if there is no background created, you just don't understand what he is talking about.

But I learned this, and the great help for me was that I knew the music. If you read in a book about music and have no idea, it's very difficult to talk about it. I can't. I can't talk about this just from a book point of view, but I had it in my fingers. I played it, most of it. I knew who Mr. Froberger was because I played it. I know Kuhnau because I played it. They were not only names for me, they were facts. And so it became easier and easier. I have great respect before the historian; I am somehow antimusicology, not because I don't believe in it, we need them badly, but because I have no talent for it. I was very much afraid of these classes, and every time I had to give a baroque class I started preparing as if it would be for the first time. And maybe it was good, because each time I discovered something new.

Tusler: These classes were not taught primarily from the performing point of view. It was a history class.

Ehlers: No, no. This was more historic, a history class. But still I insisted, of course, that there was no talk without music because I don't believe in talking about music without hearing the music. Some of the students who were pianists I asked, for instance, to play a sarabande and [discuss] the tempo they would do, because I believe very much in doing, more than in anything else.

With my interpretation class, I have this experience every new semester. I get brilliant pianists, really brilliant, I mean technically. They have no idea how to approach Bach.

And because they have no idea, they go to extremes. It's either too slow or too fast because they don't know what to do with it. Here I come back to my old theme: they are not educated on phrasing. Phrasing in later music is something understood because the composer phrased it.

Tusler: It's written right into the musical score?

Ehlers: With a rest or a bowing which ends it, or something. But if you look at Bach's endless line (I repeat myself, I'm sure), this is the cue to Bach playing. It doesn't matter if it's a little louder or softer, but the sentences which are in the long line have to come out to make sense. The greatest compliment I ever get is from people who dislike Bach and hear me play and say, "Strange--it doesn't seem so difficult when you play it."

It's like a person who reads along, covers an enormous amount of words, without ever raising the voice or stopping or getting slower. The same with Bach. And believe me, these brilliant people don't see where the phrase in Bach swings. Handel is much easier because he thinks differently. His phrases are easier to recognize.

So all this had to be done, and I'm very proud that people like Dr. Charles Hirt or Roger Wagner once attended my classes and both repeated the classes because they felt they got something out of it, just to give you an idea about the caliber of students we had at this time. I was the first who had some knowledge about this field.

Tusler: Was Charles Hirt one of your pupils then?

Ehlers: Ja, ja.

Tusler: He wasn't teaching then.

Ehlers: Oh, no, he worked for his doctorate. Now you can imagine how old I am. [laughter] All those students. Roger Wagner worked, too. He was an organ student and working with me. We had long talks about phrasing. At this time I was probably the only person around whom they trusted that they could get something from it. I don't think Roger worked for a degree. Dr. Hirt worked for his doctorate. Many students who are teaching now all over America I know have been in my classes. With some of them my ideas might have worked out so that they use them in their teaching.

Tusler: All of this was so new then. People were just discovering the baroque and it was just beginning to be taught.

Ehlers: Ja, quite right. Well, there are people, for instance, like my friend Hans Theodore David, a professor at Ann Arbor, Michigan, who knew all these things much more than I did, but who was no performer. My great help was that I could show what I meant in performing.

Tusler: You illustrated these things yourself right in the class?

Ehlers: Oh, very much so, very much so.

Tusler: And you got the students in your classes to perform also, if they were performers.

Ehlers: Well, it's very difficult. The pianists, of course, I had in my interpretation class, and went through details with them. The interpretation class I still have, and as

long as I am at USC I think this class I won't give up. I gave up the baroque class, because so much preparatory work was involved, having material ready and so on, and I felt it takes too much of my strength. But I love to give the interpretation class because I have to do with people who do something, who play, and when they are playing I can immediately explain what's right, what's wrong.

I start out with the making of a piece, which is for me the tempo first. I am always astonished at the first question of the students, "Should I play it loud or soft?" which doesn't make so much difference in baroque music. The tempo is the important thing. I think sometimes first I confuse them terribly, but at least I make them think, and even if the result of their thinking is not probably what mine would be [at least] they start to think about it.

Tusler: So when you went to USC you were teaching those three things: the baroque class, the interpretation class, and private lessons.

Ehlers: Private lessons in harpsichord and in piano.

Tusler: The only place you had to deal with a class situation was in interpretation.

Ehlers: I don't believe in class teaching of instruments because the problem for every player is a different one. It doesn't make sense. I never could agree to this. Style you can speak of in general, but performing has to be dealt with separately.

My first student on the harpsichord was somebody who is

now in Santa Barbara, John Gillespie. He was my first student in harpsichord. He took his doctorate and learned harpsichord playing from the beginning. He was already a good pianist.

Tusler: Do they make prerequisites like that? Does a student have to have a strong background?

Ehlers: I have them always play piano first for me, because I have to see how the machine works, how the fingers work.

You have much more resistance on the harpsichord than on the piano, and their fingers have to be very well educated.

You have one, two, three, four strings [sometimes] plucked at the same time. It depends on what register you [use].

If you have the full register on my Pleyel, for instance, this includes the upper eight, the lower eight, the lower sixteen and the lower four, and if you couple this together it's quite heavy to put the key down clearly and precisely.

So you have to educate their fingers that they immediately feel, even before they touch the key, how much effort they should give. Not too much and not too little. The too little is obvious to everybody who listens, because then the strings are not plucked at once and come out crisply, but one after the other, which gives a dirty sound. This is what I have first to work on with all pianists who start to play the harpsichord. Somehow on the piano they mostly go more tentatively into the key, not so direct and clear. How it is on the organ I don't know, but with the harpsichord the finger has to be prepared for a decisive tone without being hard or pounding.

Tusler: But as you say, this depends on the particular registration.

Ehlers: The finger always has to be prepared for it. But you know that you have less to overcome if you have a lighter registration.

Tusler: What happens then if you strike the key too hard?

Ehlers: You get an ugly noise. You hear the wood.

Tusler: You hear a click?

Ehlers: The click you hear anyhow, but you hear wood on top of it, the jack jumping up with force and falling down with force.

Tusler: Does the audience actually hear that, too?

Ehlers: I don't know how far this carries, but I hear it and it annoys me. I don't wish to hear anything outside of the tone, no wood, nothing. But with pianists, too, you hear the wood if they are not careful with their touch.

Tusler: So this is why you always start the students on the piano, to see first what their particular problems are.

Ehlers: I want first to see what their finger dexterity and their possibilities are. The harpsichord student I start naturally on the harpsichord, but the choice of pieces depends on what I have heard them do on the piano.

In a way, the easiest thing is to teach organists, because their thinking is the same; they don't think of crescendo and diminuendo. They think of lines and contrasting lines as we harpsichordists do. But their technique is something else. Organists have mostly very lazy fingers, and harpsichordists

can't have lazy fingers. The attack is too difficult on the harpsichord. Maybe on the old harpsichord it was easier, but on the modern harpsichord you feel the resistance and you have to attack so that the plectrum plucks cleanly. This is what I call, and some harpsichordists call, "dirty." The tone is not clearly produced. It's not the wrong note; they play the right key, but the way they produce this is not clear-cut. It's like we women, if our skirt is not clearly hemmed.

Tusler: The irregularity spoils the whole line.

Ehlers: Ja, ja. This is what I mean. It doesn't matter with one or two notes, but if the whole piece is played like this, it's [bad]. I'm very sensitive to this.

Tusler: Is this a very difficult thing, then, for a student who is first coming to the harpsichord, to make this adjustment?

Ehlers: It depends on the talent, like everything else. It is a new way of thinking. The pianist steals into the tone; he caresses the tone. There is no caressing on the harpsichord, even if you wanted to, so you have to find another way to get the effect you really want.

Tusler: And there is no such thing as playing piano or forte on the harpsichord.

Ehlers: Oh, there is.

Tusler: But by registration?

Ehlers: By registration, only. So you can only do it when the music indicates that here you are allowed to do a change. You can't steal into changes [as you can] on the piano.-- this is not possible on the harpsichord; it's not possible

on the organ, either. And it's not meant in this music. The contrast of the lines, especially in Bach, is very clearly indicated, and this somehow stealing into another dynamic is really not quite the style for baroque. The baroque is very much based on contrast.

But if you transfer this music to the piano you will have to give in a little, because I think one has also to give the piano a little bit what the piano can be. If it's done in good taste, I think it's okay. If you overdo it, if the piano gets [in the foreground] and the music is in the background, if you only want to make the piano sound without relationship to the music, this I would reject. But on the other hand, it would be stupid to try to imitate on the piano what you do on the harpsichord.

Tusler: The effect would be dry and sterile, I suppose.

Ehlers: Ja. And nothing should be dry and sterile. Then the music loses. I rather prefer an overdone performance with warmth to this sterile approach to playing music. I think really this is what killed Bach for quite a time. I remember very well when I played Bach here for people who disliked Bach because they felt bored. The first reaction from a few very intelligent people, not super-musical, but very intelligent people, who said to themselves, "You think so highly of Bach and we read about Bach the great composer, but whenever we hear it we are disappointed, we are bored," (probably not if they heard the Brandenburg Concerti because there is so much change in tone color in the orchestration; but if they heard

Bach on the piano), was very often to say, "But it's not boring at all when you play Bach." I never feel bored when I play Bach, and so probably they don't feel bored.

Tusler: This projects itself.

Ehlers: The big line has to breathe, that's all there is to it. This is what my main teaching in the interpretation class is all about. I sometimes reproach myself because I neglect the French people in my teaching, not because I don't love them--I love Couperin, I love Rameau; but French music can't be played on the piano. The piano tone is too heavy for the constant decorations of the French, and if you say, "So leave them out," well, then the music is not French music anymore. It's essential to Couperin and Rameau. So I neglect to teach it, not with my harpsichord students who are ready for it, but with the piano students.

But I push them very much on Bach, much more than on Handel, which probably is a mistake. Phrasing is much more important in Bach than in Handel. Nobody else had those endless swinging lines, so if we are not tuned to hear where the line breathes, where it relaxes, where it starts again, you hear an etude. This is what happens to poor Bach. Handel is much more showy. The complications are much less. He can write polyphonically, he has proved it, he is a great composer; but somehow his way of thinking about music is entirely different; or the personalities must have been different; everything. They were as opposite as their music is opposite. Two diverse personalities; the one man of the royalty and the

other man of the church. I think this is it.

Tusler: Handel to me is a man of the theater, and his music is very theatrical with lots of make-believe in it.

Ehlers: Ja, ja, ja. Big gestures, beautiful arias, and so on. But I could live without Handel, and I can't live without Bach. It's my constant nourishment. I grew on Bach. I play Handel, naturally, and it's a joy once in a while to play a suite, but it doesn't fill me up, whereas every time I play a Bach piece I see new things, I get new revelations, new sentiments about it.

Tusler: He's a far more profound composer?

Ehlers: I don't dare to measure. I'm afraid to measure. But for me, it is my daily bread.

You know why I love teaching--I get so much out of it by talking to intelligent students. I had one girl in my interpretation class, a highly talented pianist but without any feeling for the style of Bach, just operating with forte and piano; and I found out that it doesn't matter so much. The fundamental mood of a piece gives you the dynamic approach. We played one of the most beautiful sarabandes by Bach from the, I think, Sixth Partita. She played it utterly freely and romantically, which I have nothing against because I believe that in every great artist there has to be a good streak of romanticism;;but by romantic, I mean a Schumann approach, which is good for Schumann but not for Bach. She was very reluctant to see my point. She played it utterly freely. Now, this is one of the sarabandes where Bach changes almost in every

measure the value of the notes, from eighths to sixteenths to thirty-seconds, even to sixty-fourths, and I felt that by playing it as rhapsodically as she did, the value of these differences was eliminated. If you start rhapsodizing, then you somehow disturb the design of the composer.

When she played it I said, "You play very well, but I don't see it this way. Let me think about it and let me go myself through the sarabande at home, and let's talk the next time." Sometimes, you see, even as an experienced person who thinks she knows something, you can't put your finger down; and also you hesitate to kill the initiative of a talented person, and this girl is very talented.

So the next week when we met, I said, "I have worked a great deal on this sarabande of yours and I became more and more convinced that my first reaction was right. With your freedom, you kill what Bach did."

She said, "I came to the same conclusion."

Which made me very happy. These are the moments when I feel happy--not that I was right, but that the student learns to see and to think, which happens once in a while. The students always want to be told about how to play it, even the best ones, how fast, and how loud. Dynamic is not so important, it's really more or less black andwhite in the baroque, though on the piano you have naturally to do something more with it, which is good as long as it's in good taste. These are the moments when I feel rewarded as a teacher. Mostly, I feel the negative side, not always blaming myself, I must say; but I

think if a teacher has the power to convince the player, not only to imitate but by his own thinking, then he is successful. I am not always successful. How much lies on me, how much lies on the student, I don't know. Probably I was not [always] able to convince as a teacher, because you are not always the same person. You are like a performer, which you are in a way. You have your good days and you have your bad days.

I must say that mostly if I don't succeed with a student, I blame myself. If it's right or not, I don't know, but somehow it's in my nature. I start with myself. I say, "Where did I not work the way I should? Where didn't I react to the special temperament of the student, to his shortcomings and to his valuable sides?" Which is very good, because [this way] my teaching interests me all the time. It is one of the things which are very dangerous, to get bored with your own teaching.

The problems are almost all different with each student. Facilities come in; brightness; what do you see in the music; how do you look at the music.

Tusler: And how much background they've had, how much they've absorbed?

Ehlers: Well, in this field they have very little background, and the less they have the better for me. The background I have to eliminate entirely. The background is mostly based on the old [ideas]--either Bach is a superman and they play it like a giant from the beginning to the end, or they make Mendelssohn out of him.

If you really start to think, it is difficult for our

generation of young people to recapture the feeling of the eighteenth-century composer, especially a composer like Bach who doesn't give them a melodic idea like Mozart did, like Beethoven did, but who spins a line. So what should you do with the line? If you had words without a comma, you would read the sentence four or five times and say, "Oh, here should be the comma." This is how I always operate. I give them an enormous sentence which I speak without raising my voice or coming down, without any punctuation, and say, "Now, what is the sense of it?" They can't find the sense. Then I try to show them the parallel. "This is like Bach, so put your own sense in." With these words, they can, naturally; in the Bach line they very seldom can. But this starts to interest them, and out of the sense comes then the feeling for the tempo.

This fascinates me, because every student is a different problem. Sometimes they have no problems and this is the worst, you know. You can't do anything the brain doesn't go along with until you have to use brain. I don't want to imply that Bach is brainy music. For me, I react [to it as] it is in my temperament, first with warmth and love. For me Bach became an open book, and this is probably the only thing I have achieved in life. But for the student, these are notes, and I have to guide them to see where they would make a comma; then it comes out in their playing.

Tusler: How does articulation differ from phrasing?

Ehlers: This is very difficult to describe. Articulation is something in the phrasing, I would say. The bigger unit is

the phrase, but inside the phrase, like when you speak a sentence, you will give a certain accent, a certain impetus on certain words without even stopping. If there is a comma, you are allowed to raise your voice or lower your voice and to stop for a second. I think this is a difference, too. But you see our modern player (I don't mean the students who play modern music, which they should do and have to do--they live in the twentieth century), but our students of today can't face this fact. For them Bach is an endless line; they don't know what to do, so they work with dynamic. Really, it doesn't matter if you play a piece a little louder or less loud with Bach--it's the declamation which counts. After they catch on, they get very enthusiastic. But it takes time, and I don't blame them.

They are always astonished when I play Bach for them. If one student plays a piece which I have in my fingers, I sit down and demonstrate it on the piano because our harpsichord, I'm sorry to say, is so poor at school that we avoid playing it. Suddenly they say, "Oh, this is a beautiful piece of music. It's touching, it's beautiful." They haven't seen it by themselves. You have to open their eyes and their ears. The fingers they can do everything with. This is a constant challenge to me and I love this work.

Tusler: Were you also the only piano instructor when you first went to USC?

Ehlers: Oh, no, when I came there were a few piano instructors but of a school which we wouldn't appreciate today. It was

then that Dr. Krone asked me to help him find a head of the piano department. By then I knew a few people here and I was very impressed by John Crown, who became a dear, close friend of mine. Dr. Krone met him in my house; naturally, he wanted first the impression of the person, and he had a very good impression. The first year when the war broke out, 1941, this was when John Crown came to the university. He is now the head of the department and I couldn't wish for a better head of the department, intelligent and wise too. He has to deal not only with different temperaments of students, but also with different temperaments of teachers, seeing, from the beginning almost, the possibility of every student. How he develops them is unbelievable. I must say, we work in a very excellent way together. If John hasn't time for a student, but believes in the student, he mostly gives him to me because he knows I don't go into fields which are not my field, but I establish them in my world. I play with them Mozart, I play with them Schubert, and I play with them Bach.

It might have something to do [with the fact] that John was partly educated in Vienna and partly educated in Frankfurt that our feeling for tone quality is very much the same. By birth he is American but he studied with Moriz Rosenthal in Vienna, and he studied at the Frankfurt Conservatory which at this time was one of the best we had in Germany. Somehow he is pleased with what I do with the students tonally. We both are very much for a singing, beautiful tone, which was

then that Dr. Krone asked me to help him find a head of the piano department. By then I knew a few people here and I was very impressed by John Crown, who became a dear, close friend of mine. Dr. Krone met him in my house; naturally, he wanted first the impression of the person, and he had a very good impression. The first year when the war broke out, 1941, this was when John Crown came to the university. He is now the head of the department and I couldn't wish for a better head of the department, intelligent and wise too. He has to deal not only with different temperaments of students, but also with different temperaments of teachers, seeing, from the beginning almost, the possibility of every student. How he develops them is unbelievable. I must say, we work in a very excellent way together. If John hasn't time for a student, but believes in the student, he mostly gives him to me because he knows I don't go into fields which are not my field, but I establish them in my world. I play with them Mozart, I play with them Schubert, and I play with them Bach.

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the Viennese School at this time.

He is a wonderful head of the department. He came then [in 1941], but it was through the war years and you can imagine there was not much development.

Tusler: Not many students?

Ehlers: Oh, yes, quite a few students, but only a very few teachers. He were half worked to death, I must say. I had the interpretation class; the baroque class; piano students; did I have chamber music? I can't remember; harpsichord students. I had only John Gillespie [as a harpsichord student] first; then later on, after the war, came John Hamilton who just [received] his doctorate and is a professor at Eugene, Oregon.

Tusler: He was your second harpsichord student.

Ehlers: No, no; before John [Hamilton] came this boy who was an enormously talented organist and who is now one of the leading organists in New York, Bruce Prince-Joseph. He became my second student. Enormously talented, and a born showman. I liked him very much--warm-hearted, talented, impulsive.

He did the strangest thing when he gave his piano recital. I prepared him very well and he played beautifully, and he got much applause. But at the end he came and he did what I have never seen in my life, especially not from a man and a student--he came out forward and sent kisses to the audience. I nearly crawled under my bench because I hadn't prepared him for any such appearance--it would have not mattered, anyhow, he would have done what he liked to do as a showman.

He has made a terrific career in New York. One of my students who is now an organist in New York and who played with me last summer on the four-harpsichord concert, [Harold] Cheney, said that whenever Bruce has something which he can't do, he gives it to Cheney and is a good colleague, which I am pleased to hear. Cheney is an excellent organist and a very good harpsichordist, too.

So you see, quite a few people have already gone through my hands who have established themselves, and I am very happy about it. The next one whom I could name after Prince-Joseph, is Malcolm Hamilton. He has enormous talent, too.

Tusler: He came to you much later. In these early years it was John Gillespie and Bruce Prince-Joseph. How did you become acquainted with John Crown?

Ehlers: This I can't recall. I think it was through the pianist Jacob Gimpel who invited me one evening to his house, and there I met John Crown and his wife, and I thought both very nice. My English wasn't very good and John could talk a little bit of German and he knew the Viennese background, and so we became very close. Also, we lived close together in Hollywood so it was very natural. I liked him as a person. I heard him play, I talked to him, I had the feeling this is a born teacher, and I was right. The success this man has with students and what he gets out of them is unbelievable.

Tusler: Was Max Krone still chairman of the department then?

Ehlers: Oh, ja. He was chairman until Dr. Kendall came.

Dr. Kendall came in, I think, '49. (I remember because shortly afterwards I went to Europe for a summer vacation.) Dr. Krone was a very good department head, but Dr. Kendall is probably more equipped for the growing department we are now. Dr. Krone had his speciality, choral music first of all, which is very good and has its right to exist. The school he and Mrs. Krone built up in Idyllwild developed wonderfully. They have gone through some difficult years really, but they are now already established, there is no worry any more, and I think it's wonderful for the youngsters to be together in the summer and make music under good competent leadership.

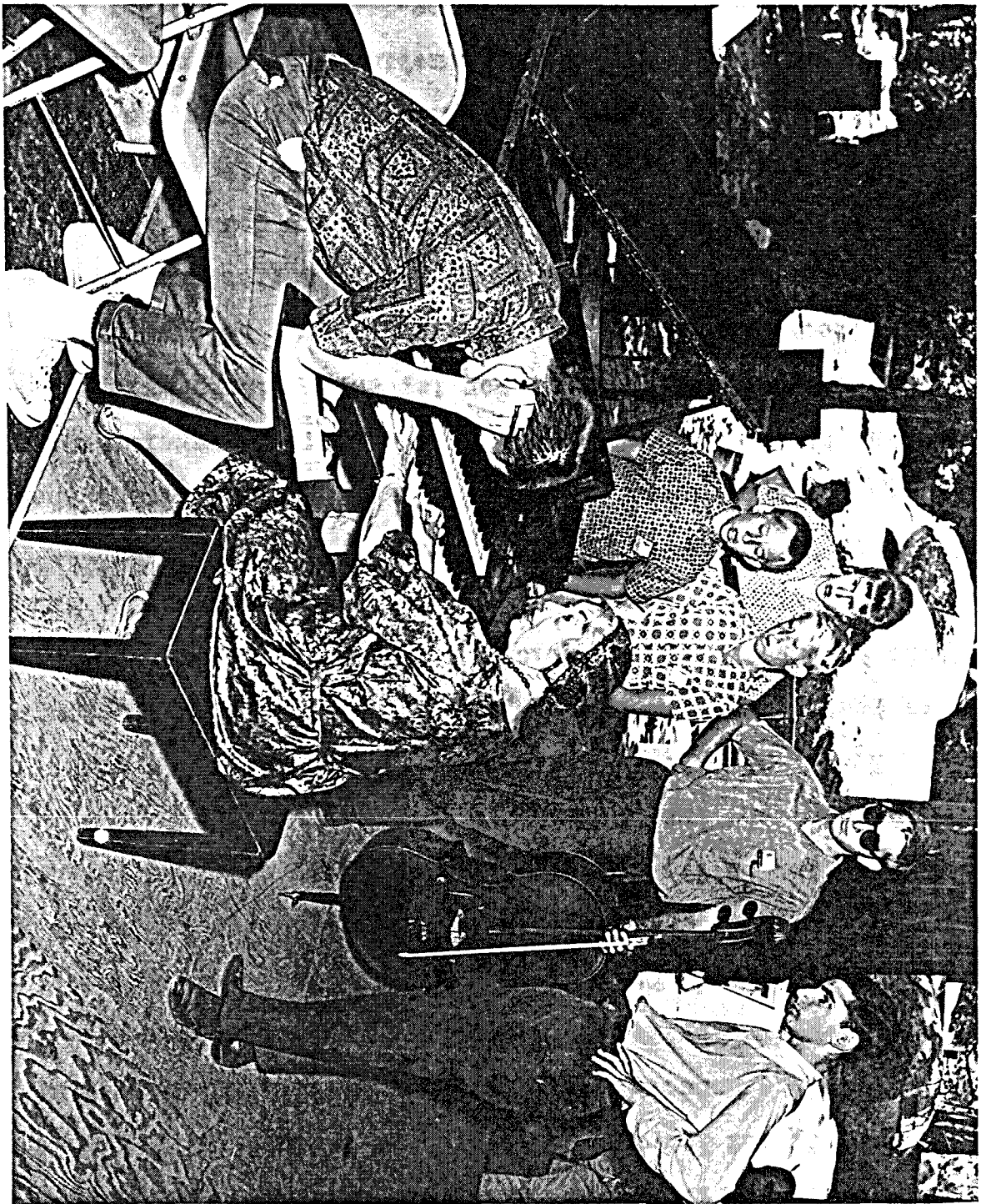
A few years ago I kept my promise to come up with the harpsichord and play there. I played the Haydn D major concerto under Ralph Matesky, a very good conductor, who was teaching, that summer, at Idyllwild. I was rather nervous because the harpsichord was standing in the open air. It was covered up overnight, naturally, but still, I didn't know how it would behave, whether the wood might swell. But it worked fine.

Dr. Krone was very much set on this idea [the Idyllwild school] and it made him very happy.

Tusler: USC must have grown a good deal in those years when he was chairman, too.

Ehlers: Enormously, ja, it has grown [then], but not the way it is now.

Tusler: What were the conditions you had to work under there



in those early days? You had a music building?

Ehlers: What is now the music building was standing on another place. They moved the whole building. John Crown and myself, and later Lillian Steuber and the cellist, Deak, taught in the Hancock Building. The Hancock Building was occupied before by research people. Many of them had to go into the Army and the rooms were empty, and Hancock, who, as you know, was a great lover of music gave us the rooms. I had a room on the top floor, I remember, and John and Lillian Steuber had one there, too. We taught there.

I will never forget, I came down one night--it must have been after nine o'clock, it was pretty dark. I thought I was having an hallucination. Suddenly, opposite Hancock, or almost opposite, was standing a house which was the school of music before, you know? I thought, I am dreaming? but it was. They moved the whole house! [laughter] And then it came to the place where it stands now. The music department is now where the faculty center is, which didn't exist at this time. It was probably more convenient because part of the teachers were in Hancock, and if a class was in the music building they had to walk two blocks down.

I also remember that during the war we [broadcast] every Sunday from the Hancock Building a program, sometimes piano, sometimes harpsichord, sometimes chamber music. I think this was Mr. Hancock's doing. But I will never forget our first appearance there. It was the first appearance of the harpsichord in this series and John Crown was supposed

to give an explanation over the air, explaining what a harpsichord is.

He talked about it and said, "Now, listen: I play a C on the piano and then on the harpsichord again." And he played a C on the piano and he played a D on the harpsichord. [laughter] We still think of it and laugh! And so you see, we have come through all the child sicknesses with the school, John and I. This was one year later, after I came, that was all.

Tusler: You just mentioned Lillian Steuber's name. Were you in any way responsible for her coming there?

Ehlers: No. I hardly knew her, but John knew her from childhood. They grew almost up together, and he knew what a wonderful person, what a wonderful teacher, what a reliable artist she is.

Tusler: So there were the three of you teaching keyboard instruments then.

Ehlers: Ja.

Tusler: But nobody else at that time?

Ehlers: Ja, in the preparatory department; but we never had any close contact with them. So this is almost the birth of the USC Music Department which we talked about now.

TAPE NUMBER: FIVE, SIDE ONE

December 13, 1965

Teaching at USC:
Performance in Europe and America

Tusler: When you were first in Los Angeles and you were still living with your daughter Christel, I understand that Otto Klemperer, whom you had known in Europe, approached you to perform.

Ehlers: Ja, that is true. He was generous enough to give me the chance to play before the Los Angeles public. He was then the head of the Philharmonic, and he asked me to play the Fifth Brandenburg Concerto with him. This was really my first big appearance before the Los Angeles public. I think this was partly the reason that Dr. Krone approached me to teach at USC.

But before Dr. Krone did this, he sent some "ambassadors," I must call them. I didn't see it at the time, but later I was aware of it. Three ladies came. One who later became my dear friend was Dr. Pauline Alderman, the head of the Music History Department at USC. The second was the head of the Theory Department, Julia Howard, and who the third was, I don't know. But they came and I was delighted to play for them. I never suspected that this was done because Dr. Krone wanted some assurance; he was absolutely right. Here I came, and nobody in Los Angeles had heard my name until I appeared with Otto Klemperer. I think their report

must have been very favorable. As I told you, a few days later Dr. Krone asked me to come and see him, and I think the story is already told.

Tusler: But you hadn't known Pauline Alderman before this time.

Ehlers: Oh, I didn't know anyone, anyone. Later she became one of my dearest, closest friends, and is still a close friend to me whenever I have the chance to see her. She moved to the east because she has more access to big libraries, and her main interest is in writing now; she had to give up teaching--her hearing became very poor, and you know a teacher can't teach if you don't understand the questions and hear what's going on. She did it for a long time because she was adored by our students. A lovely person, the ideal of a teacher, I must say. Great knowledge, a big heart, and a warm response to every student.

Tusler: Where did she get her training? In Europe or here?

Ehlers: Oh, no. She visited Europe, I think she was in Paris once, but she got her training in America, I couldn't tell you where.

Tusler: How did they approach you? Did she phone you and ask to come and visit you?

Ehlers: "We have heard you are here with a harpsichord and we are interested to see your harpsichord and to meet you." Of course, when they came they asked me to play. I didn't know what it would lead to. I never thought it would lead to anything, because my name didn't mean anything--I had no contact with anyone from USC or UCLA.

Tusler: But you suspect that she and Dr. Krone knew about you because of your playing with the Philharmonic.

Ehlers: Yes, and also because of the film Wuthering Heights which had been very popular. I think this also was the reason that I appeared twice with the Bing Crosby show, which made me very popular. It made me very popular because they knew now what a harpsichord is and who Alice Ehlers is. I had such a success the first time that I appeared a second time, which I have been told had never [happened before] in one season.

So all those things were lucky incidents to help me. But I was very doubtful, happy and doubtful, if I could accept Dr. Krone's engagement. But funny enough, I am at my happiest if I am with people, to teach, or to talk about what I know more than they know. In short, I love teaching, so much that I am almost afraid that in private conversation I have become a schoolmaster, always teaching and always having this in mind. But you know, I love young people and I love to see their reactions and their opening up. It's a great experience. I have now [been]--how long am I at USC?

Tusler: Twenty-five years.

Ehlers: Ja, twenty-five years, so you can imagine all kinds of young people came through my hands. It's always for me a great thrill if I can open up someone or help him on the way, opening up their hearts and their minds, especially to Bach, my beloved Johann Sebastian Bach.

Tusler: So you went into it actually with some doubts about

whether you were going to be able to do it.

Ehlers: Very much so. Very much so. When Dr. Krone said, "You will teach this class," I said, "I can't. I never have taught classes. I gave private lessons."

Tusler: But he had full confidence that you could go ahead and do it.

Ehlers: Full confidence. He was a great [person], and still is, in his quiet way. When I brought him John Crown and recommended him, he at once knew this is a good man. How good he was, nobody could know, because John developed to be not only a wonderful teacher but a wonderful colleague, everything.

Tusler: Pauline Alderman was in charge of the music history.

Ehlers: Yes, music history.

Tusler: But you were actually teaching the course in baroque history.

Ehlers: Baroque, ja.

Tusler: This was because you were a specialist in Bach?

Ehlers: Ja, I think so. It's the first time this year that I give it up. I have had this history class in baroque up to now. It became too much and I asked now to be relieved of this. This summer I will give a course on Handel and Bach, which is easier; but to go through the whole baroque, as I explained once, became too difficult. Since I had to move to Clark House I was removed from the library--if I forgot to have records or music ordered a week ahead of time, I was left alone, and I despise talking about music without

listening to the music. I find more and more our students are glad to [simply] note down what you say. Nobody ever asked, "Could we hear it?" Never in my whole practice do I remember anyone saying, "Could we hear it?"

Tusler: They just want to hear you talk about it.

Ehlers: They take notes. Music has to be heard. I'd rather let them hear the music and not talk about it than talk about music and not let them hear it.

All this procedure became too much for me. So for the first time I gave it up this year to Dr. Koole and I feel relieved, absolutely relieved.

Tusler: But all those years you actually taught the course, for twenty-five years.

Ehlers: Yes, for twenty-five years.

When [Manfred F.] Bukofzer was teaching here, I sat with my mouth and ears open, because of so many things he said. I wouldn't say that I was not aware of them, but I wouldn't have said so many things because I didn't know the little things which are important for the scholar, as I am not really a scholar. I am a performing person who got the little bit I know through performance. So I was faced with something which I felt I was not up to. I also know that my baroque classes were very alive, because my students, who are now independent great musicians, like Roger Wagner, Charles Hirt and others, always tell me how good my baroque class was. It was alive, you know. I let them sing it and I let them play it and I let them do it, because being a

player myself, I can't accept just preaching from up there and telling them things.

But I felt that now is the time to give it up, and I don't know how it's handled now. I'm sure it's handled entirely differently, but this is the difference if a performer teaches a class or if a history person does, and both have their right to do [it]. I'm sure many of the students are happy, because it is in the nature of students, as I have experienced, to be happiest if they can sit down with a pencil and write dates and sentences which don't mean anything to them. In my class I remember I've said, "Don't write, listen; and if you have something to write, write it after you listen."

Tusler: I want to go back to Otto Klemperer. You knew him in Europe before you came to this country.

Ehlers: Ja, but very distantly.

Tusler: Was he in Berlin when you were there?

Ehlers: Ja, ja.

Tusler: And what was his position?

Ehlers: I don't know if he was head of the Opera; I don't know.

Tusler: And he knew of you because of your performances there?

Ehlers: I don't know if he knew of me. I never had anything to do with him--it was really here where he gave me the chance to appear before the public. Don't forget, all these men are great prima donnas, and you had to be either an enormous

talent, which I never was, or a big name to even come close to them. If they needed you or gave you a chance it was a historic moment.

For instance, [Erich] Kleiber, who was the head of the Opera in Berlin, I had never met him before, but when it came to the performance of Graeser's Art of the Fugue (which was the second performance--the first as I mentioned before was in Leipzig, and Kleiber gave the second one in Berlin), he approached me to play because, first of all, he trusted me that I knew something about Bach, and also I had the name as harpsichordist. Otherwise, there was no connection. Only in [Wilhelm] Furtwängler's Passions I always played, and in Holland, in [Willem] Mengelberg's.

Tusler: Do you mean the Bach St. Matthew Passion?

Ehlers: Ja, and the St. John Passion. I played the recitatives. The part of the Evangelist was always accompanied by a harpsichord, in my time; before, never. Before it was done on the piano or the organ. Don't forget that when I came out with the harpsichord, the harpsichord was still new. I don't know where Landowska did it--I think she did also sometimes the part of the Evangelist and probably played the figured bass in some of the arias; I don't know, but she did it too. I think she did it with Mengelberg before I had a connection with the harpsichord.

Tusler: Of course, when it comes to large orchestras, a Philharmonic-sized orchestra, it's very difficult to find a piece of music where the harpsichordist can be the soloist,

isn't that true?

Ehlers: Well, you have to reduce the orchestra. This is the only thing you can do. This year in Carmel, for instance, when I played the Fifth Brandenburg Concerto, Mr. Salgo reduced the orchestra to a small, exquisite group, and this will happen here for the Schweitzer Memorial [Concert], Mr. [Walter] Ducloux will have to reduce the orchestra.

Tusler: Otherwise there's no balance at all.

Ehlers: No, there is no balance, because the big halls and the big orchestra kill the harpsichord.

Tusler: Where was it that you performed the Fifth Brandenburg with Klemperer?

Ehlers: With the Philharmonic in Los Angeles.

Tusler: And did he use a small orchestra?

Ehlers: It was a great moment for me. I can't tell you. I [also] played it in New York with Ormandy. Ormandy gave me the great chance to be heard in Philadelphia. I played the Fifth Brandenburg with him in Philadelphia first, and he took me when he conducted the New York Philharmonic. I got very good write-ups and I think it was a very great success. Afterwards, when I went with my friends to a restaurant where all the artists go, the great agent Hurok was sitting there, who had behaved years ago very funny toward me. When I still lived in Germany, he came to Berlin to see what was going on and engage some artists for America. He was great then as an agent, but not as great as now. He is now the Almighty. He heard me in a small hall with the sisters Amstad,

and he was absolutely taken because it was a perfect ensemble, small voices, perfectly trained in the Italian method, and the music.

He went to my agent Luise Wolff and said, "I want this trio for America." And we got an American contract which he cancelled a few months later--partly because of the political situation. Well, we were heartbroken. It was announced in all the Berlin papers that we were engaged, and it was the truth, of course. It was not a personal thing. Our agent, Luise Wolff, was the greatest agency in Berlin--what is now Hurok in America was Luise Wolff in Germany.

After my concert with Ormandy in New York--and it was a great success--Hurok came to me. We sat very close at this restaurant, at two different tables, and he said, "I have to apologize, I behaved very badly toward you."

I said, "Now that I've been in America, I understand. Of course we were very upset, but I understand you."

This is the kind of music for which [there] is no hall in America and probably not even the public. Today, maybe. Today you could probably dare, in Schoenberg Hall, to give a whole evening with these wonderful duets which are never done--Italian, German, English. We had a wonderful program, mostly copies of old manuscripts, not only the printed ones. One of the sisters [Marta Amstad] was trained as a dark soprano, almost an alto, and the other [Marietta] was a high soprano, light, and beautifully trained by one of the greatest singers of Italy. She is dead now,

but Toscanini used to send her all good voices for training. These girls were perfectly trained.

Tusler: Who was the singer, do you remember her name?

Ehlers: The teacher? I used to know her name. I think Ferni, Signorina Ferni. A very famous teacher in her time. But she never moved away from, I think it was Turin, not Rome, where she was living. Toscanini sent any voice he was interested in and thought needed further training to Ferni. She was once at La Scala, but when she retired she was teaching.

Tusler: She herself was a great singer.

Ehlers: A great singer, ja, at La Scala. This is how Toscanini knew her, because he was conducting at La Scala, and every good singer of whom he had hopes and promises he sent to her. I sat in on all the voice lessons which she gave [to the Amstads], because you know it was very interesting to me, being with singers and working with them musically. I had a good ear for this.

In the summer, I went always to Switzerland where the two sisters had a family home, and there we studied the program for the next season. It was the only way of doing it--we traveled a great deal, all through Germany and England. (England loved it especially, because England was not ready for big voices. They loved this wonderful chamber music. If you wanted big voices, you would have been very very disappointed that these were small, wonderfully trained voices.)

One summer [we were at] Beckenried on the Vierwallstaedter See where they had their home, and we were working there. I said, "I don't know, Marietta, what's the matter. I feel I do always the same [thing] that the singer does, subconsciously, and I always get pain in my chest when I work with you. I can't find out what this is, really. If I work with Marta I don't have this pain, and when I work with you I get it, and I don't know what it is. Maybe I should start with you first--maybe I'm tried."

Well, the interesting thing to me was, when we came to Turin and I sat in on the lessons, that I learned a great deal through remarks by this wonderful singing teacher. I was interested. And I'll never forget her first expression to Marietta. It was, "Mama mia, what are you doing? You hold your breath here instead of letting it go out slowly as you should." And I automatically did the same, and this was the pressure on me.

Tusler: You felt it, you sensed that that's what she was doing.

Ehlers: Ja, ja, ja. I didn't know what [it was], I only breathed with her and did the same thing, you know?

Tusler: Yes.

Ehlers: And I was afraid I had something, an illness. I felt something was wrong, the voice didn't come out enough, but after all I am not a singing expert. I have a good ear for production and those things, but this time I didn't catch on, and automatically I did the same--I kept the breath

here and was very sensitive to it. I learned a great deal about accompanying singers there.

Tusler: Did you accompany for these lessons?

Ehlers: When they sang their programs when we went on tour, of course I accompanied. But when she gave voice lessons to them, then I was sitting there. She didn't need an accompanist.

Tusler: Playing as a solo performer and playing as an accompanist is an entirely different experience.

Ehlers: An entirely different thing. But at this time I could do it. I mostly tried with my solo not to be too [close to] the end of the program because then I was worn out. We had very interesting programs. Each of the singers sang one solo, one or two, mostly songs and arias nobody has ever heard. At that time it was different. Today one knows all the literature; but at that time nobody dipped into the old repertoire, and if you heard some old music, you heard all the same kind of arias.

We copied so many old things, and I will never forgive myself that I was not intelligent enough to make use of all this which was given to me. I will never forget when we went to Bologna. We had a concert there and could stay two or three days. The head of the library of the Bologna Conservatory was, I think, Alfano. (Names, I hope you've found out by now, are something which I'm not too good in). I think it was Alfano, who's also a musicology man.

We had one or two days free and I was interested in the

library, Alfano said to me, "Well, here, my dear, here is the key--go in and please yourself." I could have stolen what I wanted. I am sorry I didn't really. [laughter] There were manuscripts and manuscripts of things I had never heard of; some which seemed to be good I copied, especially for two sopranos because this was what I was interested in. But there was an unbelievable amount of music, not ordered, not cataloged. Nothing. I could have taken all I wanted. I am still sorry I didn't.

Tusler: All in manuscript form?

Ehlers: All in manuscript.

Tusler: Of course, that was before the days of microfilm. You had to copy all the parts?

Ehlers: Well, I copied what seemed interesting to me, and mostly things, of course, for two sopranos. But I have heard now that all the Italian libraries are in very good shape. This was the time before Mussolini. I didn't know; Alfano trusted me. I could sit in this library for hours and I really got bewildered, so much was around me.

Tusler: It must have been very exciting.

Ehlers: Dirty, dusty, exciting--but in a way I was too young and too restless; you know, it was so much that I didn't know where to start.

Tusler: Would you say that the harpsichord parts in this music that you performed were really in the role of accompanist, or were the parts that you played on the keyboard of equal importance?

Ehlers: No. Absolutely a figured or unfigured bass.

Tusler: Did you have to realize the figured bass?

Ehlers: No, most of it was already written out. I changed here and there something, but it was all written out.

Ludwig Landshoff did a great deal. He brought out very many of the old Italian arias or duets. Two volumes of duets. of Stefani and God knows whom else whose names the public has never heard, you know. The musicologists would know. Stefani was one of the greatest to write for voices. Wonderful duets, some of his.

I regret very much that I have never a chance with the singers in school to do some of these duets. You see, when they come in my Interpretation class, they mostly come because they are required, and they want to learn solo arias which they have to sing; they know they will sing the St. Matthew, St. John's Passion or the Christmas Oratorio, so [they want me to] study their part with them there, which is really not what I should do in a class. This is the duty of a coach. In the class I should acquaint them with music which is hardly known, and very seldom done. But there is no time. A few years ago, it was different. Then I had time to take singers like Marilyn Horne or others--(I had good voices at this time) and give them things which were not at the moment used. Many of the duets we performed in class, if I had the chance of [getting] two voices. Also I had good help at this time: Hans Lampl took over part of the coaching.

Tusler: Was there a higher proportion of teachers to the number of students when you first went to USC?

Ehlers: Oh, we have many more teachers now.

Tusler: You have many more teachers, but there are more students in each class, probably, now.

Ehlers: I had smaller groups, especially in the Interpretation class, and exceptionally good voices. They had vocal lessons, with which I was not involved. Then at this time we had a very good woman teacher there, too, Mrs. Wilson. They were all not only good teachers but they were interested in what we were doing. When I gave a singer this wonderful cantata, Lucretia, I said, "My dear, I can help you with the music but you have to take it to your voice teacher, because the vocal problems I can't solve."

All those things were very interesting, and are really only possible if you have good students and not too many. Now I have no time to devote enough attention to each student. I often get performers who shouldn't attend this class--not that I don't like them in any way, but what has a marimba player to do in my class? They are very musical people, and they played the Double Concerto by Bach on two marimbas very nice and good, but I can't correct them. I don't understand anything about the instrument. And double bass players! Cellists, fine, because I still have something to say if somebody plays the solo cello sonatas, or the gamba sonatas. Flute is fine, as long as there is original literature there. I feel, even not being

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a flutist and not being a gamba player or a cello player, that I have valuable remarks to make, because it's Bach. But with these other instruments I can't say a word, and it takes the time and place of other students where I could be of use, and I feel terrible.

There is a talented, enormously talented girl, who has problems on the piano. Not finger problems, just problems in interpretation. You know, interpretation is not a thing which you can say, "This is right and this is wrong." If she starts [to play] an embellishment before the beat we know the baroque loves embellishment on the beat; fine, this is easy [to correct]. But there are other things, and in Bach there are quite a few problematic things which can be seen this way and that. I am not saying that my way is the only way. In certain pieces I still, every time I play them, consider, "Is this the right way to do it?" So let me say, it is my right way--it's the way I see it. But with the younger generation, they might see it differently. You have to have the right to say, "No, I can't agree with this," not just based on whether you like it or not, [but on whether] you have the fundamentals. This needs time.

[Sometimes] I, as I call it, have to "preach," like in a history class where you stand there and talk and talk and talk and they take notes, which I hate, by the way. I always say, "Don't take notes; listen; quarrel with me; respond to what I say; take notes when you go home, but please don't write." I have the experience that if you write you

don't listen. Mechanically your ear accepts the word and writes it down, but you can't think at the same time. Do you think I am right?

Tusler: I absolutely do. If you're going to respond intensely to anything, it can only be one thing at a time.

Ehlers: This is what I feel. But they are so eager to write that I start out every class of this type with, "No pencil and no paper. I will tell you what you should write down. If I insist you should remember something, a name or a date, I will tell you. But please follow me."

Tusler: How many students did you say you have now?

Ehlers: In the interpretation class, I have sixteen or eighteen. In the baroque class, which was, as I call it, a preaching class, I had many more because there was no performance. In a performance class you perform, and I have to be able to say, "No, try in this way," and why no, and why yes. Thank God this year my interpretation class doubled because I complained. I have two, two different classes.

Tusler: You split it into two.

Ehlers: And they are still too large. You see, my interest is in where I can be of help, and to whom I can be of help. To pianists, of great help. To strings, to a certain degree, because I know the music well and I can talk about bowing and tempi. Flutists, fine; oboists, fine. But when they come with krumphorns and with bassoons and so on, I am of no help. And they sit there--they have to take it, it is in

the catalog, and they have to have it.

Tusler: Is it a required course for music majors?

Ehlers: It is a required course.

Tusler: How do you organize the class? Do you plan in advance who is going to perform what?

Ehlers: No. They all get a certain number of pieces, the pianists one piece because they can't work on more than one piece. I try to find out what they have played in the other literature. I have to hear them, too, because I have to see their technique and possibilities, ja? Now I have one or two very high, good-playing people. I give to them, for instance, difficult pieces like the Sixth Partita, which is one of the most difficult pieces to play; there are very many questions about it, how to play certain things. This I can only give to good, excellent pianists and intelligent people. Then I have some for whom I think a French suite, an allemande is the right thing. I have to give the piece according to their technical facilities and their musical background, as well as their brain function.

Tusler: This you have to estimate yourself.

Ehlers: All myself. You know, some have good fingers but they are naive like a child, musically. They have had a good teacher and the teacher has trained the fingers; the teacher has told them, "You play this like this," but why they have this phrasing or that, they don't understand. So I give them easy pieces.

Then I have students on a high level, like a boy who

came to me the other day (he is not with me any more, but was with me before). He has to play for his final examination the Sixth Partita by Bach, which is a wonderful piece but very difficult. And we sat together and I said to him, "I don't know what is right. I like it best this way, but I can't tell you it's right. Maybe you are right the way you play it." But this I do only with people on a high level who understand, you know? With the others I put down the law, because they would be lost without it.

It is very difficult sometimes to decide really, with all the rules you know--sometimes you don't want to follow them. You are much easier in your mind if you don't know the rules. You go naively there, you see? I have, for instance, one extremely talented girl who is intelligent, too--a wonderful combination. She brought me the sarabande from the Sixth Partita, one of the pieces most doubtful as to how it should be played. It is enormously improvisatory. Now, here is a question: how much should she do about it? Bach himself improvises the piece so much--should one as a performer go overboard and improvise on the already improvised piece, or should one just keep to Bach's improvising? I am of the latter opinion. But who knows who is right? She is, thank God, intelligent.

Intelligence has a great importance too, not only musicality. I have some very musical people, but their minds are somehow simple, so I don't expose them to this kind of conversation or decision. I give them simpler things.

I wouldn't know how to deal with them where there are questions of why this or that. You have to have the feeling--every good teacher has that feeling--of what he can expect from a student, not only finger-wise, but from the brain too. In both my classes together, I have probably four [students whom] I could tell, "It could be probably this, too." Both [choices] would be possible. With the others, I have to make the decision.

Tusler: Is this a type of mind that is capable of asking questions about things and probing?

Ehlers: Ja. This is a type of mind that has not only fingers but brains too, and great musicality.

Tusler: They look below the surface, into it.

Ehlers: Ja, ja. And of course, if I could, I would only like to have to do with this type of student, but in a school this is not possible. At least I achieve with the other types certain things. I achieve, like for instance a very simple example, that they will be scared to give the two- and three-part inventions to beginners as they always did. I warn them, I tell them, "Listen. If you go out piano teaching, don't start Bach with the two- and three-part inventions--they are not as easy as they look." So at least I achieve this--this they will remember.

So what should we give a child, a talented child? I say, "Give him a gavotte, a bourrée, a minuet--something with rhythmical impact that a child enjoys playing and doesn't from the first moment on get scared of the name of

Bach." Later on, then you can decide. Then go into those things which need a brain and the possibility of decision, of what to do when.

Tusler: Are these pieces which Bach himself wrote very simply, or are they arrangements by somebody else?

Ehlers: No, no. They are simple pieces--he was a great teacher, and he taught not only his sons, primarily his sons, but other students too. And he treated them like children. But of course even the pieces he wrote for his son Wilhelm Friedemann are difficult for a modern child because they are polyphonic. Polyphony was right for the age of Bach, it was what they heard all around. For our children, it is not. Our children look for melody.

Tusler: Some Mozart, or simple pieces by Haydn?

Ehlers: Ja, simple Mozart. Ja, very simple pieces. To come with Bach at too early an age is a great mistake. This is what, in the years when I was younger, when I went from music meeting to music meeting, I always preached, "Don't give the inventions too early." They are looked on as a kind of exercise--they are for the understanding musician great compositions, but a child is bored with them and from this moment on hates Bach.

Early Training

Tusler: How were you started when you were a young pianist?

Ehlers: I have no idea, not the slightest idea. I was started like every other child with everything else, and my

really great love for Bach developed independently of any teacher.

Tusler: You don't recall having been given the two-or three-part inventions.

Ehlers: I probably played them like every other child played them, and without any comments. It was given like we give Czerny exercises. For a child in Bach's age this was right; they were used to polyphonic listening all the time. But not for our children. It's all wrong.

Tusler: Were you required, or do you remember now, to practice a great many hours when you were a child?

Ehlers: I have no idea what was required of me. I did what I wanted to do, and I don't recall that anybody ever had to tell me I had to practice.

I was not at all a child prodigy. I was by nature a very average talent. And I am still. It is this that I can't explain: why Bach's music for me was an open book from the moment I had to play it. Every teacher said, "Stop playing Bach. Play Chopin and Mendelssohn, this is what you need," because I started out as a pianist.

Tusler: Somehow you made these discoveries yourself.

Ehlers: Absolutely myself. It was a love which I can't explain. I think sometimes, what was it? The only reason I think of is that by nature I'm a very disorderly person, and this higher order did me good. This is what I try now to rationalize, because don't tell me I understood it-- I didn't. But I think here was some order, something which

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guided me.

Tusler: It seems to me a very extraordinary discovery for a young person to make all by herself, as you say.

Ehlers: Very, very. I made the discovery--now when I think back, for me it was natural. Bach, Bach, always Bach. My teachers said, "Stop with your Bach. You know it anyhow." I know now that I didn't know it. But for him it was interesting that a young girl always came with Bach. He wasn't interested. He was interested in my flexibility and playing something pianistically. From the point of pianistic playing there was nothing in the Inventions. I can't explain it, and I just think it was a God-given balance to my undisciplined and disorderly nature, that this order which Goethe calls "the order of the world" appealed to me so much.

Tusler: During those years when you were a child and just beginning to learn the keyboard, you did acquire a strong technique.

Ehlers: I don't think so. I don't think my technique was anything special. I was in no way a special talent. But then I came to the instrument which was Bach's instrument and I felt certainly, "This is it. This is my home."

Tusler: Did you have to work very hard to achieve a technique after you made that decision?

Ehlers: No. No. The harpsichord was my instrument.

Tusler: You already had strong fingers?

Ehlers: I had strong fingers and I got them even stronger.

I had a very good technique which I owe to Leschetizky, to nobody else, and then to this one man whom I mentioned before whose name I've forgotten, not a good player, not a good musician, but a good technician, who gave me really the last good technique [I had]. Landowska never taught technique with me.

Tusler: Before you went to Landowska, you had this technique.

Ehlers: I had this technique, thank God.

Tusler: And this can be achieved no other way except by the old-fashioned grinding away at it.

Ehlers: Grinding away, ja. For months I didn't do anything, when I came to this teacher, because I had hurt my hands through the wrong technique. I played with the pressure on my wrist, and my wrist is much too small to have taken this for a long time. I got an inflammation and for months I couldn't play. Months, I couldn't play, before I came to the harpsichord. And then somebody told me that here is a person, a piano teacher, not with a big name at all, but who is excellent. It was thanks to him that I got this where my energy is focused, not in the wrist but here, in the fingers, and this is the way I teach. Since then I can play hours and hours. This is now, I don't know how long, at least, forty years. I've never had the slightest difficulty. And this is the way I teach.

Tusler: Is that the way Leschetizky taught also, with this type of hand, this type of approach?

Ehlers: Not as outspoken, not as outspoken; but at least

he loosens the arm. But I don't know where I would have gotten otherwise the pressure here [in the wrist], if he had watched it.

I worked not only with him, I worked with a student of his. This student was one of his best students, not a brilliant performer but a lovely player named Bertha John. When Hitler came to Europe, she came to the States. I never saw her. I knew somebody offered her a home in Boston and then she died there before I could see her. A lovely person. She had to leave Vienna because she was married to a Jew. A lovely wonderful person.

I used to go every summer to Vienna, as long as my parents were alive, and one year she said, "Alice, you have to give me a few lessons. You have to teach me the way you play now--it seems to be the only right way for me." This is taking the weight away from the wrist. Here--all my strength focuses in the fingertips, you know? whereas it was focused before in the wrist. And I couldn't take it and got this inflammation.

Tusler: When you had the inflammation were you already then studying with Letschetizky, or was this earlier?

Ehlers: No, this was afterwards...I don't know, because I was in Berlin.

Tusler: I see. And it was a man that you worked with there in Berlin who loosened this up.

Ehlers: Who opened my eyes; very third-rate pianist himself, not an artist, you know, but a good technician. He had many

people who came with the same problem.

Tusler: And what was his approach to it?

Ehlers: Well, it's just to transfer the weight. There is no approach, you have to feel it and to practice on it.

Tusler: What kind of exercises did he use?

Ehlers: Very simple. Thirds.

Tusler: The five-finger type of exercise?

Ehlers: Ja; I don't know, I can't remember. I use always thirds because they feel it better in thirds. Many of my students. I have now one talented harpsichord student with very small hands, very thin; all her body altogether is only bones. I told her the other day, "My dear, the time will come when you can't play any more because all the pressure is here on one of the most delicate places." Landowska played like this, but Landowska had enormous hands.

Tusler: She could get away with it.

Ehlers: She could get away with it. She had enormous strong hands, and some people might get away with it. I couldn't. Anyhow, I absolutely am sure for the harpsichord this is the way to play. For the piano, I don't know; I wouldn't dare to say because I have neglected the piano and couldn't say what kind of a technique [is best]. I look at my students--they all have different kinds of technique. They come from different teachers--from John Crown, from Lillian Steuber, from Joanna Graudan. They have to have the interpretation class which is very interesting to me. They come with different attitudes, you see?

I won't interfere with their technique. This is in the field of their teacher. I have to get this-and-this effect,-- how you do it, with your nose or with whatever, I don't care, but I have to get this effect. But if they then come and say, "But what should we do to get this effect?" I say, "I do this." It is not right to disturb them or interfere in their work with their wonderful teachers.

Tusler: As you say, the piano is a different instrument. Perhaps you do have to bring more weight into it.

Ehlers: Well, I think every pianist must find his way. But it's very interesting. Between all the thirty-two or thirty-five students I have in interpretation, as I told you, I have probably four or six who are interesting and worthwhile. What the others get, I don't know. But at least they get a little bit. All, all are afraid of playing Bach.

Now, the other day one of Mr. Crown's students who studied with me came to me, an excellent musician and excellent player, and played the Sixth Partita, which is a problematic piece anyhow. He did very beautifully and we got on very well. I said, "I would do this, my dear; but I don't know, you have to be convinced of what you do. If you are convinced of doing this, I wouldn't dare to say it's wrong." I just wouldn't do it. It's very difficult, you know; you don't want to make them insecure.

You also don't want to interfere with what another very important teacher tells them to do. But, I must say,

my colleagues are very generous. They say, "Your Bach you take to Ehlers." They take care of the other things, but still the technical aspect is the same, you know? And sometimes it just doesn't work out for Bach's [style].

But it's a very rewarding and wonderful thing for me to have these good students. With the poor cripples it's not so good, because I can't demand from them much, their fingers won't do it; but if I get those really top students, where the technique is just there, and sometimes the brain too. Also, you see, you come to the point where you can't insist you are right--I have not the courage. As I have mentioned, this heavenly sarabande from the Sixth Partita, one girl plays enormously rubato. I have nothing against rubati, because I am sure Bach used it too; but it's just that in this sarabande he himself made so many rubati by changing the time value of the notes from measure to measure, that I feel one kills his intention by coming with his own.

So you can't insist on those things. You just can say, "I see it this way; now fight it out with yourself." This is, of course, where the interesting teaching starts, but there are not many you can do this with. I am blessed--I have now in the interpretation class four or five. This is more than you can expect.

Tusler: That's a very good percentage.

Ehlers: Ja, in a class of thirty-six. There is never trouble with the violinists or the cellists, especially not with the cellists.

Tusler: There aren't any problems with them?

Ehlers: No, because they have to change the bow, ja?

The bow goes to an end. First of all, they have wonderful teachers. Every student who comes from [Gabor] Rejto

I have hardly anything to say. It's exactly, exactly the way I see it. It's just a joy to hear them. We make music together. But the only problem are always the pianists.

Of course, you see, they face the literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; they have to play a modern piece and they have to play Brahms, and this is absolutely a different world.

Tusler: Entirely. What about the fact that they are playing more than one line simultaneously, where the violinist and the cellist have only one line to deal with?

Ehlers: Naturally, this plays a part in it, too.

TAPE NUMBER: FIVE, SIDE TWO

December 20, 1965

Teaching Baroque Style

Tusler: In your Bach class, or your interpretation class, you get piano students from all kinds of different teachers. What kind of problems do you get into with this, with interpretation? How do you handle it?

Ehlers: Well, this is a very good question. First of all, you have to handle each person individually. You have also to judge how much a student or a person can swallow and understand. So I have not one recipe which goes for all. The students come, finger-wise, technique-wise, first-class prepared, but mostly absolutely ignorant about how to play Bach. It depends on the student how much I feel he can absorb. I have learned this in all the years: that I can't come with the same amount of energy, enthusiasm, conviction, to every student. I have learned to--what should I say? like a medical man almost, to give two drops or eight drops or ten drops of medicine to the student. This you learn through experience, you know?

In the nature of every teacher, I think (and I can only talk for myself, but I think it's the nature of every teacher who is enthusiastic about his subject), you want to do too much. You want to overwhelm them with all you have experienced, with your love, with your enthusiasm, and so on. This, I have learned, is no good. You have to come

from the student, from his standard--not only his standard of technique, but his mental conception, too. It's all so new to them. They come from playing Chopin or Mozart or Schumann and have learned to watch their touch and give all those different--what should I say, colorings, or dynamic expressions, almost from tone to tone. Now I come and try to cut this out, and still have them feel the intensity of the music and bring this music to life.

First I have to make them hear a phrase. You would be astonished how difficult it is. When they look at a page of Bach they are absolutely helpless. Here starts a sixteenth-note movement in an allemande from the left side of the page on the top, and ends on the right side on the bottom. And nothing happens. There is not a sign of dynamics in it, and they are absolutely helpless. So first I try to explain the living line which, as in a book, has to have its commas, its dots, its points of rest, stopping more or stopping less. With some, with the very talented ones, I open a little door. The not talented ones I confuse utterly: with these I give up the "why" and I tell them, "It just has to be like this." But with the talented ones I try to open their ears and their hearts to the line of Bach. Sometimes I am successful, but sometimes with the most talented ones I have a hard fight.

Tusler: Because they have ideas of their own?

Ehlers: They have ideas, thank God they have ideas. And they bring all their emotional impact, which every player

has, into Bach. Now, I don't want to say that there is no emotion. For me, there is enormous emotion in Bach, but somehow it has to be--help me now, what I want to say--this emotion has to be treated differently, you know?

Tusler: It's a more controlled type of thing, perhaps.

Is that the idea?

Ehlers: Ja, controlled in a good word; but you now can ask, "What do you control? What do you control?" I don't know how to express this. All that I can do is try to tell them, "Now sing this phrase. Where would you breathe? You have to breathe somewhere." Nothing is alive without breath, neither in nature nor in music. "Where would you breathe?"

You would be astonished how insensitive they are to these long lines, where they breathe. Of course they are used to shorter phrases where the breathing is obvious, done by the composer in his invention of the theme, the thematic material. And I think this is the reason why they all thought, and still many think, that Bach is cold, without any expression. They are astonished if they hear me play Bach. (Sorry to bring myself in, but I have to in this case). Well," they say, "but this is not boring. This is beautiful." And I have achieved quite a bit. If you take the years I have taught, you would say, "Oh, you fool, only a few students." But I have a few students who have understood what I am driving at, and they might be able to give it on--I am sure they are able to give it on.

Now I asked students just last week, in my last lesson, "Would you now kindly criticize me? What did I leave out? What did I neglect?"

"Well, you neglected Telemann, and you neglected Handel and you neglected Couperin," and so on.

I said, "You are quite right. I didn't neglect them, but I will explain to you now why I didn't mention them. Every good pianist has to play and play Scarlatti and play him brilliantly. There is nothing to explain. You have to have a wonderful technique and then you go ahead. The same is true--Telemann I think is a bore, if you ask me. He has his place in the history of music and certain things I accept of his, especially his chamber music, but his keyboard fantasies I wouldn't waste my time on. You can do it alone. With Handel also, if you are very interested in him, you will find a way to play it on the piano." I think he is a failure on the piano. I have never heard any of the pianists ever play a Handel suite, have you?

Tusler: No.

Ehlers: Because they felt it was no good. If you want to bring Handel to life you need his instrument, the harpsichord. I don't mean to say he is a minor composer; he is a great composer, but his way of writing is so dependent upon the harpsichord with its sound quality, that nothing is left. You can't say the same for Bach. Bach, if you understand him, can be played beautifully on the piano,

and again I name Glenn Gould and probably a few others who, if there is the right understanding and don't exaggerate in one direction or the other (mostly pianists feel tempted to play all the tempi too fast or too slow, which is partly created through the type of tone which the piano produces). But you can play Bach beautifully on the piano.

Tusler: Why is this, do you think? Why is it that we can take Bach over onto another instrument with greater success and not Handel?

Ehlers: Handel is probably only meant for the harpsichord it's written for. Bach goes over the frontier, you know? Bach's music for me is eternal.

Tusler: The music itself is so much greater?

Ehlers: Look; some have said about Bach's vocal music, "Well, this should be played on a flute, this is not vocal at all." And in some ways they are right. But Bach oversteps the barrier of instruments, and everything. It is something beyond and greater than all of these limitations. This is the reason I play Bach instead of Handel. If you have the urge to play a Handel suite, very soon you might be disappointed because Handel suites, without the color of the instrument, are very poor. Bach is never poor on the piano, handled by a man like again Glenn Gould, because I don't know anyone to mention of the other pianists--I haven't heard them play Bach. I haven't heard Rudy Serkin, whose understanding of Bach I believe in a great deal, but I haven't heard him play Bach on the piano.

Tusler: Why is it, do you think, that so many pianists will take a transcription of Bach and perform that?

Ehlers: Not any more, do you think? Now, in my youth it was true, because a transcription gives the piano what the piano wants.

Tusler: More sonority.

Ehlers: More sonority.

Tusler: And the audience will respond to this.

Ehlers: Ja, of course. If you play a concert in a big hall and you play a big instrument like the piano, you should play something which sounds.

So I try to explain this to them, and I said, "I'm very glad I asked you for your criticism, because after all, I am sure I have my weaknesses; as a teacher I might forget, but this is not forgetfulness. The only music which I regret I couldn't give you is French music because you would have learned a great deal about performance of ornaments. But if there's one music which is not suited to the tones of the piano, it's French music."

And I quoted to them that I listened to a whole evening of Casadesus playing French music. Now, if anyone has sense for the French idiom, it's Casadesus. But it was the most boring thing. Hearing all the amount of ornaments you have in Rameau and Couperin--this is not good on the piano. I could have played probably some chamber music, and I tried, but in one semester, you see--I had two violinists, nothing special, but quite good. Well, I gave them a

Couperin trio sonata. They never had time to look at it because they have to, first of all, fulfill their assignments for the violin teacher; they are teaching themselves; and I gave them a Bach sonata to learn. So they never had time to get to the Couperin. The time is so limited, one semester really is nothing to get them into the spirit.

Some of the pianists caught on, thank God, and these are the ones which I will have next week coming here [to Mme. Ehlers' home] to listen to Malcolm's [Malcolm Hamilton] recording of the Well-Tempered Clavier. All pianists; maybe one or two of my harpsichord students, but they are all pianists. They at least will understand what is it all about.

Tusler: Your main concern, then, with them is the phrasing. That is the really essential thing that you have to have.

Ehlers: Articulation and phrasing because they are so unable to phrase this. It plays a part in every music, I know, but it's so visible, it's so understandable when you play Beethoven, Mozart, Schumann and Schubert. There is no question. It's indicated in the music.

Tusler: The composer himself has made it.

Ehlers: Through a rest. Here ends my phrase; here you go on. But there is nothing of this in Bach.

Tusler: Bach himself did not do any marking of that sort on his music.

Ehlers: No, naturally not. Phrasing wasn't done; very

little old music is phrased. Vocal music didn't need it because the words, the sense of the sentence gave you the idea to take a breath. And in a way violin music doesn't need it--the bow goes to an end, and if you are an intelligent violinist you think, "How far should I go? How should I treat my bow so that it can still take this note in, because it belongs to the phrase?" The pianist doesn't have this problem. He has ten fingers and always can muddle around. The only thing they are interested in is loud or soft, which is not of this importance in Bach's keyboard music.

So I was very glad they came out with their criticism.

Tusler: Do you try to get arguments started in the class, friendly arguments?

Ehlers: Ja, I try, I try. But you see, to start arguments with the ones that don't know what they are talking about is very senseless. It takes my time, the time that they should play, and they talk about things they don't know. If somebody already has a conviction...

Now, the other day I had an interesting case with a brilliant pianist, a really brilliant pianists, who studies a Bach concerto with me. I couldn't hold back. I said, "Why is your tone so ugly when you play Bach? Why is it so hard? I have heard your other pieces [and they are] beautiful."

"Well, I thought Bach has to be played objectively."

I said, "Objective, yes, but the tone has to be beautiful."

You see, there are so many misunderstandings. The talented ones feel attracted to Bach but they don't know how to handle him, and I don't blame them. I also tell the pianists, "Don't avoid dynamics in Bach, little crescendo, but handle them more carefully." It shouldn't be the basic approach like in Schumann, Brahms, romantic music. It is just sometimes possible to set piano against forte and forte against piano. I even tell them, "Don't try to imitate organ or harpsichord which are either/or." You can make slight inflections of dynamics, a little more and a little less, but it is very seldom that you can start piano and end fortissimo. If Bach wants more he adds more, either in note values or in voices. It's all on the page. But you see this funny idea that Bach is treated brutally with an ugly tone on the piano. I say, "Why?" This I don't call "objective playing."

Also, nothing is objective. Bach managed to show as solid a heart as any other human being. It shouldn't be "objective." Only the whole inclination of the time was different to our inclination, and his way of writing was even different to his time because there is not one in the baroque who had the style of writing that Bach had. Handel is a typical, typical baroque composer. Bach uses some of the expressions and the stylistic characteristics

of the baroque; but there is only one Bach, anyhow, for me.

Tusler: It's really extraordinary that he should have this particular complexity that nobody else did.

Ehlers: Ja. Absolutely. Well, it is the end of a period, and he swallowed up everything he could and transformed it in his way of writing.

I read a very interesting article yesterday about certain things which always bothered me. I don't know if this is of any interest; but you know there was a time, especially here in this town, when they started out preaching that lines of eighth notes should not be played evenly but slightly dotted. This I never could apply to Bach. Students (you know, the students who are so in between-- they have read things but not really digested them, with no experience) came with the idea that maybe it's right. I can't understand it. I can't see this dotted rhythm with a chain of eighth notes--that you don't play them evenly, you play them slightly dotted.

Tusler: With respect to what music? All music?

Ehlers: All of the baroque. Well, this man wrote a wonderful article, based on quotations of the time, that this only is in regard to the French school and not to Bach.

I very often said to Malcolm, "Malcolm, I can't do it." And he said, "I can't either." I said, "With this polyphonic music it just doesn't work." Now for the first time I am backed up with this article. I don't know the man;

he is teaching somewhere at a university in Richmond, Virginia, and it's in the last--what is it,, a very profound paper which comes for the...

Tusler: The Journal of the American Musicological Society?

Ehlers: Ja, quite right. And I was so grateful, I wrote the man enthusiastically and said, "My teaching this way was not based [manything], I couldn't quote anything; now you helped me to back up what I felt." I felt always we can't do this in Bach's music. It's fine, probably, for Mr. Telemann or for French music. Now he brings the proof that this was mentioned only for French music. So it made me feel better, much better. But, you see, the students read this, swallow it, apply it senselessly to everything which comes under their hands. And you can't blame them because they can't have this background.

The class in baroque is a one-semester class; just they learn one piece with me and then go off. Because really there are very few who care for this period. There are a few who love Bach, that's true, even pianists, and want to do it well, and of course I'm much more lenient with them and allow them to use the possibilities of the piano. I would never say black and white, like on the harpsichord. But what I have to explain always to them, more than anything else, is that the phrasing, the breathing is the main thing, and how much you breathe. For this you have to develop your sensitivity. There is no rule on it.

Tusler: I suppose it has much to do with the tempo of the piece, how much of a break the performer can make.

Ehlers: Well, the tempo of the piece of course for me makes a piece or kills it.

Tusler: But I mean the speed at which you're playing would have something to do with the amount of time you could take to articulate a phrase.

Ehlers: Well, for me the speed of a piece is the making of the piece or the killing of it. So if they play too fast, which they mostly do, they have no time for anything, and I think that this is part of the reason that people dislike Bach.

Tusler: It's just a blur of sound.

Ehlers: And if anything makes me happy it is that people who have heard me play Bach have said, "Well, I thought Bach is boring but it isn't boring when you do it." Of course, I give time to breathe and I give time to do the line.

Tusler: What do you do when you're studying a piece by Bach which you've never learned before in working out the phrasing?

Ehlers: I have nothing to work out. I don't know where it comes from, because as I told you, I don't look at myself as a great talent. I had to work my [way] through everything and things don't come easy to me, but Bach speaks to me. I can't tell you, I can't...I just don't understand how anybody can overlook those things.

Tusler: Do you sit with a pencil in hand and actually mark music?

Ehlers: Never. Never.

Tusler: That isn't really necessary?

Ehlers: Not necessary. It's absolutely not necessary; probably in a very difficult piece where I could over look it because it's so interwoven in the polyphony, maybe once I make a little sign that in playing I wouldn't forget it; but very seldom.

Tusler: Having been through the piece, you automatically, almost instinctively, know?

Ehlers: Instinctively I do those things. Sometimes I say, well, am I right or not? because there are two possibilities. Sometimes there is more than one possibility. But the students don't even see one possibility offered--they don't see anything. They just see notes and then they play them louder or softer, you see? I know this takes almost a lifetime to learn to do, but some of the intelligent ones catch on when I show them. But still I have to show them.

Tusler: Do you advise them to mark their music, to put marks on the phrases, or to analyze?

Ehlers: No, I don't believe in analyzing in this way.

Tusler: You don't approach the music for yourself or with your students from a formal or analytical point of view?

Ehlers: This comes in during the study, but it's not the beginning, for me.

Tusler: Do you ever discuss form with them?

Ehlers: Of course, I have to.

Tusler: Do you find that they know very much about the baroque forms, the structure of a fugue, or whatever?

Ehlers: Well, they get it in their harmony and counterpoint lessons--let their teacher worry about this.

Tusler: This is not part of what you have to deal with.

Ehlers: No, no. I wouldn't feel up to doing this at all. But [I try] to give them the understanding for tempo.

[I am] very glad they are so open with me, so I could answer. What should I teach? The French music is out because it sounds terrible on the piano. Handel--to teach them a Handel suite--there are no problems involved. Probably [what] I would say about a Handel French overture, is done with one sentence. French music, as I said, is out. Scarlatti they can learn with their piano teachers, and they do it, because it's adjusted for the piano then and not as I handle it for harpsichord, as it was meant by Scarlatti. So what is there but Bach? And this is where they need the most help. But I am glad they came out with the criticism, and I answered them. And I will come back to it next time. I haven't made up my mind how I should approach it. I probably will show them pieces and say, "What should I have taught you here? You would have to learn the notes, you have to think a little about the tempo, and then it would have been done."

Tusler: That covers it.

Ehlers: Ja. But in Bach, not.

Tusler: Do you find that the baroque phrasing, and particularly in Bach, is usually off-beat?

Ehlers: Sometimes yes, sometimes no.

Tusler: But not always. This isn't a rule of thumb.

Ehlers: Listen, no, dear; but the dance forms give you this. Some are upbeat dances, some start on the beat.

This is a form on which most of the music of the eighteenth century is based--the suite is a dance, a collection of dances. The sonata hardly did exist. Bach calls his violin and cello [pieces] suites, and you can't come there from a different point of view. Just say, this is a characteristic of the dance. There is a repeated rhythmical pattern.

The allemandes mostly have upbeats, as I remember right now. This is a characteristic of the dance. A minuet starts on the beat, the sarabande starts on the beat.

This nothing to do specially with Bach, but all these things I put in when we talk about [how] one plays a sarabande or a courante. Don't forget these are classes. In the private lesson, I act entirely differently, naturally, with my harpsichord students, and also with piano students if they play Bach with me.

Tusler: I suppose another of the problems in the phrasing of Bach is the fact that you've got three, four, or perhaps five lines going simultaneously, polyphonically, and each one could well be phrased at a different point.

Ehlers: Ja, should be probably phrased--but this is only true in fugues. In the dance movements you have [it]

not quite so. In the fugues it's so worked out that if the one [voice] has the theme probably the other has a counterpoint to it. But it is in the dance movements, in the free movements, where you see only this amount of black notes and don't know what to do with it.

Those kids I have invited to listen to Malcolm's records next week I chose very carefully, you know? All of them are pianists; a few are harpsichordists, but with the harpsichord those things are not a problem. They, by choosing the harpsichord, know already a little bit of the limitation of the instrument, which is good for the music of Bach; but for the pianist who can go overboard with a Bach piece on the piano it's a very good illustration. I don't mind a little crescendo and diminuendo on the piano because it's meant on the piano, and the clavichord could do it.

Tusler: The clavichord had a crescendo and diminuendo?

Ehlers: Oh, ja. Ja. Very, very small possibilities, and only to be heard in a small room, but it shows you the possibility was not out of the mind of the baroque composer. And take the voice. All these wonderful compositions in the baroque have not been sung, I'll never believe, in a straight quality.

Tusler: No. Have you ever played the clavichord?

Ehlers: I tried it. I think I mentioned before that Professor Curt Sachs lent me one of the wonderful old clavichords from the collection of old musical instruments at the Hochschule

fur Musik in Berlin. He wanted to tempt me, but I was too stupid at this time, I was so much in love with the harpsichord. The clavichord needs a very distinct treatment; this is an art in itself, and only the old people probably could handle both instruments, or all three, by the way--organ, harpsichord and clavichord.

Tusler: How is it so different?

Ehlers: Well, because the tone has to be produced by vibrating your finger slightly, almost like a string instrument. You could do a little crescendo, only by the vibration of the finger. Now, my attack was much too brutal and too direct. The harpsichord has to be attacked directly because the plectrum inside, I found out, if it doesn't pluck just directly, [makes an] unpleasant dirty noise. There is no tentativeness in my finger on the harpsichord. On the piano you have to be. The pianist has to caress, in a way, the tone, just what he wants to get out. He has to get a piano singing tone. This is the same with the clavichord. The clavichord is really the predecessor of the piano.

Tusler: More than the harpsichord?

Ehlers: The harpsichord has nothing to do for the piano. It's antipianistic in everything, in its technical meaning and in its possibilities.

Tusler: What actually happens technically inside the clavichord?

Ehlers: The tangent strikes the string like the hammer

strikes a string.

Tusler: In other words, like the piano.

Ehlers: Like the piano, ja. This is why I said the clavichord is the predecessor of the piano, only with a very small range. There is one woman in Stanford who plays it beautifully. You know, the clavichord was for some time the instrument for all amateurs. I have heard here one lady play the clavichord. I will never forget it, because it was the most amateurish playing you can imagine. You know, she whimpers the sentiment along. I can only say "whimper" along--it's not music. I will never forget that I persuaded Dean Kendall to go with me and listen to her, and already I was a very little afraid before she played because she said, "The clavichord, you know, has to be treated with so much finesse. It's like the moonlight."

And I said, "Oh, God help me." This is not my way. But her playing was also like that moonlight, you know? [laughter] And I said to the dean, "Let's go home."

He said, "You stay, now. You are responsible for the idea."

But, you see, this is a very great art. Landowska never played it. I heard it only in Carmel with this woman whose name I've forgotten who is teaching at Stanford-- she played it so that you [could] say it's beautiful. It's artistic. It is music, not just simple sentimentality, you know? But as I say, you can play it only in a small room.

Tusler: The sound is so limited.

Ehlers: But very educational for finesse.

Tusler: Does one play the same literature on the clavichord that is played on the harpsichord?

Ehlers: I don't know. I'm sure that probably many of Bach's Inventions were played by his students on both instruments, because both instruments, plus the organ, were taught at the same time. It's the spirit behind it which is the same--it's the baroque spirit, and then you give to each instrument what it can do. I am sure that some of the Inventions are beautiful on the clavichord, and maybe even some preludes from the Well-Tempered Clavier. I can't visualize the fugues, frankly speaking.

Tusler: It never has more than one manual, does it?

Ehlers: No. There is only one manual.

Tusler: So you don't have the registration.

Ehlers: No, nothing. Just one tone quality to work with. If you ever have a chance to hear this lady from Stanford, you should hear her. A really great artist.

Tusler: Do you believe that the piano tone can be changed and controlled by the performer?

Ehlers: I am absolutely certain about this.

Tusler: I've heard people express the opposite point of view.

Ehlers: Well, maybe they're right; but what makes one person's piano tone so beautiful and so sensitive, and the other's brutal and nothing? It's not only the piano and forte, it's not only the dynamic, it's also the quality of the tone which changes. Now, have you ever heard Glenn Gould when

he has a good day?

Tusler: Yes, on recordings.

Ehlers: Well, this is no good, you can't judge a tone from records.

Tusler: I've never heard him in person.

Ehlers: Beautiful sensitiveness. Sometimes brutal, if he is very extreme, you know, swings left or right. He is very dynamic in this way.

But this [the clavichord] was really the forerunner of the piano with the idea of changing the tone quality, in a different way. And it's interesting that these ways existed side by side--the objectivity of the harpsichord and objectivity of the organ against the subjectivity of the clavichord. In a way, the harpsichord and the organ are [also] subjective instruments. You put in the register and the register works for you. Now comes the other thing: what do you do with the register, how do you phrase, how do you get [to the point where] the art starts to be considered? It's all so close and so difficult to explain. I understand those poor students who come for one semester, and want to get the feeling, "Now I know how to handle Bach." Really, I am very careful to say, I dare to say now, I dare to say I know about the music.

It's very interesting. I have a very talented composer whom I have to show how the line goes in Bach. He is fascinated. He said, "I have never seen this." I said, "How come?" How come that a composer can love Bach, study

Bach, can analyze the fugues ten times better than I do, and still doesn't know what to do with it when it comes to the instrument? And he is a good pianist.

Tusler: He's just never had to think about it before, how to make it come out of his fingers. It's quite different, I suppose, having it in your head.

Ehlers: Ja, and also seeing it and then bringing it out in sound probably. I don't know, it's all very confusing, and all I wish is that I could be twenty years younger and would know as much as I know today. I could achieve something with the students. I have with the harpsichord students, I think I have. But those poor pianists who come, and all they get out of it is utter confusion, because it's not time enough for them to think in a new direction when it comes to Bach. And I only say Bach because Handel is another problem. If you wish to play a Handel suite on the piano and you like it, do it. So this is what I try to explain to them.

Tusler: Of course, you have many more students who are pianists than who are studying to be harpsichordists.

Ehlers: Harpsichord students have private lessons. But these are classes. With the private piano students, this is fine--I can at least in studying one Bach piece with them personally on the piano convince them through this piece. This doesn't mean they know what to do with the next, and I don't blame them, but at least one piece they play probably right in tempo. It starts with the tempo question. They

all play Bach too fast. They see the sixteenth notes and they [play them too fast] or they play them too slow. I can't blame them; again I have to say this is music so remote from our time, in a way, that you have to be very mature to understand the style of this music and the beauty. Some of my students understand it, thank God, and then in their way they bring it out musically on the piano. But as I told you, the one with good fingers whomade the brutal piece out of it because he thought Bach had to be played without sentiment, just beat, and this is wrong. And the others oversentimentalize.

But it's hard on the piano. With the exception of Gould and this woman whom I can't appreciate very much, Rosalyn Tureck (I appreciate her intelligence and knowledge but not what she does with Bach), no pianists play Bach any more. They feel that piano and Bach don't go together. With Glenn Gould, it sometimes goes wonderfully together, I must say, but he is the only one. If he has a good day his Bach is beautiful, but you know because he is eccentric and he can give you tempos either so slow or so fast it kills it.

But you see, I'm in an inner conflict with this class. I ask myself, "Do I do any good or do I disturb them only without doing any good?" But probably disturbance in itself is good, I don't know.

Tusler: To bring students around to the point where they can ask themselves lots of questions about things is I think very good.

Ehlers: I wonder if they do. The intelligent I am always very pleased [with]. They have to give a recital before they graduate. One of our most talented students in every way, as a conductor, as a player, as a composer I can't judge, came to me the other day and said, "May I play the Sixth Partita for you?" It is one of the most problematic pieces, how to perform. And this is always wonderful for me and I'm gladly giving my time to do this, but these are only the very brilliant students who feel that I can be of help to them.

Tusler: What is it about the Sixth Partita?

Ehlers: It's just plain difficult to judge. It's very difficult to play pianistically, and it's a long piece, and you have not the change of registration which you have on the harpsichord. This is one of the most difficult pieces. Beautiful; the greatest of all his partitas as far as the musical capacity. And I of course, naturally, being a person with common sense, don't demand things which are unpianistic. On the contrary. I allow them to think, to do certain things on the piano which I would absolutely resent if a harpsichordist tried to do, or an organist.

Tusler: Does it sometimes happen with the various piano students you get that some of them are attracted over into the harpsichord area?

Ehlers: No; they are interested. I think the pianist should stand with the piano and not be distracted, because it ruins their piano touch. But I am glad if they are able to perform Bach on the piano, because if this is the instrument

they play, they should be able to project the greatness and beauty of it. But if you count, there are very few students who do. Now this boy, for instance, who plays his master recital at the end of January, is a great talent. He composes also, and he knows why he comes and asks. I'm very grateful for those students who have trust in me.

Tusler: The harpsichord students that you get at USC, then, are students who come there just to study the harpsichord.

Ehlers: They all start out on the piano, because they have to learn the keys and they have to get the technique. I wouldn't take somebody who doesn't play a keyboard instrument. I have one very interesting student now who takes a double doctorate in harpsichord and piano. It will be very good for teaching. It will never be a high artistic quality of playing, but this is not necessary. He understands the music, and it's very good if a piano teacher knows something about the harpsichord.

But in our school, I must say, it is a very lovely working together. Hardly any of the piano teachers touches Bach. They leave it to my interpretation class, which is good because the students won't be confused. My approach is different tempo-wise, technique-wise, and so on. It's a wonderful trust we have in each other, you know? I can't teach what they do, the wonderful technical approach to the piano and all those things, but I can be of use in this field in which I really think I should be used in. This applies to cellists as well as to violinists, to every instrument,

really. What it comes to is the phrasing and articulation which Schweitzer preached all the time. If he had done nothing else, this pointing out the importance of phrasing and articulation would have been enough for me.

Commentary on Harpsichords

Tusler: Does the school of music at USC own a sufficient number of harpsichords?

Ehlers: Oh, please don't ask this question. It is my, what should I say, my weakest point, because I am deeply hurt that I have to teach on an instrument [such] as we have there. One miserable instrument which we bought during the war and have had it since. This was the reason I gave the concerti this summer with my students on one, two, three and four harpsichords. Have you heard it?

Tusler: Yes, I heard it.

Ehlers: To make money. We made fifteen hundred dollars, but it's not enough for a new harpsichord. I have to see the dean in one of the next days and tell him he has to buy a new harpsichord, otherwise I resign.

Tusler: What kind of an instrument is it?

Ehlers: It's a Neupert. If we buy a new Neupert, I am glad the new Neuperts are excellent.

Tusler: But this is a very old one?

Ehlers: It's an old one; it's worn out; and built during the war probably not with first-rate material; used now since '49.

Tusler: And it's the only one.

Ehlers: It's the only one we have.

Tusler: Is this a problem in arranging practice time?

Ehlers: Oh, this is arranged by me and this works out fine; but it's a problem for me to teach. So I hope that we can now come to some conclusion. I just can't teach. I think it is not fair toward me, it's not fair toward the student.

Tusler: If you have your free choice of what kind of harpsichord they should buy, what would you recommend?

Ehlers: Probably Neupert. This Neupert which I heard recently, which a student of mine bought, is a beautiful instrument.

Tusler: Are they being manufactured in Germany?

Ehlers: Ja.

Tusler: What about some of the American companies that have been springing up now?

Ehlers: I haven't heard one good instrument. Challis is very well worked. I must say, from the workman point of view, it's first class. The tone is disappointing to me. I played the largest Challis, just bought a few months before I [went to] Ann Arbor, Michigan at the university. It had all the things a harpsichord should have, but for me the tone was not adequate. I couldn't hear myself at all.

Tusler: You mean it's not big enough, not resonant enough?

Ehlers: It has not resonance enough. It's probably wonderfully built, reliable and so on; the man is an excellent worker. The workmanship is first class. I taught two

summers in Michigan at Ann Arbor, and went several times to his workshop. He knows what he is doing. But I don't think he is very conscious of tone quality; I don't know.

I think every instrument is individual. The Neupert I heard last time was beautiful, and so the next might not be so good; I don't know. It is like with violins. You might have three Amatis, and each one will be different, maybe each one good in his way. I thought now for the school Neupert would be probably the best. Pleyel is very expensive and also has one disadvantage: I don't know if he has changed his method, but the four-foot is only on the lower keyboard. So I never can play cleanly a two-part invention on eight and four. If I want to have balance, I have to have two eight-feet which is not always good. If I want something more brilliant in character, I want to have a four-foot, but how do you play two parts which are of even importance if you don't have the register for the second part? Then I would have one on eight and four, and one eight alone, which makes one part weaker. But musically this is not correct, because they work both the same way.

Tusler: Is that true of your Pleyel, also?

Ehlers: Ja, of course.

Tusler: Have you ever talked or written to them about it? I wonder what their line of reasoning would be.

Ehlers: No, no. You see, I tell you, I won't change Pleyel any more. This is Landowska's design which she did with the Pleyel people, and they so far stick to it. I don't

think there is much I[could do]. One of my students who spent two years in Paris came back and I asked, "How is the harpsichord situation? How are the harpsichordists?" The answer was, "Lousy," All he said. And he is very objective and was long enough there.

Tusler: The Wittmeyer, I suppose you feel, is not a big enough instrument, resonant enough.

Ehlers: Well, I have heard only those around here, so I cannot really judge them properly. A school instrument must be built strongly, and I think the Neupert [is].

There is one man in England, William de Blaise who copied partly my Pleyel and took the new advantages which Neupert brought in, and he is not so expensive. I would recommend him. Stanford has [one of his] instruments-- I played a concert on it. It was close to the Pleyel because the man who built it copied my Pleyel. Years ago when I was, I think I mentioned, on my Jerusalem trip, this flutist who was from the Philharmonic in Jerusalem was very interested. At this time he didn't think of building, but he was interested in the instrument and took a perfect design of my Pleyel. Now he is in the manufacturing business in London, and I played his instrument a few years ago when I was in London and liked it very much. Then Stanford bought one of his and I played it last summer and liked it, also. It's almost an arrangement like my Pleyel, with some advanced ideas. For instance, he has a four-foot on the upper and on the lower keyboard so I could play a

two-part invention without swindling my way along. If I would be younger I would probably buy such an instrument. I would even recommend it for our school.

Tusler: How much does such an instrument as you need, the size of instrument that you need, cost?

Ehlers: I don't know.

Tusler: Up in the thousands?

Ehlers: Oh, dear, at least four to five thousand dollars. I played a de Blaise in London and here and it is at least, comparatively, the cheapest.

Tusler: Of course, we have a local Los Angeles builder, too, Richard Jones.

Ehlers: Oh, dear. [He is] wonderful as a repairer and also a tuner. He handles my Pleyel and it's in good condition since he takes care of it, but I think I would not recommend his instrument.

Tusler: Perhaps he just hasn't worked with it long enough.

Ehlers: I think he has worked quite a time, but I don't think he has the chance and the means to develop it really. I heard it once used by this Dutch organist who was here years ago in Hancock Hall, [Gustav] Leonhardt. He played the Goldberg Variations on it and it was a great disappointment. Jones takes wonderful care of my Pleyel, but as a builder he has different ideas; they are sound from the practical point of view, but you have to have tone, imagination as a builder, too, I think. Or is it all good luck, what comes out? I don't know. Challis instruments were disappointing

to me in tone quality, though built, the mechanics, perfectly. But this instrument which I played in Stanford is quite good and the name of the man has to come to me again, because I will write to him. I think I will get now a harpsichord.

Tusler: Do you think it's of any use from the teaching point of view, for students who are just beginning to learn harpsichord technique and who have been trained on the piano, to work on a small harpsichord, a spinet?

Ehlers: No, absolutely not.

Tusler: This doesn't help to really solve the problems at all.

Ehlers: Not at all, because they have to learn to overcome the resistance which comes when you have several registers coupled together. And this has to be educated from the beginning.

Tusler: Perhaps a small instrument does more harm than good, from that point of view.

Ehlers: I wouldn't like the small instruments at all.

Tusler: Richard Jones makes a small spinet, you know.

Ehlers: Well, this is nice for sentimental playing at home, but I'm not going to teach on such an instrument. So we have to wait and see what comes out, but I hope I will get one. You know, sometimes something slips my mind, and I forgot entirely this man in London.

Tusler: Are there any other well-known German builders besides Neupert and Wittmeyer?

Ehlers: Not that I know of, but there may be. I have no interest, so I don't go into research on this point.

Tusler: I believe you taught at Claremont a number of different times.

Ehlers: Well, I taught not harpsichord.

Tusler: I wondered if they had good instruments out there.

Ehlers: There is one out there, I don't know how it is.

I think quite a good [one]--is it Wittmeyer or Neupert?

But at this time it was Bach interpretation on the piano.

This is much more important [than] teaching harpsichord.

A harpsichordist is like an organist, close to his instrument, and has been taught by the organ teacher and by the harpsichord teacher how to play the [instrument] and how to take care of the stylistic element and so on. But on the piano when they play Bach, all of the students come in with their Schumann attitude to Bach. And this is where the trouble starts.

Well, you see, I have learned to be very modest and say it is one step in the right direction. How far we will go, I don't know. [When] I think that when I came here nobody knew, except the college professors, what a harpsichord is or sounds like, I can be very pleased [about] what has happened in this city alone.

Tusler: When you came to Los Angeles, you were quite literally the only harpsichordist, at least in southern California, and very likely in the entire United States.

Ehlers: Ja. No; I don't know when Kirkpatrick started,

but maybe, it might be around this time that Kirkpatrick came out too, when I came here.

Tusler: But certainly there was nobody else.

Ehlers: No. Landowska came later [to this country], I think, and not at this time. But you see, I believe there are cycles in everything, and I think also the time was ready for harpsichord and harpsichord playing and for this kind of music. So we all came at the right time.

Tusler: The times were ready for you, and you were in the right spot at the right time.

Ehlers: Ja, ja. This is a blessing.

TAPE NUMBER: SIX, SIDE ONE

January 3, 1966

Discussion of Bach's
Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue

Tusler: Today you and I are going to talk about the Bach Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue.* Can we start out by my asking you if this is one of your particular favorites, if it's been significant in your career? Have you performed it a great deal? Why did you choose for us to work with this particular piece of music?

Ehlers: Well, first of all, my dear, I think it was you who chose it. But anyhow, it's a good piece to choose because it's one of the few pieces which gives you great freedom of interpretation. I mean, the word "fantasy" indicates it already. And still, for me, in this freedom is a certain strictness. I give it only to very advanced students who can think by themselves, because to imitate is very easy.

I never played this piece as long as I was under Mme. Landowska. I don't even remember ever hearing her play it. I'm sure it was in her program, so it probably has slipped

*In the following discussion, Mme. Ehlers is using the Kalmus edition of the Bach Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue edited by Hans Bischoff; Mrs. Tusler, the Schirmer edition by Hans von Bülow. All measure numbers refer to the Kalmus edition. It should be further noted that Mme. Ehlers bases her study on the Bach Gesellschaft, using the Kalmus edition for teaching purposes.

my memory. But it became one of my favorite pieces. I have it constantly on the program. But to give it to students, I hesitate. They can, of course, imitate. They can do what I tell them, but it's not the idea. The idea is that they should find out. And if you are interested I will tell you how I found out and believe I am right.

First of all, I never play a piece. I sit down with the music and read it. I read and let the picture impress me. Now, if you look at this fantasy, you see these first two measures are absolutely isolated. Turn around and you will see they don't come till very, very much later, this kind of runs. So they stand there for me like a curtain raiser, saying, "Attention, please. Now I start." This is how I explain it to my students, who have not the slightest idea what to do with it.

And as a side remark, I am amazed and sad when I see those students with their brilliant finger technique sitting before a piece without the slightest idea. They are absolutely helpless. I wonder sometimes if there's not something wrong in our music teaching, that we don't stimulate their own ideas or their thinking processes how to see the music. They have to promise me not to go and listen to a record. This fear of thinking and facing it themselves. Well, I had to face it for myself, and I am glad I had to do it.

I think this is one of the easiest pieces, not to play, but to face. Now, for instance, these two measures, they

are like a curtain raiser, like a fanfare saying, "Attention." Now he cuts in here, and gradually rolls into motion.

[measure3]. You see first the second voice playing in eighth notes, ja? Then in the fifth measure the left hands starts to take part in this broken-chord pattern. It gets more and more agitated. The player has hardly to do anything. Bach does it. You know what I mean? With the first two measures after the first two runs, you have the left hand playing eighth notes, quietly, whereas the right hand already goes in the sixteenth motion, a motion of going up and down, and in motion all the time. In the fifth measure, the left hand starts to get into motion, too. Then the motion gets more and more and more, till you come to measure 21, where he has this running thirty-second note pattern which ends in climbing down in the triplet pattern.

Here again it's very interesting--I don't know if you'd say it's a newer edition, I'm sure it is not Bach's doing--where he starts with a D minor broken-chord pattern [measure 27]. It has come down, down, already in triplets, and here [measure 27] starts this new pattern. Now, what does one do here? (The "lento" I disregard, because it calms down by itself in some way, and it is not [written] by Bach; but it is a good remark made for those who don't find their way by themselves.) Now, what do you think should be done? For me it's all very clear. The first broken-chord pattern is written out. He says with this, "This is the way I

want it." The next has eight voices; you roll faster, ja? The first had only six voices, the D minor pattern, or six notes. The next has eight, so you roll faster. The next one again has eight; the next has eight; eight; and then four; eight again; till you come to the A major chord. So you see, he gives with the D minor chord the idea of how he wants the others played, of course a little faster because there are eight notes to be rolled, till he ends here in A major and makes a little kind of cadence [measure 30].

Now, I personally play the last chord after this trill in the cadence from up-down; I roll it from up-down. If it's right or not, I don't know; it is the most natural for me. First of all, the A has to go somewhere, ja? And the A goes for me to B-flat, so I roll down and then up also. When I end up, the next run makes sense. The whole run grows out of the B-flat. Do you see my point?

Tusler: Yes. You start on a B-flat for the trill.

Ehlers: Ja. This is natural because all the trills start with the upper note in Bach's time. But not only this: I end [sings] on the B-flat--I roll down and roll up again, so that I really end my chord here where the next run starts. [measure 31]. If I would only roll down, this doesn't make sense, the B-flat is lost. But I roll down and roll up again, so that the B-flat is in my ear. From then on, I proceed with the run, which makes sense as the end of the B-flat chord. Then comes a chord pattern [measure 33] which is pretty clearly set out, I think. The first one

I roll up and then I roll down the D in the D major chord, and the C goes simply as a passing tone. Then I go absolutely as it's written [measures 34-42], always rolling up, and pointing out the chromaticism, B, C, C-sharp, D, C [in the top voice]. This has a certain freedom, and the freedom is already indicated by Bach, because you see the chords have different [numbers of] voices. Some have eight voices, some only six, so I roll slower, naturally, for the six. One has even five, the E-flat major chord [measure 40]. So this gives a change. Here six voices, here eight voices, here five voices. So I follow the pattern; otherwise it would be so almost sterile, just rolling up and down without sense. But Bach indicated, for me, anyhow, that the tempo has a kind of improvisatory character; the whole line is improvisatory as he will find his way where to go. If you play all these chords, as all the students [do], with the same tempo, the character of improvisation is entirely gone. So I tell them always, "Look here. Some have three, seven voices, some eight, some five, some six voices in the chord. So take this as a guide to roll freely here. It shouldn't sound learned all the time." This is very difficult to do. I never knew it would be so difficult for a student to do this, to get the way of thinking this way.

Tusler: In your edition, there are just the chords given.

Ehlers: Just the chords.

Tusler: Does this mean that you are supposed to supply

the arpeggio yourself?

Ehlers: Bach has supplied it with this measure here

[measure 27]. He showed you here the pattern he wants.

I follow through with this wherever the chord pattern comes.

Tusler: Is this the way Bach himself wrote it in his score?

Ehlers: As far as we know, ja. There is no one hundred percent authoritative facsimile of the Chromatic. But this is in all the copies which were found, that the first [group] is spread out the way he wants it, and here, why should he write it out? This is for me the example of how those should be played. Here he has six voices, and in the next he has eight voices, so I personally roll this faster. So there comes life into it and [it is] not always the same.

Then he gives interruption to these rolling chords with this figuration which you see on A major here [measure 30], the embellishment and all those things. The important point is that you see, just with your eyes, the change in the picture. Then you will do it automatically. The person who improvises has probably to think, "Where am I going from here? Why does he suddenly have six, or five voices, even?" For me it is--I don't know if it actually happens, but it is a moment of giving time to think where I am going next. And improvisators, even Bach, probably had to have some time to think about where they are going. But for the students, this doesn't mean anything. You have to point it out to them, the idea. Here [measure 34] he is pretty

sure what he is going to do, and he has almost all the time the same amount of voices, four, seven or eight, you know. He goes B, C, C-sharp, D, D, C, D-flat, E-flat-- he goes up almost constantly chromatically.

Then comes a moment of hesitation, in the fortieth measure. Here he has the last notes, has a passing note, and he feels somehow, now it's enough of this broken chord pattern; and with this run [measure 42] he goes again in a very short episode back to this broken chord pattern.

Then after he ends in A major [measure 49], he starts with the recitative. Now, the recitative, of course, we all know is based on words, and the sense of the words give you the idea of how freely or how fast or how slowly you do it. All this is very difficult to explain to students. They do it after they've heard me play it, you know, and there comes out of themselves not the slightest idea. First of all, I regret to say, very few of the piano students have experience in accompanying a recitative, which is a thing by itself. In a recitative you have to know the words, the sense of the words, to help the singer to go and to stop and to go and stop. They are very one-sided in their musical education, either because they don't hear enough, or they hear only records; whereas we in our youth heard every person who played the Chromatic Fantasy playing it, which helped me to go at it in an entirely different way; when I heard it, and then I looked at the music, I was convinced this was not right, even [with such] great masters as

Busoni, for instance. I couldn't follow their way, even accepting certain changes, you know, like playing in octaves, because this is what we do on the organ and the harpsichord-- we don't play octaves but it sounds like octaves.

Tusler: With the registration.

Ehlers: With the registration. This I don't mind, but with other things.

Students always want to play the Chromatic, they are interested, but they don't know what to do. Then comes the recitative, and here they are utterly helpless. They have no imagination about what to do. I try to explain to them that you have to visualize two people in the recitative: one is the singer and one is the accompanist. The recitative starts out with this embellished phrase [measure 49]. They play out the chord in measure 50 as though they were the singer, instead of feeling that this is the accompanist. Here they see it [measure 51] because Bach makes here a rest. This is again the accompanist, and this must be not only dynamically but mentally divided. It's very difficult to explain from only the printed music without hearing it.

Tusler: So this part, this recitative part, is actually even more free than that which has gone before.

Ehlers: I wouldn't say "free." But I have to feel it is a recitative and, as I pointed out before, it comes from the vocal literature; so you have two "people," the singer and the accompanist. Here you have again the singer in the

next. Here is the accompanist who answers [measure 51].

Here, it's easy, because Bach wrote a rest in between, but also dynamically it should be different from this.

Tusler: So you get into some real registration problems here.

Ehlers: Not really problems; but you have to think of it--

sometimes you would take up the energy of the singers to make it dramatic; here, probably you shouldn't go back.

But here, I would play the after-remark of the accompanist very discreetly. It is very difficult to put this into words, but the main thing is that the student should see what's going on here. They are utterly helpless when it comes to the recitative. They wriggle out the runs in the beginning very well; I mean, it's good technically; but when it comes to the idea that this should be not played by the metronome but more like speech (which really a recitative is, it's a speech in music), that some of the sixteenths are faster than others, this to make clear to them is very difficult. You ~~have~~ to have a very talented and imaginative student so that they can think for themselves.

Tusler: So that's the first really tricky spot?

Ehlers: I would say yes, because I take the technique for granted. They all ~~have~~ good technique. But then to do something, to have their imagination tell them ~~what~~ to do, this is something entirely different. They are not used to it, because modern literature helps them (helps or [does] the opposite), helps them to know what to do, so they are never stimulated by anything where they have to think, you

see? And this is a piece they always want to play and mostly don't know what to do with. Then nothing is left [but] I have to show it to them. First, I explain to them as I have talked to you now and say, "Look here. There you have to accompany the singer. You know what a recitative is. So try to visualize within yourself two persons, the singer and the accompanist, which we have to be in this case, the singer and then the accompanist following the mood of the phrase sung before by the singer." It sounds easy but it is not easy for them because it's unusual.

Then when it comes after the andantino to the run [measure 61] there is no difficulty again, because this is a technical matter and they all have good techniques, too good techniques.

Tusler: Too good techniques?

Ehlers: Ja, because you know their technique sometimes takes over too much and the brain is left in the background.

Now, the only place which is for me strict in rhythm is the end. When Bach builds the grandioso--I don't know, should I call it a coda? from here, where he returns to the D minor [sings] da-da-da-dee-dum [measure 75], he builds it up from here; for me these left hands are like pillars, carrying the whole happenings in the right hand. You see, for the first time, he goes strict with the left hand in big chords. (In your edition it's all so terribly cluttered up.)

Tusler: Yes, I can't even find where your spot is here.

[Schirmer edition].

Ehlers: Ja, it's harder to see because it's so much edited. So ridiculous--I can't even find it.

Tusler: Where my score is marked *maestoso* in measure 77, that's what you're talking about.

Ehlers: Ja. Now we have it, ja. From here on, you have this very strict pattern in the left hand, which is absolutely not to be seen in your [edition]. You see, this is for me, as I said before, like pillars holding the majesty of this right hand, this improvisation. [sings] You see, not two figures in the right hand are alike. The right hand is rhapsodic. The left hand holds it with a strong...

Tusler: Foundation.

Ehlers: Ja, ja. Foundation; it gives a wonderful foundation. So it is really very simple; it's only a matter of seeing it.

Tusler: So that last section, which you're just speaking about, is more strict in tempo, would you say? There's less rubato there?

Ehlers: This is for me absolutely strict. The rubato is done by Bach himself, sixteenth notes, thirty-second notes, eighth notes, all the changes in the right hand; but the left hand has to be strict. In the right hand you can do what you want, but you have not much chance because he changes, as you see. He starts out with sixteenth notes and he has eighth notes, and then he has thirty-second notes [measure 75] here and even sixty-fourth notes in the last one [measure 78]. So if you start here monkeying around, then his design

doesn't come out clearly, because the more the composer writes down, the less we have to do after my idea. Otherwise you disturb his design. So this end of it--what would you call it--it's so outspokenly different from the other [parts] of it. It's as I said, strong pillars carrying the harmonic development to its end. It's a grandioso piece. And look here, this stupid, old-fashioned remark: "Poco a poco crescendo," as if you would start piano [measure 77-78].

This starts big, for me, anyhow.

Tusler: And you use a very full type of registration.

Ehlers: The fullest I have, the fullest I have to this coda.

Tusler: Is the overall effect from the beginning to the end of the fantasia one of an arch of growth?

Ehlers: A big arch, ja. For me, ja, a big arch. Because you see the runs are absolutely isolated, as I said, [measures 1a and 2].

Tusler: At the beginning. Yes.

Ehlers: And then he builds it up, which you can see by just looking at it, without going into detail. From the picture you see how much more animated it gets. Then when he starts to come to the recitative, of course, he has gone already through quite a bit of modulation, as you can see. The recitative is something entirely different, which is, for me, giving somehow this wonderful--what should I say--other picture [compared to] this restless beginning, you know?

[where] something constantly goes and goes that you never know where it goes to, just really a fantasy following the intuition

of the moment; and then it calms down and you have this quiet recitative.

Tusler: Like a little moment of reflection before he goes on to something else.

Ehlers: Ja. And he feels, now enough of this rattling around; now I need peace, and quiet. It is a unique piece in Bach's whole output of works. There is not a second one.

Tusler: Isn't that rather strange? I wonder why that is.

Ehlers: I don't know. It's unique and probably it should be unique. If you consider all the things he wrote--I don't know how many suites, how many partitas, how many preludes and fugues; but only one piece in this style, ja. It is a very interesting thing; I never thought of it, really, why.

Well, he couldn't double this. This is in its way so perfect.

And I ask myself, has it really been improvised first?

Really, on one occasion, improvised first, when he sat down at the instrument, and then sat down later to write it down.

Tusler: I was wondering if this type of piece, in his day when performers were so good at improvising...

Ehlers: At improvising, ja.

Tusler: ...wasn't maybe traditionally improvised, and very few of them may have got written down.

Ehlers: I am sure probably that he has improvised it, and then of course in writing it down has improved certain things which in the improvisation didn't please him. But it's unique. It's called a fantasy, but if you compare it with

the C Minor Fantasy, for instance--do you know the C Minor?

Tusler: I've heard it, of course, but I can't say I know it.

Ehlers: It's a piece in strict two parts, ending in the dominant, the first part, and starting in the dominant and ending in the tonic, in C Minor, again. Ending in G major, the first half. I don't think I have one here. I would have been interested [to see], which I don't know offhand, if the two parts are exactly long. I think the second part is a little longer. It's one of the most balanced and masterly pieces he has written. But it has, for our feeling, nothing to do with the word "fantasy." Whereas this [the Chromatic Fantasy] is what we imagine a fantasy should be like. Why he called it "fantasy"--[perhaps] the word fantasy had a different meaning in his time--I don't know.

Tusler: In the organ literature, aren't there some pieces that are called fantasy and fugues?

Ehlers: I don't know. I really don't know, I would be very interested. I have always the feeling in the organ literature it's prelude and fugue. Maybe they are in character here or there [like a] fantasy, but he calls them always prelude and fugue. But the C Minor he calls fantasy, and of course the Chromatic. Now, the C Minor in character has nothing of what we call a fantasy; [it is] strictly, strictly built, whereas in this you feel the improvisation, from the very beginning when the run goes up, you know? Whereas the C Minor Fantasy starts [just] as it goes on.

Tusler: The only thing that really seems to bind it together,

though I haven't analyzed this piece at all, is the harmonic structure. I daresay if you took it apart harmonically you'd find some sort of pattern...

Ehlers: Probably, ja, ja.

Tusler: ...that was going through it that gave it a kind of unity.

Ehlers: Ja, quite right. I have never taken the time and I should be interested in doing this really. This work appealed [to me] so much when I first looked at it, but I was wise enough not to attack it before I felt ready for it. This is why I don't teach it. I can teach the music and they all want to play it, but this is not what I want. I want them to find out something for themselves first, and then bring it to me and talk about it. But they are helpless, no use. Even the most talented of the modern young people, if you put them before this, don't know what to do. In all the years I have been at USC, and I mean constantly teaching (I forget what was my European experience; probably nobody was ready to play it), with all the many pupils I've had, pianists. I am thinking of, there was probably [only] one who had the freedom of thinking and feeling to approach it. All the others want to play it, but I hate to teach it because it takes the improvisatory character away. Either they imitate what I play before them, or it is just one-two-three-four, nothing to it. I try to avoid it but they all want to play it.

Tusler: Why is that, because it's so dazzling?

Ehlers: Ja, it's dazzling; it has a ~~great~~ famous name, and they want to play it; and they love it, really. The only freedom I give them here in playing it, in changing something, [is with] the first runs which I told you are like a fanfare for me. "Attention, please." I let them play them in octaves, both hands.

Tusler: On the piano?

Ehlers: On the piano, Ja. On the harpsichord I don't need it, I have the sixteen foot. But [it] sounds terribly thin on the piano in the middle register; it's nothing. And it should sound like a fanfare, setting with these two measures the whole idea of the fantasy. I have to have tone. So this is the only thing where I really am all for changing, doubling it. But if you will look at the editions by pianists you will see that I am very tame. [laughter] Look at Busoni and look at--what did I have in hand the other day? I couldn't read it. The Goldovsky edition of it. It was like a strange piece for me. I looked at it, and I looked at it (one of the students brought it), and I couldn't find my way through it.

Tusler: Well, that was true with my edition, the Hans von Bülow [Schirmer]. It looks like a different piece of music from yours.

Ehlers: Ja. Maybe one has to do something on the piano; I don't know. I don't know. I talked once with Rudy Serkin, who liked my playing of Bach very much. He said, "Alice, I don't touch the Chromatic Fantasy because I feel it doesn't

come out on the piano the way it should." He might have changed in between, with his wonderful pianistic power, and maybe he has changed his mind; or maybe his son plays it. I haven't heard the son yet play it, but I heard that his Well-Tempered Clavier came out and I want to hear it. I am very interested.

Tusler: His son made a recording of it?

Ehlers: His son. Very young, but great talent seemingly, ja. Very great talent.

Tusler: Where was it that you knew Mr. Serkin?

Ehlers: In Europe. We had the same piano teacher. He said, when he visited here a few years ago, "Alice, Robert was wonderful." (He was the teacher of Szell and Serkin at the same time), I said, "Not for me. His technique ruined my hand absolutely." I had afterwards for six weeks to stop; and then Leschetizky got me into all the technique. For me, it was not. Rudy Serkin always had a fantastically large and strong hand. So it was probably good for him.

Tusler: You had no connection with the Chromatic Fantasy while you were studying with Mme. Landowska?

Ehlers: No, no. Never. I never heard her play it.

Tusler: I would think it would have been very much within her particular style.

Ehlers: Ja. I am so sorry that I never heard it. I don't know if there is a recording of hers of the Chromatic Fantasy. I have to find out because this would be very interesting. No, certain pieces she never studied with me; and in a way

I am very glad, I'm very grateful for this. Probably she had the same feeling as I have now with my students. They have to be ready for it and then study it alone. What we can do afterwards is discuss it and I [can] say, "I can't agree or I can agree." But if they are not mature enough to build it themselves, different from my idea, then they shouldn't do it. Everybody can imitate if I say, "Here you play loud, here you play slow, here you play a little faster." This is nothing. It has to come from them. It is one of the few pieces which I resent to teach.

Tusler: Because it's such a personal experience for everybody?

Ehlers: It's a fantasy. The C Minor, in our sense, is not a fantasy, it's a strict composition. But this is a fantasy, and I think the personal approach, how you see it, how you feel it, is very important. Everybody can imitate. Then it's only a matter of tone quality, who has a fuller tone on the piano, the more singing tone for the recitative.

Tusler: So you really learned it by yourself.

Ehlers: Oh, ja. Thank God.

Tusler: Did you ever discuss it with Dr. Schweitzer?

Ehlers: I can't recall if we talked about the Chromatic Fantasy. I think, ja, I think so. I think I learned it on his old piano, memorized it, in Gunsbach. Because I remember I was so very angry once. He came in when I practiced on it and said, "If you end this piece piano (as all the pianists did at this time, you know, dying out) you go to hell! [laughter]

And I screamed at him, "I never want to end piano. I end as big as I start." Because these chordal things carrying the voice don't lend themselves to being "handled."

But I was very angry that he took this from me and had the feeling I might end piano, because it was the thing that was done. I remember even with great artists--I think it was Edwin Fischer playing it in England, all the old ladies were just taken when the last chord was so pianissimo that you hardly could hear it. You heard an "Ah-h-h!" going through the audience, you know? [laughter]

And I was furious. Look at the music. A decline has to be designed in the music, a dynamic decline, not just by going down; [true] he motions down, but now where should he motion? Either up or down. But if you look at these enormous chords in the left hand like pillars, as I said, carrying the thing, and the right hand just elaborating on top of it, there's no reason [for a dynamic decline.]

Tusler: In this particular edition I have here, it does just what you were saying, fades away to a nice pianissimo.

Ehlers: Fades away. But if you look at the music, here, from what I call the coda, where is there any reason [for it?] It goes on with the same intensity. The chords in the left hand are as I said like pillars. He elaborates in the right hand--look here, every figure is different. But the left hand holds the whole piece together, gives the foundation, and doesn't get slower and slower.

Tusler: I wonder if one reason why some people have thought

it should fade away at the end is the fact that in the tessitura it's coming down lower.

Ehlers: Of course, this gives them an idea. But it has to go either up or down. But this is the usual treatment on the piano. Everything going down dies out.

Tusler: Was Edwin Fischer particularly famous for his Bach playing?

Ehlers: No. Not to me, anyhow. He was on the robust side and, funny enough, people always combine Bach with robust, you know. He was a great artist. For me, he was greatest in Beethoven and Brahms, but I never liked his Bach. By the way, I don't know one pianist, really, whose Bach playing I like.

Tusler: Did you know Mr. Fischer personally?

Ehlers: Oh, we met, we met. It was very easy in Europe, you know; we were all living in Berlin and we met either here or there. He was, in his playing, very German. He never really was very much loved in Vienna. Vienna had a different idea--I don't say better--but a different idea of tone quality. They loved a singing quality, like Schnabel's, who was of course a wonderful pianist. I preferred Schnabel, too, because of the beauty of his tone. But the Viennese public were so fond of tone quality that they very often forgot about the whole build-up of a piece.

Tusler: Serkin was Viennese?

Ehlers: Ja. He was born in Vienna; Fischer was not. Fischer was German, but he came naturally to Vienna. Schnabel was

born in Vienna, ja. Serkin, too. Both Viennese. But Schnabel was a Leschetizky student whereas Serkin studied with Professor Robert. Serkin and Szell both studied with Robert.

Tusler: Did you know Szell?

Ehlers: I knew him in Vienna, I knew him in Berlin.

Tusler: Did you ever perform with him?

Ehlers: No, never with Szell.

Tusler: Shall we talk about the fugue [of the Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue]?

Ehlers: Well, the fugue is not interesting; it's like any other fugue, and I wouldn't like to go into details because I don't know if my analysis would please the theoretical people. There is nothing special about the fugue.

Tusler: Do you consider it as definitely part of the whole piece?

Ehlers: No.

Tusler: It's not necessary to perform the two together.

Ehlers: Absolutely not; but as Bach wrote them together I think we should perform them together. But, for me, one has nothing to do with the other. I have never found any link between the two. But this is also true with some [others], if I come to think [of it]. I have never thought of it--now you just put an idea before me. There are many of the preludes and fugues in the Well-Tempered that there is no relationship between the fugue and [the prelude]. I must really look at this, if this is true. It just came to my

mind. On the other hand, the C-Sharp Major Prelude and Fugue [Book I, Well-Tempered Clavier] have a certain likeness. You know, the C-Sharp Major Prelude is so lively and the fugue has this very lively motive [sings the fugue subject]. You see, this is the one interesting thing, to talk about things, which I have lost the capacity entirely because when you teach you are so concerned with what is wrong and what should be made better and why it's wrong, that you never go out of your boundaries, so to speak. This is something I don't know if I have ever thought about, the relationship of preludes and fugues in the Well-Tempered Clavier.

Tusler: Whether or not it's necessary that they should be performed together.

Ehlers: Well, I think this, yes. I think yes. If the composer has meant them to be together they should be performed together, [unless] you have a reason for only performing the preludes to show the different types of forms in the preludes, if you [should] take this as a title, the different types in Bach's composition of preludes from the Well-Tempered Clavier. Some are like sarabandes, some are like two-part inventions. This would make sense; but if you want to present Bach or Bach's works, then I think they should be together.

Tusler: Then wouldn't the same thing follow with this, the Chromatic Fantasy?

Ehlers: Nobody plays the Fantasy without the Fugue.

Tusler: In my edition, the way the last measure of the fantasy is written, the final low D there is held over to the first bar of the fugue.

Ehlers: No, nothing to do with it. This has nothing to do with it.

Tusler: This is the editor's mark.

Ehlers: Absolutely. He is finished here [measure 79] and a new piece starts. This is wonderful--you should keep this [edition] and once get a good edition, or if you are at UCLA in the library, go to the Bach Gesellschaft, which is better even, and make a few remarks. It's interesting.

Tusler: Fantastic, how it's been changed.

Ehlers: He absolutely makes a--I don't know what he makes out of it--a piece by Brahms.

Tusler: He makes the fugue subject, then, which he indicates should be played pianissimo there, grow out of this pianissimo at the end of the fantasy, so that the two things are hooked together.

Ehlers: Well, probably this was his idea; but this is a ridiculous thing. First of all, how loud, after all, can be one voice? He starts [with] one voice. This is now the theme, A, B-flat, B, C, up to there [measures 1 - 8].* This is the material on which--how many measures have you in the fugue?

Tusler: One hundred and sixty-one.

*The fugue measures are numbered separately from the fantasy.

Ehlers: All right. On these seven notes, A, B-flat, B, C, and so on, is a piece built of harmony, one hundred sixty-one measures; and I [should] introduce it like a mouse stealing into a room, instead of presenting it great because it should make an impression on the listener?

Tusler: They should have to suddenly stop and listen.

Ehlers: They should be impressed. They should be impressed.

Tusler: So how loud should it be?

Ehlers: Full. Healthy and full. First of all, it is, as I said, the material on which a hundred and so-and-so many measures are worked on, so it should be the first entrance.

Also, it is not a lyrical theme-what's lyrical about it?

It's a very straightforward theme, manly, and nothing to dream about. In the Well-Tempered there are sometimes fugues where you have the feeling of dreaming. They are short fugues. Here he has a very straightforward theme, which he felt probably he can do anything he wants to, and builds this long fugue out of it.

Tusler: Then when the other voices join in, do you keep it at the same registration level?

Ehlers: Of course. If I go back in the beginning [in registration] then the adding doesn't work. The other voices come to add to it, so if I go somewhere back then I hurt his idea. My going back comes somewhere else, but first I have to introduce each voice as an addition. Then, when there is a place of relaxation, I can do something. No good organist will do it, no good harpsichordist will do

this, going back in the midst of the building up, you know. The interesting thing is not the theme but what happens to the theme when the next theme comes, and then the next comes. And then, after they are all in, then you can dynamically manipulate, I feel.

Tusler: Do you take pains in the registration to bring out the fugue subject?

Ehlers: If I can. But sometimes the accompanying motive is very interesting and very worthwhile to be heard, whereas the fugue theme you have already heard a few times.

Tusler: The countersubject can be just as interesting.

Ehlers: The countersubject sometimes can be very interesting, and should come out.

Tusler: So actually they frequently will be balanced, as far as the dynamics are concerned.

Ehlers: Ja, ja, I balance very often, because both together make a fugue and not the theme of the fugue, alone. But I would say here that each fugue needs a different treatment. You have to understand it, you have to know what's going on perfectly, and then you have to do what your musical instinct tells you, because it depends also on the situation. If the subject is in the middle voice, hardly to be heard, then you have to do probably more than when it's in the top voice or the lowest voice. And also, it's not only the theme which is interesting; the inversion is at least as interesting as the theme itself. Or rhythmical changes of the theme in another voice, and so on.

Tusler: Does he do in this particular fugue very much playing around with it?

Ehlers: No. It's one of the simplest fugues, very simple indeed in the build-up of it.

Tusler: It remains in three voices, doesn't it, throughout.

Ehlers: Ja, mostly. The chords don't count as separate voices, you see. It is one of the simplest fugues, I must say, which Bach wrote, compared with some of the Well-Tempered Clavier. But I feel, after this rhapsodic fantasy, he really wants a straightforward, clear-cut fugue.

Tusler: So there's quite a contrast between the two, as far as the character is concerned.

Ehlers: Of course. Enormous contrast, because this kind of prelude is so elaborate, it's so long and so really improvised in character, keeping the improvisatory character which a fantasy should have. You don't find [this] in any of his preludes in the Forty-Eight.

Tusler: Is this an unusually long fugue subject, would you say?

Ehlers: I was just thinking about this before. I think it is.

Tusler: Does this make any problems for the performer in phrasing or articulation?

Ehlers: No, no, not at all. I must say this is one of the easiest fugues to play, much easier than many of the Well-Tempered Clavier. It sometimes seems to me that all his vigor, imagination, enthusiasm, everything went into the

fantasy, and the fugue is really a very clear, down-to-earth fugue.

Tusler: How would you, as a performer, handle that opening statement of the subject?

Ehlers: Straightforward, certainly not piano and not overly loud, but so that it impresses the hearer that he recognizes it whenever it comes, even if it's changed a little bit, like the second entrance where he drops a...In the beginning, he has a quarter note; in the second entrance [measure 9] he has a dotted eighth to a sixteenth. [sings rhythm] And I think it's very interesting, because he does it very seldom, that the second entrance is changed a little bit, rhythmically, you know. Then the third entrance is again like the very first one. [measure 19].

Tusler: Would you phrase this subject at any point, or would you play the whole thing right straight through?

Ehlers: Two measures.

Tusler: The first two measures are one phrase.

Ehlers: Ja. Then I take this measure and the first note of the fourth measure [sings], and here I phrase again.

Tusler: In the sixth measure you phrase after the F natural.

Ehlers: Ja.

Tusler: The fugue subject actually ends right there on the D?

Ehlers: Here, with the D, really the first D [measure 8].

Tusler: And then would you follow that same phrasing in all the entrances of the subject?

Ehlers: Ja, ja. I think one has in this [fugue] to be very

strict. Sometimes it's not so clearly to be heard because the other voice interferes, but if this is the end it's always the same ending. The fugue doesn't stand up for me to the greatness of the fantasy.

Tusler: Would you say that there are fewer phrasing and articulation problems in the fantasy than there are in the fugue?

Ehlers: In the fugue there are none at all, absolutely none, whereas in the fantasy you can probably see certain things differently, you see? As I always pointed out, the fantasy is a fantasy and probably some people might see certain things differently from the way I see them. And you can't say who is right and who is wrong. You can say, "I like this better than I like this." But there is a certain freedom possible, whereas in the fugues which go straight forward you have hardly any freedom.

Tusler: The opening two measures that you were speaking of before, in the fantasy, do you conceive of this as one big phrase for each measure?

Ehlers: Well, [the second] is an imitation of [the first]. I'd play to the fermata, to the rest. As I said, it is a fanfare, calling trumpet, twice, one on D and one on the dominant, A.

Tusler: And obviously there wouldn't be any break in that. It's all one movement.

Ehlers: Ja. You can take a deep breath again, if you have a fanfare to play, [before] the second one. It's very simple.

Of course, there are certain places which one has to elaborate on, [for example, to] bring out the chromaticism here in measure 10, F-sharp, F, E, E-flat, D.

Tusler: And this you would do by the phrasing?

Ehlers: I don't know how I do it. [sings] I would play it very clearly, point it out. You see how it goes? E-flat, D, D, C-sharp, C-natural, B. [measure 11] The chromaticism comes out here very clearly.

Tusler: That's what the ear has to hear.

Ehlers: I think it's very clear, because the right hand has nothing to do.

Tusler: It's just decorating it.

Ehlers: Ja. Going down, decorating with your right hand with some figurations. I think it is so clearly to be seen what to do from the paper. The strong beginning, the climbing down here, you see.

Tusler: It stands right out when you look at it.

Ehlers: Ja, it stands right out--the climbing beginning which gets more excited when the right hand has these sixteenth-note figures. He works himself into it more and more and more.

Tusler: After those opening two measures, which you play with the fullest possible sound, then on measure 3 your registration would drop down?

Ehlers: I think I take the sixteen foot out, but I don't know if I do. I don't make it piano, which is ridiculous. But I take, I think, the sixteen foot out, which gives it a

lighter character. And I think I put it in, but I'm not sure when away from the instrument, in the chromaticism. I put it in again. Here, these are for me outspoken echo effects, forte and piano [measure 13].

Tusler: This you get by moving from one manual to another?

Ehlers: Ja. However you get it is a personal affair, but I think this should be. And then here the design is for me very interesting, in measure 16, this moving up, and then suddenly, this rolling down after the B natural [measure 17].

Not as most play, Da-da-da, Da-da-da, no; it's da-da-da-DEE.

And then look here, what do you see? Three notes, three notes, three notes, three notes, three notes, three notes. They go all together till the end. This is all the idea of phrasing, to make it clear. Otherwise, you have an enormous amount of sixteenths which you don't know where they go to, where they come from. This is what makes it so confusing; but it isn't. Can you see what I mean here?

Tusler: Yes. The way he has it phrased here, it's wrong?

Ehlers: Absolutely wrong.

Tusler: You've got to have that feeling of going up to the higher note.

Ehlers: Somewhere, to the highest note, quite right. And then he rolls down in the pattern of three. Then the whole intention turns. Now he comes in longer lines all running down, you know?

Of course, now I have tried to talk about it; but when I studied it those things were visually so clear to me

that I never put it into words, you see. This is also the reason that I refuse to teach it to a student before the student is able to see the logic of the design for himself.

TAPE NUMBER: SIX, SIDE TWO

January 10, 1966

Program Building; Teaching Baroque Style
and the Harpsichord

Tusler: Last week we were talking about Bach's Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue, and at the end of the hour you said something about program building that interested me. You said you liked to plunge into a program with such a piece as the Chromatic Fantasy. Would you like to comment some more on that?

Ehlers: Well, I don't know that there is much more to tell. I love to not to wait till the end of a concert with the big pieces, you know? The bigger the piece, the easier it is for me to be immediately absorbed and get into it. I am very nervous, and I am getting more and more nervous, I am sorry to say, on the stage. But if I have such a big piece, which I love very much as I pointed out before, and which takes my interest from the very first beginning, then I feel much better. Everybody has his own way of seeing things. Some people want to play shorter pieces, easier, to [prepare] themselves psychologically. With me it's entirely different. I can play the easier pieces after I'm a hundred percent relaxed, but I play the big pieces to have all my concentration ready. Only a piece which really interests me can do this to me.

I do the same sometimes with students. I give them sometimes a piece which goes far over their heads, just to put them, not on trial, but to let them face the greatness of a piece. First of all, they don't see it, you know? They are only concerned with piano and forte, where should I play loud, where should I play [soft]. It is very strange that very few of these young people--[only] the very talented--have I found to have a feeling for the great line in Bach. Till they see this, it takes quite a time. But I like to put them before it. It's much more important for me to teach them the Inventions which are very difficult, so that they make music out of them. Everybody plays them like little etudes; [to] come to the point of seeing in these short and seemingly easy pieces of music, [to] feel these are masterworks, you have to be very mature.

But if I put the Chromatic Fantasy before them, they have something to do, you know? And this brings them into the world of Bach a little bit. Because let's not fool ourselves: the younger generation has very little contact with Bach. Only the very talented of my students have this great attraction to Bach. Then they face the reality, and it doesn't come off on the piano. I must say they are partly right. I come to more and more understanding that one or two generations before, my generation, felt we had to help Bach; we had to adapt or arrange him for the sound possibilities of the piano. This is not right, either. You know how much I am against those arrangements; but on the other hand, I



don't know a way out. And to deprive them of Bach, not playing Bach at all on the piano, this is also not right, not right for them and probably not right for the piano.

I have heard very seldom good Bach playing on the piano. Myra Hess could do it; it was probably a little bit on the sentimental side, but she was very careful in the choice, mostly chorale preludes which she arranged herself. It never disturbed me. Whereas Rosalyn Tureck disturbs me terribly. It's either brutal in order to sound powerful, but Bach's power is not brutal, nor is it sentimental. Glenn Gould in his good moments, if he doesn't overdo, I have heard play beautiful Bach, and sometimes when he gets strange ideas about tempi, I couldn't understand the music which I know really every tone of, ja? But when he has his good-balanced day, I've heard him play Bach very beautifully.

So the thing is this: one shouldn't limit such a great composer as Bach just to the instrument of his time. If you think about it a little bit, the clavichord was in the direction of our piano. There you could make a dynamic differentiation, not the way you can on the piano. It was only very little. Through the vibration of your finger you could create a crescendo from tone to tone, or in the tone. But of course I personally think the clavichord is too small or too--not sentimental, it can be misunderstood if I use the word sentimental; the clavichord is almost a romantic instrument. This is not to say this romanticism is not in Bach's music, too, [but] not in the way of Schumann, of

course; you know what I mean. If I replace the word "romanticism" with "espressivo", the Bach is full of this. The difficulty is only to bring it out on our keyboard instrument.

Tusler: On the piano, you mean.

Ehlers: On the piano, ja. On the piano. And I really don't know quite what to say. Now, for instance, I heard one of our very talented students the other day, who is devoted to Bach and who loves it, play the Sixth Partita, and it was disappointing in a way. He played every note; he understood the music, and still it didn't come off. So I don't know if his inner vision was not the right one. When it starts with this tremendous broken-chord pattern going up, it was just pleasant, there was no drama in it. I don't know, I don't know if it can be played on the piano. My daughter was with me and she said, "I don't like Bach on the piano." She is used to hearing it always on the harpsichord. The boy loves Bach and understands it, and still it didn't come off, and I don't know why.

Tusler: You're thinking that maybe the reason it didn't come off was the instrument itself and not the performer.

Ehlers: I think so, I think so.

Tusler: Why is it easier to get the espressivo sound on the harpsichord than on the piano?

Ehlers: No, it's not--it's very difficult to get the espressivo sound on the harpsichord. Harpsichord is not an espressivo instrument. No. It is a clear-designed instrument, and this I love. In the espressivo passages, I take a registration

which I try to "sing", as much as you can sing vocally on the harpsichord; but you can sing beautifully on the piano. And this he [the student] didn't do. On the one side, he didn't sing enough, probably being afraid to get sentimental, which can easily happen on the piano; and in the powerful part of the piece, this beginning which is for me very dramatic, he didn't give enough power. I blame myself a little bit, because he played it a few days [before] to me. He likes me very much. He was once my student for a short time, because when I see great piano talents I push them over where they should be, with great pianists, and with our great piano teacher. And John Crown is a master, especially in developing these talented boys here. He has a talent for this, letting them go their way and still controlling it. He came and played it for me a few days [before], and I should have had the courage to say a few things, but a few days before a concert I try not to say too much.

Tusler: It might be too disturbing to them.

Ehlers: Ja, so I didn't say. But now, sitting as a listener in the hall, I felt everything was lacking. When we came out, Maria [Mme. Ehlers' daughter] said, "I don't like Bach on the piano." I said, "How much is the instrument a part of this; how much is it the player in this case?" Because they are now so afraid to give any expression that it almost sounds too objective.

Tusler: Too dry.

Ehlers: Now, no composer, anyhow not of the eighteenth

century (I don't know how it is today; probably the same as it always was), no composer writes objectively. He is involved, or he is not involved, but it is his child, it's his creation. I don't think you can be objective if you create. Now, this E-Minor Partita starts with a broken-chord pattern, and it was a broken chord pattern. For me, it is like a scream. I should have probably told this boy, but a few days before the concert is really too late to change anything.

Tusler: The very nature of the harpsichord, the quality of the instrument, is in itself objective.

Ehlers: Ja, you are quite right.

Tusler: So that when a person is performing on the harpsichord, he doesn't have to worry about being objective.

Ehlers: No, and you put the register in which gives drama or life, and then the other things you do with tempo and phrasing.

It's all so very difficult to explain, and I don't know if I have spoken about it, but after every interpretation class, I have weeks of depression, almost. Really, if I take all in all, there is here and there one student who catches the idea behind what I try to teach. It's not that I say, "Play here a little faster or here a little louder." This doesn't matter at all. But the idea behind all of it, very seldom. And I ask myself, is it that most of the young students who are naturally educated with the literature of the piano, that this world is so far removed from their minds and their hearts?

Once in a while I get somebody. I have a girl now who

is very seemingly devoted to Bach, because she proposed pieces to play which mostly are not regarded as playable on the piano, but she has a certain, I guess, inner relationship to Bach. Now, she played for me the other day, and then I had to tell her something strange, which will sound strange to you. I said, "My dear, don't forget you play the piano." Because here comes the--what should I say--the difficulty. You can't play an instrument if you don't take care of the instrument itself. So you have to compromise a little on both sides. You can't play, like I do, or the organist does, putting certain registers in which are decisive for the color of a movement, and then in this movement, it's up to your phrasing and articulation, how you bring life to it. If he has the color sense, the color stays here. Some fool around, of course--well, I don't think of those. But the same is true with the harpsichord.

Tusler: Is this something that one learns to have, this color sense?

Ehlers: I think every imaginative person will say, "For this light capriccio I want a lighter color, so I won't take the sixteen foot and probably will prefer the four foot with a mixture of eight," or something. You have to be creative in your--what should I say--not only thinking, but there are two qualities you need. You need the thinking process and the ear, as every musician does. You have heard pianists where the ear and the fingers were wonderful, and there was something lacking--the feeling for form, the feeling for

what I would call the thinking process, the feeling for phrasing, and so on. The phrasing for the pianist in pianistic music is not so difficult because it's so indicated in the music, whereas this endless line of Bach goes and goes and goes and goes, and you have to feel where would I breathe, where would I change the bowing, and this is the thing I'm mostly fighting for. I try to tell them everything which is alive has to breathe, and so has the music. If you play on and on and on, it's dead even if you make a diminuendo or a crescendo.

But to get this all over, and get this all over in a semester, is not possible. All you really achieve is confusing them. And let them find their own way afterwards. But I'm very disappointed, mostly, and very depressed after a semester is over, because I haven't achieved much. A strange thing is that what they come for mostly are the ornaments, if they play the ornaments right or wrong. Well, I prefer the ornaments played rightly too, but I tell you, I'd rather have somebody play the ornaments wrong and have the feeling for the line.

Tusler: The overall pattern.

Ehlers: The line, where to breathe. It's very difficult to explain those things, but one semester is too short.

Tusler: I can quite believe that.

Ehlers: One semester. If I had one semester with one person alone, it would be good. But there are sitting eighteen, a much too large class that I can't achieve. Every time I

come, I say, "My class is too large again." "Yes, I don't know how it happened," says our registrar. "We closed it with twelve, and suddenly I look in the books, there are eighteen." Now, how can you manage? Eighteen people.

Tusler: And at all different levels of development.

Ehlers: Not only ~~this~~--[different] instruments. Did I tell you I have a marimba in my class?

Tusler: You said that once before, yes.

Ehlers: Did I tell you they played a three-part invention the other day? They surprised me with a three-part invention, one part played by an oboe, and the other parts by the marimba, and it was delightful, I am ashamed to say. [laughter] Absolutely delightful. I asked them to play it twice. First of all, the oboe has to breathe, ja? which my pianists don't do. And the marimba's tone went so well--really, I enjoyed it. I mean, it's something out of any serious musical discussions; but I'd rather have them play this and get acquainted with the music and enjoy it than not at all.

Then I have all kinds of instruments who have always to play transposed music. It is very interesting and depressing at the same time, and a few of the students speak up. I always encourage them to speak up. There was a--what did he play? a bassoon or a horn player, who opened up very much. He said, "I love this class. but I have so little chance to play because there is no literature. I only have transposed pieces." Corelli Violin Concerto for horn, or something, I don't know.

I said, "I know, and I feel terribly to have you sitting there, and I try very hard to convince the dean that those whose literature is outside and who have always to play Corelli sonatas, the few which are transposed, shouldn't be forced to have this class."

All the instruments which were used in the baroque-- flute, oboe, violin, cello (I don't mind if it's not a viola da gamba, this is very close, you know) should take part. But it's depressing to me to have them sitting there, and I know they are bored. Mostly they are schoolteachers, music teachers in school, who will never need it. And here they sit, and I know they resent it because they have no chance to apply it as teachers--what do they have in their school where they could apply all the rules of ornamentation and phrasing which are so important for a performing person? But I can't convince the school to limit the class only to those people who really can actively play. And it depresses me.

Tusler: Of course, this detracts from the work that you can do with the others, that you could therefore spend more time with.

Ehlers: Ja, ja. And also it makes me unfree because I see a few disappointed faces.

Tusler: A little while ago on the tape you mentioned the achieving of a singing tone in the espressivo sections, and the necessity of finding this.

Ehlers: Ja; well, if you can talk about a singing tone; but you can. People always say, "You sing," and I try. I think

it's partly because (I must have mentioned this before) that I had to earn my money when I was very young by accompanying singers, and I think this gave me a great feeling for the vocal line. And I try, even on a plucked instrument, to play so that it sings, and it seems that I very often succeed because people are very moved by the second movements when I play, when I try to play *espressivo*.

Tusler: I think that this is a particular quality of yours, that you do achieve this singing tone.

Ehlers: I hope so.

Tusler: I hear it in your pupil, Malcolm Hamilton, too, that he has acquired the same thing.

Ehlers: He has great sense for it, ja.

Tusler: Is there a particular technique for doing this that is described in words?

Ehlers: I don't know. I don't know. First of all, you have to hear it inside yourself, like everything, like a pianist, and then you have to try to play so legato. It is very strange, I see it with all the students: because the mechanism plucks, they try to do the same on the keyboard, instead of counteracting the plucking by playing very legato. I mean, they can't actually pluck, but they don't counteract it, you know. They play almost nonlegato.

Tusler: Is there a way on the harpsichord of controlling the plucking?

Ehlers: No, no.

Tusler: The plectrum is going to pluck just as much...

Ehlers: The plectrum has to pluck, otherwise we don't hear the tone. It is not the tone itself, it is something between the tone which I can't explain. People tell me, "If we didn't know that you have no pedal, we would say that you have a pedal, because it is a perfect legato which you play." You Have to have the inner vision, what you want to hear, and then to a certain extent you can get it on the harpsichord.

Tusler: You learn to do this, as you were saying before, just by using your ear and hearing what you are doing?

Ehlers: By having the imagination for how you want to have it sound. That is always, of course, a question. You want it, and you think you have it sounding this way; but how is it for the person outside? This is why [I ask] the students to listen while I play or somebody that has the ear for it or understands it, like Malcolm [Hamilton], does it come over? But it comes over, the legato and the espressivo. Sometimes the students say, "But you make a crescendo." I can't. I don't make it. It is in the phrasing, it is in the flow of the declamation that you sometimes give the impression of a crescendo, you know?

Tusler: Or it's written into the music itself?

Ehlers: Oh, then it's easy if it's written in the music itself. Then it's up to the player to underline this in the right way. These are such difficult things and so difficult to describe, and of course they never come into consideration with the students if you have a not very talented one, who is [not] on the artistic level like Malcolm is. But I am

almost more interested in the interpretation class because they have to deal with an entirely different instrument and still have to try to bring out what I call the baroque style of an antibaroque instrument. This is my problem and this interests me much more, in a way. With the harpsichord students, I try to teach good harpsichord playing, try to control their technique, try to let them see the secret of registration, and those things. But with the pianists who love this, especially Bach, and want to play it on the piano, it's much more difficult. Either you get them brutal to avoid sentimentality, or if I say *espressivo* it gets romantic, too romantic. It's very difficult, and you have to be almost an artist, you have to be a Glenn Gould, really, to do it, to accomplish it and do it right, just so that it doesn't harm Bach and is lovely piano playing at the same time and doesn't hurt your stylistic feeling. It's a great secret, and I have a few pianists who have the feeling for it, but it's very difficult because at the same time they play so much other music, you know, and you would have to concentrate. It must be possible.

Tusler: With your harpsichord students, do you actually teach them to hold the hand in a different way, or to use the fingers in a different way?

Ehlers: I try not to interfere, because they are not beginners. They have played organ or piano for years. So if their, as you call it, hand position or arm position interferes with the tone quality, then I talk about it. But otherwise I

don't. I have now a very talented young girl. She has studied in Germany and she came to USC to study with me, highly talented in every respect. I don't agree with her [way of] holding her hand or wrist, mostly the wrist, but as long as it doesn't interfere with her playing I keep quiet.

Tusler: For you, the wrist is almost completely straight with the arm, isn't it?

Ehlers: I don't know how it is. I have one unit, which starts--what do you call it here?

Tusler: From your back?

Ehlers: ...from the back, and goes into the arm to the fingertip. This is why I can play for hours without getting tired.

[The way] this girl plays, somewhere there is stiffness, I think with the wrist; but the fingers go well and she's very strong, so maybe she can do it all the time. When I would do it, my wrist--you call this wrist, ja?

Tusler: Yes, right.

Ehlers: ...is not very strong, and I would get, as I had as a young girl when I played piano, inflammation and couldn't play for weeks. But she can, and she plays very virtuoso and very intelligently, and she should be a good, good player. I don't know how far her imagination will carry her, but she should be a very good player. As long as it doesn't interfere, as long as she doesn't feel any pain, I let her go because she wouldn't know what I am talking about, you know, and she is too far gone. With the beginners I watch, of course, if they are not too set. Mostly I don't get beginners on the harpsichord

but they have been taught piano, and all that I do is then try to [get] their piano technique to change a little bit into more finger technique which the harpsichord needs. You need very little arm or wrist but clear finger technique.

Tusler: All in the fingers. When you yourself are performing, say the difference between a beginning movement which is bright and quick and light, let's say, and then the espressivo second movement, is there an actual difference in the way you hold the hand?

Ehlers: I can't tell you, I never think of this. I never think of this. I know what I want to express and according to this, I do everything.

Tusler: It just comes out.

Ehlers: Naturally every registration demands different treatment. If I have a pure eight foot I can sing and crawl along my keyboard, and if I have the full register with great resistance, sixteen foot and two eight and four, and then of course I treat the keyboard differently. I use it in a piece where this registration is adequate, probably a very big overture or a very dramatic place, and for me one goes with the other. I can't separate, you know? It is a unit and it should be a unit for me.

Tusler: Does one use as much staccato on the harpsichord as on the piano?

Ehlers: Well, the question is, where do you use staccato on the piano? I talk about Bach, I don't talk about pianistic music now. I hardly would use a staccato.

Tusler: On the harpsichord, do you mean?

Ehlers: No, no, I mean, look here. If there are separated patterns, like for instance, I think it's the last movement in the C Minor Partita which starts with a jump. The jump is a characteristic figure and it should sound like a jump, so it should sound on the piano like an aggressive jump, ba-BA [sings], and not da-da [sings softly], because this is part of the design, and so it should sound on the harpsichord, so it should sound on the piano. So naturally I would play it, I wouldn't call it staccato, but short, separate, two short separate notes.

Tusler: It's almost more like a détaché, maybe, than a staccato?

Ehlers: No, détaché is not enough, because this is an out-spoken jump. If Bach starts with this outspoken design, then it should sound outspoken. And if you had an allemande, where he goes from one tone to the other, it's natural that you play legatissimo and sing. A player does this instinctively, or he is not a player.

Tusler: I have found that with many piano editions of Bach, you see the staccato marks on many of the notes, but if one plays it that way on the harpsichord, it comes out sounding jangly and too separated.

Ehlers: First of all, it is because the plucked tone is plucked by itself, you see, so if I add staccato...If it's in the design, as I pointed out before, like in this last movement of the C Minor Partita, it should come out outspoken like this,

and when there comes line, it should be like line, singing, according to the character. Now, how you sing is in the hand of each player; and of course it's harder to sing on the harpsichord than it is on the piano, but you can sing. And you should sing.

Tusler: And this can only be accomplished by working for this legato touch.

Ehlers: Touch, it's all touch, and imagination. You have to have the imagination, you have to know in your mind how it should sound. I get many, many players who underline the plucked characteristic of the harpsichord, which is ridiculous to underline it.

Tusler: Because it's there, anyway.

Ehlers: It's there. It's there anyhow, and all you have to do is follow the characteristic of the phrase you play, as I said, and underline it a little bit by attacking the note short.

Also, every register has to [be approached] differently. The eight foot, the upper eight foot, has a different key resistance than the lower eight foot. If you have eight and four, this is again a different resistance and the finger has almost to sense it before it falls down. If you let the finger fall with too little energy, it can happen that the eight and four foot don't click together which I call a "dirty" tone, like fringes on a dress which are not cut clean. Or when you add the coupler the resistance is even more. Plus sixteen foot, it's very hard to touch. But the finger has

to be prepared. The good player knows immediately how much to give. This is a difference from the organ; you can put all the registers on it and the key doesn't show it, but on the harpsichord if the key has to pluck three or four strings at the same time, the resistance is much greater, of course, than when it has to pluck only one string. A good player knows this before he even touches it, but this needs experience.

Tusler: That just comes with practice and knowing.

Ehlers: Practice and experience also changes from harpsichord to harpsichord, and now you will understand that most harpsichordists prefer to play on their own instruments because they know the tone qualities. I guess the same is true with organists, only the organist can change if he comes to a new organ, as a traveling organist has to do, by getting acquainted with the quality of the certain organ registers--but not the touch. The hand is not involved. He might change here and there some registration because it's not becoming, what he did in this place on the organ, is not becoming for another organ in a different place; but it has nothing to do actually with the fingers. But if you play the harpsichord, there is a great difference in key resistance if you have only an eight, or an eight coupled, or eight and four, or eight and four and sixteen. So the finger has to be prepared in advance. When the finger touches the key, it's too late. The arms, the fingers, everything have to be geared from the beginning.

Tusler: A pianist has something the same problem, doesn't

he? in traveling from one instrument to another.

Ehlers: Ja, but this is another problem. This is a problem to ~~get~~ acquainted, how to get out certain [parts] that he wants to sing, how much to give in order to sing a phrase, etc. It's a different problem, but it is a problem also for every [pianist]. Why does every pianist look after the instrument first before he goes to a rehearsal? He tries the instrument. Only the organist has a different problem because every organ, as you know, is differently organized. But after he gets acquainted with the organization of the organ, there is no problem with touch.

But so far, I never come [to this] with the students, it would confuse them. What I try and let them see is the design in Bach, and if I succeed in this I am very grateful. One semester is not enough. It just makes them a little insecure on one side, and on the other side, it's not time enough to give them security. I have very talented and intelligent students, you know, who think for themselves, but then it's difficult, too; they are guided mostly by what they have read, and then to have the discrimination [to decide] can I do it, how much can I do it on the piano, this is very difficult. Now I become more and more doubtful if Bach can be played very well on the piano, especially after this last recital I heard. This boy is so talented, and has great love for Bach, so everything was there; technique; and it came out disappointingly.

Tusler: What is that young man's name?

Ehlers: Michael Thomas. Very brilliant boy, a lovely boy, and he loves Bach. He put it on the program between Chopin and Beethoven's Hammerklavier, I think was it, and what did he play at the end? I think Liszt at the end; grandiose playing, and understanding; I know he understands Bach. He came to me the week before and I felt there was much lacking, but it was too late to say anything. It would have made him too selfconscious when he played it. And now the opposite happened. He tossed it off, you know? He tossed the Bach off the way he tossed off the other things where it was good. So maybe I should have spoken. This partita starts with a tremendous broken chord in E minor, but it is for me a dramatic beginning, you know? It is only the E minor triad, good; but how it stands, starting up--it is a curtain raiser, it's dramatic, exciting and should be played with great bravado, so that the listener almost trembles in his seat! It wasn't exciting at all; it was perfectly played.

Tusler: But nothing happened.

Ehlers: Nothing happened, whereas for me it should have been played...Now I don't know if one can do it on the piano. This is what I ask myself. When all is over and I see the boy again, I will say, "Now, Michael, sit down. Let's try it. Let's talk about it and let's just try it, not as a pleasant E minor broken chord which goes over three octaves, but as a fanfare-like exciting beginning." But you know, four days before a concert you don't say something.

Tusler: Let's go back to the program building that we started

talking about. You said you liked to begin with a big piece to get into it.

Ehlers: Ja, a big piece, ja. Afterwards is everything easy. I have to get myself into it.

Tusler: You have to get yourself--and also the audience?

Ehlers: And the audience, ja.

Tusler: Then what would you do? Suppose you began with the Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue as an opener, where would you logically take it after that? Would you let it drop down?

Ehlers: Well, either I play the Italian Concerto, which everybody knows--there is no difficulty for the listener and even those who don't know it can follow easily, or...I haven't done solo programs for quite a time now; I try not to play solo, it becomes too strenuous for me. So I don't know what I did all my life; I can't remember what I did afterwards.

Tusler: Did you usually play all-Bach programs?

Ehlers: Oh, no, no. I mostly ended with either Rameau, Couperin or Scarlatti, mostly with Scarlatti. Now I probably would do only Bach programs, but I think a harpsichordist should show the harpsichord from many sides. Mostly I played either a Rameau group or a Couperin group, and always some Scarlatti. As I confessed the other day, very little Handel. And there is no excuse for it.

Tusler: Do you think that the program should end with a big piece also?

Ehlers: Well, I don't know. I think this depends on the temperament of the player. I haven't made any rules. I think

that it should liven up toward the end. People are acquainted with the instrument; their energy is probably spent in concentrating on certain things; now they should be entertained. Rameau is entertaining, wonderfully entertaining; I mean, it's wonderful music, I don't mean entertaining in a--what is the word? degrading?

Tusler: Or superficial way?

Ehlers: Ja. No, I don't mean this at all. It's music which you can enjoy without working with it, you know? Certain music you have to work along with it, but Scarlatti is sheer joy, joy in the player's facilities, joy in the melodic lines of Scarlatti. With Rameau, Couperin the same. Couperin is more introverted than Rameau is, I've found, and more difficult to project to an audience.

Tusler: So where would you put such pieces, on the second half of the program?

Ehlers: On the second half of the program I would play some Couperin, some Rameau, Scarlatti.

Tusler: The more serious things on the first half of the program.

Ehlers: Ja, ja. This is how I do it. Lately I try to mix with other instruments, because I think it is to the advantage of the harpsichord to be heard with flute or, if you have the right violinist, with violin, or gamba. And it is for the public easier to take because--don't let's fool [ourselves]--for our modern public to hear a whole evening of harpsichord music is a strain. They don't discriminate enough the finesse between the registers, and it's always the plucked tone to which they

have to get used again and again and again. I think one almost gives a better picture of the possibilities of the harpsichord by mixing it, so I try to do this as much as I can now. Also, I said I feel I haven't got the energy to carry a whole program through.

Tusler: Did you always play your programs from memory?

Ehlers: Not any more, but I used always to.

Tusler: Was this every a problem to you, memorization?

Ehlers: No. I wasn't a genius like some are, who look at it, like Glenn Gould, and learn it. I had to work on it, but it was not what I would call a problem.

Tusler: You said that you were nervous always.

Ehlers: Oh, ja.

Tusler: This is always true for an artist, isn't it?

Ehlers: Ja, but the--what do you call it? the grade of nervousness is different. It should be never so that it ruins your playing, and I don't know if it actually did ruin mine, I really don't know. But I am very nervous, and now even more. But thank God it hasn't ruined the playing.

Tusler: You have to be so secure in your technique that you can be nervous and still keep control.

Ehlers: Ja, ja, ja. And strange as it sounds, I am securer in my technique now than I ever have been before. Only I wouldn't put on strain playing by memory. I know the pieces by memory, but I have the music there. In a way, I blame myself for doing it, but I was relieved when in an article which Goldberg wrote, a very lovely article on Myra Hess whom he adored and

whom I admired very much too, [he said] that in the last years she always played with the music standing before her. So did Landowska. It's a natural process for safety reasons.

Tusler: Do you think that a performer plays better when he plays by memory?

Ehlers: If the memory doesn't interfere.

Tusler: He frees himself more?

Ehlers: Ja, but if I have the music there, I don't look at it. It gives me a certain security; I play really by memory, only I feel better, the heart doesn't throb so much, you know? This is it. [laughter] But it's all difficult to explain, and really every person acts differently, I think according to our temperament and to our education. Education is very important, I think, and the more I handle students the more I'm convinced that [though] talent is first, education is almost on the same level as talent.

Tusler: Is there any particular technique that you use to memorize?

Ehlers: No. Maybe there is a technique but I don't know. Maybe I should have made up during my lifetime certain techniques; I haven't. You see, I never thought about these things. I don't know why a teacher never talks to students about those things. Nobody ever talked to me. So what happened is that partly there was a memory of the fingers--mostly, probably; and then a few places where the fingers didn't have the memory I had a problem to look and learn. I can't remember. I think, also, it is with every person different. Some have a fabulous finger

memory, some have an eye memory, so I think probably every player has to handle himself in this direction.

Tusler: With Bach I would think this would be a particular problem because of the continuous flow of the music.

Ehlers: But there is so much logic in this, in his lines and in the flow, that it is the easiest for me to memorize. I always had the easiest time with Bach. He starts with a design and the design comes again and again. Sometimes it's in the left hand, sometimes in the right, and sometimes it's a little changed and naturally transposed during the development of the piece. But he works with one material, which is a baroque-ish idea anyhow. Look at his music. He sets out a piece with a design, and then what he does with this design--but it's mostly this design.

Tusler: But if there were a momentary lapse in the memory, then because of this continuous flow it might be harder to pick it up again.

Ehlers: Maybe. I don't want to think of it, dear. I don't want to think of it. Everybody has to solve his own problems in this direction.

Tusler: Were you always fairly free in building up your programs? Were you able to choose your programs yourself?

Ehlers: Always, always. I chose my programs when I was soloist; I mean, if I had a solo evening, of course I made the programs up with the pieces I loved most and felt safe with, and also had the feeling the public would go along with. And if I were in an ensemble, of course we worked it out together. When I played

with Hindemith we mostly played--ja, a harpsichord solo was demanded always when we traveled, because people wanted to hear the instrument, which I can understand. It was not as well known as it is today, even in Italy. They have very good harpsichord players. I got just recently some publicity--I had long forgotten the name of the harpsichordist from Turin who wrote "your former student," and then it came back to me that I was teaching once in Turin and she was my student, and she seems to get on very well. She is the harpsichordist in the Societa di Corelli, which comes here now almost every two years. And all this started out when I started out, you know. But I always took my instrument with me. Here I know what to do and how it acts, of course. I marvel today how I ever could do it. The difficulties of traveling with this instrument, you know.

Performance in Europe and America

Tusler: Did you ever have an agent here in the United States?

Ehlers: Ja. Kasanoff. She was in the east. She died a few years ago. She didn't help very much.

Tusler: I wondered if you'd ever gone on actual tours here in the United States.

Ehlers: Yes, I did. But it was mostly to schools.

Tusler: Where the demand for this type of music would naturally exist.

Ehlers: Ja, ja, of course. I played, as I mentioned before, at the Coolidge Festival and I played in Washington, D.C. at the Library of Congress. I played with the Philadelphia

Orchestra under Ormandy, and I played under Klemperer here; but in between the harpsichord became so popular that they have their own harpsichordists in the east and very good ones, and it saves the traveling and the expense with the harpsichords. There is no reason to travel so much.

Anyhow, I intend slowly, slowly to play fewer concerts, only those which tempt me very much. I just got an offer which I accept with pleasure to play at this year's Bach Carmel festival, with my students again, the four-harpsichord concerto [of Bach]. The conductor, Salgo, wrote me (I don't know if it is a good idea or not) that before we play the four-harpsichord concerto, the original Vivaldi for four violins, after which Bach wrote this, will be played.

Tusler: Oh, how interesting.

Ehlers: Ja. Very interesting, but I wonder who will win, probably the four violins! [laughter] I don't know if it's really--what should I say--a crescendo to the four-harpsichord concerto, or if it will be a diminuendo, playing the four-[harpsichord] concerto. [laughter] After all, the people are used to violins. This is a tone which they love and are accustomed to. Now, to have the four-harpsichord sound, this is an entirely different thing if they would like the tone.

In the morning of the same day, that we play in the evening the four-[harpsichord] concerto with orchestra, I will play with Malcolm [Hamilton] an all-duet program. The soloists who appear in the evening program always have to give the same morning program in the church for the people who couldn't get

any tickets for the evening program, because they are mostly sold out, for the evening program. But of course I accept something like this, because I love Carmel, I like the atmosphere, I like the conductor, and it brings back memories. This was my first great success in America, playing at the Bach Festival in Carmel.

Tusler: That was before you had played with the Philharmonic here, I suppose.

Ehlers: I think so. Or afterwards. But anyhow, this was Los Angeles, and the name didn't carry. I told you, I think, [about] the first time the conductor came down from Carmel to hear me because he didn't know if I would fit in with the quality of his performances. I played about six measures, and he said, "Thank you, thank you, that's enough." I didn't know what this meant. But he came up, as I have been told later, and said, "I made a fool of myself, going down to listen to her."

Tusler: Who was that conductor?

Ehlers: An Italian who had the Carmel Bach Festival. He suddenly died and then Salgo became his successor.

Tusler: Who is the present conductor?

Ehlers: Salgo. Sandor Salgo, an excellent man. He teaches at Stanford and has gotten into the baroque spirit through the Bach festival. Of course, they play many other baroque composers, which some of the people in Carmel don't like at all, but I think he is quite right. You can't play always Bach, and also it gives a good background. He plays Handel and he plays other composers too, but there is much criticism.

Tusler: Has this been quite a tradition for you, to go up there every year?

Ehlers: Since I started out, I went almost every year with the exception of one summer when I went to Europe. I think it was only one summer I didn't go.

Tusler: You've made quite a few trips back to Europe since you've been living here.

Ehlers: No, only two.

Tusler: And not as a performer?

Ehlers: No, not at all. Only as a visitor.

Tusler: And you didn't stay for any great length of time?

Ehlers: No, just the summer, just the summer.

Tusler: You never had any desire to go back and concertize again there?

Ehlers: Imagine how strange--I have no desire to go back again. Maria, who goes back now, is so excited and so happy with the idea of meeting her old friends. But all my friends left Germany when I left it, and all my friends are now here or in England. I have nothing to do [there] any more.

Tusler: All of your connections are here.

Ehlers: Ja. I got a letter the other day which stirred me up a little bit. There was--what was it called? the Lessing Hochschule. ("Hochschule"--you know what it means; not what we call "high school," it can't be verbally translated; it is like the supreme, the utmost of any school). This man who headed it before the war, Dr. Levine, arranged scientific, scholarly evenings in this Lessing Hochschule and artistic evenings,

and it was here where I started out in Berlin to play. It was in his program where I put for the first time the six Bach sonatas with violin on the program, not all six in one evening, but in two evenings. But nobody had ever dared to do this, to play all six Bach sonatas, or six flute sonatas, or the six Brandenburg Concerti in a series, you know. He had the spirit and not only the spirit, but the courage, to do those things. He came back to Berlin (he had to leave Berlin because he was Jewish), and suddenly a letter came from him and I was so surprised that old times came back to me, what we all did at this school. It was not a big hall and we weren't paid very highly, but he had the spirit to do things which nobody else had done. But how did I ever come now to him, what did I want to say?

Tusler: I asked you if you'd gone back to Europe to concertize.

Ehlers: No, I didn't and I have not the slightest wish to.

He in his letter suggests if I wouldn't come. And I don't want to, because you see at this time everything was new, what we did. Nobody had played six Bach sonatas; maybe they had played one, but I can't remember that I ever heard one of the great violinists play Bach sonatas, because in a way it is an unthankful--was, at this time, an ungrateful job. But at this time at the Lessing Hochschule we could do what we wanted, and we did those things. I played for the first time there the six Bach sonatas, and there are many wonderful memories. But I don't want to go back. I have not the slightest wish to go back. And they do now all those things, anyhow.

Tusler: Yes. I understand what you mean. You can't step back into the past.

Ehlers: No. I don't want to step back. People I loved are gone, and with the new generation, I don't mean anything to them; they don't mean anything to me. I have no homesickness of any kind, and also not for Vienna. It is sad that I lost all trust in the people who could act, or even if they didn't act, they didn't counteract when all the things happened. I am perfectly at home and happy here; I feel at home here, and I have my colleagues who are not only colleagues but friends, and I love it here. I have not the slightest wish to go back. A few years ago, when Christina was with her family in Switzerland, in Gstaad, she took a house for a whole year and I came in the summer. This was wonderful, I was a visitor there.

Tusler: And that was the last time you saw Dr. Schweitzer.

Ehlers: Ja, in '59. On my way back, I went to see him and I am so glad I did it. Also, I saw another dear friend of mine, Fritz Münch, probably also for the last time. He is the brother of Charles Munch, the conductor, and we were very close because he studied cello at the same time at the Hochschule für Musik when I studied harpsichord. This is how we met. Then when he had finished and after the war was over, he had the choir for the church in Strasbourg and he became the church organist and the musical director of the conservatory. I played very often in Strasbourg. This is a place I liked very much. I spent two days with Fritz Münch when I was on my way back after I had seen Schweitzer. I am glad I did all this

at this time, you know, because I will never go back to Europe.

TAPE NUMBER: SEVEN, SIDE ONE*

February 28, 1966

Performance in Europe and America

Tusler: I understand you've been doing quite a few concerts recently. First there was the Schweitzer memorial concert at USC, and then there was another little incident that I'd like to have you tell about.

Ehlers: Well, this is really the first [such] incident in my whole career. I missed a concert. And I must say, and this is the truth, not to my own fault. One of our students, who was supposed to play the bass part in the sonatas with a cello, offered to drive me. (Miss Shapiro [the violinist] came directly.) Of course I was very happy that Maria was not involved for once and he would drive us.

Well, he said he knows the way very well and refused any explanations which I got from different people where to go. So we drive and drove and it became later and later, and we came out in Pomona, when I suddenly for the first time ~~dared~~toed interfere and [say] that it seems entirely wrong, where we are. By this time it was almost eight o'clock. Eight-thirty was when the concert started. But on the other hand I didn't want to make him nervous, you see. So he stepped out to ask questions, but I don't know if you have ever asked anyone in America. You never get a real answer. First of all, nobody

*Only one side of Tape VII was recorded.

knows more than to the next corner, you know? So we got some advice--I don't know if he followed the advice. We went through very lovely country, I must say, but it became darker and darker and he became more and more nervous.

Then we came to a big college, but it was dark. I think there was a light in one building. I said, "That's strange. I mean, after all, a concert is a concert, and it looks utterly lost and sleeping." So he stepped out and rang the bell and pounded on the door--no reaction. It was the wrong college.

Tusler: Where were you at that point, do you know?

Ehlers: I don't know, not the slightest idea. I know only the country was very lovely and I distracted myself not to upset him more, because I didn't want to have an accident on top of all this. So I humored him and I said, "Finally, I see a little bit of the country." Then I made him ask people, but you know, people don't know--they know always only to the next corner.

Well, finally we found out we were in Pomona where we had no business to be and had to drive back to Orange County. When we arrived there everybody was walking out, Miss Shapiro, and the public walking out. I was really heartbroken. It was the first concert I missed in my whole career. Ridiculous.

Tusler: I think it's fantastic that you never had this experience before.

Ehlers: Never had this experience before, in all the different countries. The harpsichord was there, I was there, everything was there; and from here to Orange County I missed. They were

gracious enough to have the concert repeated yesterday night, and the dean came and said, "You know, in a way it's good, we have many more people today." Very kind of him, of course. [laughter] But it was a lot of unpleasantness--everybody was nice to us and to the boy too, but I felt very miserable and on top of it, had very much more expense, you know; my harpsichord had to come back for the Schweitzer memorial [concert] and out again, and this means quite [a lot]. I couldn't charge anybody for it because it was my instrument.

Tusler: Where was it in Orange County?

Ehlers: At the state college, Orange State College, I think. They have a harpsichord (I didn't even have time to try it out yesterday) but nobody to teach, really. One lady came to me afterwards. She is very interested. She has a small instrument herself and she wants to have a few lessons to know what is what. It's so difficult to say what is what. You can't just explain only the technique and only the different approach. It's very difficult. You have to grow into it. People always think [that because it's] a keyboard instrument, you have just to learn a few technical things or the matter of registration. It doesn't work like this. So if someone says, "I just want to have a few lessons, " I always feel very guilty, because all the years I have spent with Landowska I wouldn't say I could have shortened by one day.

Tusler: The whole touch, everything, is so completely different?

Ehlers: Not only the touch. Every piece has to be differently approached. The German school is entirely [different] from the

French school. The virginalists are a field in themselves. It's not only the technical approach, it is an all-around picture which has to be taken in, and I don't know if this goes so quickly. Also I believe it doesn't go by just telling. Every person has to experience it. I have the feeling, for instance, that I now at the end of my life and my career start really to have the experience with every piece. Well, maybe I exaggerate, but this is my feeling. Now I know.

I'm just working up the Goldberg Variations again. I played them very often and I put them absolutely off. I am always afraid of mechanical things. I'm afraid that a piece which is in your fingers will turn out [to be] nothing more than a perfect...

Tusler: Just a reproduction of the notes?

Ehlers: Ja, ja. But I want to have a piece always anew. What is the English word for Erlebnis? "Experience" is too dull a word for it. "Sensation." It has to be a new sensation, otherwise I can't play it. Now, the cadenza which you will probably like, which I played in the Brandenburg...

Tusler: In the Fifth Brandenburg?

Ehlers: Ja--I have played it I don't know how long, with Klemperer and with great conductors, and I let it absolutely go until it again is a new experience for me.

Tusler: What do you mean, "let it go?" Not practice it for a long time?

Ehlers: Ja, practice probably a few different [spots] where I know you have different technical difficulties--take it out and

practice like a finger exercise on this. But I don't play again and again. You can't do it, or I can't do it.

Tusler: It takes all the freshness away from it.

Ehlers: Ja, ja. Now last time I had the feeling I created it for the first time. This was one of the best [times], for my feeling, I ever played it.

Tusler: For the sake of the record, I should say this is what you performed as your part of the Schweitzer Memorial Program [at USC].

Ehlers: Ja. I can't make a crescendo, as you know, on the harpsichord--you can't if you don't change a register, which would be bad taste; and I know that a few people told me they [could] hardly sit still during the cadenza, it was such a climax. I did it only with the inner tension, because I can't do it differently.

Tusler: It is curious that you do get that literal effect of crescendo on the harpsichord.

Ehlers: But it shows you that there is something else involved than "good fingers" and whatever you call it.

Tusler: That cadenza--every note was written down by Bach?

Ehlers: Oh, yes.

Tusler: There's nothing improvisatory there at all.

Ehlers: No, no. He improvise*d*, and this is one of the very few, I think the only one, where he himself wrote a big cadenza in.

Tusler: In any of the concerti?

Ehlers: I think so; I can't think of any of the concertos right now where he wrote a cadenza. Probably he played it very often

and improvised it. I'm sure he improvised, and then later sat down and wrote it.

Tusler: Of course, this is one of the famous pieces in harpsichord repertoire.

Ehlers: Ja, because it's the only one of the Brandenburgs where the harpsichord has this big part, not just a figured bass to fill the harmonies, but being really one of the soloists. It is flute, violin and harpsichord.

Tusler: I suppose you've played the Brandenburg Fifth hundreds of times in your career.

Ehlers: Very often, very often. But now I haven't played it for a long time. I played it this summer twice in Carmel, I love it very much, and I'm very glad I didn't play it for years because if you play a piece too often...I noticed it yesterday on the program [I played] with Miss Shapiro. Everything was good. There was nothing bad about it, but a few wrong notes which I invented yesterday. [laughter] Otherwise, it was good. But still I find it has lost the freshness, and I won't touch this program for a year at least.

Tusler: Were these the Biber sonatas again?

Ehlers: The Biber sonatas, and Haydn, Mozart and Bach. If you travel, you keep to one program more or less. We have not so much time and I have to get used, sometimes (like last year in Berkeley), to a different arrangement of the harpsichord; so I am happy if I can manage this, you know.

Tusler: And different acoustical problems in the hall, perhaps?

Ehlers: Well, this I can't take into consideration. If we would

have tried to have four or five people sit in the hall, everybody says something different, so you can't. You just let the piece go as you are convinced it should go.

Tusler: Yes. But I would think in different halls that it would require a different type of balance between you and the violinist.

Ehlers: Maybe; but maybe this would more affect the violinist than my registration.

Tusler: She has to adjust herself to you because the harpsichord remains stationary and the violin can change.

Ehlers: Ja, ja. I think Miss Shapiro has learned this in the years we played together, fantastically, [how] to come out and go down.

Tusler: Just by feel---there's no other way to do it, you just have to sense?

Ehlers: Ja. Well, of course, when I have the thematic material she must give me a chance, and she knows now how much to go back in order to be heard but still to give me the [theme]. It took quite a time, because you know she has a big tone by nature, and to reduce it without making it sound reduced is very difficult. It took us almost three years till we have the feeling of a perfect balance. I must say I learned a great deal from her, and I think she learned something in Bach playing from me. But I'm very grateful to have her because otherwise it's no pleasure to play this kind of music, if it's not a constant give and take. She knows now how far the harpsichord carries, more or less.

Tusler: Where else have you played the Brandenburg Fifth?

Ehlers: Everywhere.

Tusler: With many of the major orchestras?

Ehlers: The greatest was with Ormandy in Philadelphia as well as in New York. This was really my introduction to New York.

Tusler: Under whom was that?

Ehlers: Ormandy.

Tusler: Ormandy in both places.

Ehlers: In both, ja, ja. Philadelphia is where he is the steady director, and in New York he was invited. He was gracious enough to take me. This was my entrance almost into America, you know, this playing with him. But of course, I was amplified.

Tusler: They'd have to do that, wouldn't they, in a large hall?

Ehlers: Ja, and the amplification was hidden. Fritz Reiner was in the rehearsal and he said to Ormandy, "She has to be amplified," (he was going around in the hall), "but do it this way, so that nobody sees it and we have no comments about it." You know? Because people are so stubborn.

Tusler: Probably he cut the orchestra way down, however.

Ehlers: Probably he did it, I'm sure, but even so he had a very good sensitive feeling for the orchestra.

Then I played it here in the Philharmonic, in the old Philharmonic, under Klemperer. And I don't know where else. I can't remember.

Tusler: Were those, would you say, quite different experiences playing it under those different conductors?

Ehlers: No.

Tusler: Their approach was essentially the same?

Ehlers: No. I mean you can't "approach" him much. Bach has so clearly put out the picture, tutti, solo, tutti, solo, that I don't know what you have to think or to be to have a different approach. I mean, the dynamics are given in the score by tutti and solo, and what you have to have is a good ear for how much can the harpsichord take or the violin and flute, and tune them down mostly, never up, you know? I played it this year, as I told you, in Carmel, and I'm very happy, only not happy that Eudice [Shapiro] won't be there.

Tusler: Did you ever play the Brandenburg Fifth in Europe?

Ehlers: Oh, all over the place. I can't remember now where, but everywhere where there was an orchestra and a conductor who had understanding. I know I played it in Frankfurt under [Hermann] Scherchen, this I remember, and in Holland I played it.

Tusler: With what conductor was that? Was it Van Beinum?

Ehlers: No, no, before Van Beinum.

Tusler: Was that Mengelberg?

Ehlers: I played it under Mengelberg once, but then I played it under this other man, who was a very good conductor, who lived outside Amsterdam. What was his name? I played [there] so very often.

Tusler: The man from The Hague, Van Otterloo?

Ehlers: No, no. I did the St. Matthew Passion with him. We did it, I remember, on Sunday with an intermission between the first and second part. Everybody had dinner there. What was this man's name? Very good conductor, very strict and very good

stylistically. I was, in a way, very much afraid of him, almost as much as of Mengelberg. But he was very good, and had this chorus, not in Amsterdam, but very close to Amsterdam, in Bussum. He had the Bussum chorus and orchestra and he was very good.

Tusler: But frightening to work with?

Ehlers: Very strict. Well, I don't know--not as frightening as Mengelberg.

Tusler: What was Mengelberg like to work with?

Ehlers: He could be very insulting, but he was somehow very good to me. He corrected me but never let me feel that I lost my confidence. He was very good to me, but I remember this great flutist he had, who was a very difficult person. Great flutist, Ary Van Leven.* He later became the first flutist of the Vienna Opera, but he was under Mengelberg and Mengelberg insulted him so in front of everybody else that he got up. Of course he was dismissed immediately. But Mahler took him immediately for Vienna. Ary Van Leven,* he couldn't take it. He was a very proud man and a very great virtuoso, a good musician, too, not only a great flutist. Maybe Mengelberg went too far. He had a reputation to be very strict.

By a sheer coincidence we met in--was it Zurich? or some little village outside Zurich. There was a lady who adored Mengelberg (I don't know how she came to know him), and she had a big house and she lived all alone. I stayed there when I played [in the area], and he stayed there, and we were once together there. He was very kind to me. The Vatican singers

*Name spelling unverified.

came and had a concert in Lucerne, and he took me along. I remember very well--you know, they sang always not chant, but chant-like music.

After we left, I said, "Mr. Mengelberg, this is a music I don't understand anything about. I have no door open for me."

And he said, "I can understand this. You have to grow up with this music. I was myself as a little boy one of the singers, and I know the chant and I know the value, not only the value but the meaning of the chant. You have to approach this not like you go to another piece of music listening; it's an entirely separate world, and you needn't feel badly about it." I say absolutely I listened to it, but--

Tusler: Nothing happens?

Ehlers: Nothing happens, ja. So when you had him privately he could be very human, very kind. He was very kind to me, I must say.

Tusler: But he was very strict when he was working with the orchestra.

Ehlers: Ja, ja. Biting, you know? He could insult somebody with a word, and this was what happened with the flutist who was very proud and a wonderful flutist. And he, instead of being quiet and taking it, took his music, got up, and this was it. So he was immediately dismissed. Mengelberg wouldn't take this.

Tusler: Were you there when that happened?

Ehlers: Oh, no. Long before my time. I know it only from the flutists. When I met this flutist he was much older than I am; he was the first flutist under Mahler in the orchestra in Vienna.

When I started out playing my first concerts, I don't know in which year it was, I [asked] him very humbly if he would consider playing a flute sonata with me because, for instance the first Bach flute sonata in B Minor is very long, endlessly long, and if you haven't a flutist who has the power of keeping the interest going, it's just lost. I learned a great deal from him.

Tusler: You did actually perform it.

Ehlers: Oh, with him, very often, in Vienna and in Berlin and then we traveled together. I don't know where we all were.

He was a very difficult person but he was kind of fatherly to me because he knew how much I admired him. He was not only a great, great flutist, he was a great musician altogether.

When Mahler went to New York he took him along from Vienna.

Tusler: Were some of the other conductors you worked with, like Ormandy and Klemperer, of this same type of personality as Mengelberg?

Ehlers: They were all different. I was always afraid of Klemperer and for no reason, because he was good to me. I was afraid of Mengelberg. Ormandy was very kind, so I was very relaxed.

Tusler: But you didn't feel relaxed with Klemperer.

Ehlers: Never, never,

Tusler: Why was that?

Ehlers: I don't know--well, [he was a] very strong personality.

Tusler: He made you feel nervous about what you were doing?

Ehlers: I don't know what. Maybe today I wouldn't be; but don't forget I was still in the, not exactly the beginning,

because I came with a reputation from Europe, but still I hadn't played this with these top people so much, you know. I played with Mengelberg, ja; and I played very often in Zurich with the conductor there [Volkmar] André, who was their great conductor but who was not the quality of Klemperer or Mengelberg.

Tusler: Isn't it extraordinary that a man like Mengelberg can build such a marvelous orchestra when he is a kind of tyrant?

Ehlers: I think you have to be a tyrant to do it. I think you have to. And I think the orchestra, if they see his point, if he is right, they take it. But if a soloist comes once, you know, and gets one rehearsal, he is not used to the man and only knows his reputation--there is quite a different story. I think the orchestra takes everything if they see the conductor is right. They resent it only if he is fussy and if they don't see the musical rightness of it. Each conductor handles the orchestra differently, absolutely differently.

Tusler: You mean his technical approach to it?

Ehlers: His technical approach, and then the human approach, too. Bruno Walter always did it with very great kindness, you know, very firm but always treating them on the same level. It's a personal temperament, you know? Like some teachers are different. The same thing; there is no rule to it, but some make one feel easier and at home, and with some, like Klemperer, I was scared to death. First of all, the great respect I had [for him]; and then his way of saying things. But we got on quite well.

Tusler: But you don't think that that changes the quality of the performance, if they make you feel a little bit tense about it?

Ehlers: Well, I think in the performance, at the end, you don't think of it--you just play. He has to follow anyhow, when I am the soloist; he has to do it. He can only say afterwards nasty things to me, but not during. No, he [Klemperer] was always very kind; he said sometimes, "Would you try it faster or slower," or something, and I tried. Sometimes he was right, sometimes I was right. But I have had no bad experience with any conductor, really.

Tusler: How much before the concert, when you were in rehearsal, did they interfere, would I say, or make suggestions about the style?

Ehlers: Not much. Well, I played Bach, and with Bach I knew so much--as much as they did. What did I play? I only played Bach, and I played the Mozart Rondo quite a great deal.

Tusler: With orchestra?

Ehlers: Ja, it's written for orchestra. In D major. It's a small piece but a very charming piece. I played it here and I played it in Holland, too--not any more, it doesn't interest me enough, but it's a lovely piece to play, and I played the Haydn Concerto.

Tusler: Is that usually done on the piano?

Ehlers: No, it is written for harpsichord, or at least harpsichord or piano, and it sounds much more interesting on the harpsichord. It sounds kind of dull on the piano. This I

played a great deal; I don't know if I played it with Klemperer here. I am very sorry that I was sloppy in collecting programs, because those things slip by. You live for the moment and what you did before is forgotten, and especially after so many years. Tusler: We were talking a little bit earlier about some of your experiences in Holland, which you found a rather unique country to perform in for various reasons.

Ehlers: Ja, of all countries I was most afraid in Holland. First of all, the public was educated to a very high standard through their conductors. Then second was the criticism. [Herman] Rutters was in Amsterdam, I don't know what the name of the big press, [Het Algemeen Handelsblad], in Amsterdam was. But his word was like the Bible. Rutters accepted or said no to somebody. He made you or he killed you, you see? And also you always had to consider the taste, [whether] somebody liked the sound of the harpsichord--this you couldn't fight. But somehow it reflected on their criticism.

Tusler: Did his reputation extend beyond Holland, all over Europe?

Ehlers: Ja, absolutely, absolutely.

Tusler: So what he said there really did affect your career.

Ehlers: Absolutely. It helped, or it made people ignore it because they didn't like it. It counted, you know? Some people discount any criticism, but with those who don't, there were a few critics they listened to and valued. Rutters helped, and not only in Holland, but all over Europe, I must say. Like here, for instance, with old Olin Downes in New York. If Olin

Downes said something, this went all over the country and had value.

Tusler: What other critics who were famous in Europe at that time affected your career, would you say? Were there any in Germany or in England that had the same kind of reputation?

Ehlers: No, probably there were in England, but England was always very interested in harpsichord. In Vienna--Vienna had no sense for the harpsichord at this time at all. It was the Schubert tone, you know, and there the sound of the harpsichord--I got respect and good write-ups, but nothing as enthusiastic as in other cities. The great writer at this time was [Julius] Korngold, who had no relationship either with old music or with the sound of harpsichord. He was polite, you see. No, Rutters was the only one I was really afraid of.

Tusler: What kind of reviews did you get from Rutters?

Ehlers: I think only good ones, because I would have remembered [otherwise]. He didn't like my singers--he was very cruel, you know, after that night I told you about.

Tusler: You haven't told that on the tape.

Ehlers: Oh, didn't I? Well, you know Holland. You know how foggy and cold it is, and misty and all those things. But these girls were very stubborn, and after rehearsal, pretty late in the afternoon before the concert the next day, they had to take their evening walk. I warned them that it's misty and foggy, and please be careful. But they had to have their evening walk, and they didn't sing well the next day. We got a terrible write-up--I was in it because I accompanied; he wrote something

very nice about the Chromatic Fantasy. Then it happened that Rotterdam telephoned and said they will pay the fee, but please don't come. They were afraid to present us. I didn't accept-- I accepted for the girls because they had a cold and I thought there's no reason to repeat a fiasco. But I insisted that I'm going to play. And I played.

Tusler: They couldn't exactly back out of it. I suppose you'd already signed a contract.

Ehlers: Oh, ja, but they could back out this way, say they are sick and drop the contract, after this write-up from Rutters.

Tusler: That was in Amsterdam that you got the bad write-up?

Ehlers: Bad in Amsterdam, and the next [place] was Rotterdam where we had to play, and by then the press was out. The Amsterdam [Het Algemeen] Handelsblad was the leading [paper] and everybody said in Holland, "What does he say," you know. So a criticism or a write-up of his [was important]. He made it not clear enough that I was good--he just made an overall picture because he was so badly impressed by the girls. So Rotterdam felt they should cancel it, but I didn't accept it, and then it was a big success, and I'm glad I did it. So there are all kinds of adventures when you travel.

But altogether, I think Holland was one of the strictest musical countries I played in. To get a good write-up, to be accepted in Holland, was very difficult.

Tusler: Did you enjoy going there or did you rather dread it?

Ehlers: Very much so.

Tusler: You liked Holland.

Ehlers: I liked it--I had wonderful friends there, I had a wonderful time.

Tusler: Where did you used to stay when you went there?

Ehlers: Private people, private people. I was always invited. In Bussum I stayed with my friend who had a wonderful large house and was a warm-hearted and a lovely person. We always were invited in every country--we had our...

Tusler:...Your meeting places.

Ehlers: This was done in Europe, you see? People with big houses invited the artists to stay. I'll never forget in Frankfurt am Main one of the very famous houses--you had to have money to have such a house where you could invite two or three artists at the same time. I remember once in Köln, at this lady's who had this great feeling for artists, what they need, and providing for them. There were I don't know how many people at the same time; it was filled.

And just when I wanted to go to bed I remember she came to me and said, "Alice, I am terribly sorry. I have to change your room."

I said, "What happened suddenly?"

She said, "Well, Furtwängler called--he is coming tonight" (he was conducting somewhere in the neighborhood of Frankfurt), "and you know he is very particular; he always wants to have the same bed and the same room and insists he can't sleep in another room. Would you mind changing?"

I said, "I don't mind at all because I haven't started to go [to bed]." So in each of the guestrooms, one person was

sleeping. And Furtwängler came late at night. I think he conducted in Mainz and came then back to Frankfurt.

This was wonderful. I had a family in Zurich, or two families in Zurich. Did I tell the Zurich story [about] when we got Strauss late in the house?

Tusler: And about the playing cards.

Ehlers: Ja, ja, ja. And the lady of the house wasn't interested in anything else but just getting the right amount of people together who would play cards with him until two o'clock in the morning. "Otherwise," she said, "he is unbearable." [laughter] She paid them to come. She paid them back the loss. They had to lose, you know, to keep him in good spirits, and she paid them back the next day. This is one of the funniest stories, ja.

Tusler: How did you get acquainted with these people?

Ehlers: Automatically when artists came, they sent him an invitation.

Tusler: Whether you knew them or not.

Ehlers: No, I didn't know them. This was an old couple. It was a wonderful house on the lake of Zurich, and it was their doing to invite the artists and make it wonderful for them.

Tusler: What was their name, do you remember?

Ehlers: Reiff, this I remember. I had Reiff in Zurich who were on the Zurich Lake, which was very comfortable for me. I went to the--what is it?--Town Halle, I think it's called, in Zurich. I could walk, you know. And then I had friends who were on the [mountainside], up there, wonderful to live

but very uncomfortable to commute. Sometimes if I didn't have much to do, I stayed with this family, and sometimes when I had rehearsals I stayed down. And it was wonderful, you know. These people had so much help you had never to worry about being a burden.

Tusler: They had money and all the leisure.

Ehlers: Money and the help in the house, and it was wonderful, comfortable.

Tusler: With whom did you stay in Holland, do you remember? What families were involved there?

Ehlers: Well, I don't remember the names. I had a family in Amsterdam where I always stayed, a lovely woman there; and I had--I called her always Moos, outside Bussum. A lovely big house there, and she was very motherly. First thing, she took all my laundry and looked for what had to be cleaned; and then she went into my wardrobe to see where the buttons were missing, and I had nothing to worry about. It was this kind, it was just wonderful. I was so grateful. I'm so sloppy anyhow, and then everything [was done]--my luggage was packed by her, wonderful. And the same with Mrs. Rottenberg. Only here she had much more domestic help than the lady had in Holland, but she had help, too. She must be long dead because she was much, much older than I was.

But this was wonderful, traveling. You always came to the same places, you know; you were kind of at home. In Switzerland, too. It was very lovely.

Tusler: Of course, you got to meet that way other musicians

you might not have come in contact with, I suppose.

Ehlers: Well, sometimes, sometimes. This Mrs. Rottenberg in Frankfurt had I don't know how many guest rooms. We were three or four people at the same time. As I told you, this one night that I spent there I had to play the next day in Mainz and I wanted rather to stay in Frankfurt. I don't know how many people [were there]. And then suddenly Furtwängler decided to come because he felt more at home there, so I had to evacuate the room which I had because he was used to this bed.

Tusler: Did you ever perform with him?

Ehlers: In the St. Matthew Passion I played with him, but not as a soloist with the Haydn Concerto. I don't think I played the Haydn Concerto in Berlin with one of the bigger orchestras. No, the hall was much too large and amplification didn't exist at this time. When I played here with Klemperer and when I played with Ormandy it was amplified but hidden.

Tusler: So the audience was really not aware of it at all.

Ehlers: Nobody was aware of it; neither was the press. They were very delighted at how well my harpsichord [sounded]. This I really owe to not only Ormandy, but to [Fritz] Reiner, because he sat in the audience, not in the evening but at the rehearsal, and went from place to place, and said, "You have to amplify or you can't hear her." Then they figured out how to do it, where to put it, and how to hide it so that it is not seen.

Tusler: Were you worried about that the first time?

Ehlers: No. I'm only always worried about my playing. This other thing is their job to do. If they take me for such a big

hall, then we know in advance we have difficulties so something has to be done. I only was grateful that Reiner was there, with his good ear, to say, "You are overpowering [her], or now it sounds too much amplified," and so on. Because the player can't do it.

I am now, as I mentioned before probably, very unhappy that I never kept a diary; at the moment I was living the moment so strongly that I thought this will hold on forever and I will remember at eighty what I have gone through when I was forty, you know. Stupid.

Tusler: It really doesn't work that way.

Ehlers: No. Absolutely not. I know it now, and I regret it very much because there were many things, I am sure, which I have forgotten, names, places, people. Also many things, like what happened with Schweitzer, these still stay even if I have forgotten the exact dates; but so many other things of interest, musical interest, personal interest, have of course slipped my mind. If I could live again I would really keep a kind of diary, not about my feelings, but about what happened who I met, what happened, just the very down-to-earth [things]. Either I was too lazy or I didn't see it. No, I lived so intensely I thought, "Oh, I will always remember." But this doesn't exist. One impression covers the other. Only a few great things I remember, and some influences I remember. Probably it's not a pity, but it would be nice to remember certain things.

Tusler: When you were living and traveling in England, and

touring there, did you find that people there also followed in this European tradition of opening their homes to artists?

Ehlers: Ja. They did. I didn't expect it, but mostly they did.

Tusler: I know you stayed with Sir Donald Tovey in--where was it, Edinburgh?

Ehlers: Ja, Edinburgh.

Tusler: Was that the occasion for your being at their house? Were you performing there and they invited you?

Ehlers: I played in Edinburgh, ja, and he invited me. One of the most loving personalities I have met in my life. A great man in every respect, as a scholar--not as a player; it was so sweet. You know, he loved the harpsichord and always apologized when he played it. And it was, in a way, sad, because as I told you he was a very tall man and he had tremendous feet, and when he wanted to move one pedal for registration he touched at least two, and he always had to apologize and then start again. He said seeing me in the audience was such a discomfort for him he always felt like saying, "Let her play." But he was a great musician and a lovely personality.

Tusler: I didn't realize that he was a performer himself.

Ehlers: Well, he performed. He wasn't a performer, but he performed. He had a deep understanding of the music and he played the piano too, but his handling of the harpsichord was a little--what should I say--strange to me. Maybe this was a harpsichord he wasn't used to; and it is difficult to find the pedals.

Tusler: Are they arranged very closely together?

Ehlers: Each maker makes it differently. Not only the arrangement of the pedals is different (the sixteen and four and eight foot lie on different pedals), but also the distances between the pedals are different, and probably he hadn't had time enough to work on this pedal. But he was a great musician and one of the most lovable people I have met.

Tusler: How did you become acquainted with him?

Ehlers: I really don't know. I have not the slightest idea, if it was in London or if it was when I came to Edinburgh or if it was through Schweitzer. I don't know. Schweitzer and Tovey were very close; he stayed in Tovey's house when he was in Edinburgh, and Tovey adored Schweitzer like a little boy looking up to a giant, you know. It was very touching.

Tusler: How did they communicate? Dr. Schweitzer didn't speak any English, did he?

Ehlers: No. He had always his secretary with him, and Tovey understood a little German, not very much, but a little. But somehow they had a very close and wonderful contact, and it was so wonderful for me to see. Tovey was a great man in his way, you know, not only as a scholar but as a person, and he was like a little schoolboy, devoted to Schweitzer, looking up [to him]. Tovey was a wonderful personality--I am glad I met him, not often enough; generous in his mind, musically wonderful, I mean in understanding and after all, contributing a great deal, as you know, to the music of the past.

You know, it is a pity that at the moment when you meet these people you are not quite aware of their importance,

not only importance by name but importance as people, as persons. I liked him very much and I was aware, but still I didn't try enough to know him. This is probably a natural thing. You are so full of yourself when you are young, and what you are doing. This is the only importance: how you are doing and what you are doing. So you take all the other things just in your stride. I think if I would meet Tovey today I would have much more impression from his great personality and get out of his wisdom not only knowledge but much more wisdom. But I was full of Alice Ehlers, you know.

Tusler: Of course, your career was really just opening up at that time.

Ehlers: Ja, ja. And you have to have a certain distance to be able to take all the other things and put them in the right place.

Tusler: Was he a rather quiet or modest sort of person?

Ehlers: Modest, very modest, but when you got him to talk, it was of the greatest liveliness and interest. I know that he [communicated] with Schweitzer through a secretary who spoke perfect German and perfect English.

Tusler: Were you ever at Tovey's house at the same time when Schweitzer was also there? The three of you were there together?

Ehlers: Ja, ja, ja. And Tovey's wife, who was very important to Tovey, because she made it wonderful for Schweitzer. And I was [there]. A young secretary was there because I remember I told the doctor, "Doctor, please take your secretary along, because I'm not good enough [to translate] and it would be a

pity, because I know you and Tovey have so much to talk about, if my limitation of the language would be a handicap." He had this secretary and he had, as I mentioned before, a secretary also when he talked to the High Commissioner, to Sir Arther Wauchope, because for the same reason I told him I refused, that I can't translate well enough and it would be a pity.

Tusler: Did they discuss musical things largely?

Ehlers: I can't tell you, I can't tell you really. I don't think so. Maybe they talked about some Bach interpretation; but Tovey was so touching, which I will never forget. You would have thought a young schoolboy had met Schweitzer--really [it was] a devotion which came from the inside, not just being, what should I say, well educated and giving the older man [respect]. But you felt the love and admiration of this man. It was touching, I will never forget it.

Tusler: He must have been very greatly influenced by Schweitzer's philosophy.

Ehlers: He admired him so much. Ja, probably, ja. He admired him so very much, and this showed in every gesture and every word. And being himself a great man, it was touching, you know.

Tusler: Do you feel that you yourself were greatly influenced by Dr. Schweitzer in ways other than just the musical?

Ehlers: I am sorry. I am not. I am not good enough. Because he was a hundred percent good person, always thinking more of the other person than of himself. In a way, he only thought

of himself sometimes to--what should I say? to keep his strength, where to put a line. The line was much too generous for me. I wouldn't have seen all those people. I wouldn't have given my time and energy for all those people. To some, it made sense, you know. But for him there was no difference. I told you before, I think, that I was once so very upset, furious, and broke out. And he said, "But they want to talk to me, so naturally I talk to them." He made no--Some people were closer to him, and some people were not close to him; this didn't make any difference. I mean, close to him personally, like I had the honor to gradually become really very close; but close to him mentally. Some people came when he allowed me to sit in and there were wonderful conversations on their level, where I hardly could follow. This I could understand, that he said it did him good to have this exchange. But then with other people, there really was nothing, and with a greatness and goodness he took them all in. I don't know how one can do it, but he did it.

Tusler: That was his personality; he had to be true to himself that way.

Ehlers: Ja. I wonder sometimes, because he could be very impatient and--can you say impetuous? he was.

Tusler: Yes. And he had to gradually learn how to control that.

Ehlers: But how? Sometimes I couldn't take it any longer, the questions and his giving from his time, and I know how generous this was at this time. He wanted to finish his books, and so on, and sitting there and not putting on a face, but being

from the inside out patient--I don't know.

Tusler: Do you feel that you were influenced to any degree by his religious ideas?

Ehlers: No. I am sorry to say I am not inclined [that way], somehow; I don't know, either I am not a deep enough thinker, which I am certainly not, or it's outside my personality. You know, I think in a way it is my strength and my limitation at the same time, that instinctively what doesn't belong to me I push, or it pushes itself, away. So I am as I am, a hundred percent the way I am, natural, with all the shortcomings I have. Either it's laziness that I have never tried to change, or it is something stronger than me. You know, the way I went into my music points it like this, making Bach my main object. Loving Chopin, loving Mozart, I had all this in my youth, but then like--what do you call these things?

Tusler: Blinders.

Ehlers: Blinders, going straight this way, not knowing where it will lead me, but having to do it because I believe in it and I love it. And so I can't find an explanation. I don't know, maybe in my Bach playing there is some influence of Schweitzer or something which subconsciously has influenced my viewpoints--I can't tell you.

Tusler: But not in the other areas.

Ehlers: Sorry to say, no. I would be a much better person if his influence had worked.

Tusler: But of course he did influence you, and I don't mean just musically, but by the very fact of his personality, through

knowing this great personality.

Ehlers: I don't know, I really don't know. I would like to hope, but I don't see any. I am an entirely egotistical person, and keeping--what should I say? I don't know if he was egotistical, I don't know; it was, if you want, egotistical to follow his belief. I don't know.

TAPE NUMBER: EIGHT, SIDE ONE*

May 16, 1966

Interview with Alice Ehlers
and Malcolm Hamilton**

Tusler: Malcolm, I'm going to start by asking you to give something about your background. How did you get mixed up with the harpsichord? And how did you and Mme. Ehlers first become acquainted?

Hamilton: Well, I started out as a pianist, naturally. From my earliest childhood, Bach and Handel have always been my favorite composers. This I loved, much to the neglect of all the other music that should have and did make up my general background. But the baroque composers, though I didn't even know the term at that stage of the game, always held a tremendous fascination for me.

I guess I must have been about eleven or twelve, I suppose--I started piano when I was four--but I must have been easily twelve years old before I ever heard of the harpsichord for the first time. This was, of all things, just a little continuo part that was played on the--do you remember the Bell Telephone Hour series they used to have on the radio? I believe, if my memory serves me correctly, it was Marian Anderson who

*Only one side of Tape VIII was recorded.

**Malcolm Hamilton, one of Mme. Ehlers' most prominent students, is a teacher in the University of Southern California Department of Music and a well-known concert harpsichordist.

was on that night. She sang "Bereite dich, Zion" from the Christmas Oratorio, and they had a harpsichord with it. Of course, I just lost my mind over it. I thought this was marvelous, and immediately something clicked. The color, just the whole mood that it set with this music that I loved so much, really inspired me tremendously to hear some of the solo works that had been written for it and some of the things that I had played. Of course, this led to my collecting the recordings of Landowska, who really was the only one who was recording domestically at that time, for Victor--the only ones available at that time. I didn't know of Mme. Ehlers then--in fact, this was earlier, before your Decca records, I would imagine.

Ehlers: I guess so.

Tusler: What year was this, approximately?

Hamilton: Oh, 1944, I guess.

Tusler: Landowska's records were well known.

Hamilton: Oh, yes, because she had recorded for HMV, and of course they had put them out on Victor--that was with the old 78's. I remember the Harmonious Blacksmith and the Rondo alla Turca and all the war horses. I thought this was just really the height of everything, as far as the keyboard was concerned.

Tusler: That's interesting, because your introduction to the harpsichord was sort of the same [as Mme. Ehlers']. When you heard it for the first time, you knew right away that that was going to be your instrument.

Ehlers: I did, ja. The same thing--there was nothing else.

Tusler: So apparently this happened to harpsichordists.

Hamilton: I guess so.

Ehlers: We have to be fanatics to carry through.

Hamilton: I guess so. But, as I say, the more I was exposed to it, really solely through the medium of recordings (which then really were rather limited--you could get practically everything that was on the market, which was not too much at that time), but the more I heard of it, the more I knew that this was really what I wanted to do. Of course, whether I could make a go of it--wanting and doing are two completely different things.

It wasn't until 1953 that I encountered my first harpsichord in the flesh, which was when I went to the University of Washington to complete--I entered there as a junior--my Bachelor of Arts. They had a big Neupert harpsichord and a woman who played it, but they hadn't offered any instruction on this. They had just gotten the harpsichord, apparently, the year before I had gotten there, and this woman, who subsequently became my first teacher, Irene Bostwick, had been given a grant on her sabbatical to go down and study with Putnam Aldrich at Stanford, and had come back and established herself as the harpsichordist at Washington. But they were not as yet offering any instruction.

Well, of course, I was dying to get my hands on this thing and play it. So, by a long round-about story, which I won't bore you with, I managed to get permission from Stanley Chapple, the director, through having inadvertently done a favor for him. He had made the mistake of saying, "Well, what could I do for you, sometime?"

I said, "Well, for one thing, you can let me study harpsichord."

And he looked rather pensive for a moment, and he said, "Well, why not? It's never been done before, but yes," he said, "I guess you can."

Well, it was a very strange experience starting out, because the moment I sat at the instrument it was like coming home. I've all my life had difficulties, more or less, as a pianist. I've always loved to accompany, and this has always been my forte. I was doing professional accompanying of sorts, I shudder to think what standard when I look back now, from the time I was about nine. I was official accompanist for the music festivals back home, and accompanying and chamber music were [my forte]. I had no aspirations whatever as far as solo work goes, although every teacher whose path I crossed immediately tried to channel me into that, you know, as teachers do. There were always obstacles, not the least of which are my small hands, for one thing. I could never grope with Schumann, Brahms, and so forth, with these big chords and the--

Tusler: The wide stretches?

Hamilton: The wide stretches--this was really beyond me. I played reasonably well enough to, because I got my Licentiate degree from the Royal Schools in London and my Associateship from the Toronto Conservatory, which as I look back on I don't think I could play the same exams that I did then. So at least I could, you know, make a decent job of it, but I always felt as though I was making the best of a bad bargain.

When I got to the harpsichord, it just was a mutual falling in love. It was just marvelous. It suited everything--it did

everything that I wanted it to do, within my limitations, really, because I knew so very little about it. We just took to each other and became fast, bosom friends.

Then that following year, in 1954, in the spring, a great event came to Washington in the form of Alice Ehlers, who came up for six weeks on a Walker Ames fellowship. Of course, this was just my idea of heaven, because here at last... My own teacher had given me really very good grounding on touch and so forth, but was not primarily a performer. She admits this herself.

Tusler: This was Bostwick, with whom you were studying?

Hamilton: Irene Bostwick. Yes.

Tusler: And she knew something about the harpsichord because she had been studying with Aldrich.

Hamilton: She had studied with Aldrich and she had subsequently studied with Landowska in her last years and with Denise Restout, and had a good deal of knowledge; she is a very knowledgable person and very, very intelligent but, as I say, is not primarily a performer and consequently does not understand the basic problems of the performer. I used to sit there and just drink every minute of Mme. Ehlers' classes in, mainly because everything she said not only made so much good sense but was backed up with performance experience and was directly to the point, completely down to earth and sensible as far as the communication of the music to a listener is concerned, rather than theorizing on someone says this, and Philipp Emanuel Bach says that, and so forth.

Tusler: It was a practical approach instead of a musicological

one.

Hamilton: Completely practical; yes, it was. And yet, harpsichordists are a funny anomaly, because we all have to be musicologists, to a certain extent; we all have to be scholars to a certain extent, by virtue of the fact that we're playing an old instrument. We have to know how they did things and what went on. How closely we follow this prescription later on is, of course, perhaps sometimes another matter.

Anyhow, that was my first encounter with Mme. Ehlers. It wasn't, I'm sure, too impressionable a one as far as she was concerned, because I played probably absolutely miserably and I don't think I stood out in her memory at all. I was a little sort of mouse in the class, and I was the only harpsichordist in the class of piano majors, who numbered I suppose around thirty. It was a real boom year, then, particularly for pianists and singers. And any playing I did was on the piano, which was lousy, because I was in the throes of changing over my entire pianistic approach to the harpsichord. Then when you get back on the piano, nothing holds up. Anyhow, I got a great deal out of it, and I knew right then and there that this was my ultimate goal, to study with Mme. Ehlers eventually.

I had in the meantime gone home and taken my teaching credential for British Columbia, and taught French for three years in junior high school, more or less to please my father who wanted me to equip myself to earn a living at something other than music in case anything happened to my hands. You know, the businessman's approach. So we mutually decided the easiest

thing for me to do would be to teach. Well, of course, I wasn't going to teach music. This was absolutely out of the question as far as I was concerned. Well, this is another story. The state of music in the schools up there then was really unbelievable-- anyone that could play "God Save the Queen" with one finger was immediately shoved into teaching music, and I simply wasn't about to do this. [laughter]

Ehlers: So play with one finger, you could do this.

Hamilton: Well, true, but for five hours a day, you know, it just would be a little much. The only way I knew I could stay in music was to keep it for those two or three years as a hobby. Actually, I only had to teach two years to get my permanent credential, my permanent certificate, which I still have and could fall back on if ever I needed it. Heaven help me if I do. But I enjoyed it so much, and we got a phenomenal raise and I had good youngsters and got all the best classes, so I stayed an extra year.

But the time was coming that I had to get back to music. It was essential. I wanted to get my masters' and if I was going to perform, then get into it. Of course, I was going to go down to USC to study with MMe. Ehlers. I wrote to her [in the fall of 1958]. She wrote back and very generously said of course, she remembered me, yes, and she would be happy to accept me as a student, and so forth.

Then I started going through all the channels for entrance to USC. I'd sent everything down and heard nothing back at all. I don't know what had happened. The USC Admissions Office, of

course, had probably lost the whole thing, I don't know. But the time was getting rather closed and this had grown into the spring of 1959.

Well, a bolt out of the blue came from the University of Washington. Two music fellowships were being inaugurated by the National Defense Education Act--it was a short-cut course, three years, to the PhD in musicology. At that time, I really honestly, in all candor, didn't know what musicology was, or I might have thought twice, at least when I found out the Washington version of musicology. It paid a stipend of around \$7,000 for the three years. My name had come up; they wanted people who were interested in baroque music. So could they submit my name?

I wrote back and said, "Oh, sure, why not?" You know, I'd never won anything, or been awarded anything before in my life, so I thought, well, what have I got to lose?

In the meantime I hadn't heard from USC, but I thought at any moment now the mailman's going to come with something. Well, to my great astonishment, I was awarded the fellowship, so it was a matter of a bird in the hand. I thought, well, fine, I get this, get the doctorate out of the way in three years, and then I'm free to do what I like; I can go down to USC for post-grad work and I've got all this behind me. So I accepted it, and not three days after I had accepted it, which was so funny, along came my acceptance from USC. But by that time it was too late. I thought this is probably the hand of providence, so the bed's made, I have to lie in it.

Of course, I was expecting really great things. This was

just going to be--Well, it turned out quite differently. For one thing, they (the school, Washington) had very, very set ideas about what one did under this type of fellowship and what one did under this type of program. The first thing I was told was that there was to be absolutely no performing. Yes, yes!

Tusler: Oh, one of those.

Hamilton: Yes, one of those. So of course, that didn't go over too well, as you can imagine. Playing is my life, and I had absolutely no intention of giving it up; and besides that, it was too much of a good thing. I had developed, established, believe it or not, some kind of a reputation, maybe through being the only one who played, I guess, in the two years that I was at Washington before. Of course, this had boomed back on me, you see, so I was getting engagements here and there to play, and I was taking them. Well, I was on the carpet every time that I did. To make a long story short, this was not too happy a three years out of my life.

Tusler: Oh, you actually did stay there, then.

Hamilton: Oh, you bet I did. I sure did, three years.

Tusler: You were committed to it and you had no choice?

Hamilton: Yes; I put in two summers on my own as well, at my own expense, and unfortunately--

Ehlers: Weren't you at Berkeley one year?

Hamilton: Yes, I was just getting to that. This is the only real ray of light in the whole thing. Eva Heinitz, a very dear mutual friend of Mme. Ehlers and myself, and with whom I

played in Seattle many times while I was there, had said that Mme. Ehlers and Heinitz had been invited down to Berkeley for the six-week summer session to work down there. And she said, "Why don't you come down?"

I said, "Oh, I'd give my eye teeth to, I would just love it, nothing better."

So I made all the necessary arrangements and I went down for the six weeks to Mme. Ehlers. I hadn't seen her since '54, and this was when we really began to get off the ground as far as our relationship, as far as my absorbing what she had and applying it, was concerned. That six weeks, after this desert of being stuffed in the music library, you know, and writing interminable paper after paper after paper on heaven knows what, was really like a fresh drink of water to me, because I had nothing to do down there except take my lessons. I had three or four lessons a week from you, I believe.

Ehlers: Ja, I think so.

Hamilton: I practiced seven or eight hours a day and never felt it, and attended her master classes. I took copious notes all over the place, because usually I had so much individual work from her that I was never put on the mat, except for once in a while when I accompanied in class. So I was completely free. I took down [notes] much to her wrath, because she didn't like us taking notes. With the rank and file of the students I can quite see her point, because if they're busy writing, they're not really absorbing what you're saying, and then it doesn't make sense to them when they get it away. Am I right?

Ehlers: I believe absolutely that today. You have to put all your energy into listening to a teacher, ja? and making sense of it. And what I've found out is they write down the words which they hear--what do you say, the aural, but it doesn't make sense at the moment to them and it doesn't make sense later.

Hamilton: It makes less sense later, too.

Ehlers: Ja. This is why I'm not for it.

Hamilton: But at the same time, I think that you have to keep some kind of a record, a sketchy outline or something.

Ehlers: I thought intense listening, and then go home and write down what you still remember, and maybe then I should check again.

Hamilton: Well, a lot of them I notice too are making little marks in their scores. I did, myself. Sometimes, providing you've got a good little system, this makes a great deal of sense too.

But anyhow, this was my summer, and I loved this, and I really felt that my playing had developed. As a matter of fact, I was quite encouraged but at least I was really in serious doubt as to my own capacities and whether I was just kidding myself and fooling a lot of people who really didn't know very much about the harpsichord up north.

Ehlers: I was not for a moment doubtful about his capacities.

Tusler: From the very beginning, you felt that this was a talent?

Ehlers: From the very beginning. Of course--that this was a rare and great talent; and up to now he hasn't disappointed me.

Hamilton: Oh, bless you.

Tusler: When did you start to feel that way?

Ehlers: From the very first, when we started.

Tusler: When you were at Washington?

Hamilton: No, I'm sure not at Washington, we had really no [contact].

Tusler: From Berkeley.

Ehlers: He gave me nice dinners, that's all I remember.

Hamilton: Oh, no, that was years later, dear.

Ehlers: Was it years later? Well, anyhow, at this time I didn't--

Hamilton: No, I'm quite sure I didn't make any [impression]. I'm sure I couldn't have, I couldn't possibly have made any impression except as a very lame little pianist at the time.

Ehlers: Well, we didn't have any personal contact.

Hamilton: No, we didn't.

Ehlers: When I had the contact in the Berkeley summer, I knew immediately with whom I had to deal.

Tusler: Were there other talented students there that summer at Berkeley? Or do you feel, as you think back to it now, that Malcolm's talent really stood out?

Ehlers: Oh, well, there is nothing to think about, I know it. I hope he doesn't get--[much laughter] What is the word in English?

Tusler: A big head.

Hamilton: Swell-headed, yes.

Ehlers: Ja. [laughter]

Hamilton: Well, anyhow, this was a mixed blessing in many ways, because this equipped me to go back and work on my own. This is one thing (I want to just digress a little bit here) that I've always admired about Mme. Ehlers' teaching and which I have tried to incorporate in my own: her whole philosophy. If I'm misquoting she will probably kill me in a hurry, but the way I see it, my interpretation of it is that she trains you, or tries to train you, to think for yourself and to equip yourself so that you can take a completely fresh piece of Bach, let's say, and if you don't know exactly what to do with it, at least you've got some equipment. You've got some basic fundamentals to follow this through. I have been all my life taught by the spoon-feeding approach.

Ehlers: May I interfere here?

Hamilton: Please.

Ehlers: This was my reaction to the teaching of Landowska, because I was taught by her the same way as you said, called spoon-feeding?

Hamilton: Yes, spoon-feeding, yes.

Ehlers: When she left, I had the feeling, "God help me. What am I going now to do? I have played all the pieces which I studied with her now." And this was when my husband said, "Can't you read music?"

Tusler: But you had no belief in your capacity to go ahead.

Ehlers: I had never tried it. I had never had a chance, they had never guided me to find out for myself. This was it, this you had to do, and this you did.

Hamilton: Well, you see, now, to carry that farther, I was taught by a second-generation Landowska student. Aldrich had studied under Landowska, Bostwick had studied under Aldrich, and then Bostwick had studied subsequently under Landowska. This was the whole approach; this whole approach, you know, goes together.

Ehlers: Ja.

Hamilton: And for the first time, I had to really stop and think; in fact, I got thrown out of two lessons, asking what I should do with this, or should I use the four foot, or should I do something.

And she said, "I don't care if you use the four foot, I don't care what you do with it--what do you want to do? What does the music want from you?"

Well, I'd never thought of this, and suddenly I had to turn around and think. She said to me, "Now, don't you bring this piece back to me unless you've got a conviction about it. I don't care if it's wrong. It can be completely wrong. Then we discuss it." But she said, "You settle first of all what the music wants from you and what you want from the music; then you come to me."

This, I think, is a completely healthy approach. Well, I had six weeks of this, getting beaten around this way, and it was marvelous.

Tusler: This was really the formative thing in your career.

Hamilton: Absolutely. It really was, indeed. These six weeks, I think, if I have to really pinpoint any time that things

suddenly began to open up--not only that [way] but technically, too. I was tied up in a bundle of technical nonsense, trying to imitate pictures of Landowska's hands and all this business, which was partly my own immaturity and I don't know what.

Again, [though] I was with some good guidance, in many directions, from Bostwick, I was very largely, in many ways, self-taught--almost completely. In fact, anything that I learned I taught myself, apart from the repertoire that she gave me, which again was limited.

However, as I say, this left me in a rather mixed emotional state at the end of the summer, because for one thing it had equipped me really to go back and start to gig for myself on these things; and on the other hand, I thought, "Ye gods, I've got two more years of this," realizing I also had two summers to put in, too (and that's another long story) to face all this business after this marvelous refreshment that I had had. Well, I had made a pact with myself and with Mme. Ehlers that as soon as this silly fellowship business was over, I was coming down here come death or high water to study with her, and that was that.

So, to make a long story short, the two years went by, plus two summers at my own expense up there, and I really wasn't any closer to a doctorate than I was when I went there. I had a long, very impressive list of courses that I had taken, but it was a matter of great procrastination. They had only given two doctorates in [music] at that time at Washington; one had taken twelve years to do it and the other

had taken ten years, and this was constantly held up to both of us. Really. That's a fact. So that, you know, what business did we have in trying to do it in less? Well, of course, the National Defense [Education Act] took a rather different view of this.

So the end was approaching and so was my money, for that matter. The end of that spring quarter was coming, and I thought, ye gods, I have to get out of here and do something! So I managed to turn the courses and the work that I had done into a master's, and scraped out of it that way. It just meant writing a thesis, but this I spent that last spring on and I thought, well, fine, then let's get out of here and call it quits. It was actually a Master of Arts in Music History because they didn't offer any performance degrees up there.

Tusler: That's good and academic.

Hamilton: Yes, exactly, and I'm grateful now. Really, I do feel that these things in a way are worked out for us, and this has been a blessing in many ways. It fits together. Also, when I look at it, too, I may not have been quite as ready for all that Mme. Ehlers had to give had I come down at that time, inasmuch as I was really put on my own mettle and had to solve so many of my own problems. But she was marvelous, you know, in so many ways; when I had to play recitals, I'd make a tape. Do you remember I used to make some tapes and send them down to you and you'd send them back to me?

Ehlers: Really?

Hamilton: Yes. The big French overture, the B Minor, and many of these things.

Ehlers: I am glad to see I was [helpful].

Hamilton: Oh, no, she was wonderfully generous. She'd send back a sheaf of comments on this, and that and the next thing. Then I'd listen back to my tape and follow, and really, it was like a lesson. Marvelous.

Then, a couple of times in the interim, she came back to Seattle. One of the times, as a matter of fact, remember, you played in Portland, and I picked you up there and drove you back. Wonderful time. She played in Portland and I met her in Portland and drove her back to Seattle and she played in Seattle.

Ehlers: It was spring.

Hamilton: Yes, the mountains were gorgeous; it was just a lovely, lovely time. And while she was there, I made the most of that; we had lessons and good sessions together and so forth.

Then my harpsichord was born that summer, just the summer between the spring that I finished in Washington and the fall that I came down here. I took possession of it about a month or so before I made the trek down to Los Angeles. So that more or less brings it up to date as far as how I got started with Mme. Ehlers;

Tusler: What year was that, that you came here?

Hamilton: '62, fall of '62, yes.

Tusler: And it's just this year, 1966, that you're finishing

your degree at USC.

Hamilton: Yes, Doctor of Musical Arts. It would have been finished a lot sooner, probably, had I been able to apply myself to it more strongly, but I've been teaching, concertizing, and so forth, so it's been a matter of taking a course here, a course there, and finally piecing it together. But I certainly owe Mme. Ehlers a great, great deal, not only for what she has done for me musically; but since I have been down here she has opened many doors for me and made contacts. I wouldn't be where I am now had it not been for her. But we've had a wonderful, and still do have, a marvelous relationship and marvelous rapport.

Ehlers: It's now a give and take, you know?

Tusler: Now you're both performers.

Ehlers: Ja, and all our talks about the musical problems to solve--it's a wonderful feeling of give and take. I must confess I never felt very much like a teacher with Malcolm. There was so much good material there, you know? It was always more an exchange of ideas, a give and take which I had never had with any of my students before, and God knows if I will have it ever again. It's one of the rare cases.

Hamilton: One way or the other. [laughter] But I think a witness to this is our two-harpsichord work, because we play extremely well together. We have a wonderful ensemble and yet we are completely individualistic.

Tusler: Is it true that you both have really basically a different approach to the instrument? Do you think your

style of playing is a different one?

Hamilton: Well, how would you put it, Mme. Ehlers?

Ehlers: Well, I would say first for both of us comes the music. Then we transfer it, naturally, to our individualistic technique.

Hamilton: We want the same things from the music, but how we go about extracting it is [different]. Now, for instance, I mean to get down to basics: Mme. Ehlers' hand is completely different from mine.

Tusler: How?

Hamilton: Well, it's the musculature, the shape of the fingers and so forth. She has a broader palm and my fingers are a little longer and a little slimmer. So consequently my technical approach is quite different from hers, my hand position and so forth. I have a naturally much higher finger lift than she does.

Tusler: In other words, the technical approach must be suited to the individual always.

Ehlers: To a certain extent. First to the instrument. Don't you think?

Hamilton: Right. Yes.

Ehlers: And then to the personal possibilities.

Tusler: Is this different from the way Mme. Landowska taught? Did she always advocate a certain type of hand approach?

Ehlers: She never talked about those things. I just imitated, but I could only to a certain degree because her fingers were much longer than mine, much longer. And then what do you call this here?

Hamilton: The palm of the hand, yes.

Ehlers: Palm. Much bigger, much larger than mine, and consequently much more powerful than mine. She never talked about technique with me, not once.

Hamilton: No. I was just going to say that while I was in Seattle Isabelle Nef from Switzerland came out and gave a couple of concerts in Seattle, and I took four or five lessons with her. She was also, though later than Mme. Ehlers, an early Landowska pupil, and she said exactly the same thing that Mme. Ehlers said, that Landowska never once mentioned technique or fingering or hand position or anything like this to her. She said all this came very much later, but at that time she never [did].

Ehlers: Well, in her book she talks very much about it.

Hamilton: Yes, fingering was almost a fetish, really.

Ehlers: All my colleagues who were not up to her--what should I say, to her liking, she said to me, "My child, please work with them." She didn't give them any help technically. Nothing. Not me, either. But I was very well trained before, you see? finger-wise, very well trained, and then on top of it I observed her. I don't know why she didn't do it.

Hamilton: I wonder if that's how a lot of this business has developed, with some of her, maybe, lesser lights, this business of imitating the hands and this same business with fingering, because it seems now to be carried to great extremes, you know. She thinks there's only one fingering, which I violently disagree with.

Tusler: You mean there are a number of different fingerings?

Hamilton: Oh, of course; I think, again, you have to take the individual hand into consideration. I can navigate fingerings that I wouldn't teach to my students, really, because it wouldn't work for them. Some of them can do things that I couldn't hope to do, and bring them off. And who cares? As long as the phrase delineates itself, as long as the line comes out, I don't care how they get it, if they play it with their big toe, as far as that's concerned.

Ehlers: Ja, this is what I think, too.

Tusler: You agree with this, then.

Ehlers: Ja, ja.

Hamilton: Well, that's one thing, too, that I'm very grateful to Mme. Ehlers for. She's never once tried to [interfere]. Sometimes if I'm having trouble with the fingering I'll ask her. Sometimes she'll show me what she does and I try it, and it either works or it doesn't work. But she never interferes with you. She's never once been dogmatic and said, "No, use this finger on such and such a note."

Tusler: So there's a different fingering for each type of hand, but nevertheless fingering is of primary importance, isn't it?

Ehlers: Very important to play a phrase correctly, but it might be different fingers for him and for me.

Tusler: Do you believe when you're working out a piece for the first time that each note, every single note, must be fingered?

Ehlers: Oh, no, not everything. It's not necessary. Only in very decisive places, I write fingering. The right fingering is of great importance to bring out the meaning of a phrase or musical line.

Hamilton: Yes. Because you see if you come up through the good school, from the ground up, of scales, arpeggios and so forth, your fingering falls into a pattern, and you see this, your mind sees it really before the eye catches it, almost. I mean, you see a scale passage going up and you go one-two-three, one-two-three-four, or whatever it is, without thinking. Automatically, you don't have to think of it. But it's in tricky passages, in very angular passages.

Ehlers: In polyphonic passages.

Hamilton: Polyphonic passages, right, or nasty skips and so forth, then this is when it has to--

Ehlers: You take it and experiment.

Hamilton: Yes.

Ehlers: What is comfortable, what is safe. And sometimes you have to give up the comfortable for the safe.

Hamilton: Right.

Tusler: What do you mean, safe?

Ehlers: Well, it's less risk that you miss a note.

Hamilton: Yes, absolutely. For instance, I'm thinking particularly of the Three-Part Inventions and the fugues, which are devils as far as the fingering goes because you have to practically turn your hands into pretzels to make the voices all come out. Very often you have to do a lot of finger substitutions,

finger shifts, which after a while become natural but still can go very much awry in performance. You have to drill this with yourself very [hard].

Tusler: Of course, the harpsichord demands this. It's that kind of an instrument, isn't it? I mean, much more so than the piano, wouldn't you say?

Ehlers: Yes, because harpsichord tone is so much shorter.

Hamilton: We don't have a pedal that we can cover a lot of this with, you see.

Tusler: You must sustain the melody by the way you finger it.

Hamilton: Exactly, yes. You have to be in contact with the key.

Tusler: So this is a greater problem for the harpsichordist than the pianist.

Ehlers: Ja.

Hamilton: Very definitely. And then, too, your fingering, you see, can make or break the articulation of the line. You can build in an articulation by using what the old people called an "imperfect" fingering. For instance, going two-three over a big interval. To remind yourself to make--like, for instance, in the bass of the Italian Concerto in places [sings] you can design a fingering--

Ehlers: The fingering must serve the expression of the phrase.

Hamilton: Right.

Ehlers: It's not only that the fingering is comfortable.

Sometimes it's not good if it's too comfortable.

Hamilton: True.

Ehlers: It's the design of the phrase. Fingering should be so that it is comfortable for the hand to a certain extent, but also first of all design the phrase. And so sometimes a fingering which looks to the onlooker very queer is good for the phrase.

Hamilton: Yes. But fingering should never--I don't see the sense of it ever becoming an end in itself.

Ehlers: No, heavens not.

Hamilton: It's the means to expressing what you want brought out.

Tusler: But how do you get that marvelous singing tone on the harpsichord? I think this is one of your fortes [Mme. Ehlers], that you get that, don't you agree? [question to Mr. Hamilton]

Hamilton: It is. Yes, definitely.

Ehlers: I don't know how I get it. Could you explain it? I couldn't.

Hamilton: Your whole approach, I think, Mme. Ehlers (again, I'm sort of stepping out of my own bounds), but my impression of her whole approach is a vocal one, because everything is approached from this cantabile. Everything sings. She also is very fortunate in the fact that I think she has one of the most beautiful harpsichords that I have ever heard, really. It's gorgeous, it's certainly the most beautiful Pleyel. But still, you can have a miserable player on a perfectly gorgeous instrument and you don't get this. This has to come from the player. The instrument can certainly get in your way, but--

Ehlers: It might have something to do with my early education. I had to accompany so many singers in my life.

Hamilton: I'm sure it did. I'm quite sure it did, and I know this, that any semblance of cantabile that I have in my playing I'm sure has come from exactly the same source.

Tusler: From accompanying.

Hamilton: From accompanying, and particularly accompanying singers. This I love to do far more than instrumentalists. I've always been a frustrated singer ever since I can remember. This I think has probably transferred itself over, I don't know.

Tusler: Do you feel that Malcolm has that singing style?

Ehlers: He has the same longing for the singing phrase, ja.

Hamilton: But this again, as I say, is something that has to come from within, because the harpsichord by its nature is not really a singing instrument, you know.

Ehlers: No, Landowska didn't every talk about this.

Tusler: Landowska didn't have that singing quality, did she?

Ehlers: No, she didn't approach the harpsichord this way.

It's quite interesting that Landowska was also not good as an accompanist, you can imagine. And I had first, when I was very young, to accompany singers a great deal in vocal classes, just to earn money, and subconsciously I must have imitated certain of those singers. Especially, as I think I mentioned when we talked about it, when I accompanied these two sisters who were Italian-schooled by a wonderful singer who was once a great star under Toscanini at La Scala in Milan; you had to

be good to be there. When I met her, as a teacher, she was already an old woman and couldn't sing any more, but her teaching had this bel canto, still the bel canto. Somehow subconsciously I try to get the bel canto on this plucking instrument we play, and to a certain degree one succeeds. I believe very strongly in the--what do you call it, the imagination?

Hamilton: Yes, it's an aural imagination.

Ehlers: Ja, aural imagination; before I play I know how it should sound.

Tusler: There's a sort of psychology about it that you project from inside of yourself?

Ehlers: I know what I want hear.

Hamilton: You have to have a vision, I think, of what you want.

Ehlers: Ja, ja. I [know] what I want to hear, and then it comes off better or worse, but anyhow I am guided by it.

Hamilton: Yes.

Ehlers: Whereas Landowska didn't have a vocal vision at all.

Hamilton: No.

Ehlers: If she ever accompanied singers it was such a-- what should I say, unvocal accompaniment. The human voice you have to allow to give and to take and she didn't have [this].

Hamilton: Yes, this I was going to say. No, this I get from my second-hand dealings, with her, through recordings and so forth. She seemed such a dominant type of person that I could never visualize her in an accompanying capacity.

Tusler: Or any kind of ensemble, perhaps?

Ehlers: Ja, [this is a] different thing.

Hamilton: I think she would always take the wheel, really. But then I think this vocal approach goes deeper than just in the matter of Mme. Ehlers' tone, but her approach to phrasing, I think, has to do with this, too. I know that from my very early days with Mme. Ehlers, she was always talking about "breathing" here, not making a break, but "taking" a breath here in the line.

Tusler: That's something that Dr. Schweitzer was so instrumental in bringing you to.

Ehlers: Ja.

Hamilton: [laughter] Do you remember when you had a student who signed up for voice lessons one time to improve his breathing? Do you remember that? You told me at USC one time. She nearly had a fit. Just a typical example of how sometimes terminology can go astray. This one not-too-bright student that Mme. Ehlers had [laughter] had asked her if he could change his lesson time. Of course, she was on a fairly tight schedule.

"Well," she said, "if it is really important."

He said, "Well, it's interfering with my voice class."

She said, "What are you doing taking voice? I didn't know you could sing."

He said, "Well, you told me that I should work on my breathing." [laughter] So apparently he had gone out and signed up for class voice. I guess he missed the whole point.

Ehlers: I'd forgotten this. That's true, ja.

Hamilton: I'm using this more and more with my own teaching

now. It's amazing the lack of sense of line and sweep and swing and phrasing that these youngsters have. And now I'm even resorting to (whether they do it or not I don't care, but sometimes I think they must because things start to happen) to [urging] them to sing it through themselves, and at least get some kind of a linear vocal idea. They're so hung up on fingers.

Ehlers: I agree.

Tusler: And smashing ahead?

Hamilton: Exactly. This is really, much as I adore it, a mechanical instrument. Of course, if it's played even indifferently, let alone badly, then it sounds ticky and mechanical. You have to work like a dog to make it sing, to give the impression of it singing.

Tusler: What would you say, if there is any one single thing, that a harpsichordist must have beyond anything else? A sense of rhythm, a sense of line, a feeling for the tone quality?

Ehlers: Everything. Imagination, everything.

Hamilton: Yes, I think it all comes in.

Tusler: You don't feel that any one thing is more important than the other?

Ehlers: No. I'm very sensitive about the--what should I say--physical aspects. You see, what happens in the harpsichord is you press a key, the jack goes up and plucks, but it goes down again and this makes a little noise. Subconsciously you have to take this noise also into consideration.

Hamilton: Yes, true.

Ehlers: I don't think of it any more--he doesn't think of it any more. But if you train your ear, you know exactly how much you can allow a tone to disappear.

Hamilton: Yes.

Ehlers: You can't teach this because there are those people that don't have the ear for it.

Hamilton: No. It's an odd sense. No, either they have this sensitivity or not. But I find too that in my own teaching, when I have to stop and analyze--you know, I'm constantly having students ask me, "Well, why did you do that?" or "How do you do so-and-so?" and I have to stop and think.

Half the time I really don't know. I do it, you know, completely naturally. So this [teaching] has been wonderful for me inasmuch as I've got to stop and dissect what I'm doing. And it always comes back to one thing for me, and that is timing. The timing of the attack, the timing of the sound, the timing of the release. I've found too that it's sometimes more important the way you leave the key, the way you release the key on the harpsichord than the way you [attack it], because you see we have to monkey around, really, with duration because we can't get louder or softer by virtue of our touch, so we have to do it with lengthening or shortening the notes. This will create the impression sometimes of not necessarily a crescendo or diminuendo, but certainly a rise and fall.

Tusler: I didn't realize that you had that much control over it on the harpsichord.

Hamilton: Oh, you do indeed. But it has to transcend this to the point that you're no longer aware of this. I mean, it has to become a technical ingredient, you know, a tool that you just--

Tusler: That's almost automatically there.

Hamilton: Exactly, yes. So that then it just becomes a means to express [the music]. I don't think for a moment about when I'm putting the key down and when I'm letting it up when I'm playing. Again, I have this vision of what I want in my ear and mercifully, if I'm in good shape, the fingers will do it.

Tusler: We've talked about some of the ways in which the two of you are similar. How would you say your playing is different?

Ehlers: Well, we are different personalities. I can't go into detail. [laughter] You see? And so something of this difference must come out in the playing. Even we see alike, don't we? Much alike.

Hamilton: Yes. We complement each other, you know, in many ways.

Ehlers: Our approach to music is more or less [the same]--we see a piece alike.

Hamilton: Yes, we do.

Tusler: The interpretation of it, you mean.

Ehlers: Ja. I never interfered with Malcolm because it's a great talent, he has to go his own way. But we've talked about it.

Hamilton: Oh, yes. Greatly.

Ehlers: Sometimes he could accept certain things and put them, in his own way, into his playing; sometimes he saw it differently. I think this is one of the most important things for a teacher to accept, if one has to deal with a talent like Malcolm's, is to accept it on his own terms. I say, "I would sometimes do this." Then it's up to him if he wants to do it, too. But in this way it's a wonderful thing to work with--I wouldn't call it even teaching, I would say we work together. It's painful, after having a person like Malcolm, this talent and this insight into the music as well as the instrument, to go to the others, and I'm afraid I'm getting less and less a good teacher for the others, where you have to preach every little thing. I don't mean explaining things, but--

Hamilton: No. But there has to be a stimulus. There has to be a give and take, you know. If you're not getting something from your students, it's all output, and you dry up.

Ehlers: Ja, quite right. I see this more and more. I have now at the moment three or four harpsichord students. Not untalented, but I dry up. And only in our conversation or discussion about music do I flourish again. Because you see, it's not a constant give. You have to have some--

Hamilton: Some stimulus.

Ehlers: Stimulus, and some resonance for what you're doing and saying. I feel more and more that I have developed with my students, not with all of them, but with some of them, like Malcolm, for instance, because we see things, in spite

of our entirely different way of playing and entirely different temperaments, we see things alike, more or less, ja?

Hamilton: Indeed, yes. And by the same token, I have never attempted to ever try to copy Mme. Ehlers, I mean her way of playing. She will show me something that I'll immediately take, you know, that I want to do. But I still have to go about it my own way.

Ehlers: Of course, it's the only way.

Hamilton: Because it's the only way that I can, with anyone.

Tusler: Interpretatively, you mean?

Hamilton: No, not so much interpretatively, but technically go after it. Going way back, back to Berkeley even, it was never a case of "Now do this" or "Lift your finger a little higher here" or "Do such and such." She'd say, "I need a little more on this note," or "I need something here," or she'd play it for me. And then if I wanted this, which ninety-nine times out of a hundred I did, I would have to go about it myself. Then, finally, I would see it for myself. Now, this is a matter of "Give a little more time on this one," or "Push the line a little bit," or something. But it was always a matter of showing me the end result rather than the means, which I loved very much, and I still do, because this to my mind puts the emphasis on the right end of things.

Ehlers: Ja, but it is also a shortcoming in teaching, I must confess. I was very much spoiled by teaching you, because with the other students you have to go almost to saying, "You do this or that."

Hamilton: Yes, I know, I've found this from my own experience.

Ehlers: And I lost this, I lost this, you see? because I am not used any more to "Do this, do that." I let them try to find out, and then if they don't find out, which mostly happens--

Hamilton: Then you have to. But how much better it is to at least give them their head at first, and let them muddle around with it and see, because if they do come out with it then, fine, you've made a gigantic stride.

Ehlers: No, first you have to create their inner longings; this isn't there. They don't know what they want to hear.

Hamilton: Yes. This is true.

Ehlers: They have no pictures, so I have to start to build their imagination [about what] they want--what do you want to hear? And then they look at me, you know? They have never thought.

Tusler: Is this a fundamental lack of talent, do you think?

Ehlers: I don't know, I don't know what it is.

Hamilton: I don't either. Or whether it's a matter of not having lived long enough with it--I don't know. Or whether it's something that you just [have]--I still feel this with the one or two youngsters that have gone through my hands who I feel really have it, you know, that it's a flair, a oneness with the music and with the instrument, that one can't teach.

Ehlers: I think so, too.

Hamilton: Either they have it, or they don't.

Ehlers: I think I have the flair. Those who didn't have the

flair didn't get it from Landowska.

Hamilton: No, I can imagine. I'm quite sure.

Ehlers: She was the least to give it because she didn't talk with the student.

Hamilton: But if they were intelligent enough, there's so much that they could have gotten--there's so much that I've gotten out of listening; not all of it I accept, no. But there's so much that I get even out of listening to Landowska's recordings. I mean, the greatness of it. First of all, if you can go about solving your own problems as to how, and if you can evaluate what is good for you and what isn't. But with the rank-and-file student, who is expecting to be "taught" in the real sense of the word, I mean, to be led by the hand, then it doesn't go.

Tusler: But the true performer is really born?

Hamilton: The true performer--yes, I think so.

Ehlers: Ja, I also, ja.

Hamilton: And this is a joy, because then not only can you guide this, but it stimulates this wonderful back and forth, give and take.

Ehlers: Of course. This is why I was so sorry and sad when Malcolm had finished, because it was always such a give and take at the same time.

Hamilton: Yes. No, I still need her judgment very much.

Ehlers: Oh, ja, you always need judgment from outside.

Hamilton: Always, always. Forever. And I wouldn't have dared ever put the Well-Tempered [Clavier] out on the market

without her ears going over it very carefully.

Ehlers: Well, so do I need you now. If one has the same-- what should I say? directions to go and being more or less really agreed in musical taste (otherwise it couldn't be done), one needs [that] very much.

Hamilton: I think every performer needs an objective pair of ears, because when you're at the instrument you can't hear a hundred percent what you're doing.

Ehlers: Ja.

Hamilton: So much of it is in your mind, and your mind normally should be ahead of your fingers because of this matter of the vision coming first and then it coming after. But sometimes you're not quite sure whether it has matched up, whether the mind's ear and your actual ear have made the identical picture.

Ehlers: Ja, what you want, and what you really do.

Hamilton: Right. So I think everyone [needs this], I mean barring the medium of tape recording where you can play and then listen back to yourself; and even then you still, I think, need someone's reaction, if it's someone that you value, and there's no one's reaction that I value more than Mme. Ehlers'. No, I'll always need her, really.

Ehlers: I need you, too, because you're the only person who knows what the instrument can do and what it can't do, ja? Knows the piece, knows the style of the music, and also what one has to know at the level where Malcolm is now, even if I would do certain things differently, what is his personal--

what would you say?

Hamilton: Reaction.

Ehlers: Reaction. And how he has to do and how I have to do it.

Tusler: Do you sometimes violently disagree with an interpretation of Malcolm's?

Ehlers: So far, I have never had to, have I?

Hamilton: [laughter] Well, I'll wait. [much laughter]

Ehlers: If I had, then I would have blown up and he would remember. [laughter]

Tusler: There were never any blowups before.

Hamilton: No. There are some things, as I say, that we interpret differently, and we've agreed to disagree on certain things. By and large, our approach as to what we want, what the music wants from us, let's say, is basically the same all the way along the line.

Ehlers: This brings me to something very important. Don't you think what the music wants is there for always and can't be juggled around? But people see differently, probably.

Hamilton: Yes, they do.

Ehlers: Or they see different things in it, because otherwise we wouldn't have such [disagreements]--beginning with tempo, the idea about it.

Hamilton: No, I think so. Right, right. No, it has to awaken this in the person, and if this little receiver set isn't there, it never will.

Tusler: But there's a wide variation of possible interpretations?

Ehlers: I don't know if it's wide, this is what I'm just asking. In tempo, it can't be.

Hamilton: No, no. No, that's very true because we're governed to a great degree, by the form, the dances and so forth, you know, in the suites.

Ehlers: Ja, but even if it's not a dance, if it's a prelude, for instance, which is a free piece, ja?

Hamilton: Yes, yes.

Ehlers: As in the English Suites or Partitas or a prelude of the Well-Tempered.

Hamilton: Well, I think you're probably right. But there's a margin, you know, there's a difference.

Ehlers: A margin, ja.

Hamilton: For instance, there is no absolute metronomic identical tempo for anybody. My tempo in something might be just a hair faster than Mme. Ehlers', and vice versa. And yet we could both bring it off. Of course, when you're playing together this is a different thing, and we have never to my knowledge ever had any kind of disagreement at all as far as our two-harpsichord work goes. It's been wonderful.

Ehlers: No, we both together experiment, and the less good a piece was, the more we had to experiment.

Hamilton: Right, sure.

Tusler: Of course, there are so many variables in the situation, like the size of the hall.

Hamilton: Oh, indeed.

Ehlers: This I never could take into consideration. I'm

sorry, I can't, never did, no. I have my tempo, which I have established for this piece, and if the hall is large or small it can't make any difference to me.

Hamilton: No, I don't think it does make any difference to you, but I bet you that probably you compensate for it subconsciously. I know I do, because when I'm not consciously playing faster or slower but my ear tells me how I'm sounding, sometimes I feel that I'm going in a fast piece at breakneck speed and sometimes I feel that I'm really playing quite comfortably, and the sound is still the same. I think that we adjust to these things without knowing it. But it's an unconscious thing. I think the ear leads.

Ehlers: But on the stage you don't know how it sounds at the end of the hall.

Hamilton: Well, I never do anyway, really.

Ehlers: I listen only to me, what I [do].

Hamilton: Yes. So do I. Yes. But then sometimes different halls, though, can make quite a difference. For instance, the way I play in Hancock and the way I play in Schoenberg Auditorium, I'm quite sure if you recorded both of those and played them side by side would be slightly [different]. But I'm not aware of this onstage. I couldn't be, I haven't time.

Ehlers: When the tempo sounds right to you here, you play it. You know what you want from the piece.

Hamilton: Of course, there are many, many variants in registration. Now, one's approach to registration is another thing, how many ways are there to register a fugue, or a

prelude, or something like that.

Tusler: And this is a truly subjective thing, where tempo is more determined.

Hamilton: Yes. Tempo is more [determined]--right. The tempo is very basic. I always remember one of the first things I ever heard Mme. Ehlers say, "Tempo is the life blood of the music."

Ehlers: Ja, it is.

Hamilton: "It makes or breaks." And it's absolutely true. If the tempo is right, if it's right for you, then everything else will fall into place. If the tempo is wrong, then it doesn't matter. And this, I must confess, I miss in many harpsichordists today, I really do. This is one thing Landowska had that was fantastic.

Ehlers: Ja.

Hamilton: And one thing that Mme. Ehlers has, and Rafael Puyana. These, I think, are the three really greats as far as I'm concerned, because there is never, to use a cliché, literally never a dull moment. Everything has life breathed into it, and everything moves and goes, has a direction.

Ehlers: Well, the same is true with your playing.

Hamilton: I hope so.

Ehlers: Or else I wouldn't like it. It can be endlessly boring if this is missing.

Hamilton: Oh, indeed. Absolutely.

Ehlers: You can't do what the pianist can supply, constant crescendo and diminuendo, so it would be unbearable.

Hamilton: But rhythm, of course, to me is so basic anyway, that unrhythmic piano playing is also unbearable.

Ehlers: Ja, true, but you can hear--

Hamilton: But it's worse on the harpsichord.

Ehlers: You can fake with crescendo and diminuendo constantly, which you can't on the harpsichord.

Hamilton: True.

Tusler: I want to ask you about some of your more famous episodes of playing together. What are some of the things that you've done together?

Ehlers: Well, Malcolm has a better memory for this than I.

Hamilton: I think probably, as far as I can tell, we are the only two-harpsichord team on the continent. The only other duo-harpsichord team that I have heard of is Puyana and that Spanish girl [Genoveva] Galvez, who made a recording in Spain. I don't even know how we started out, in fact. We just decided that this would be fun, two or three years ago--I think it was the spring of '64 that we gave a concert at USC for the library. That was our first performance, and it was an enormous success. We had a whale of a time, we just had lots of fun. And one thing led to another. We opened the Pasadena Art Festival series; we played at the Ojai Festival; we played on a concert in Berkeley; and of course, we've done concertos together, we've done the Bach double concertos several times now. This summer we're playing at the Carmel Festival. We're playing together in the Concerto for Four Harpsichords with Hal Chaney, another of Mme. Ehlers' students,

and Ralph Linsley. And then Mme. Ehlers and I are doing a two-harpsichord program as well.

Tusler: Is there actually very much literature in this field?

Did Bach write a great many things for two harpsichords?

Hamilton: Not too much, unfortunately not, though much of the literature is written by lesser lights. The sons of Bach. One of our favorite pieces is the big Mozart D Major Sonata, which one only hears played on pianos. I think we're the only ones that dare to play it on harpsichords, and it comes off really phenomenally well. Several of the suites of the French people, such as Couperin, were written, if not definitely with two harpsichords in mind, he'd have a note saying that these could be played either by gamba and harpsichord or by two harpsichords, and so forth. So you capitalize on this. And then there have been a lot of original works--for instance, there's a big sonata by Wilhelm Friedemann Bach, there are quite a few things by Johann Christian Bach, and some lesser known things. There's a French composer, Gaspard Le Roux, who has written a little suite for harpsichord, which is not particularly profound, but charming music. One of our great joys are--we haven't played all of them yet--the six sonatas that Bach wrote for the pedal harpsichord for Wilhelm Friedemann's instruction. Of course, these are known today as organ sonatas because this is the only instrument with the two manuals and pedal--pedal harpsichords are practically extinct--on which these are played. So we have, I can't really say "transcribed"

them actually, because we're just playing exactly what's there, we're not adding anything to it; but we play them on the two harpsichords and they come off really very, very well. But we've certainly met with great enthusiasm wherever we've played. For one thing, people don't get a chance to hear this literature very often, and then really, in all honesty, you'd say, I think, it's played pretty well, too.

Ehlers: Ja. I think we've certainly gotten on very well together.

Hamilton: It's certainly got plenty of life.

Ehlers: It's very sad that the literature is very small.

Hamilton: Yes, I wish it were larger.

Tusler: I was wondering how much there was in the contemporary field.

Hamilton: Very little practically nothing for two. Distler has written a concerto, I think, for two harpsichords and this is the only thing that I know of. And I don't really know the work.

Tusler: Of course, I know how you feel about playing modern music.

Ehlers: I wouldn't, because I have no inner contact with it. I can't play it well if I have no inner contact with it.

Hamilton: Again, unfortunately, we feel very much alike on this too, even though I'm a younger generation, and I should, but I still have great difficulties, let's say.

Tusler: Maybe this is in the nature of the harpsichordist, that he is attracted to the instrument in the first place

because of the old music.

Hamilton: No, not necessarily, because there are many harpsichordists [who play modern music]. The Poulenc, the Martin things, this is fine, but there's still enough romanticism in it, you know. No, with me, it's a great ineptitude for one thing, and also (I justify this to myself, and it may be rightly or wrongly, I really don't care) the fact that as far as the experimental things that are written for the instrument, I am so out of it as far as this goes that it would take me really an age to grope with the notes. And then I'm not really convinced of what I have when I'm through. My own philosophy is this: I have so little time to practice and to play with all the teaching I'm doing, that even if I had it, and heaven knows how long or short my life span is going to be, I'll never really come to grips with all the music in my own period that I love so much. Consequently I'm being very selfish about it. I dearly love the baroque period; this is my period, and Bach and Scarlatti are my "meat and potatoes". The more time I can spend on this the happier I am. If something is going to take me away from it, then I want to be very sure it's going to be really worthwhile and I'm going to love it when I'm through. I'm a very bad liar on stage. If I am playing something I don't like it shows all over me.

Tusler: When you played the [Henri] Lazarof pieces a month or so ago it was really very exciting.

Hamilton: Really? I'm very glad because I really didn't

feel very excited about them. Not that there's anything wrong with the music; this is, from all the authorities whom I revere, really an up-and-coming great composer. It's just a foreign language to me, I don't understand it.

Tusler: Did you have to work harder on that than you would ordinarily?

Hamilton: Oh, you have no idea. Absolutely, and with nothing really to hang on to. This is one of the things that bothers me most about this sort of thing, that when I work for hours on a passage out of that piece and get up and go for a drink of water and come back again, I'd swear I'd never seen it before, about five minutes later. Nothing is held in my ear, in my fingers. Drives me crazy.

Ehlers: I want to ask you what you think is the reason for this? Don't the fingers react--don't they have a memory of the phrases?

Hamilton: They practically have to, until this is really drilled in. This, however, is only one of many problems we face in coping with contemporary music, and why we both have chosen to concentrate our energies on the music of the baroque period, which is so dear to us.



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

Madame
Alice Ehlers

Whereas, MADAME ALICE EHLERS, INTERNATIONALLY RENOWNED HARPSICORD VIRTUOSA, PROFESSOR OF MUSIC AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA, AND SOUTH BAY RESIDENT OF THE CITY OF TORRANCE, HAS OBSERVED HER EIGHTIETH BIRTHDAY, ACTIVELY TEACHING MUSIC AND PERFORMING; AND

Whereas, MADAME EHLERS HAS CONTRIBUTED TREMENDOUS EFFORT AND TALENT TO THE PROMOTION OF FINE MUSIC BOTH LOCALLY AND ABROAD, GIVING LECTURES AND RECITALS THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES, EUROPE, SOUTH AMERICA AND THE ORIENT, AND SINCE 1942 HAS BEEN PROFESSOR OF MUSIC AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA WHERE SHE TEACHES THE HARPSICORD AND GIVES CLASSES IN THE INTERPRETATION OF EIGHTEENTH CENTURY MUSIC FOR INSTRUMENTALISTS AND VOCALISTS; AND

Whereas, THIS GRACIOUS LADY HAS BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH THE GREATEST MASTERS OF THE ART OF MUSIC AND HAS BEEN THE RECIPIENT OF NUMEROUS PRIZES AND HONORARY DEGREES, INCLUDING THE MENDELSSOHN PRIZE OF THE BERLIN STATE ACADEMY; AND

Whereas, IN KEEPING WITH HER CONSISTENT SUPPORT OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG MUSICIANS, THE SOUTH BAY CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY HAS ESTABLISHED THE ALICE EHLERS YOUNG MUSICIANS PERFORMANCE FUND TO ASSIST YOUNG MUSICIANS WITH FUNDS TO FURTHER THEIR MUSICAL CAREERS;

Now Therefore Be It Resolved BY THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF THE COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES THAT MADAME ALICE EHLERS BE HIGHLY COMMENDED FOR HER CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE COMMUNITY, THE NATION AND THE WORLD THROUGH HER ARTISTIC AND HUMANITARIAN WORKS IN THE FIELD OF MUSIC; AND

Be It Further Resolved THAT CONGRATULATIONS AND BEST WISHES BE EXTENDED BY THIS HONORABLE BOARD TO A GRAND, NOBLE LADY UPON HER EIGHTIETH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION.

ADOPTED BY ORDER OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF THE COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES,
STATE OF CALIFORNIA

JS

Frank D. Bonnell
CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD AND SUPERVISOR 1ST DISTRICT

Kenneth H. H.
SUPERVISOR 2ND DISTRICT

Barton W. Chase
SUPERVISOR 4TH DISTRICT

James L. Davis
SUPERVISOR 3RD DISTRICT

Walter M. Jones
SUPERVISOR 5TH DISTRICT

ADDENDA

Schweitzer-Ehlers Correspondence

The letters reproduced here in the addenda have been selected from Mme. Alice Ehlers correspondence with Dr. Albert Schweitzer, and included as part of this manuscript because of their general interest. The correspondence extends from 1932 to 1965 and is largely in German, although a few letters are in French; all are handwritten. Those included here have been translated from the German by Dr. Rudolf K. Englebarts, formerly head of the UCLA Library Catalog Department.

The original letters are in the possession of Mme. Ehlers, who kindly gave permission to the UCLA Library to have them photographed. The xeroxed copies of the originals, as well as the Engelbarts translations, are contained in the Library's Department of Special Collections.

Gunsbach, September 16, 1932

Dear little sister Cembalo-

Today autumn fog lies over the meadows. It is indescribably beautiful. The organ is completed and sounds wonderful. We all feel homesick for you. With many greetings...It was so beautiful.

From my heart

Your Albert Schweitzer

Lambaréné, June 19, 1935

Dear Cembalinen-

So then, finally you are going to Gunsbach! But that is a good sign. I deduce from it that you are flooded with contracts for recitals. I am overjoyed at this! Last year we dared not hope for anything like this. And how dear your letter! How wonderful that you will be able to enjoy Gunsbach.-- I am writing in a great hurry. I am interrupted every minute. The luggage of two nurses who will depart, is being prepared. And there are continually motorboats anchoring at the hospital. You ought to see this hubbub.-- The sun is shining beautifully in the river...And how, with all this splendor, everything looks so hopeless about the world of man...Often it is impossible to understand it... Stay healthy.

[Signature removed]

.....

Lausanne, June 19, 1936

Dear Cembalinen

I am so glad that you are having a rest in Gunsbach. A thousand thanks for your dear lines. Do not eat too many cherries and get sick. Don't sleep until you are in a stupor. And ask no foolish question. I write to you to England that you may remain in Gunsbach as long as you desire. And so it is to be. You will arrange things so that there will be as little work with your room as possible. And if there is any work to do and you can pitch in, please do it. So then your presence will be in no way noticeable except that a few more leaves for salad will be needed daily. I take pleasure to look forward to July 12 when I shall see you in Gunsbach.

Who would have thought that day in Berlin that one day you and I would find our home under one and the same roof?...

Yours as of old

Albert Schweitzer

May 5, 1937
 Lambaréné. Send letters
 to Gunsbach

Alice Ehlers
 Dear little sister Cembalo.

I was sorry not to meet you in Bordeaux. I had been looking forward to it. Your lines of the 16th of March are in front of me. --It is terribly murky and sultry here on the equator. Perspiration is dripping from me while I am writing this. I am thinking of you and I am happy that I know you, and that I share with you all the heavy burdens you carry. --And that the lines of Bach's music are so clear before you mind's eye is beautiful. --I am proud that I was permitted to give something to you -- Here I am drifting in a maelstrom of work. The assistants are skilled. There is a high morale in the Hospital. --I must not write letters. This is just a small greeting -- And keep up your courage. --See you in Gunsbach. --Kind regards to you and yours.

Thinking of you tenderly,

As ever your

Albert Schweitzer

.....

Doctor Albert Schweitzer
 Lambaréné, French
 Equatorial Africa
 [Stamp]

Via Port Genlil,
 November 17, 1950

Mrs. Alice Ehlers
 846 West 42nd Place
 Los Angeles 37, California

Dear Cembalinen,

I am just engaged in putting some order into the chaos of unanswered letters (there are hundreds). And so I encounter yours of June 1, 1950! So I take a few minutes to write to

you, for if I were to return it to the pile of unanswered letters I wouldn't know if I'd ever get the opportunity to reply. First a remark about the odd condition of incapacity in which I found myself at the time of your stay in Gunsbach. When I went to bed after your departure because I simply could not stand up any more it was discovered...that I had a fever of 40°, but no reason could be found for it. This was the 5th time in my life, that this happened to me; the first time I had it was when I was 24 years old! Two days later the fever had disappeared, as if blown away. Remained a few days of weakness. And this happened just when you were here and when I had so been looking forward to playing Bach and César Franck for you on the Gunsbach organ tuned under my supervision. (It had suffered much during the war, when the tower had been shot away and when it stood in the water). Long ago I had been intending to explain this to you. When I dragged myself up to the church on the hill and later beside you stumbled home, little did I know that I had such high fever. Such a thick skin has been bequeathed to me by the muses. I am pleased that you have such a busy and [undecipherable] life. Too bad that you cannot go to Boston. That you esteem the [undecipherable] book makes me happy--wrote about me without knowing me. I am wondering how your poor brother is? ... I have been experiencing a very difficult year (it is now a year since my return). Often I felt I could no longer bear the burden of cares, excitement and work. But finally I always was able to carry on. And now things are progressing relatively well. I have two physicians who are not only skilled, and pleasant persons but who wish to dedicate themselves permanently to my work. And so it is worthwhile to train them for the work. Eight very able nurses,...But for a whole year I did not have a single free afternoon...and always worked late into the night, and in the morning I get up at 6:15 o'clock...When you come back again to Gunsbach be sure not to make your stay too short so that the 40° fever which the job of seeing you again is probably going to give me may have time to moderate. Concerning the inventions, this is the situation: Play all grace notes. Bach intends them as exercises [undecipherable] and for the fingers they represent a considerable exercise for independence [?]. And the grace notes do not disturb the main themes when they are played correctly and musically. Thank you for caring so much for me; we have such beautiful memories in common.

Pardon the writing; my poor hand has a writer's cramp and can do no better.

Yours

Albert Schweitzer

Doctor Schweitzer, Lambaréné
[December 17, 1959]

Alice Ehlers

Dear Cembalinen. So you are going to travel to Boston in order to give a concert on your instrument in my honor to celebrate my 85th birthday on March 17. And the viola de gamba artist Eva Heinitz will join in the concert to play that instrument with its wonderful tone. I am writing at once to thank you and Mrs. Heinitz. I am today (this is the 17th of December 1959) on board a ship which is taking me back to Africa; we are skirting the coast south of Dakar. Whether on March 17, 1960, with all the load of work in Lambaréné I shall be able to write to you, I cannot predict as yet. So I do it now while I am at least partially my own master. But I shall note the day on the calendar, and I will calculate, translated in Lambaréné time, the evening hour at which you will be giving your recital, so that in thought I shall be with you at the concert. Please give my regards to Eva Heinitz. I feel sorry for myself for being almost 85 years old. I would much rather be 30 years old and quite unknown. But I must consider myself fortunate because everyone is so good to me. My life is very hard. But the love which mankind gives me keeps me upright in my great fatigue.

With all my heart
your Albert Schweitzer

.....

Dr. Albert Schweitzer
Lambaréné
Republic of Gabon
[stamp]
June 25, 1961

Mrs. Alice Ehlers
960 - 9th Street
Hermosa Beach, California, USA

Dear Cembalinen:

Again you have given recitals to help my hospital! I thank you from the bottom of my heart. How sweet of you to

do this for me! The program was very beautiful. I am also going to write to Mr. Fiske and his orchestra. Today is Sunday. I am writing to you at my desk in the consultation room, in the noise which always fills it. About myself there is not much to be said. My life runs along evenly, only it is getting more and more difficult. The hospital is constantly growing in size. Every year new buildings must be built so that the sick can be taken care of properly. I myself have to oversee the building process, which is a heavy burden for me. Building can proceed only during the rainless season, between June and September. The ever increasing correspondence is another great load on my shoulders. It is heartening to be in correspondence with so many persons. But where can I find the time for so much letter writing? And my poor hand with its writer's cramp, and my eyes, so greatly overworked, demand more and more consideration...

Thus I weave as well as I can along through my existence. And I feel that I am getting older year after year. But I must not complain. Relatively speaking I am still quite sturdy and can still work very well yet. My daughter will be staying with us here for some weeks. Two of my grandchildren will arrive soon. They will be permitted to come each year as long as I live. The money for these long trips, it seems to me, is being spent for a good purpose! I live quite a bit with my memories. I can see you clearly, in company with a cellist, that day when you came to see me in Berlin. And I remember also quite well your long sojourn in Gunsbach. Perhaps you heard on the radio a few weeks ago that I was supposed to be sick. There is not a word of truth in it. It is unbelievable that the radio is ready to spread such careless news! Maybe it is like that only in Africa.--

Everything goes smoothly in the hospital. I have excellent physicians and excellent nurses. They all get along very well. I really must consider myself fortunate! This atom business has been oppressing me for a year, the situation goes from bad to worse. It is depressing--

With kind thoughts as

As always

your Albert Schweitzer

I enclose the latest photo of myself. I hope it will please you.

.....

Doctor Albert Schweitzer
 Lambaréné
 Republic of Gabon
 Equatorial Africa

October 4, 1961

Mrs. Alice Ehlers
 c/o University of Wisconsin
 Department of Music
 Madison, Wisconsin USA

Dear Cembalinen

To your letter of September 10, 1961, I now wish to tell you that I had to inform the conductor of the Bach-Festspiele that my work does not permit me to be present during the Bach days in Carmel. Alas in my life I cannot look forward to anything except work. How gladly I would have come to this Festspiele. I even had to give up the hope of going to Europe for a few weeks this fall, because I am busy building which has to be completed before the onset of the rainy season (late in fall). Building is impossible in the rainy period.

A thousand thanks for your dear letter of August 28, 1961. How you poor dear must have suffered. But how fortunate that modern medical science can save people who are in such dire straits...

Baroque music is a foolish term to signify an epoch of musical history. Baroque really means "crazy". It was used to signify the architectural style of church building which originated in the 18th century and which had no relation to Gothic and Romanesque, and was simply a movement which developed a new type without any genuine style. But that has nothing to do with the developmental situation of music. It would be best to simply state the period for music: beginning of 16th century, End of 16th century. -Beginning of 17th century, end of 17th century. - Beginning of 18th century, end of 18th century.--Essentially Bach belongs to the Gothic period. His music is Gothic in style. So do not use the word Baroque music for music of his period except with the statement of the time period. Do not use the stupid word Baroque which can be applied only to the architecture of the epoch.

With all my heart

as ever
 your

Albert Schweitzer

Alice Ehlers 416 Calle Major

Redondo Beach, California

Dr. Albert Schweitzer
Lambaréné, Gabon
West Equatorial Africa

June 17, 1965

Dear Cembalinchen.

Your letter of April has given me pleasure. I see that you are working hard and that you have success. Everything you are writing is of interest to me. --I am writing this in the large consultation room. I cannot write as much as I would like to because I have to rest my poor overworked hand with its writer's cramp, so it will not completely leave me in the lurch. My correspondence has grown to immense proportions. And then to decipher this scribbling and to suffer the torture of reading things which were typed, and the letters faded and no spacing was left between lines. And these people require that I answer myself. But enough of complaining. I possess something which is very beautiful in my life: that my philosophy of humanity is making its way in the world and that it means something for mankind. It is making its way thanks to its innate strength, because it is true and because it brings a new spirit into this dreadful era of atomic weapons. I cannot understand that I have been responsible for this revolution in thinking, that my book Civilization and Ethics would have such an impact. The doctrine of reverence for life is now being taught in many schools. It made its way without opposition; it originated here in Lambaréné. -That is why I feel so much at home here. My hospital is doing well, only it is constantly growing. Do you still remember the name of the gentleman who was with you and who sent the hospital such fine shovels and working equipment? Please remember me to him and tell him that they are still in use and are giving us good service and that I always think of him in gratitude. Greetings to all acquaintances.

Yours

Albert Schweitzer

To hear from you is always an experience for me.

Ehlers' Notes on Schweitzer-Wauchope
Meeting

The following notes were made from memory by Mme.

Ehlers directly after the meeting of Dr. Schweitzer and Sir Arthur Wauchope, British High Commissioner in Palestine, from 1931-1938, at which she was present. In the text of Mme. Ehlers' tape-recorded memoirs, there is further commentary by her on this meeting, and her own spoken translation of the notes.

October 28, 1935

I have experienced a few wonderful hours and shall try to record them. I visited the revered doctor, in company with Sir Arthur Wauchope. I did not look forward to this meeting, because from experience I know how empty and disappointing such meetings generally are.

Sir Arthur raises questions, and the doctor answers in his patient and definitive manner.

"Have we developed in a religious sense?" Yes, for we have tried to realize the ethical aspect of religion more seriously. It does not suffice to teach morality, it needs to be lived. The basic concept of all great thinkers is the same. Love is the best way of being rational!

"Are you not angry with me that I ask so many questions?"

"No! When earnest men meet and their time is limited the only right procedure is to ask and to answer.

"We have progressed but the last 100 years have seen another retrogression. That is hard for us to grasp, that we deny and forget the truths we have possessed at one time and then have slipped back."

"What is your opinion of the Norse-Germanic religion which the Germans are presently attempting to revive?"

"I do not understand that belief; it has nothing to do with religion."

One remark of Sir Arthur's moved me greatly. That was when he said that Palestine is full of hatreds and that it needs love more than any other country. And then he asked Albert Schweitzer:

"Can you tell me why my tree of good will cannot flourish in Palestine?"

Schweitzer does not know the country and so he could not answer the question. He only said that his work in Lambaréné was much easier than Sir Arthur's work in Palestine. When we took leave I was asked to translate Sir Arthur's words: "Sometimes it takes a whole lifetime and you fail to establish friendly relations, and sometimes in one minute you make a friend out of a man."

The doctor asked me to thank Sir Arthur for his visit and to tell him how glad he was to meet him and to express his gratitude for coming.

...I had a wonderful afternoon! First all alone tea with Sir Arthur, thereafter we drove to see Schweitzer. I jotted down some particulars. The two men were at once animated by great mutual sympathy. I remained silent; his English Secretary took notes. I did not really want to accompany him, because I was so nervous. But his Excellency and the doctor wanted me there. And now I am glad, for I shall retain a lasting memory of it. I ought to take more notes Mrs. Schweitzer told me. On the trip from Dover to London-- I went to meet him; we were quite alone and I told him so much and answered so solemnly. To my question: Are you happy? he answered in the affirmative; for I work and my work is successful. As an individual I no longer exist, I am no longer flesh and blood individually. I live as a kind of "extended being" [?] - He has no use for philosophy as pure science. Philosophy has justification only if it injects itself substantially into life as humanity. This was the philosophy of the Greeks, closely connected with the state. - Unfortunately my memory is rather poor, and my rendering of the conversation is even poorer, though at the moment it seems very lucid to me. It is a pity for he expresses himself so simply and without any reservation.-

Well and now, just arrived home, I find an umbrella purchased in the most expensive umbrella store; very elegant, magnificent quality. From Sir Arthur! I am angry!

INDEX

- Accompanying 385-387
 Alderman, Pauline 209-211, 212
 Aldrich, Putnam 363, 365, 374
 Alfano, Sr. 220-221
Algemeen Handelsblad, Het,
 Amsterdam 346, 348
 Allegro Recording Company 180
 Allemande 144, 251
 Allen, Sir Hugh 45, 49, 112-113
 Amati violin 263
 Amstad, Marietta and Marta 41-44, 51, 52, 92-93, 114
 115, 158, 160, 169, 216-220,
 347-348, 385
 Anderson, Marian 361-362
 André, Volkmar 64, 343
 Articulation 201-202, 383
 see also Phrasing
- Bach, Carl Philipp Emanuel 365
 Bach, Johann Christian 401
 ✓ Bach, Johann Sebastian 3-6, 9, 23-24, 26, 31,
 345, 403, 407, 408;
 197-198
 96, 98
 34, 124-127, 130-131, 144-149;
 196, 198-199, 202, 245-246
 313-315
 131-132, 146, 224, 306
 81-84, 190, 197, 201-202,
 239-240, 244-245, 248, 251-
 252, 306
 247-248
 40, 78-84, 144-146, 187,
 190, 201, 248, 257-258
 323
 147-148, 196, 241-244, 252,
 257, 258, 259, 267, 300-
 305, 311, 315, 137, 319
 57-58
 83
 146-147, 243
 50, 75-76, 106-107, 115
 compared to Handel,
 harpsichord of,
 interpretation of,
 dynamics
 legato,
 ornamentation,
 phrasing,
 rhythm, dotted,
 tempo,
 memorization of,
 piano performances of,
 Soviet attitude toward,
 symbolism in,
 transcriptions,
 250th anniversary celebration,
 BBC,

works:

- Art of Fugue, 77, 102;
 David ordetration, 154, 155, 156;
 Graeser orchestration, 149-157, 215;
 USC version, 156
Brandenburg Concerti, 196, 328;
 No. 5, 209, 216, 334-336, 338-339
Capriccio on the Departure
of My Beloved Brother 12
Christmas Oratorio, 222, 362
Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue, 11-12, 121-122, 319, 348;
 performance analysis of, 268-300
 Concerti for harpsichord, 27, 400-401
 Concerto for four harpsichords, 325
 Concerto for two violins, 143, 223
 English Suites, 397
 Fantasy in C Minor, 17, 27, 74, 281
Goldberg Variations, 26, 265, 334
Inventions, Two and Three
Part, 3, 4, 184-186, 228, 229,
 230, 231, 255, 300, 307,
 382, 408
 114, 319, 383
 64
 397;
 314
 83
 145, 198-199, 226,
 227, 235, 236, 259,
 302, 318
 215, 222
 64, 215, 222, 339, 352
 342
 179
 401-402
 328
 35-36, 129, 136, 181, 244,
 255, 284, 288-289, 291,
 293, 394-395, 397
 229, 401
 180, 216, 325-327,
 336, 339, 400, 411
 268n., 290
 188-192, 196-202, 239-261,
 300-308, 317-318, 411

 Italian Concerto,
Musical Offering,
Partitas,
 No. 2,
 No. 4,
 No. 6,

St. John Passion
St. Matthew Passion,
Sonata for flute, No. 1,
 Sonatas for gamba,
 Sonatas for pedal harpsichord,
 Sonatas for violin,
Well-Tempered Clavier,

 Bach, Wilhelm Friedemann
 Bach Festival, Carmel

Bach Gesellschaft
 Baroque style

 see also
 Names of individual composers
 Bechstein Saal, Berlin
 Becker, Hugo
 Beethoven, Ludwig van

41, 158
 77
 4, 5, 9, 44, 59, 145, 201,
 244, 287, 318

- Beethoven Centenary, Vienna(1927) 44-45, 55, 60, 61
 Bell Telephone Hour 361
 ✓Berg, Alban 6, 8, 13, 33, 64
 Berlin, Germany 29-30
 musical life in,
 Biber, Heinrich Franz von, 32-33, 35-37, 62, 150, 336
 Biblical sonatas 268n.
 Bischoff, Hans 220-221
 Bologna Conservatory 363, 364, 374, 375
 Bostwick, Irene 4, 5, 24, 90, 145
 Brahms, Johannes 237, 246, 287, 290, 364
 British Broadcasting Corporation 33, 62, 75-76, 106, 114
 Buenos Aires, Argentina 159, 162-163, 165-166
 Bukofzer, Manfred 188, 213
 Bülow, Hans von 268n., 283
 Busoni, Ferruccio 171, 184, 275, 283

 Casadesus, Robert 243
 Casals, Pablo 44, 55
 Challis harpsichord 262-263, 265-266
 Chamber duets, baroque 41, 43-44, 115-116,
 158, 217, 221-222
 Chaney, Harold 205, 400
 Chiapert, _____ 91-92, 98
 Chopin, Frédéric 4, 5, 9, 23, 90, 230,
 239, 318
 Clavichord 252-256, 301
 Collegium Musicum, USC 182-183, 184, 187
 Coolidge Festival 173, 324
 Corelli, Arcangelo 148, 307, 308, 324
 Couperin, François 130, 138, 148, 197,
 241, 243, 244, 319, 320, 40
 Crosby, Bing 47-48, 52, 177, 211
 Crown, John 203-204, 205, 207, 208,
 212, 234, 235, 303
 Czerny, Carl 230

 Dahl, Ejarne B. 103
 Dahl, Ingolf 156, 182, 183, 187
 Daquin, Louis 62-63
 Dart, Thurston 50, 99
 David, Hans Theodore 154, 155, 156, 191
 Deak, Mr. _____ 207
 De Blaise, William 103-104, 264-265, 266
 Decca Recoding Company 178, 179, 362
Denkmäler deutscher tonkunst 14, 36
Dirschner, _____ 15
 Distler, Hugo 402
 Dowd harpsichord 99, 104
 Downes, Olin 45, 173, 346-347
 Ducloux, Walter 216

- Dynamics 122, 143, 147-148, 192, 194-196, 198, 199, 202, 246, 285
286, 290-292, 310, 399-400
- Ehlers, Alfred 14, 38, 40, 46, 54, 61, 94-97, 110, 175-176
- Ehlers, Alice
and Hindemith, 32-37, 40, 42-43, 61-63, 111, 149-150;
and Landowska 14-16, 17-20, 24-28, 29, 160
and Schweitzer, 162, 172-174, 373, 379;
53-54, 68-84, 117-124, 131-135, 355-360;
405-412
correspondence 20-22, 87-90
harpsichords: first, 90-98
second, 50-54, 110-112, 175
leaves Germany, 46-48, 176
moves to US, 14-18, 23, 24-28, 30-32, 170
musical education: 1-13, 23-24, 229-234
Berlin Hochschule,
Vienna,
see also Landowska, Wanda
performance:
Europe, 27, 32-37, 40-46, 49-52, 61-66, 75-76, 113-116, 156, 215, 327-328, 339-354;
66-67, 105-110;
54-60
158-166;
45-48, 52, 209, 216, 324-327, 331-333, 336-339, 352-35400-402
121, 248A-249, 334-335
178-181
138-149, 181-208, 222-229, 234-252, 256-261, 300-318, 365-366, 370-374, 391-394;
188-189, 212-214, 225, 228, 2182-184, 187;
143-149, 189-192, 197-199, 222-228, 236-246, 257-261, 306-308, 311
48-49, 181-183, 209-214
- Israel, 14, 16, 45n., 176, 302, 303, 327, 331
Russia, 44-45, 55, 174
South America, 112-113
US, 301-303, 308-311, 315, 384-387
- two-harpsichord, 218-220
practice methods, 65
recordings, 30-31, 32, 62, 150, 222
teacher,
- baroque class (USC),
Collegium Musicum (USC),
interpretation class (USC),
- USC position,
- Ehlers, Christina
see Wentworth, Christina Ehlers
- Ehlers, Maria
- Engel, Carl
- England
- Espressivo
- Ferni, Signorina
- Feuermann, Emanuel
- Figured bass

- Finger technique 231-234, 311-313, 315-317,
379-380, 388-390
- Fingering 380-384
- Fischer, Edwin 286, 287
- Fiske, Mr. 410
- Florence, Italy 92
- Form, baroque 249-250, 251
- Franck, César 408
- Frederick the Great, Emperor 57, 79
- French baroque style 125, 130-131, 148,
243-244, 247-248, 250
- Friedlaender, Max 74
- Froberger, Johann 189
- Fugue 251-252, 255
- Fütwangler, Wilhelm 29, 66, 215, 349-350, 352
- Galston, Gottfried 23
- Galvez, Genoveva 400
- Ganz, Rudolph 23
- German baroque style 130-131, 148
- Germany, Nazi 50-51, 53-54, 67-68, 74,
110, 111, 175
- Giesecking, Walter 90
- Gillespie, John 193, 204
- Gimpel, Jacob 205
- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang 5, 231
- Goldberg, Albert 321-322
- Goldovsky, Boris 283
- Gould, Glenn 85, 140, 147, 242, 255-256,
258, 301, 311, 321
- Graeser, Wolfgang 149-157, 215
- Graudan, Joanna 234
- Gunsbach, France 53, 75, 134-135, 406, 407, 40
- Hamilton, John 26, 99, 141, 204
- ✓ Hamilton, Malcolm 28, 35-36, 104, 129, 136,
137, 141, 181, 205, 244,
247, 252, 309, 310, 325;
361-404
- interviewed with Alice Ehlers,
Hancock Hall, University of
Southern California
- Handel, George Frederick 100, 207, 398
44, 62, 125, 190, 197-198,
241, 246, 250, 319, 326;
44, 223;
241-242, 257;
- Lucretia,
piano performances,
250th anniversary celebration,
BBC,
Harpsichord 50, 75-76, 106-107, 115
- amplification, need for, 216, 338, 352-353

- Harpsichord (con^t)
 builders, comparison of, 261-267;
 see also
 individual names, i.e.,
 Pleyel, Newpert, etc.
 compared to clavichord,
 construction of,
 modern development,
 maintenance,
 technique,
- Haydn, Franz Josef
 Heifetz, Jascha
 Heinitz, Eva
 Hess, Myra
 ✓Hindemith, Paul
- Hindemith, Rudolph
 Hirt, Charles
 Hitler, Adolf
 Hochschule für Musik, Berlin
- Hollywood Bowl
 Horne, Marilyn
 Howard, Julia
 Hubermann, Bronislaw
 Hurok, Sol
 Hutchins, Professor_____
- Idyllwild Music School
 Improvisation
 Israel
- Italian baroque style
 Italy
 musical taste in,
- John, Bertha
 Jones, Richard
 Juilliard School of Music
- Kalmus Edition
 Kasanoff, _____(agent)
 Kempff, Wilhelm
 Kendall, Raymond
 Kirkpatrick, Ralph
 Kleiber, Erich
- 252-253
 86-88, 93, 94, 309,
 354-355, 388;
 18-21, 88, 98-102
 102-103
 28-29, 79, 81, 137, 193-
 196, 234, 266, 302-305,
 309-316, 333-334, 383,
 388-390
 229, 345, 352
 11, 36
 179-181, 369-370, 409
 146, 301, 321-322
 32-34, 36-37, 40, 42-43,
 61-63, 111, 149-150, 324
 62, 149
 190-191, 213
 54, 66, 67, 74, 175, 233
 14-15, 17, 30-31, 77, 96,
 170, 252-253, 329
 108
 44, 182, 222
 209
 10-11, 67, 103, 106, 109-110
 41, 216
 177
- 206
 280, 281, 335-336
 66-67, 70, 71, 105-110,
 413, 414
 148
- 62-63
- 233
 265, 266
 46, 177
- 268n.
 324
 16, 17
 205-206, 254
 173-174, 267-268
 151, 215

- Klemperer, Otto 59, 60, 209, 214, 216, 325, 334, 338, 342-343, 345, 346, 352
- Koldofsky, Adolph 37
- Koldofsky, Gwendolyn 37
- Koole, Arend 213
- Korngold, Julius 347
- Köthen, Prince of 58
- Kretschmar, Hermann 14-15
- Krone, Max 48, 52, 181, 183, 184, 188, 203, 205-206, 209-212, 189
- Kuhnau, Johann
- Lambaréné, Gabon 70, 78, 119, 120, 122, 133, 134, 138, 406, 407, 408, 409, 410, 411, 412, 414, 100, 222
- Lampl, Hans
- ✓Landowska, Wanda as performer, 35-36, 83-84, 124-126, 137-138, 215, 234, 254, 268, 322, 385, 386, 399; 26, 28, 34, 124, 126; 125; 89-90
- Bach interpretation, 15, 24-29, 38-39, 81, French music interpretation, 127-129, 135, 142, 173- Mozart interpretation, 174, 232, 284-285, 333, as teacher, 365, 373, 374, 379-380, 394
- at Hochschule für Musik, 14-15, 17-18, 170 Berlin, 18-20, 88-89, 98-99, development of modern 263-264 harpsichord, 268
- in America, 167-168
- in France 56
- in Russia 362
- recordings 160-162, 163, 171-172
- South American tour, 41, 115-116, 222
- Landshoff, Ludwig 218, 385
- La Scala, Milan 403
- Lazarof, Henri 37
- Lehmann, Lotte 178
- Leigh, Vivien 265
- Leonhardt, Gustav 120
- Lert, Richard 4-6, 23-24, 232, 233, 284, 288
- ✓Leschetizky, Theodor 327-328
- Lessing Hochschule, Germany 340, 341-342
- Leven, Ary van 327-328
- Levine, Dr. _____

- Levisons, Frau ————— 91, 92, 93, 98
 Lew-Landowski, Henry 18-20, 27, 89, 99
 Library of Congress 45, 174, 176, 324
 Linsley, Ralph 401
 Liszt, Franz 318
 Los Angeles Philharmonic 209, 216, 338
 Orchestra 148
 Lully, Jean Baptiste 57
 Lunacharski, Anatoli 19-20
 Vasilievich
 Lyon, Gustave
- Mahler, Gustav 1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 21, 22, 87-88, 340, 341, 342
 Malcolm, George 50
 Mallorca, Spain 175-176
 Martin, Emmy 73, 117-118
 Martin, Frank 403
 Matesky, Ralph 206
 Memorization 321-323
 Mendelssohn, Felix 200, 230
 Mendelssohn Prize 16-17
 Mengelberg, Willem 215, 339-341, 342, 343
 Menschen an Sonntag (film) 47
 Milan Conservatory 41, 168
 Minder, Dr. ————— 118
 Minuet 251
 Morini, Erika 36
 Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus 5, 9, 21, 87, 89-90, 201, 203, 229, 239, 244, 345, 401
 Munch, Charles 329
 Münch, Fritz 77-78, 81, 329
- National Defense Education Act 368, 376
 Nef, Isabelle 380
 Netherlands 346-349
 Neupert harpsichord 101, 261-262, 263, 264, 266, 267, 363
- New York Philharmonic 216
 Orchestra
 New York Times 45, 173
- Ojai Festival 400
 Olivier, Laurence 178
 Opera House, Vienna 87, 88
 Organ 194, 256, 316, 317
 compared to harpsichord, 29, 79, 81
 technique, 216, 217, 325, 338, 342, 351
 Ormandy, Eugene 131-132, 197, 224, 243,
 Ornamentation 271, 306, 408

Otterloo, Willem van	339
Paisiello, Giovanni	43
Pasadena Art Festival	400
Pergolesi, Giovanni	43
Philadelphia Orchestra	216, 324-325, 338
Phrasing	74, 80-85, 124, 125, 126, 127, 143, 190, 197, 201- 202, 239-240, 244, 248- 248A, 251-252, 256, 261, 293-296, 297, 306, 314, 315, 387-388
Piano	
Bach performed on,	85, 146-148, 241-246, 248, 252, 256-261, 300- 306, 311, 317-318; 234-235;
technique,	253-254, 301;
compared to clavichord,	79, 81, 193-197
compared to harpsichord,	19-21, 86-93, 98-99, 101, 104, 193, 263, 264, 265, 384
Pleyel harpsichord	56-57, 166
Pohl, Otto	403
Poulenc, Francis	204-205
Prince-Joseph, Bruce	220, 299, 318-321, 323
Program building	34, 35, 124, 126
Projection, in performance	9, 36, 60, 111
Pulay, Erwin	9-10, 12, 109
Pulay, Ignatz	4, 12
Pulay, Mrs. Ignatz	9-10, 16-17
Pulay, Lothar	25, 399, 400
Puyana, Rafael	
Rameau, Jean Philippe	130, 138, 148, 197, 243, 319, 320
Recitative	274-275
Registration	193, 194, 195, 256, 263, 264-265, 283, 291-292, 296, 297, 302-303, 305, 313, 315-317, 398-399
Reiff, family, Zurich	64-65, 350
Reiner, Fritz	338, 352-353
Rejto, Gabor	237
Restout, Denise	18, 25, 26, 365
Rhythm, baroque	247-248, 251-252, 400
Robert, Richard	1, 4, 284, 288
Rosé Quartet	2, 21, 87, 88
Rosenthal, Moriz	19, 203
Rottenberg, Mrs. _____	351, 352
Roux, Gaspard le	401
Royal College of Music	45, 49, 113

- Rubato 236
 Rubinstein, Artur 11, 19
 Russia 56-58, 59-60
 musical life in 1920's, 346, 347-348
 Rutters, Herman
- Sachs, Curt 30, 96, 252
 Salgo, Sandor 216, 325-326
 Santa Cruz, Domingo 158n., 163, 163n.
 Santiago, Chile 162-166
 Sarabande 145, 146, 189, 251
 Sauer, Emil 184
 Scarlatti, Domenico 5, 44, 50, 75-76, 106-107, 115, 125, 138, 241, 250, 319, 320, 403
- Scherchen, Hermann 339
 Schirmer, G., Music Publishers 44, 268n.
 Schnabel, Artur 11-12, 19, 23, 24, 30, 287-288
- Schneider, Max 153
 ✓ Schoenberg, Arnold 2-3, 6, 7, 12-13
 Schoenberg Hall, UCLA 217, 398
 Schubert, Franz 6, 11, 203, 244, 347
 Schumann, Robert 23, 145, 198, 239, 244, 246, 267, 301, 364
- Schwartzwald, Eugenia 2, 12-13
 ✓ Schweitzer, Albert 15, 37, 53-54, 114, 155, 285-286, 329, 353;
- and Ehlers 72-74
 first meeting, 405-412
 correspondence
 see also
 Ehlers, Alice
- and Tovey, 355-357
 and Wauchope, 67-72, 357, 413-414
- Bach interpretation, 131-132
 ornamentation, 81-83, 124, 126, 261
 phrasing, 83
 symbolism, 78-83, 123-124, 127, 139
 tempo, 117-121, 132-134, 357-360
 character of, 74-78
 Gunsbach home, 78, 81, 122-124, 126-127, 1
- performance, 216, 331, 333, 335
 Schwartzwalder Memorial Concert, 113
 (USC) 30-31
 Scotland 284
 Seiffert, Max 1, 4, 242, 283-284, 287, 2
- Serkin, Peter 33, 35, 37, 331, 332,
 Serkin, Rudolf 336, 339
 Shapiro, Eudice

Societa di Corelli	324
Solomon, Martin and Ethel	51 -52, 112, 168
Sossini, Dr. _____	158-162, 163
Spivacke, Harold	45n.
Stefani _____	43, 222
Steinberg, Lotti	107-108
Steinberg, William	67, 103, 106, 107-108
Steingraber, Johann George	86-87, 101-102
Steinway Piano	98
Stern, Isaac	11
Steuber, Lillian	207, 208, 234
Strasbourg, France	53, 329
Strasbourg Conservatory	77
Straube, Karl	150
Strauss, Richard	6, 7, 8, 64-65, 66, 350
Swingle Singers	157
Symbolism in Bach	83
Szell, George	1, 4, 284, 288
Telemann, Georg Philipp	241, 248
Tempo	74, 78-85, 114, 123-124, 126-127, 138-140, 144, 145, 187-188, 192, 248A, 257-258, 397-400
Thomas, Michael	318
Thomas Church, Leipzig	150
Tolstoy, Leo	56
Toronto Conservatory	364
Toscanini, Arturo	218, 385
Tovey, Donald	354-357
Transcriptions	243, 283, 290, 301
Tureck, Rosalyn	258, 301
Turin Conservatory, Italy	91, 168
Tusler, Robert L.	136
University of California, Berkeley	
Music Department,	369-370
University of Chile	
National Conservatory,	158n., 163, 164-166
University of Michigan	262-263
University of Southern California	
School of Music,	48-49, 156, 181-184, 202-208, 209-214, 223, 261-262, 331, 361n., 367, 368
University of Washington	
Music Department,	363, 368-369, 375-376
University of Wisconsin	
Music Department,	51

Van Beinum, Eduard	339
Van Wyck, Mr. _____	48, 52
Vatican Singers	340-341
Victor Records	362
Vienna, Austria	
musical life in,	1-3, 6-8, 33, 36, 61, 287, 347
Vivaldi, Antonio	325
Wagner, Richard	7, 65
Wagner, Roger	190-191, 213
Walcha, Helmut	131
Walter, Bruno	343
✓ Wauchope, Sir Arthur	67-72, 109, 110, 111, 357, 413-414
Webern, Anton von	3, 6, 33
Wentworth, Christina Ehlers	16, 46-47, 48-49, 151, 152-153, 176, 177, 181, 209, 329
Westrup, Professor _____	182
Widor, Charles	130
Wilson, Mrs. _____	223
Winterthur, Switzerland	63
Wittmeyer harpsichord	105, 266, 267
Wolf, Johannes	30, 149, 152, 154, 155
Wolff, Luise	159, 217
Wolff and Sachs Agency, Berlin	59, 159
<u>Wuthering Heights</u> (film)	47, 52, 177-178, 211
Wyler, William	47
Zurich Conservatory	63