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FLAUTIST, COMPOSER, TEACHER

John Vincent

Interviewed by Lawrence Weschler

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

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

John Nathaniel Vincent was born in Birmingham, Alabama, on May 17, 1902. He studied flute with Georges Laurent at the New England Conservatory in Boston, Massachussetts, from 1922 to 1926 and then studied composition there with Charles Converse and George Chadwick. He took a job as a high school music teacher in El Paso, Texas, for three years but left to become a teaching fellow at George Peabody College in Nashville, Tennessee, and, while teaching, simultaneously worked on a B.S., which he received in 1932. In 1933 he took his M.A., also from George Peabody College, and then pursued doctoral studies at Harvard University, where his principal teacher was Walter Piston. While at Harvard, he received the John Knowles Paine Fellowship, which enabled him to spend two years at the Ecole Normale de Musique in Paris and to take private lessons from Nadia Boulanger. He completed his Ph.D. in 1942 at Cornell University, where he studied under Roy Harris. He was head of the music department at Western Kentucky State College from 1937 to 1945, but after receiving his doctorate, he accepted a position in the music department at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Vincent remained at UCLA until his retirement in 1969.

Alongside his teaching, Vincent held a number of administrative positions. He was chairman of the music

department from 1948 to 1952, served as president of the Los Angeles chapter of the National Association of Composers from 1960 to 1962 and again from 1971 to 1975, and was director of the Huntington Hartford Foundation from 1953 to 1965. His musical compositions include String Quartet in G (1936), the ballet Three Jacks (1941), Symphony in D (1954), Symphonic Poem after Descartes (1958), Consort for Piano and Strings (1960; later amplified for full string orchestra and renamed Symphony for String Orchestra and Piano, 1973), Second String Quartet (1967), and the choral work Stabat Mater (1960).

Vincent evolved a tonal idiom which he termed "paratonality". His compositions are structured by particularly strong fugal elements. In this interview Vincent discusses the central importance of the Modes in his composition. He is the author of several books: The Diatonic Modes in Modern Music (1951, completely revised 1974), Music For Sight Reading (1940), More Music For Sight Reading (1941), and, with Ruth Vincent, Sing Together (1954).

Vincent died on January 21, 1977, in Santa Monica, California. In February of the same year he was posthumously awarded the Four-Star Award of Merit, the highest honor of the National Federation of Music Clubs.

INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER:

Lawrence Weschler, Assistant Editor, UCLA Oral History Program. B.A., Philosophy and Cultural History, University of California, Santa Cruz.

TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

Place: The first two sessions were held in Vincent's apartment in Los Angeles. The last three sessions were recorded in Vincent's room in Santa Monica Hospital.

Dates: December 4, 6, 12, 13, 14, 1976.

Time of day, length of sessions, and total number of recording hours: Interview sessions were conducted at various times of day and averaged a little more than an hour. Approximately six hours of conversation were recorded.

Persons present during the interview: Vincent's daughter Helen was occasionally present, as were various members of the hospital staff.

CONDUCT OF THE INTERVIEW:

The interviews were planned to follow a chronological format, covering first of all Vincent's early background and education, then his career as composer and teacher, and finally his work as director of the Huntington Hartford Foundation. After two interview sessions, however, Vincent became seriously ill and was admitted to Santa Monica Hospital. Although three more sessions were conducted at the hospital, the project was far from completion when Vincent died on January 21, 1977. As the interview stands, it covers Vincent's life up to his stay in Paris from 1935 to 1937 and thus contains a great deal of information on his education and early influences. The interview touches only tangentially upon Vincent's contributions as composer and teacher.

EDITING:

Editing was done by the interviewer, Lawrence Weschler. The verbatim transcript was checked against the original tape recordings and edited for punctuation, paragraphing, spelling, and verification of proper nouns. Words and

phrases inserted by the editor have been bracketed. The final manuscript remains in the same order as the original taped material. The front matter and index were prepared by Teresa Barnett, editorial assistant.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:

The original tapes and edited transcript of the interview are in the University Archives and are available under the regulations governing the use of permanent, noncurrent records at the university. Interview records and research materials are on file in the office of the Oral History Program. Vincent's letters, manuscripts, and photographs are housed in the archives of the UCLA Music Library.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE

DECEMBER 4, 1976

WESCHLER: Mr. Vincent, I thought we'd begin by talking about your distant family background. You might talk a little bit about your parents and where they came from in both directions.

VINCENT: I was born in Alabama, and my parents were also Southerners. My father was born in Alabama; my mother was born in Mississippi. This was, of course, post Civil War times--1870s--and so they grew up in that particular era. I was born 1902. My mother was twenty-six when I was born. Now, there was no particular musical background in my family. My maternal grandmother was said to play the harp; my mother's mother was said to play the harp. She died before I was born, so I know nothing of that, but my father was always very fond of music. He liked to sing. In fact, he sang with male choruses, and in a male quartet in college--and always enjoyed it. In fact, he sang around the house a great deal.

So we all enjoyed music. We had an early phonograph. At the beginning of my life there weren't really any phonographs to speak of, you know, but as soon as they were available my father had one to make music. We had that kind of music situation. And he continued to buy records,

good records. Symphonies were not so much available, but opera selections were, I mean, the "March" from Aida and things of this sort. And we always took in musical events when they came to town. Sometimes they were light, like Gilbert and Sullivan. I think the nearest thing to a concert would be a concert by a band such as [John Philip] Sousa's band.

WESCHLER: Did you actually see bands like Sousa's band?

VINCENT: Oh yes. I heard Sousa's band several times in Birmingham. And then, a very strange thing. When I was twenty--when I had gone to school a year--I went to Boston. The first concert I went to in Boston was a Sousa's band concert in Symphony Hall, as it happened. [There was a] man there who manufactured flutes, and I went to see him one day because he had manufactured my piccolo. I had some small thing done, and we got into a conversation. He said, "I'm going to Sousa's concert tonight, and I have a ticket. Would you like to go?" I said I would; so I went. The reason this has any particular significance is that Meredith Willson, whose name is known to you, was a flute player, one year younger than I, and he was in that band. He and I have been friends for the last twenty, twenty-five years. We always remarked how close our two careers have been: both from relatively small-town United States, both flute players, both became symphony players, both became

composers. Of course, he went the way of the opera and light opera and that sort of thing--and has been tremendously successful. I went the way of a university professor because of composition; I mean, I became a professor because of composition. But it's one of those things that happen, you know. We've always made a pleasantry of that particular thing.

WESCHLER: Before we get too far away from Birmingham, Alabama, what was your father's profession?

VINCENT: My father's profession? He was actually a promoter. He was always promoting something, some business or enterprise. He ran several political campaigns for different politicians--for Oscar W. Underwood, the senator. He ran his campaign for the Senate, United States Senate, and won. Underwood later ran for president, I mean for the nomination of president, and didn't win that. He was not managing that--1924, I think that was. But otherwise my father did various kinds of things.

Early in his career he started a linen supply business, and that involved laundry. And they did pretty well and then sold out, and I guess did all right on that, and went into something else which didn't do too well. One of the things he went into was becoming a coal commissioner. Five men founded a corporation where they sold wholesale coal all over the South. Birmingham is a center of mining coal,

and iron, too. But they mined the iron, mined the coal, and then sent it by the trainload all over the South. Well, he was the middleman from the mine to those companies, whether they'd be a power company or whatever. And they made a very small profit, ten cents a ton, or something of the sort, you know. But I'll have to explain this. They do it by contracting for all the coal from a mine; the mine has to sell its coal in order to employ 500 miners. So they make a contract with somebody to sell this coal as it came out of the mine. As soon as it was loaded in the car, it was off the company's hands and on my father's hands, and they had to ship it. There are five days that the rail company will allow it to stand free, otherwise you have to pay, I think, five dollars a day for the next five days, and then fifty dollars a day for each car. So you had to have a pretty rapid turnover, you understand. Well, after the World War, the United States government had stockpiled a great deal of coal for emergency purposes during the war, and they decided to dump that. And they just dumped it on the market heedlessly, for what it would bring. Well, companies such as my father's couldn't sell a nickel's worth of coal. Everything was cheaper than they could possibly buy it, and their contracts were running on. So their company went broke. Do you understand what I mean? They were squeezed out of business, just wiped out. Well, that

hurt him badly and he was slow coming back. So he founded another linen supply business which he built up within three or four years until they got the notice that some of the bigger companies were cutting into their business. So it became a question of, did he have to sell out to them to keep down their competition, or meet the competition-- which would have ruined him by undercutting him wherever he was trying to trade? Do you understand that? So he sold out and became manager of that. And that pretty well saw him improve his career. I mean, see, it was that sort of thing.

WESCHLER: So you think he was bitter as a result of some of these things?

VINCENT: No, no. Not particularly bitter, no. He knew business and that's the way business was. Business was cutthroat, and he was on the whole a good-tempered man. He must have had some feelings that life was pretty frustrating, because at times we did very well. At times we were quite poor, you know. But we were four boys; I was the eldest. We all had college educations, and I think we've done pretty well.

WESCHLER: Was that unusual for Birmingham, Alabama, for four boys in the family to all have college educations at that time?

VINCENT: I would say so. My father went to college, and my

mother went to what would be termed college--it was called a seminary at that time--but it would have been called a college now. So we had a high level of appreciation for college education and so forth. There never seemed any question but that we were going to college.

WESCHLER: What kinds of cultural emphases were there in the house, although music wasn't especially one?

VINCENT: My mother was a painter, and a professional one. She was not an amateur. She had her studio in a downtown office building all the years that I can remember--it started before I was born, I guess--she had students, she taught students painting and drawing and so forth. She maintained this place of business until she moved away from Birmingham, which was just the last few years of her life. My father died first, and then she moved to Beaumont, Texas, where my second brother lives, and made her home with him, although she visited around with the rest of us. But by that time she was well into her seventies. She had been president of the Birmingham Art Club. In fact, she helped them found what is known as the Birmingham Art Gallery, which has, in the last ten years or so, new housing in the new county buildings. They had no permanent quarters until the new buildings were built; but, I mean, it's a growing proposition that she started. She was president of the Birmingham Art Club for many years.

WESCHLER: What kind of painting did she do?

VINCENT: Well, about what you might expect of a situation like that. She had to do what would bring in money. She painted china on consignment, and she taught people to paint china. But she taught also painting, I mean, ordinary painting. They went out [on] field trips and did landscapes and buildings and that sort of thing, and some portraiture. However, she knew, and she and I talked about it, that she was not an artist in the sense of a person who was following art all hours. She realized she was on the perimeter so to speak. However, she had to make money, and she did. I don't think I have a thing here that represents any of her painting, but it was absolutely figurative, representational. She and I used to talk about more advanced forms and I tried to scold her into doing something more adventurous, and so forth. She said, "I just don't have the time or the inclination to devote myself to it when this is the way I make my living and the other way I'd lose some of my clientele if I tried to lead them into cubism or impressionism, and so forth." Remember, this was some years ago. By now she would have changed, I'm sure. She was quite alive and intelligent, and quite talented. But pretension to, shall I say, "Artist," in capital letters, no. But she did earn her living that way. At times when we were at one of our poorer stages, her income was all we had.

WESCHLER: Was it mainly a sense of your mother around the house or your father?

VINCENT: You mean who wore the pants? No question about it--my father wore the pants. But my mother was part of it. I think there was as little rancor, as little trouble in our family as any family I ever saw. I wouldn't say there never were any arguments. There were. But there were no long, continuing resentments, the sort of thing that cut any great ice, you know. It was a very good relationship, but my father was undoubtedly boss.

My father had been very much interested in astronomy, and we had a fairly large telescope, a pretty good sized one for just an ordinary family. We all took part in that. And I always took such magazines as the Scientific American, Popular Mechanics, things of this sort, because for some reason--I don't know where it came from--I always said I was going to be an engineer. And so I headed toward that in high school, and afterward I worked for three years in a drafting office. We were in a slow period and I couldn't go to college right then, but I was saving my money.

In the meantime I had taken up music. My first connection was with a scout fife and drum corps. I played fife. Then, when I went to junior high, I got a piccolo and played the piccolo in the band. Then came the flute, and I had branched out. I took private lessons at this time. So flute became

my instrument.

The company I was working for was American Steel and Wire Company, which is a branch of, I think United States Steel. They're all mixed up, you know. I had worked for another company which also was connected with U.S. Steel, but in a different way, before that. But American Steel, while I was working for them, had a band, and I played in the company band. The chief engineer, a Mr. Dill--the first name escapes me right now--played trumpet in the band; so he and I had this interest. There was the chief engineer and here I was, just a detailer in the office, but we both played in the band.

It was generally known that I was going to quit school in the fall and go to engineering school, probably at the University of Alabama. And so along in the spring sometime, maybe April or May, Dill called me into his office one day and said, "Have you ever thought about going into music as a career?"

And I said, "No, never. I'm going to be an engineer."

And he said, "Well, you're a pretty good player, and you seem to be talented, and you're kind of one of the bright spots there, and it seems to me you like it. I hear that you're reading books on music on the streetcar coming to work, and that you play in groups with the municipal band of the city and so forth."

I said, "Yes, but I'm going to be an engineer, it's always been my dream."

But he put the bug in my ear and for a week or ten days that sort of stewed in my kettle. In that time I made up my mind to become a musician. I changed just like that.

Then I had to find a music school instead of a college science department or engineering department. So my father wrote Underwood, and Underwood got me a scholarship at the Ithaca Conservatory of Music in New York. So I went there one year, which was probably a mistake in a way, because it wasn't on the mainstream; but I did have a year there on scholarship. I finally realized that it did not lead to where I wanted to go, so I changed to the New England Conservatory [of Music] the following year.

WESCHLER: Before we go too far in that direction, I want to stay a little bit in your childhood.

VINCENT: Sure.

WESCHLER: You must have had some kind of strong feelings about music to have made that transition. You said that you had been reading books about music and so forth. Was there any reinforcement in the family? Or did they try to dissuade you from it?

VINCENT: Honestly, I think there was none. I don't remember

that they said, "Look, you're throwing away a chance to go to engineering school." Somebody might take that kind of attitude. I don't remember anything of that sort at all. Nor do I remember their saying, "Well, now you can go and do what you've always wanted to do." There was none of that. Somehow it just seemed to have gone and everybody seemed to agree. The idea was so new to me, I was almost puzzled by it. I mean to say I had thought of what engineering school would be like. But music--I hadn't thought just what niche I would occupy. I did not know where would the money come from after I would start to earn. I didn't think of that, not sufficiently. I jumped at it. So I jumped at it more as emotion, I think, than as logic. And I don't think my family either pushed me or pulled me either way.

WESCHLER: Now, were you jumping at performance or scholarship or at composition? Did you have any kind of sense of what it meant to go to music conservatory at that time?

VINCENT: That's a very good point because yes, even at that point the idea of composition, the idea of writing music seemed to be strong in me. The books I'd been reading--I had been trying to see how music was written and see if I could write some music. I had tried my hand at some little waltzes, something of that sort, you know. Tremendously infantile. Nevertheless I seemed to have that push. And this was far more than the people I was associating with.

The young men and women I was associating with who were playing comparably to me seemed not interested, not at all. They were interested in playing as just something to do, a hobby. I liked the playing and enjoyed it, but I was digging a little deeper. Why I had that instinct I don't know, except I've always been a bookish man. The earlier I trace back I really see how much I was reading. I didn't realize how much I was reading in those days.

WESCHLER: What kind of reading?

VINCENT: All kinds, anything. While we lived in the rural district, it was hard to get to a library. But when we lived in the city, I was in and out of the library two or three times a week checking out books. It would be everything from fairy stories to adventure stories to something on science, almost anything. I mean, I apparently could be interested in anything that was printed. The Youth's Companion was a famous magazine which I took for many years; it had all kinds of things in it. But they weren't primarily music books, although when I began to take music, a lot of times I even took music textbooks. But I had no instruction in it, and I remember the difficult time I had with some of the presumptions that the music teacher would have in writing the textbook. For instance, about parallel fifths being prohibited. Are you a musician at all?

WESCHLER: Not very much, but I know what that means.

VINCENT: Parallel fifths are prohibited, yet if you're writing a fugue it says the answer's in the fifth. Well, I say, how can you have fifths? So I set this out for myself. How could there be fifths and answers in the fifth and yet forbidden? I had to study the music, look at the music and see what he meant rather than from the words. I mean, I had no one to ask, literally no one to ask, so I stumbled through the textbooks and did a lot of good that way.

WESCHLER: Do you remember the titles or the authors of any of those textbooks? What kind of books would be available to you?

VINCENT: No, I don't, I really don't.

WESCHLER: Do you think there was any relationship between your interest in engineering and draftsmanship and your interest in composition, kind of an architectonic interest in both?

VINCENT: Yes, I think that's true, and I think that's an interest which is an earmark of my whole composition from the beginning until now. The architectural side of composition, of which there's quite a lot, is insufficiently appreciated, and ignored by so many composers that don't even know that such a thing exists. Now, that's true. But, for instance, the symphonic form is very attractive to me because it's so solidly constructed architectonically,

and so are other works, too. And so this is a predisposition of mine and it continues to the present day. I am in correspondence now with a possible commission from the Albany Symphony. A man there seems to know about me, and he wrote me inquiring about my interests in a commission. And I wrote him that I would be interested only if the commission would give me time to construct such a work; I couldn't just do it offhand. I was interested in this side. In other words, it's that conscious that I would stipulate this as a condition of doing a work for them, which is not all decided, of course, because I haven't heard from them; they owe me a letter now. But that's discerning of you to put your finger on that; it's important to me.

WESCHLER: I'd like to get a sense of your personality, let's say, the latter years of high school. Were you one of the school intellectuals, do you think? Were you in any way isolated as a particularly intelligent, bookish sort of boy, or--?

VINCENT: Well, my family was athletic. My brothers, the next two to me, turned out to be athletes, active professional ones.

Take the elder one first, Charles--they called him "Slick"--turned out to be a phenomenal basketball player. Of course, these days he would have been wealthy, but in those days they made very little. The ones that made money

were the barnstorming type. He played with a team called [the] Earle, Arkansas, Team, a small town group. They went around the country playing the best teams that they could find, just toying with them, you know, because they could beat anybody--like the Boston Celtics do now. I think it was the Celtics. Well, anyway, they call them something else now. It's a Negro team now.

WESCHLER: The Harlem Globetrotters?

VINCENT: Yeah, that kind of thing. Of course, this professional team could beat anybody they played, so they went around putting on these exhibitions and got paid for it. That was the kind of thing he did. So his professional career didn't amount to much, although he was written up nationally. Even as a schoolboy he was written up in some of the athletic magazines, like Sports Illustrated. I don't think Sports Illustrated even existed then, but it was something. He had one issue devoted to him one time. He was that great.

WESCHLER: What did the other brother go into?

VINCENT: The other was baseball.

WESCHLER: What was his name, the other brother?

VINCENT: Al. And Al was baseball. They both played baseball, and Al was a good basketball player too, but his talent was mainly baseball. So he did better. He played minor league ball, and then went on the winter circuit down

in Cuba and played winter ball. Pretty soon he was pressed into first manager-player, and finally manager. He managed many of the teams; he managed Baltimore, Cleveland, and he managed Dallas-Fort Worth, Beaumont, Tulsa, I think Birmingham for a week or two--just one of those quick changeovers. He worked for Charlie Finley at Kansas City for awhile.

WESCHLER: How was that in those days, working for Charlie Finley?

VINCENT: Well, he was pretty well isolated, but [Alvin] Dark, who was the manager, was the one that got the hell. Al was just the coach, so he didn't have too much to do with Finley. Anyway, he retired a few years ago, and he gets a full big league pension. And he's well known. Do you remember that "Schoolboy" Rowe, a pitcher? Well, he was a big pitcher at one time, and his arm went sore, and he was finished. But they turned him over to Al, and within one season he rehabilitated him, and he went on to have several other good years. There's other players that he's been credited with saving, I guess, too.

WESCHLER: How about your own interest in sports, were you at all interested?

VINCENT: Yes, I played all these sports too. I played basketball from grade school up. I never played football; none of us ever played football. I played baseball--no professionalism at all--and high school baseball, things like

that. Also, I turned out to be a fairly good distance runner. A mile or more was my better, and although I was not anything very hot, I was a mile runner. And so one of the first pages I want to see is still the sports page; I follow the whole sports. I have that in my blood, yes.

WESCHLER: Getting back to the question with which this started, what was your presence first in high school, were you thought mainly as one of the kids on the sports scene, or academic kid, or--?

VINCENT: Well, I don't know, I've not really thought about that. I felt the instinct and belonged to a literary society, the Crairy Literary Society. It was named for some English professor who had been there. It's a debating society. There were several others--Lancey Debating Society.

Then I became president of this organization one of the years. This was the first time I'd ever held any such office, but it launched me on what seemed to be a progression of things. When I went to Ithaca, for example, I was immediately recruited into the school organization thing. I was supposed to be junior class for some reason--I guess I got some musical advancement for what I'd already done--but I didn't even go to the class meeting in the first week of school. But they sent for me, and I'd been elected president of the class, which I'd hardly even attended. From then on, it seemed I was involved in first one thing and then another.

In the New England Conservatory, I became president of my fraternity.

WESCHLER: So you were a pretty social person and so forth?

VINCENT: I would say I was a pretty social person, yes. And, I guess, you might say well-rounded, or badly-rounded, if rounded is bad because of all the interesting kinks knocked out of it, you know. But I took part in the intellectual life and, more, the scholarly part, though it seemed to me I was just living. But I'm sure now that where you say you were pretty broad, I guess I was broad.

WESCHLER: Getting back to one other set of questions before we go up to New York and New England, it's just to give me a better sense of what it was like to grow up in Birmingham. You mentioned that there wasn't terribly much music. What other kinds of cultural contacts, if any, did you have there in terms of life? How large was Birmingham, for starters, at that time?

VINCENT: Birmingham's population at the time I was in high school was 115,000. It was to grow very rapidly. It was called the magic city because it was growing so rapidly. I think in 1915 or so it was just fifty years old. Of course, it's 400,000 or something now.

WESCHLER: Was it largely a poor town?

VINCENT: Well, it was. I didn't know the difference between a poor town and a rich one, but I think it would

have been called on the side of a poor town. Not that there weren't wealthy people and so forth, but because it was in the South and depending on steel and coal rather than on agriculture, it had to compete with Pittsburgh in that context up there. As a matter of fact, whatever prices they charged in Pittsburgh we had to charge there. In other words, although we could manufacture iron and steel as cheaply as they could, maybe cheaper than they could, in Pittsburgh--let's say $100 a ton--the price set for the steel manufactured in Birmingham was the same. When you sold it, anybody who wanted to use Birmingham, Alabama, steel bought it and used it in Alabama at the same price they would have to pay using Pittsburgh steel in Pittsburgh. In other words, it was called a freight plus, the price of the freighting steel from Pittsburgh to Birmingham was always charged in addition, because it belonged to United States Steel, so it was a "Pittsburgh plus" deal, which kept Birmingham from surging to the fore as a prime supplier. Do you understand?

WESCHLER: Did people in Birmingham consider themselves Southerners first and Americans second?

VINCENT: [laughter] Oh, that.

WESCHLER: Was there resentment of the North, or Pittsburgh?

VINCENT: There was a resentment of that, yes, great resentment of that. But there was nothing to do about it. It went to the Supreme Court time after time, and it always

decided against the South. It was a punitive measure. These punitive measures had been adopted after the Civil War as punishment for insurrection. These laws went on and on and on. In fact, until the Second World War we didn't get rid of them at all. No foolishness about it; that was the way it was. So we did resent that. As far as being Americans, there was no question--we were strongly American. In fact, I think the patriotism would be higher than in most places. There was very strong patriotic feeling--very, very strong.

WESCHLER: Would you today even consider yourself a Southerner, and if you do, what does that mean to you?

VINCENT: Yes, I consider myself a Southerner. In the first place, I can't escape it. I don't speak quite so much in the Southern way as I did, I guess, because I haven't lived there in so long. I suppose I could pass, except for occasional slips, as having been born elsewhere. Nevertheless, I feel a certain warmness and sympathy with the South internally. It's not a fighting thing, and I recognize many wrong things with the South, but if somebody casts some aspersions against this, that, or the other-- For instance, I resent these people who've written articles making fun of Jimmy Carter's speech. I think that's hitting below the belt. I don't think it has anything to do with the politics of that situation, and I see no reason why a man from Georgia

shouldn't be as good a president as a man from Minnesota or wherever you want. Although I realize that there are valid criticisms of the South--and I could name those, too--I don't think there's any particular good in doing it. It's not my business to run it down. You can present the best side, you can present the worst side.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE TWO

DECEMBER 4, 1976

VINCENT: I don't mean to overemphasize the South in my background, but I must confess that it is pretty strong. I'm proud of what the South has done. I'm proud of the South's contribution to the nation, of the literary and poetic figures it has produced--which have been considerable, as you know. And I feel no dissatisfaction having been born there--I mean, being identified as from there. I can't say that I wish I had been born in the Midwest or in California or something of that sort.

But in a subtler way I am influenced much by the folklore, the folklore that I grew up with--not the ones I read or something--but bits of doggerel and poetry, the songs, the children's songs that I knew and heard and learned. And all the customs and ways that people had of getting things done and doing things. See, part of the time we were in the city, and part of the time we were in the country. Even then Eastlake was six miles from the center of [Birmingham] at that time, and was identified as Eastlake more than Birmingham.

Remember, the city was growing rapidly. We moved around a good deal. We moved to a place called Guarnsey, which was a coal mining town some forty miles from

Birmingham, where my father, during one of these interludes, took a job as assistant manager of the mine. And we lived there for almost two years, and I went to a three-teacher school. In the fourth grade, I was the only student, but there were a lot of others [in other grades]. So that was really out in the woods.

After we moved back to Birmingham, my father decided that with four boys it was better to have us out in the country than in the city and on the city streets. So we moved to Hoffman, which was nine miles from Birmingham. We still commuted. He went to work everyday in town, but for a while I attended the country school there, which was a larger and nicer school, and then went from there to high school. I attended the same high school I would have if I had been living anywhere in Birmingham.

So the three or four years we were there in that spot, we farmed. We had our duties. We had the cow to milk and the pigs and the chickens to feed. Well, my mother and grandmother did most of that. But we took care of the stock, so to speak, and did some farming. My father hired men to do that, though we were paid and worked too. So I learned the value of a dollar, a dollar and a half for a ten-hour day. Quite a difference from what they're getting today. A dollar and a half wouldn't pay for half an hour.

WESCHLER: But you can't buy all that much with it today.

VINCENT: Well, I guess not. So that was pretty rural; that was country. And I loved the country, so I had a good experience in country living, without missing too much of the city. I went to country churches, heard country church music, and Negro church music, which later on I collected. I'll have some more to say about that when I'm talking about my years at Western Kentucky Teachers College in Kentucky, after I was teaching as head of the music department back there. I realized that I would collect some of that music, and I did collect it, recorded it. A unique collection, part of it is in the Library of Congress.

WESCHLER: Was religion at all an important part of your growing up? You say you went to churches.

VINCENT: We went to church. My father was president of the Sunday school department.

WESCHLER: What religion?

VINCENT: Methodists. In fact we were Methodists all the way back. This Bible you see here goes back to 1663. Anyway, it's the Vincent Bible with some breaks in it, with our names in the back.

WESCHLER: Of your ancestors?

VINCENT: Yes, before we came to the United States.

WESCHLER: Where was the family before it came to the United States? In England?

VINCENT: England.

HELEN VINCENT: Sixteen hundred and fifty or something. Just exactly what year is lost. Richard Vincent, born December 17, 1650.

WESCHLER: Amazing.

VINCENT: It's been restored as much as it can be.

WESCHLER: From one Vincent down to the next.

VINCENT: Yes, and many long breaks and hiatuses.

WESCHLER: What kind of part did religion play in your life? Was religion a kind of unifying factor?

VINCENT: I think it was a unifying factor. None of my family were preachers. But a little removed from the family was Bishop Vincent, a name that most people know. They called him Bishop Vincent. He was the man that founded Chautauqua. You know about Chautauqua?

WESCHLER: A little. You might talk about it.

VINCENT: Well, Chautauqua is a colony, a town, a gathering place on a beautiful lake in upper New York State. Bishop Vincent was the bishop who founded that. It was for people like mine to come during the summer, spend the summer there as much as they wanted to in religious study, and others in just laying around, swimming and boating. It's a big place and a going concern, and it's been there a long, long time now.

Bishop Vincent had two brothers; and though I never

knew Bishop Vincent, I knew his brother. When I was at George Peabody College from 1930 to '33, he, the brother that I'm talking about, and I became acquainted. Wait a minute--I guess he was the son of that bishop, that's right. And anyway he always said that Bishop Vincent said there was some connection between our family and theirs. That connection I don't know. It seems quite likely because of dates and proximity of time and so forth. I just never happened to know how it fit in, but he always called me "cousin." At that time in the thirties, when I knew him best, at George Peabody College, we played chess together and that sort of thing. He called me cousin, and he was perfectly well satisfied that we were cousins. He was in his seventies then, you see, and he's long since died. His name was Leon Vincent, and he's a well-known author. He has several books which are on all library shelves. He was a scholar's scholar. He wrote about Shakespeare and various writers instead of writing his own original things. He may have written original things, too. He wrote his wife's life, I know that, but most of it was scholarly writing on English authors.

WESCHELR: Getting back to the influence of religion in your own life, you say it was mainly a social thing though.

VINCENT: Yes, well, I mean, in my turn I taught Sunday school. I went regularly to church until perhaps a dozen

years ago, when some instance occurred which broke my relationship with a minister, which in some way embittered me. I turned away, not from the church, but away from the men of the church. I just simply don't take part as actively as I did because of the disappointment in the men. I don't want to really go into it, at least not now. A man of God should make some effort, it seems to me, to be as godly as possible. And when he fails and just denies it almost openly by his actions, and then still pretends and goes on to be a minister, I just don't feel the confidence.

WESCHLER: Do you feel any relationship between your religious sensibility and your music?

VINCENT: No, I haven't written particularly religious music. I've written several musical things. I wrote a mass which was not inspired by Catholicism, but--it's not a mass, I'm sorry, a Stabat Mater. It's not a Catholic Stabat Mater, but it is for male voices and is singable. I also have a cantata called Mary at Calvary, which is in English. And it's not as a monument to the fact that I am a Christian or anything of the sort. It's mainly that I am a living American who happens to be Protestant Methodist, that's all. And I just do it from that standpoint. Not with any great degree of--I'm not trying to be an evangelist or something of that sort. Not in that sense at all. [It's] simply that here is a musical form which I think is an

effective musical form. It attracted me to write a piece of music in that vein, and I did.

WESCHLER: You talked a little about your interest in folk songs and gospels in the South. Do you think there's any other influence in your music that would help us to call you a Southern composer, if that matters?

VINCENT: No. Very definitely not. I went off on a tangent at one time. When I was in Kentucky, I went toward folk song very strongly. We got a collection of music given us by the Ford Foundation, I believe it was. They gave a lot of colleges a collection of records and a phonograph to play them on. We qualified and we got several hundred records, and among them were quite a collection of American folk songs. And so I explored this whole collection. In fact, we had a little club which met once a week, and because I was the professor, I was head of the department. They asked me if I would be the leader of it, guide them in what they listened to. So we went every week, and this included citizens as well as students. I mean, anybody could come. We played records from this collection, and it was a good collection.

I came under the influence of some of these songs, most of which I'd known already before. I came more strongly under the influence of these songs, and I carried them around with me, maybe a little too much for my own musical creativeness at the time. I turned out several pieces using some of

these melodies, or the title, or something of the sort, perfectly good pieces. But I was brought up short somehow. I suddenly said, "Look, this is not the way I want to go." I mean, it's not that I avoid anything. It's perfectly legitimate, but it's not the composer Vincent. I was beginning to express something else and I didn't want to do that.

WESCHLER: That was during the late thirties when there was generally a revival of Americana?

VINCENT: Yes, it was part of that particular kettle boiling, yes.

WESCHLER: OK. Why don't we go back then to a discussion that you had with Mr. Dill and your decision to go on. Your daughter, during the break, was telling me there was a little bit more to that discussion. She described in a little more detail about how you came, how you decided not to be an engineer and-- What part did you want him to talk about?

HELEN VINCENT: Just that one statement that was always part of the story.

VINCENT: She refers to this, I'm sure. He said, "If you gave up being an engineer to be a musician, would you regret it? On the other hand, if you gave up, if you had to give up music entirely to become an engineer would you do it?" And the question was, I would not give up music. Music

would be the one. Well, if I even became an engineer, I would retain music, so that seemed to answer the question. It turned on that.

WESCHLER: So then you went up to Ithaca, New York. What was that like?

VINCENT: Well that's where Cornell [University] is, of course, and it's [Ithaca Conservatory] an old school I found out. It had been a conservatory for a long time. I hadn't heard very much about it, but it has since become Ithaca College, and it's still going much better than it ever has before. I mean, it's become a big institute. I was surprised when I last visited Ithaca to see how it was standing.

Anyway, I went there and immediately became immersed in a musical world which I had not known before, playing in the orchestra, singing in the chorus, and studying harmony, and getting the answer to questions that I had been asking but not receiving answers to.

Now, I think this is true, but examine it carefully. I said to myself, this is the thing that you're going to be, you're going to be a musician. You want to learn everything down cold, you've got to learn everything 100 percent. I wanted to be not just superficial, not just 99 percent; I wanted to be 100 percent. I wanted to know everything. Well, I made that goal to myself and didn't say anything

about it. It sounds too goody-goody or something, but I did say that to myself. And so, on such subjects as harmony, counterpoint, things of this sort I got right at the root. If I didn't get the root, I'd continue until I did get the root. And so I admit making straight A's, of course, and I did. Soon I found myself a kind of oracle on musical subjects such as counterpoint and harmony. The students would come to me with their problems.

WESCHLER: Did you have to play catch-up? I mean, were those other students ahead of you when you first arrived?

VINCENT: No, not to any great degree. I found myself pretty much on par with them.

WESCHLER: And that just through your own education of yourself, the reading that you'd done.

VINCENT: Not inconsiderable, some of the questions that I hadn't found the answer to at first, I did find the answer. I was ignorant but not quite completely ignorant.

WESCHLER: What year was this that you went to Ithaca?

VINCENT: [In] 1921, '22.

WESCHLER: And what was the sense of contemporary music that one would have had in Ithaca? Was there a sense of anything that was going on in Europe at that time?

VINCENT: Yes. Weinberger, do you know that name at all? [Jaromir] Weinberger. Well, anyway, Weinberger, an avant-garde composer, came there that year to teach. And while

what he taught was completely, shockingly beyond me, I never heard anything like that, he was composing in the latest Viennese manner, but you could hear some of the most advanced.

WESCHLER: That would include Schoenberg, for instance?

VINCENT: Schoenberg hadn't come, but he was from Schoenberg land. He was known as a wild composer, and I remember his playing. He composed a piece called the Pacific Sonata for piano while he was there and wrote that piece and played it for us. And it was certainly wild. In fact, I think it would sound wild today. So there was a number of-- But you see, don't forget that, in the classes, they were teaching the same way they were teaching in 1880. Harmony and counter-point were taught the way Beethoven might have been taught.

WESCHLER: What composers and traditions were you particularly drawn to in those days?

VINCENT: Oh, my tastes were pretty omnivorous. I mean, I remember some of the first pieces we played in the orchestra, Mendelssohn and Beethoven, and I loved those, you know, couldn't get enough of them.

WESCHLER: Were you more drawn to romantic than classical music, or does that distinction make any difference to you? Would you be more drawn to Bach and Mozart than to Beethoven and Mendelssohn?

VINCENT: I suppose I'd be more drawn to Beethoven, and that

would, I guess, include Mozart and Haydn, than to Bach. To me, there are two men in this world that stand out. One is Shakespeare and the other is Bach. And I can't quite fathom either one. I mean to say they seem to me far above anything right around them. I don't always reach Bach. I mean to say I have to intellectualize it, because you can't approach it purely emotionally. Not that I want to, but I just feel like there's more there than I am able fully to appreciate. That's not the word, fully to apprehend, to take in. Of course, I love Bach, and some of his things are as romantically appealing as any other, but I have to put these two on a pinnacle and say that they don't represent polarities which pull me unexplainedly in either direction. But I suppose you would put me down as a romanticist, actually if it came right down to it, but not avidly so.

WESCHLER: Were you being exposed to music in Ithaca, even of the classics, that you had never heard in Birmingham?

VINCENT: Oh, of course. I went to as many concerts as I could, and there they expected you to go to most of the concerts that they gave, and so I was exposed to a lot of new music, even piano music that I had never heard before, you know, and song. [tape recorder turned off] Of course, when you're speaking of romantic as the opposite of classic, you're putting too much into each category.

The epitome of romanticist is Beethoven, and the epitome of classicism is Mozart. By this one means technically that the classical forms dominate Mozart no matter what music comes out, and the romantic dominates Beethoven and on further to Schumann, Wagner, and the rest. Beethoven wrote symphonies, but they're not so firmly, fixedly, determinately structural as Mozart. Mozart's structure stands every test. Beethoven's--does it take advantage of musical chances? or does it bow and remain classical, remain to the structure? In other words, do you bow to the structure or to the emotion? Beethoven bows to the emotion, Mozart does not. It doesn't rob him of any degree of emotion, however.

But, you say, what about Bach? He was not a romantic, he was not a classic composer. He was a baroque composer. He didn't write symphonies in the way Mozart did, string quartets in the way he did. These pieces are not in sonata-allegro form. His work is baroque. And so it goes.

Each era seems to have its forms, and the trouble is trying to identify exactly the emotional terms equal to each of the structural forms. It can't be done. And so we say, Oh, he's emotional; dismiss it. He's romantic; let's kill him with one word. Or you can get him the other way. He's completely contemporary, meaning by "contemporary" that he's completely wild, meaning just anything goes. So

if you're trying to classify a person as being romantic or classic, and using only those two things, you've already done, not an injustice, you've just made a mistake because nobody is just one or the other.

WESCHLER: That was more in the question that I asked getting at what your own attractions were at that time.

VINCENT: Well, I'm sure that most people of my time were attracted to the super-romantic impressionists. And I was too. I found, discovered Debussy and Ravel, for instance. I discovered a whole world of new sounds and new emotions, and I wrote a little piece, which I published only in the last few months, which is more Debussy than it is anything else, I guess.

One can say, "Well, you copied." If one were unfriendly, and wanted to, one could say, "Well, he's trying to copy Debussy and didn't do a very good job of it." You could make a good case of that, you know. This little piece-- I don't know how much music you want me to give you to look at or to have, but this piece, for instance, I wrote in about 1924 while I was still a student.

WESCHLER: What is it called?

VINCENT: Called Nacre, meaning "mother of pearl." See if you can find the piece up there. I think it's in this area here. Maybe in one of the boxes. Put your hand there. Now look down below that. [tape recorder turned off]

WESCHLER: We're just talking about this piece, Nacre.

VINCENT: Nacre, yes, and I wrote it I think in 1924. I'm sure it was in 1924.

WESCHLER: It's a piece for flute and piano.

VINCENT: And I wrote it, just wrote it. Now, it is the earliest piece that's published. I didn't publish anything else for some time. I was still a student. In fact, this was not published at that time. It's been published only in recent months--simply because it was hanging around and I didn't know what else to do with it.

WESCHLER: In Europe, in the twenties, there was a sense of that vocabulary of super-romanticism having worn thin, and it's given as one of the reasons why Schoenberg and other kinds of things were going on in Europe. Do you think there was a similar exhaustion of that tradition in America?

VINCENT: Not until later, not until later. The history of American music is one of delaying behind the arts in Europe, particularly in music. And, say, before 1900 on to the First World War and even afterwards, we were under the influence of Germany. Our best players went to Germany to study; our best composers went to Germany to study. They were put under the most rigid study of even older-- Because in the conservatories they studied the past even more than we do. They never really got beyond that, so what they heard Schoenberg and some of the others doing, even Wagner

and later Strauss-- No American really comes out equal to Strauss in technique, which might have been but wasn't. It took some big break. So we were under the influence of this, oh, academic German music for a quarter of a century and more--[Arthur] Foote and [Walter Raymond] Spaulding and the rest, [George Whitefield] Chadwick, John Knowles Paine, all these were German influenced.

But we shook it off, began to shake it off after the war. Although some tried to go back to Germany and study, the patriotism is what forced many of them to go to Rome and then to Paris to study. So some of them went to [Nadia] Boulanger, which is what I did finally after a number of years. But [Walter] Piston, who was one of my teachers, had already gone and studied, so the changes had begun. Boulanger we'll have to talk a lot about and I'd better not get into that. Though she always had the avant-garde available to her, she never did much more than knock on the front door. I mean, she really didn't spread the avant-garde. If you did that, you did it on your own. She was more Debussy-esque and Roussel and Ibert. I mean she was stuck in the, with impressionism really.

WESCHLER: Getting back to what it was like in Ithaca, did you have any kind of dawning sense that this super-romanticism had gone too far, or needed some--?

VINCENT: I was blind, unquestioning, just had found myself

somewhere and was swimming in it, that's all.

WESCHLER: How did everybody there react to this one madman avant-garde composer that you mentioned?

VINCENT: Well, everybody acted horrified, and it was just mainly a topic of conversation. "When music comes to that, I'll stay away," something like that, you know. "It won't last long." The same kind of thing that you might get a naive audience to say today.

WESCHLER: Were there any American composers that people thought highly of? Let me put it this way, was the idea of becoming an American composer a complicated notion because there weren't that many models to draw from?

VINCENT: Well, at Ithaca there were none. There were no teachers that I know of who were interested in composition. The teachers of theory should have been, but they weren't. The man that taught, that I had, was the best there and he was good, and I'm very much obliged to him for teaching me harmony well. But he had no more idea of being a composer than anything else.

WESCHLER: What was his name?

VINCENT: I don't know, I don't remember, mercifully, I think. But when I got to the New England Conservatory I found a different situation. There I came under the influence of, well, Chadwick not right away, but, I'm embarrased that I can't think of that one because it's in the forefront

of my mind, should be right there. Well, maybe we've got enough today.

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WESCHLER: Well, we were just saying that we will start where we left off, and that was with you deciding to go to the New England Conservatory, and leave Ithaca. Perhaps you can start there.

VINCENT: Yes. Well, Ithaca was very enjoyable in many respects. There were nice people, and the teaching was competent--nothing spectacular, but competent. I felt that I'd put in a good year there, but I did feel that neither on flute nor in composition was I getting something extraordinary, which you always prefer. So the choice of Boston was inevitable, almost, because Georges Laurent was there at that time. I still consider him one of the greatest of flutists, perhaps the greatest. Better than Georges Barrere. So I went to Boston and studied with him, took the harmony course with Frederick Converse. I took counterpoint with Linon, the French counterpoint, do, re, mi, unchangeable. In the United States we use in movable do; in France they use the immovable. C is always do. So I took that, and the other courses that went with it, of course.

I think I made the point that I'd determined that I would learn everything right. I'd leave no stone unturned, and no skill unlearned. So I devoted myself particularly to harmony and counterpoint. It became a source of some

satisfaction to me that students with problems, or who wanted a tutor, would come to me, recognizing that I had somehow pushed myself ahead. And so I felt that I was pursuing these two dual courses satisfactorily. I was having to work my way through school so that made it less difficult.

WESCHLER: What kinds of jobs were you doing?

VINCENT: Well, anything I could get. At first I lived at 107 Gainsborough Street, and I got a job with a large cafeteria which was opening up across the street from Symphony Hall, and I worked the evening shift from six to twelve. And so I had my day. I got my meals and a little money for that. Not enough money to pay my room rent, but meals. That helped a great deal. I saved a little. My family was able to send me very little as my father was not in one of his best moments, but on Saturday I did work cleaning--for ladies who wanted their apartments cleaned, and wanted small repairs made. So I eked out. And then I began to get a few students, flute students, which I worked in, and that would give me a little more money. There was no playing to be had. I mean for money, at that time that early in the year, though that rectified itself later. And I made it a rule--

It's a funny thing, there are about three or four rules which I feel have been sort of basic to my approach to things.

One I think I already mentioned: that is, since music was going to be my profession, I was going to learn it cold, you understand--nothing less than perfect was admissible. Another one was that wherever I could, I would play, whether it was for money or for nothing. Whatever engagements would come my way, I would do that. I was doing a service to the people who were playing, and it was service that had to be of some use, of course. Furthermore, I learned music and practiced music and met people that I would not otherwise meet, but I would never turn down a job just because it didn't pay. I had friends and most musicians didn't approve of that. I belonged to the union and so I was supposed to take pay, but--

WESCHLER: You belonged to a union even back in the twenties?

VINCENT: Oh, I belonged to the union before I went to Boston, because I played in the municipal band back in Birmingham.

WESCHLER: Was that a powerful union in those days? Was that the musicians union?

VINCENT: Yes. It's all over the country; it was called the American Federation of Musicians, even then.

WESCHLER: Was that powerful in those days? Did they try to enforce that?

VINCENT: Well, they were pretty powerful. It's a queer thing. In those days their main power was in motion picture

theaters and vaudeville. And that was to cease within a few years, you know. When television came, why it folded, both of them.

WESCHLER: Is that to say that they did not have as much power in classical orchestras, for instance?

VINCENT: Well, unless the city had to have a city orchestra. Birmingham did not have a symphony orchestra. There were various attempts made over the years to found a symphony there and later it was founded; in other words, there were many foundings, but most of them floundered. Anyway, there was no professional symphony orchestra in Birmingham, and a long way from paying anybody. A few attempts had meant that the musicians contributed their services, and that has since been rectified. They have a symphony orchestra with a budget, and it's going on very well.

But at that time there was none, so there was no symphonic unit to play in at all, not the merest glimmer of one. So I played at receptions and parades and celebrations of various kinds, and even belonged to a group who played dances. Now, a flute in those days at a dance-- See jazz, when I began, jazz was just being born, and there were still a lot of dances that were waltzes and schottisches and one-steps, so the music was entirely different from what it was to be a few years later. I heard jazz during that time,

and I didn't partake of it. Then the organization that I played with in Birmingham was the Birmingham band. The city supported a band; actually it only played during the summer and played concerts in the park, the various parks, by going around from one park to another. So I did that several summers, even when I was commuting back and forth from the North. That was one reason for joining the union. You had to join the union to belong to that.

WESCHLER: By contrast, Boston must have been a paradise for you in terms of how much music went on.

VINCENT: Yes. And there I began to play. I played in a number of orchestras. The American Piano Company, the maker of the Mason and Hamlin piano, maintained a little orchestra, and they played around for advertisement. There was no pay connected with it. And we played. The gimmick they had was to play a piano concerto by some well-known pianist who had made the piano roll and accompany it with a full live orchestra. So part of each program would be that. When people asked me why I played in such a thing, I told them, well, just experience, to get around and so forth, and I thought it was good. So there were a number of things such as that that I took part in.

Now, through that means I met a lot of people, and eventually I became music director for two little theater groups, one called Boston Theater Guild, and the other

called the Boston Theater Workshop. They were rival gangs, rival societies. Mostly society people, or people who were-- Some women who had been actresses, or had been ambitious to be actresses, and wanted to put on plays, and they did. So they put them on in the Fine Arts Theater which is on Massachusetts Avenue. A little theater movement, you know. I was music director of these two companies, and they actually paid me something. I got paid for that. And then I, last two years I got a job at the Boston Civic Club. The Boston Civic Club was somewhat like the California Club downtown, not a golf club, just a social club where men live and take their meals and so forth and so on. Do you know that?

WESCHLER: I know of it.

VINCENT: A very snotty kind of place. I mean by that, maybe you're not familiar with that, very up in the air, you know, very exclusive. But they hired me to--they wanted music in the dining room three nights a week. I had an orchestra; it wasn't much of an orchestra, piano, cello, violin, clarinet, and flute. And I happened to own, I had bought a library that had been in distress. Somebody had had a library, and so I bought it. I bought it sometime before. I made use of that and we were able to put on concerts there three times a week. And on Saturday night, extraordinary thing, it was broadcast by radio. A half hour

of our concert was broadcast. And this was 1926, it was pretty early for that.

WESCHLER: Were you conducting these concerts?

VINCENT: In a sense I was conducting. I more or less started us off. Or sometimes it would be the violinist and I. It became just sort of natural to follow the two of us.

WESCHLER: Did you have ambitions in the direction of becoming a conductor at all?

VINCENT: Well, with the Boston Theater Workshop I did conduct.

WESCHLER: Right. And did you see that as a possible career?

VINCENT: Well, yes, to some degree. I knew I would be doing some conducting. I took a conducting course at the conservatory, but that doesn't give you much practice. So I got my practice with the Boston Theater Workshop and the Boston Theater Guild, such as it was. I mean, they might have fifteen to twenty instruments. It depended on what the play was. The music was usually somehow centered around the play. So that gave me some conducting experience.

WESCHLER: At that point would you have thought [of] yourself on the verge of becoming a flutist, a composer, or a conductor? Or all of them?

VINCENT: This more and more became the trouble, because then, in 1926, I became extra flutist with the Boston Symphony. An extra flutist is sometimes needed if a fifth

flute or something is called for; sometimes maybe somebody was sick. And so I got a chance to play under Koussevitzky, you see. I played second flute, when I played, because Georges Laurent, who was my teacher, was the first flutist for it. I guess he wanted to watch over me, and so I played second flute. I went to New York with them, played Le Sacre du Printemps of Stravinsky.

WESCHLER: How was your reaction to that, or what was the general reaction to that in Boston?

VINCENT: It had already been played once before. Monteux played it and premiered it there, and [Serge] Koussevitzky, he-- Well, it made quite a sensation. A lot of people walked out, and there was the usual success with a lot of screaming, you know.

WESCHLER: How did you react to it?

VINCENT: Oh, I loved the piece, thought it a great piece.

WESCHLER: Did you associate it with-- You described one composer at Ithaca and that kind of mad music coming out of Europe. Did you have that same sense?

VINCENT: Oh, yes, more or less. But I thought there was more point to this. I thought he turned out a better piece. I thought the violence in the music was reflected in the need of its subject. I didn't feel that was true of the other man's piece.

WESCHLER: But would it be fair to say that Stravinsky, of

that group of European composers who were in the forefront in Europe, that Stravinsky became more popularized in America sooner than any one of the others?

VINCENT: Oh, well, you say, "any one of the others." I don't know how far you mean, but if you mean Schoenberg and-- Who else?

WESCHLER: Well, then you're coming up with Hindemith and so forth.

VINCENT: Hindemith is not as violent. Yes, I think that most people accepted Hindemith and Stravinsky about the same. But I never regarded Hindemith as extreme technically as Stravinsky. Both were accepted after a playing or two. The next time they played something, people seemed to love it, you know. Notice the second [time] it was played that people would be coming and flocking to hear it.

WESCHLER: How about working under Koussevitzky? What was that like?

VINCENT: Playing under him?

WESCHLER: Yes, what was his personality like as a conductor?

VINCENT: Well, he was very suave; he was a man with a beautiful back, you know. What people see is the back of a conductor, but he had a classic back and a great tailor. He knew how to appear in the best guise. He reflected that as a conductor, so the public accepted him very strongly. He was very favored from the very beginning. Then he

finally became-- He could doodle along, he was so well established. Actually he did a great deal of good because he did play contemporary music and played the most enigmatic, the most experimental of the time. Whether or not he liked it, he played it. It was his duty. And so Boston heard a great deal of avant-garde music.

I have mixed feelings about his conducting. I think he was a great conductor despite the fact that I realize that some of the criticisms of his technique, of his musicianship, can be criticized. He had a beautiful beat. I mean to say, the motions he went through were convincing to the audience, and not always to the players, who sometimes found that the motions didn't quite fit the music, but with a symphony like the Boston, they could make up for a lot of faults.

Oh, I'm not one to say that he was just terrible, beat the wrong thing all the time; he did not. I thought he did a very creditable job of conducting, with occasional errors, and certain things he couldn't do at all, just stood there and sort of made motions and the players played--as I say--in spite of him, not because of him. But I felt he was a great man, a great figure of a man, and his influence on American music and on music was profound. He had great insight, because he played all the scores that are by now thoroughly familiar.

WESCHLER: Were these things generally becoming exposed in Boston before they were exposed in New York?

VINCENT: Many times we would have world premieres, United States premieres. The Boston Symphony made periodic trips to New York and Brooklyn and other places, too. That's the reason I got to play. And at that time, of course, there was no Lincoln Center. We played in Carnegie Hall. I had a photostat made of the first check I got from the Boston Symphony. So somewhere, if I come across it, I'll show it to you. I haven't seen it in some time. I suspect it's among a lot of miscellaneous stuff at the university.

WESCHLER: You had prefaced this whole discussion by saying it was becoming a problem as to whether you would be a flutist, a conductor, or a composer.

VINCENT: A good place to go back to, yes. Playing in the Boston Symphony, I might say that I did other jobs, too. At one time I had a regular job. There's a famous bookstore in Boston called Goodspeed's Bookstore. And I got a job being janitor for that store. It was five floors, by the way. I came in early in the morning, as early as I needed to just so I got finished by the time the store was ready to open. I could either clean it the night before I went to bed, or get up early. I had that choice. It was a great strain on me, but it was regular pay, and I think I did that two years, even though I was doing this over at the

Civic Club, which happened to be across the street. It was amusing to me that I was janitor on one side of the street and broadcasting musician on the other side of the street. But I did it, because I felt it was something I was tied to and I never knew when the music was going to dry up. Well, that was a difficulty in point of time, spending that [much] time. I began to feel it in my output, too. I don't know whether [in] the quality of the output or whether the quantity, or both, possibly both. My friends could see the strain I was under. One said, "You know, you're going to have to decide pretty quick what you're going to do, whether you're going to be a performer or whether you're going to be a composer, because it's hard enough to make a living being a performer, finding a job as a flutist in the symphony orchestra somewhere, Binghamton or St. Louis, I don't know where. They would pay you enough to live on, and then to be a composer too, that's difficult."

I said, "Well, I find it difficult in another way, and that is performing other people's music so constantly, much of it being new to me."

And I as often as possible got the score. I remember having to buy the Sacre du Printemps score, and I went and heard it first. You couldn't borrow the score. I mean, it was too new. You could [borrow] it from the library. So I bought a copy of it to study and that was my habit somehow

to acquire scores of unknown works and study them before I was playing it. Just playing my part, I knew more or less the whole thing.

WESCHLER: So that was bothering you also in your composing?

VINCENT: Yes. I was, I had difficulty disentangling myself from other people's music. So I decided to make the break and become a composer. The thing was, how to support myself. Chadwick agreed the only thing to do was to find a teaching job. "Because," he said, "you would still like to put [in] a lot of time teaching. But it seems to me that you have some more time than you would if you were doing something else."

WESCHLER: Now would that be teaching flute, or would it be teaching composition or what?

VINCENT: Well, teaching, hopefully a college job. But not right then. [Teaching] meant going into public schools. So I'd been doing some teaching on Saturdays for the schools outside of Boston, Lynnfield, all the various suburbs. I taught in several of those. I went to high schools and took a student here and couldn't take a student there, and so forth and so on. I'd had some experience and I knew the high school music director. I talked to him, and he gave me information that I would need. I seemed to have the requisite information, seemed to be qualified. So I began casting around for a job and I found an opening for a job that he was doing

as director of the city schools, instrumental music, at El Paso, Texas, of all places. This was a long way from Boston, but in August of 1927, I got married and went to El Paso to become music director of the schools.

WESCHLER: With the intention primarily to be a composer and to be doing this for money?

VINCENT: The idea was that I would earn my living by three-thirty or four o'clock in the afternoon, and whatever I did after that was my own business.

WESCHLER: Had you achieved your degree in Boston yet?

VINCENT: At the conservatory? Well, as a matter of fact they didn't give degrees in those days, they gave diplomas. I had a diploma and I had a year's post-diploma work at the conservatory.

WESCHLER: Before we leave Boston, can you talk a little bit about Chadwick and what it was like to study under him?

VINCENT: Yes, well, that's a whole chapter in itself, you see, because I'd been studying composition with Converse. Chadwick was out of reach. You pay for those conservatory lessons by the lesson, I think you know, so much a lesson. The price was out of my range, I just couldn't do it. So I was studying with Converse, whom I regarded as a very fine man, a very fine composer, and a good teacher. It must have been May, April or May. Again, one of those April-May decisions like I made back in Birmingham. I was at a concert

on Sunday afternoon, and Chadwick was in the row behind me, and I was very conscious of that. I knew him slightly. I didn't know him well, but I knew him slightly.

Sometime during the concert I felt a tap on my shoulder and turned around, and it was Chadwick. He said, "Say, Vincent." (He always called me Vincent, like it was my first name.) "Vincent, Mr. Converse has been telling me about your compositions, about your composing, your interesting composing. How would you like to study with me?"

Well, I was bowled over, completely bowled over. This was right out of the blue.

I said, "Well, I'd love it. This is the end of the year, and maybe I could swing it next year. I don't know."

He said, "No, I mean on a scholarship. You come by and we'll fix it up so you can have a scholarship next year. You come back to study."

Well, I hadn't committed myself then to the courses we were just talking about, you know, and I still would have been a performer if this hadn't happened, probably. So I went to see him and he arranged it. It became a very personal thing because he had a huge studio, as big as all of this space. He had a huge room and on one side of it was his office, and on the other side was a kind of studio with two pianos. Lots of music over there and lots of business over here.

What he did, what turned out when we did meet the next year, on Monday afternoons I would go at one o'clock, and be admitted to his office, and they provided me a little corner. In the music section there was a little table, and he would do his work, and have an interview. Or maybe he would have a period when he didn't have somebody coming, and we would have part of the lesson, get together and talk. He said, "Oh no, he'll wait. Vincent, you sit over there and recopy that." Or whatever he'd say, depending on what you were doing. And then somebody would come in and talk business, anything. So he conducted his business that way on Monday afternoon, but Monday afternoon was my afternoon, and I was there frequently from one to five.

WESCHLER: What kind of teacher was he?

VINCENT: Well, of course, it was person to person, and he got right down to brass tacks. He was a fine organist, as you know, and German schooled; he had studied with Weinberger, it was said, and I think it was true, that if you studied organ in Germany you got a thorough musical training. I think it's true. So he gave it to me. We used a text, the Gradus ad Parnassum of Fux. It was a course in composition and it was written in Latin, or maybe it was German, I don't know which. I didn't know German; I didn't know Latin. But I had studied Latin in high school, so I had a copy in Latin, and I did the best I could. I was using that, and I had no

text by its own, myself. I used the Gradus ad Parnassum of Fux. And mainly he kept me on canons, sung, and writing canons, and, then later, fugues. I wrote canons and fugues until they were running out of my ears, all kinds of ways. He regarded that as the backbone of learning composition.

WESCHLER: Was he discouraging any individual style? Was it mainly just get the technique down before you were allowed to do an individual thing?

VINCENT: No, he never discouraged me. It wasn't on that basis at all. He wanted it to be correct. But school fugue is not necessarily-- Well, it is to some degree true that the essence of a school fugue is not--its merit is not just being correct. In other words, if you've solved every problem in the canon and made the canon at various intervals and various dissonances somewhat freely, you can be said to have exhausted the means of the fugue at that subject. He would be delighted if I would do that. I think there's something more that can be said for school fugues than that, but it is pretty cut and dried.

[Chadwick] never discouraged me at all. He encouraged me, and I wrote a few free pieces. I wrote an overture, which I scored, and which doesn't exist anymore. He sort of laughed at it because, I think, he didn't feel it was using all the good technique that I had learned. I was more or less aping Berlioz at the time. I even scored it. Parts

of it were never copied, but it was even scored. And he was in the main mildly encouraging, though he never said, "Praise the Lord!" like Schumann. He didn't say, "Capital!" He was never wildly enthusiastic about anything, but always encouraging and kindly. I thought he was a very good teacher.

WESCHLER: What do you think in your own work you owe to him?

VINCENT: My mastery of counterpoint. Although I'd done straight A work in studying counterpoint with Converse, I feel that the climax of it was studying with Chadwick and doing this drudgery of school fugue. I think that's what he did most for me. He gave me a sense of being able to handle notes, twist them around in various ways, see which way they could go. You've got to work here, too, you know. You have to have some kind of talent or sixth sense, and some kind of intuition. As they say in golf, practice doesn't do you any good, but it's amazing how much better your scorecard is if you practice.

WESCHLER: And also, in general, from what you say, it sounds as though he helped define your vocation as a composer.

VINCENT: There is another facet, another ingredient which is important and needs to be added. During the last, the last two years, I was still groping for money, you know, and there existed at that time a number of dancing schools in Boston, and dancing masters, ballet schools. Oh, there must have been fifteen or twenty of them. And each one of them,

in order to compete, put on a big splash in the spring. One of the things they seemed to do was to hire an orchestra, hire Jordan Hall, which was part of the conservatory, capable of mounting an opera or a ballet there (it had a stage) and have the class perform for the public. In other words, put on a ballet show.

The reason it's of interest to me is that mostly when they started, the person who was working towards it usually danced to piano music, had a pianist, and danced to this music. But when it came time to do that before the public, they wanted an orchestra. So somebody had to arrange the score for the orchestra, and talk to the clients. I found out about this, and I would bid and bid low enough in some cases to get the job. So I would arrange all this music for the concerts or for the recital and copy the parts for a certain amount of money. It was a great advantage to me because here I could arrange something for an orchestra and hear it immediately. If it didn't sound the way I thought it should it was easy to see why, because, in the next one, try a different thing. So I did this both years, both of the last two years, and while I was very badly paid for it, I regard it as one of the major supports of my musicianship.

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VINCENT: Well, I'd just gotten married and gone to El Paso, Texas, where I hardly knew what to expect. And it was just as well I didn't. They had had no music to speak of in the schools. They had a high school orchestra, but it was in pretty sad shape. They had some choruses in the high school and junior high. There was a supervisor of music who did the choral side for the high schools and the grade schools, but I was expected to put in a system of instrumental music instruction for the whole school [system].

I began to round up teachers. Music lessons had to be paid for. The standard price was fifty cents for a lesson, say fifteen minutes or something, though many of the teachers gave a lot more than that. They had clarinet, trombone, cornet, and drums, English horn, everything, oboe, flute, the whole works. Abbie [Marguerite Durkee] found people who played, some of them not too well, but that was all there were. So we got them to teach in high schools, again on Saturday, maybe in the afternoons in some cases. And the teachers were paid out of the fifty cents. Well, that meant they had to buy, the parents had to buy instruments, too, you see, in order to have the instruments. So it's surprising how many were able to get interested and take lessons.

The first year we had two or three hundred scattered through the whole schools. The local instrument dealer was delighted. In fact, he tried to pay me out of appreciation for what I had done for him. I had brought him a gold mine and why wouldn't I take five percent or something? I wouldn't. In the first place, I knew it would be very bad policy to do so, be fired if they knew about it, so I declined it. But by the second year, the bands were beginning to show they could play at the football games even. A little scraggly maybe, but it was their band, you know. You know Meredith Willson's Music Man? I don't think I was that kind of character, but everything revolved around me. Of course, I hired other people to help me.

WESCHLER: Was El Paso like River City?

VINCENT: Ah, I would say in some degree surprisingly so. I mean, there was the usual ineptness in the political life, and things didn't go quite the way that they were arranged. And there was a good deal of trading back and forth. Nothing that shouldn't have gone on, but wouldn't ordinarily have gone on. I mean, for instance, borrowing instruments from this junior high to put on a concert. A little high-handed, because normally that wouldn't go on. Things of this sort.

In general I think the city was proud of its instrumental program, but didn't know quite yet what it had or quite what use to make of it. They pretty soon found out. The

athletic events became a prime place for the music to occur. Although we had orchestra, we had contests for players, and they came before judges and were rewarded first, second, third prize. In general, the way I earned my bread was teaching instruments and conducting the high school orchestra.

WESCHLER: How long did you stay in El Paso?

VINCENT: Three years. That led me into a, a so-called El Paso Symphony Orchestra. It was conducted by one of the choir directors in town, who was not himself an instrumentalist. He didn't play piano or any instrument at all. So his results were not too good, but he was pretty well entrenched with certain church people. Many people wanted me to be conductor of the orchestra, but it never happened, because this man wouldn't give up his job. We founded what we called the El Paso Schools Concert Orchestra, and we played programs of lighter music and music for children, young people. They were early examples of what they do now, what some orchestras do for--

WESCHLER: Young people's concerts?

VINCENT: Young people's concerts. I organized the orchestra and conducted it, gave lots of concerts. We would go around and repeat the concerts. That proved quite successful. And a lot of the players who played in the symphony played with me in that. It created a little difficulty for the other

man, because they said that he-- They found out that he wasn't too competent. I gained a great deal of conducting experience that way, as well as conducting the high school orchestra.

As for composing during this period, this was where I was up against two things, and this was very important. In the first place it was a period in which I had to find myself, what I was as a composer, what I represented, how I felt about being, not just necessarily am impressionist or a romanticist or what, or what technique I would use, whether I'd use twelve-tone row or whether I'd use, not just that, but find what I was comfortable with, what I wanted to do. This way I wasn't able to get as far away from the music as I wanted to, as I was conducting other people's music. But in general it was music that was a less--

WESCHLER: Demanding quality?

VINCENT: Less of our time, less contemporary. Therefore, it didn't seem to give me the confrontation that I was having with Stravinsky and others. So I began to compose small pieces, pieces for small groups of instruments, often including the flute because I could take part. And songs and little choral pieces. Well, I also found that it was still a conflict in amount of time, and I was not able to find these great gaps of time in which to compose regular

works. So I was disappointed there.

I decided also that if I was to stay in school business, then I would have to do something more than I was doing. While they would take me there at that time, because I was qualified, highly qualified as an instrumental man, and highly qualified as a musician, I didn't have that magic thing they called a degree. Not too many musicians had degrees, but I saw the handwriting on the wall that soon they would have to have, and further they would have to have the advanced degree, the Ph.D. So I decided that I would have to get the Ph.D., as much grief as that would cause.

So the very next summer I sent to Chicago, and I went that summer to Chicago Music College. I decided that that wasn't as good as Northwestern, so the following summer I went to Northwestern. I had two summers in Chicago studying advanced studies. Now I was getting into the academic studies and getting over that side of my life, and again this April-May syndrome occurred. Right out of the blue, I got a letter from George Peabody College in Nashville saying that they had heard about my work--meaning my work in the schools--and wondered if I'd be interested in coming to accept a position to bring this aspect of music instruction to their curriculum. George Peabody College was a college for teachers, and they wanted someone to come there and

teach this new thing, instrumental music, so that they can send out instrumental teachers such as I was. In other words, I had been somewhat of a success, to put it boldly, and what I had done had become a matter of notice. I lifted a whole city out of nothing and suddenly gave it a pretty good musical picture within two or three years. They had heard about that from one of their teachers. They had teachers even. Have you ever heard of it?

WESCHLER: Of Peabody College?

VINCENT: It has teachers everywhere, and somebody had told them, or maybe they inquired. I don't know. But I had been a success there so, to make a long story short, they offered me a position at a great advance in pay (I'll tell you in a minute) and a much better opportunity. I had been getting $2,100 a year at El Paso. That was my pay for nine months' work, $2,100, which would be regarded as a pretty good salary. They offered me $2,400, but this time for eleven months, because they went through the summer. "Well," I said, "this doesn't allow me to study. I'm depending on these three months to get away to study."

I wrote back and told them my difficulty. They said what they would prefer to do, then, with me: "We still want you. Instead of making you a part of the faculty as such, we'll put you as a teaching fellow, we'll make you a teaching fellow. The duties will be exactly the same, and

you will have the same salary, but you'll have a different title. This will allow you to take any courses that you can fit into your schedule, because there are rules against a faculty member undertaking that many courses."

So I became a teaching fellow, and I went there and was there three years. Of course that includes the summer, during which time I completed my B.S. degree and my B.A. degree.

WESCHLER: Now this is 1929 to '32 roughly?

VINCENT: Yes. '33. I went to El Paso in '27. [I was there in] '27, '28, '29, '30. I moved to Nashville in 1930 and was [there] in the summer of '30 through the summer of '33. That's three years.

WESCHLER: Did you have any important music teachers there that mattered to you or just wrote more or less at that point?

VINCENT: I'm inclined to say yes.

WESCHLER: You don't have to.

VINCENT: I'm going to say no, not because some of them weren't competent. It wasn't a matter of competency, but I knew as much or more than they did.

WESCHLER: Were you studying other things besides music in order to get the B.S. degree?

VINCENT: Oh yes. And on that basis I got enormous good out of it, because I was able to study French, German and

such things as physics of sound, and subjects that normally I wouldn't have taken, you see. It was of enormous importance to study the physics of sound, which I did there, and then, for instance, to be able to study French and German as preparation for foreign study, which fitted in there. But as music, I don't think there was anyone there who could teach me. I think I knew more than, as much or more than anyone there.

WESCHLER: How was your own composing coming during this period?

VINCENT: Well, again, that was in a sense the lowest in terms of output, because I was so busy. And I took that enormous, and they gave me as little teaching, and I took as much as I could. And it's a good thing I was a married man and not running around, not socializing very much, because I really just put my nose to the grindstone and worked morning, noon, and night, you know. I had my goal fixed to finish the Ph.D., well, finish all but the Ph.D. there, and then go to some other school. I had my mind set on Eastman.

WESCHLER: In Rochester?

VINCENT: Rochester, yes. I had made contact there and I was working, I was going to finish my master's degree at George Peabody College and then take my Ph.D. in music at Rochester, at the Eastman School of Music. Which was not

to be. I finished the degree, and I applied to Eastman and was admitted; in fact, offered a three-year teaching assistantship, which would give me money to live on. But I had also made the mistake of writing to Harvard. I admired Harvard, and it seemed unattainable, but I wrote them, to ask what their qualifications were and so forth, and they wrote back and said I had the qualifications and would be admitted to their Ph.D. program.

So very reluctantly, I gave up the Eastman Conservatory scholarship and went to Harvard on no scholarship at all. I had a little money; I had $1,800 saved up. I figured that would get me through the first year maybe, if I could get some work, additional work. Well, it did, and just barely. I wanted, of course, to stay another year, but there was a scholarship, which may still exist. I don't think of the name of it at the moment. It's probably in my mind though, but I won a scholarship which gave me enough. During the first year the record I made was good enough that I won the Elkan Naumberg fellowship for the second year.

And during this year, again I applied, worked towards the John Knowles Paine traveling fellowship, which is a very famous one. Harvard has a rotation fellowship. It sends a student abroad each year on the John Knowles Paine traveling fellowship, and, lo and behold, I won that. So that took me abroad, and that was renewable if I did well

the first year. I did well the first year, so that was renewed. I had the two years of the John Knowles Paine fellowship, which was the way I was able to stay in France and to study.

WESCHLER: Let's go back to Harvard for a second. Are you sad that you went to Harvard instead of Eastman?

VINCENT: Well, yes, and no. My life would have been different, but it probably would have been even more successful and more recognition quicker, had I gone to Eastman.

In the first place they wanted me very badly. I was, see, kind of unique. I was a performing musician who had the real determination to get the Ph.D. and really get it, you know. That meant mastering two languages. I say mastering them; I learned to master them the way you do in America. I even added Italian to that. In other words, I had the ambition and drive to do all this. And that shows in my work and my compositions, apparently. So I became through that means a friend of Howard Hanson, who was the head of Eastman. We're friends to this day, and he regrets to this day that I didn't come to him. The thing is, had I gone there, I have no doubt that I would have been successful as a student. I mean, I have no doubt of it, and that meant that whatever jobs they had any influence [on] in the country, I would have gotten the pick. At Harvard, that

wasn't so; they didn't give a damn.

I didn't finish my degree at Harvard as a matter of fact. Are you aware of that?

WESCHLER: You finished it at Cornell later on?

VINCENT: Yes. But the reasons for that I'll tell you, too. But you asked me if I were satisfied. I would have put it this way. Had I gone to Eastman, I feel sure that I would have been satisfied in certain things that I'd have done.

On the other hand, I can't say that two years at Harvard were lost, because they certainly were not. In the first place I studied with Piston, and came in contact with important music again in Boston, in a different way. And my beginnings, my association with Nicolas Slonimsky, for instance. In other words, it was a different channel, although Slonimsky had been at Eastman School, too; he taught there.

WESCHLER: Can you talk about both Piston and Slonimsky in those days, maybe starting with Piston. What it was like to study with him?

VINCENT: Well, I never studied with Slonimsky.

WESCHLER: Right.

VINCENT: I mean, he was writing his dictionary at that time, getting ready to write his book on Thesaurus of Scales. And I was thinking about my book at that time, too, did a lot of research. You've seen that book?

WESCHLER: Yes.

VINCENT: Yes. Well, Piston is an enigma in a way. He started out to be an engineer, and then he changed and wanted to be an artist, and changed to wanting to be a composer. So he, in a sense, did what I did: he changed late. But he had one of the clearest minds, I think, one of the clearest minds that you would hope to know. Very square, very foursquare, very sharp. And so he absorbed whatever he addressed himself to very readily, and he went to France and studied with Boulanger and came back here. And when I won the John Knowles Paine-- In fact, that's where he had gone on that same one, and he had gotten indoctrinated, shall I say, with modernism in the French manner rather than the German manner. He brought it back and I got that earlier indoctrination, before I went to Boulanger, from him. Well, he approached each composition on its own; he didn't try to make it conform to some other models or something and say this is alike; so each was judged on its own basis. Apparently he felt I had some promise, because his vote was necessary on the traveling fellowship.

WESCHLER: Did you study as a private student of his or in a class?

VINCENT: In class. In Harvard, it was a small class, a class [of] about ten. And I guess I was the outstanding

one because I can't think of any other who, well, Karl Kohn, not Karl Kohn, he's at Riverside [actually at Pomona College]. The last name is [Edward Toner] Cone, but he teaches at Princeton, and his last name is Cone and he was in the class. So far as I know, he was the only one in the class when I was there those two years whose name has surfaced.

WESCHLER: How did Piston go about teaching?

VINCENT: Well, the class was [a] three-hour session with a break in the middle, and he would say, "Who has music today?" You had to have music pretty often. Hopefully every time, but not necessarily. You could skip a time or two, but if you didn't get in something pretty quick, it began to look bad. But he would take this music up, put it on the side of the piano, and he'd sit down and say, "Let's see what we've got here." And he'd start looking at the score. He played piano indifferently, but managed to score read fairly well. And there were some others, Edward [Toner] Cone, I remember the man's name. If we needed a singer, why, somebody who had a passable voice would sing. If it were something two pianos could do better than one piano, or if it was something with a violin, maybe there was a violinist in the class who could bring his violin and be prepared for it. In other words, usual ways of getting to the work and opening it up so that everybody could see it.

So his way would be then to ask around the class what each person thought before he would say anything. "What do you think, Vincent?" So each of us was expected to say something, "OK" or "fine" or "excellent" or "I think this part is overdrawn, it doesn't hold the interest," or whatever you wanted to say, after which he himself would give his remarks. And then we went back to-- That was it, that was his way of teaching.

WESCHLER: Was it valuable?

VINCENT: Yes, yes.

WESCHLER: What part was valuable? His comments, or the comments of everyone?

VINCENT: I think the comments of everyone, bolstered by his own remarks afterwards, which didn't always-- Well, sometimes they were diametrically opposed to what the other people had said; sometimes somewhat opposed. But I think this gave the widest, this opened up the widest discussion, the widest view of the details, all its strengths. As a matter of fact, it became the basic way I taught too at UCLA.

WESCHLER: Can you describe Piston at that time? How old was he?

VINCENT: Well, Piston was, he was eighty-three when he died, so he's just a little older, ten years older than I. But he gave the appearance of being a sort of an up-and-coming young

man of the faculty of any college and university--you wouldn't necessarily think of music. They kept saying that he was quite a man with the ladies. I never saw any evidence of it. I never saw any evidence that he--oh, he was married and so forth. I never saw him particularly interested in any of the girls or any girl. I think that this was a reputation that he did not earn. I think he would have been amused by it, by even knowing there was such a reputation. I don't think it would have bothered him; it probably would have pleased him.

WESCHLER: Was he charismatic?

VINCENT: Not particularly, but he was curiously introverted. I mean to say, it seemed that he was modest, overly modest, at the same time knowing his own worth. He didn't sell his worth cheaply, but he didn't denigrate himself or lower himself. He gave out the impression of "I know." And he did know. He did know his facts. He did know his business. On the other hand, he didn't try to snow you. He didn't try to overwhelm you. To sit down and talk with you, he could be as simple as you and I are here. And altogether I think his personality was bright without being scintillating. His conversation was solid rather than interesting. Whenever he talked, we talked about something of weight, something that mattered, and something you talked about. Well, this earthquake prediction--things

of that sort, you know--he didn't waste his time.

WESCHLER: Did he have a sense of humor?

VINCENT: Yes, very low key. He would make a remark. Frequently it was sort of a cryptic remark, and he had a peculiar motion of turning his head, as if he turned away to hide a grin. Yes, he had. It was not the hilarious sense of humor, yet it was somewhat appreciative of the lighter side of things. And he had a sense of democracy. He invited me to his home, spent a whole afternoon once with me, just visiting together. That was a very nice thing for him to do in his position; not many of my teachers ever bothered with that.

WESCHLER: During all this, you mentioned that he had the French modernist influence; was this the first time that, in a solid way, you were being exposed to modernists?

VINCENT: Oh, no. See, I was going to symphony orchestra concerts all the time and listening to records and buying scores. Music was getting easier to-- Oh no, that was my own. But, you see, there was a big tendency for national music, such as German national music. What they had done before the war they continued to do after the war, that kind of thing, you see. They didn't bring them up short and change it. The French, however, seemed to bring them up short and change it. They seemed to have gained confidence internationally, and they didn't really do it.

But, "By God, we are as good in music as German or Italian music. Our composers are just as good." And so forth and so on, or better. They had a typical and a national semblance that they had not had before. So it was that side of it, you see, because more of the younger men that went abroad after the war studied in France than studied in Germany or Italy. Most of them.

WESCHLER: When one thinks of France, one thinks also of the Russian community in Paris. That was part of it.

VINCENT: Yes, that was part of it, too. Yes, that's very true, very sharp of you to recall that, because that was true. The international community felt it had become aware of what was going on in Russia. Not what actually was going on in Russia, but what was going on in Russians' minds in Paris.

WESCHLER: Speaking of Russians, I'd mentioned both Piston and Slonimsky. What was Slonimsky like?

VINCENT: Well, Slonimsky was always a fount of wisdom and knowledge. He couldn't make up his mind whether he wanted to be a conductor or just a writer. But the writing-- He took the wrong turn, I guess. He became very interested in [Charles] Ives and made some little reputation as an Ives propagandist, as you know. I think his reputation as a conductor went right side by side with his reputation as a propagandist for the new music. In other words, he tied

those so close together, that, if they were going to have Slonimsky, they were going to have contemporary music. Well, I think this held him down as a conductor. I think he might have had bigger experiences, but I suspect this was a game, all told, that he was put in this position. Of course, he's turned out so many fine books.

WESCHLER: How did you know him at this time? [tape recorder turned off]

VINCENT: Slonimsky's name was known to me in Boston, of course, but I don't think my name was known to him. And yet I saw him almost daily that second summer at Harvard, the summer of 1935. And, of course, I was there every day working on my theory of diatonic modes. And he was working on something. Well, Mr. [Richard] Appel was the librarian. I came to know him quite well because of the need for books and talking all the time. He was a very self-contained man; he didn't say much. But one day he said, "It's a curious thing, but you and Mr. Slonimsky are both working on books on scales."

Well, that scared the hell out of me, because I thought I had an original idea which I was keeping as close as I could to myself. My book could [be finished by] spring. So I didn't see how he really could be working on it. I had my foot in it so much already, I said, "Well, I'm going to go ahead and do it anyway." So I never said anything

about it. Daily I saw him there, and he saw me, but he didn't pay much attention because I didn't mean anything to him.

But when I got to Paris and hadn't been very long in Paris, Moses Smith, who had been music editor of the Boston Evening Transcript, wrote me, made the arrangements before I left, that on any extraordinary musical events I would represent the Boston Evening Transcript and would be paid for it. In other words, I would be foreign music correspondent, roving, which helped me get into a lot of concerts free, and also got me in print and made me a little money. Not very much, but some.

Nicolas saw one of my articles and said something to Moses Smith about it. And he said, "Yes, Vincent, he's working, he's been around." So I got a letter from Nicolas Slonimsky, saying--I don't have the letter--"Though I don't know you, a friend of mine tells me about you, and what he tells me is good. I would like to know if you would be willing to, for pay, look up a few things for me and give me the information." He gave me two things to look up at that time, and, of course, I accepted those and did them for him. So we became letter, correspondent friends.

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DECEMBER 12, 1976

WESCHLER: I'd thought we'd begin, Mr. Vincent, with your talking about, perhaps a little bit about Charles Ives, since you were talking about Slonimsky, and it occurred to me to wonder to what extent Ives was known in the Boston area in the thirties.

VINCENT: I can't really tell you when Ives first came into my consciousness, except that I know when I went to George Peabody College in Nashville to teach in the 1930s, they, in the library, had a magazine, I think it was called Musical Quarterly, in which there was an article on Charles Ives's songs. Apparently his book, Thirty-Four Songs, had just appeared, and little more was known about him. Die Musik had something. So Ives, this was a new name to me. I looked up what I could about him, read the article with interest, found that he was an iconoclast and what kind of thing he was doing. I was interested in him a slight bit, I mean, not bowled over. And then Slonimsky's name had been known to me before, because I'd been in Boston when he was there. He [Slonimsky] was an assistant to Koussevitzky, you know.

I looked at New Music, I looked at that. And some of the names were known to me, Henry Cowell and so forth. But

this was all very new music and I was doing it on an exploratory basis. It made no great impression on me as a composer *per se*. I mean, I certainly didn't change my style or anything of the sort.

WESCHLER: Was his music being played fairly often in Boston, or at all?

VINCENT: No, you looked in vain for a performance. Occasionally somebody would do one of his songs, but even then there were just five or six from which they would choose. And Slonimsky again [was] making somewhat of a newspaper impression through his concerts. Well, his name really didn't get around very much. I came to know, and I was doing it very slowly, but even that maybe sooner than a lot of people.

Now you asked about the diatonic modes.

WESCHLER: I wanted to ask you further, you had mentioned in terms of Slonimsky that both of you were working on your--

VINCENT: I think I told you when I left Chadwick, I'd been immersed, just overwhelmed with fugues and the older techniques, you know, and contrapuntal techniques, how to make correct canons in all distances, and so forth. So I got a great deal of that from Chadwick, which I think is good training. But it didn't lead me along the road very far to finding my own way, because I certainly wasn't going to write like that. Nobody was going to write like that.

WESCHLER: Was Chadwick writing like that?

VINCENT: Oh, no. He was writing his own thing more or less. He was very Germanic. If you know any of his music, you realize it's not really Germanic; it has some American connotations, but not of the Dvorak type. I mean, it isn't a hybrid of American folk songs. But it shows in his titles, sometimes he uses like "Jubilee," and, what are some of the others? But if you look at his titles you'll see this Yankee spirit sticking out and so on. But he didn't seem to use much American folk songs.

WESCHLER: Anyway, so you had these fugues and so forth.

VINCENT: But his style didn't attract me either. I felt vaguely dissatisfied with what I was doing and not knowing what direction to follow, and not wishing to follow in the apparently obvious direction of Debussy and Ravel, which was so popular at the time. Early Prokofiev was getting around, too, Hindemith, some. All of this certainly had its impression on me, including Schoenberg and, I mean, Stravinsky. I studied their scores, looked at them, but mostly they left me cold. I did not say, "Well, I believe I'll try this."

I think I tried it a little bit just to see. I'd try my hand at twelve-tone. It was easy to do. Within an hour you can know most of the gimmicks, you know. Then, curiously, I took a copybook with music staves printed on it, a grey

copybook about so thick, which I grandly felt was my compendium of penned-up principles. Truth to tell, I never did fill it full of very much, but there were some things there. And I remember one thing very definitely at the beginning, "I do not accept fugue as the mainstay of my own composition. I don't see that I shall find a use for fugue."

That was a curious thing to do.

WESCHLER: Was there any particular reason for that?

VINCENT: Probably reaction to Chadwick, I don't know. Maybe like Beethoven said something about "Blessed be us on this as the last day of strict fugue." I forget the exact quote, something of the sort, I think.

But I longed, I slowly came back to fugue over a long period of time, and it was a rediscovery that I did. To boil this down to size, I began to ask myself if I believed in folk song as an element of my style. I did explore folk song, I should say, to some extent from '27 through maybe as far as '37. But, I mean, by that time it had run its course. And not ever deeply immersed in it. But I even did some transcriptions of folk songs and based some choral works on folk songs, and that sort of thing. I deeply admired it spiritually. Folk song, American folk songs of the South, mean a great deal to me. But the thing that gradually emerged was, I found that I was attracted to

modality. Now I studied modality in Fux and in my contrapuntal studies. I studied the modes, church modes per se. Then I found these did not square with the folk song. So I studied English and American folk songs with regard to their modes; I made great lists of them and studied how many were in the Dorian mode, and how many in the Myxolydian mode, and so forth.

WESCHELR: How did you come upon all this musical history, the various knowledge of the modes? Was that things at Harvard that you studied or at back at--

VINCENT: No, this was even before I went to Harvard. This was pre-Harvard. I did it when I was at George Peabody College. I think I did a great deal of it, because they had no one particularly to guide me. I was on my own and this was a period when I could explore within myself without somebody to say do this, that, and the other. So I explored the modes very thoroughly. Hours and hours and hours I put into this, and I thought I might write a book on the modality of English and American folk songs. I never did do that, but it turned into a diatonic area of modern music, because I began to see how this had an underground influence, unsuspected, on music. You're not a musician?

WESCHLER: No.

VINCENT: Unfortunately, but still maybe I can get it across to you in some way. Music is composed of scales. But it is

not, per se, of scales any more than a language is of an alphabet. Do you understand what I mean? It has to deal with these things, but they come in larger chunks than that. The flow is not from getting an alphabet and then building it up into long words, it's-- You get long words from larger chunks and then find a way to spell it out. I don't know about that. But, anyway, music is that way.

So I put a scale down, write something in a Dorian mode. Well, some people do. That's all right, but a piece in the key of C is perfectly all right. But the thing is, I began to even go back to the Greeks. I went back to the Greek modes, and the modes of Rome, and the early Church, and the whole church history of modes.

WESCHLER: Now this is in terms of studying the music itself, or studying theory about it?

VINCENT: Studying the theory about modes. I felt there was something that tied all of this together. Maybe it's a paradox, or a parallel too far drawn, but I seemed to see a thread of unity, a thread of unity running through the music--that is, the scales of music--of the so-called Aryan race. It came down from Greece and then cut back into Rome, and back up into Europe, and the reflowering of Europe. The music of the West per se did not take so much from the Persians, from the Egyptians, the Chinese, which have their own modal systems, but came from some source which seemed,

where they could all fit together.

In Greece they had names for them, like the Dorian mode, and the Phrygian mode, and the Myxolydian mode, and so forth. All these modes, these were sections of Greece, these were geographical sections. They simply tagged these names onto them. But curiously enough, they fit together into a-- If you looked carefully you saw that they somehow fitted together. In some ways they didn't, and in other ways they did. Then I began to trace that.

So I, as I say, my allusion to ethnic culture may be overdrawn, but there may be something in it. It may have started up in the Baltic states, pre-Greek, come down to Greece, flowered and then was reintroduced, or driven by forces in the East back up through Rome and into Spain and France.

WESCHLER: Were you interested in the historical--

VINCENT: Oh, yes.

WESCHLER: Or were you doing the research of the archaeology in that kind of interest, too?

VINCENT: Yes.

WESCHLER: Does any actual Greek music exist?

VINCENT: There are a few tunes, about eight accurate tunes.

WESCHLER: But it's mainly theory that has come down to us?

VINCENT: And that is quite mixed, and you have to read almost between the lines sometimes to have these things fit.

You can say, "I don't believe this," because you have to do this to make it fit. Well, I happen to believe. I can't see that there can be that much coincidence in a single system, which would grow first into the five tones, four modes of the early church, and then the five and the seven tones and the twelve tones and so forth. And then be thrown out and come to the two major and minor; and then, with Schoenberg and others, dissipate those factors and go into something else.

So this fascinated me, how this all came about. So I gathered tremendous amounts of information about it, and, when I got to Harvard, I found myself now much more engrossed with my own concerns. I was writing music again. I'd been studying. Remember, I'd been studying very hard for three years, three and a half years, at George Peabody College. I had not written a whole lot of music. I had short pieces and things, experiments like that, keeping my feet damp, but not getting very wet. When I got to Harvard, then I went back into my mainstay of composing music. Now, here an interesting pattern happened and this may get a little detailed. Am I too verbose?

WESCHLER: This is fine, don't worry.

VINCENT: Piston had a class called Music Analysis, and he had a curious way of conducting that class. There were about eight or ten of us in the class, all bright young

graduate students. So he began in the nineteenth century with an organist--it's strange such names escape me. I had codeine, about a half hour before you came. I had some pain, and I thought I'd better take it, so it may slow me up a little bit. Anyway, we began with the French school of 1875, and, I think, at the second one with Saint-Saens. So we took them by composers. And-- Who wrote the famous D Minor symphony about 1875?

WESCHLER: Darius?

VINCENT: No, no, French. [Cesar Franck] Anyway, I'm so ashamed. But the second was Saint-Saens. And then, a famous songwriter [Gabriel-Urbain Faure]-- You know I'm not going to be able to bring those names out?

WESCHLER: I'm sure we can catch them later.

VINCENT: Well, let me epitomize it so we can catch it. He wrote lots of songs, piano pieces, he was very French in his style, beautifully turned out craftsman-like, and one of the fine composers. Well, it was at this point, this particular composer, I need his name and I hope I get it, but if I don't, we'll call him Mr. X.

We got there about Christmastime, and I, by this time, was using symbols and names that I had to make up to analyze the chords. And they used Myxolydian tonic seventh and things of this sort, used these names which I adopted. And this annoyed Piston.

He said, "Why in the hell do you do that? That doesn't belong here."

I said, "You can't do it without it. You can't explain it without it."

Because I kept up with this.

So he, before Christmas, he said to me, he put it before the class, he said, "Well, I'm going to fix you. I'm going to give you the whole class for three hours, right after Christmas, the first meeting, and you're going to explain what you've been doing and what you've been up to. And you're going to sink or swim on the basis of that."

Well, challenged by that, I spent the next month tremendously industriously, gathering all this information to prove my point. The day finally came and I was pretty nervous, because this was a tremendous spot that I was in, no one could know the spot I was in, because I had worked for some years, this was--

WESCHLER: It all came down to that?

VINCENT: Well, I began to explain. I went to the lecture board and I played some examples, and showed this, that, and the other, and why certain chords simply had to be what I called them, and could not be what he was calling them in his book. He had a book, a very famous book on musical analysis. It was a very clear book in that way, but he had to do some forcing himself to make it work. It had been

allowed because it had grown up slowly that way. But I sloughed off this and went back to its source. I began to show how my theory of relating-- I had relationships all the way back to the Greek. So the young men began to pinpoint me, just jabbing questions at me and trying to pin me to the wall. At one point, Piston broke up. He said, to a boy named Robert--again I don't remember, Robert somebody--said, "Bob, don't you see what he means is--" and he began to tell what I meant.

WESCHLER: Correctly?

VINCENT: And then he stopped suddenly. He realized he had been converted. You see what happened? He listened, and he was an honest man, and musical, and he listened. And when the light dawned he found himself arguing on my side instead of with the students. They were open-mouthed. From then on I had no trouble. I think that won the John Knowles Paine Fellowship for me, which took me abroad two years.

WESCHLER: And you really swam there.

VINCENT: I pursued this all the time I was abroad, and Piston read this first manuscript of The Diatonic Modes in its early form with great interest, and was highly complimentary.

WESCHLER: Were there other people who were reading and discussing with you as you were developing your theories?

VINCENT: Oh, I discussed it with all sorts of people.

[With] Vincent Jones, who was a member of that class, he was head of theory at New York University. And I don't think anybody else of note in that class--no, Edward Cone, Edward Cone. Now, there's a name I do think of. He is a musician and a professor of composition at Princeton now, who was in that class. I don't know who else has survived in the academic world but me.

WESCHLER: But even outside that class, were there people who you were talking to about the theories you were working on?

VINCENT: Oh yes. I talked to everybody I could about it. I talked to Roy Harris. [I] talked to Nicolas Slonimsky. I talked a little to Aaron Copland about it. Talked to Stravinsky, after I got out here, about it. And then I had my classes in which I could teach it and inculcate it to some degree, though I never forced it on them. Some of them assumed that I taught my classes without even knowing that I'd written the book, published a book on it. The book was first published in 1952 [1951], I think.

WESCHLER: It was written before that, wasn't it?

VINCENT: Yes, the first draft was written in Paris while I was abroad. Then I came back. It had been my intention to finish my Ph.D. at Harvard, but Leichtentritt had been my professor, had retired, and the man who succeeded him as musicologist I didn't like. But I did like--he was

librarian and musicologist at Cornell [Otto Kinkeldey], a very famous man, an American. He had read my book and admired it. So when I got money to continue my schooling after I got back from Europe, which occured in 1941-- I mean, I saved money from 1937 and I felt I could take a year off. Instead of going to Harvard and beginning again with a new musicologist, I went to Cornell with the other musicologist. Roy [Harris] was there.

WESCHLER: Well, we'll talk about that more when we get that far ahead, but for the time being I just wanted to ask why it wasn't published sooner? Had you been trying to get it published?

VINCENT: Yes, I tried to get it published sooner, and it was turned down, and turned down by Mills, because they'd accepted it. That's a curious story, too. I was turned down, I was living in Bowling Green [Kentucky], where I had accepted a job. I went there in 1937 and stayed through 1945 as head of the music department there. I tried to get it published during this time, and one of the companies that turned it down was Mills Music. I moved out here and applied to the-- By this time the book needed some revision, because I updated some of my ideas, and some more music had been written. So I tried again. This time I applied first to the University of California Press and they accepted it. They put up $4,000 to publish it.

Well, that was a large sum at that time, that was an unprecedented sum, but even that proved insufficient and they got bogged down. In the meantime they also had gotten interested in my music. [tape recorder turned off] The publications for the University of California took it on and gave $4,000 as budget to it and didn't do it. In the meantime Mills had gotten interested in my music and were publishing some of my music. In fact, they were going to make an exclusive contract; they would publish all my music and so on. They found out about this book and said, "Well, why didn't you let us have that?"

And I said, "You've declined it."

And they said, "Let's see it."

So they took the book and said, "Well, we want it." They made a proposition to the University of California Press, another first and last, I guess, that they would take over and finish the book in hardcover instead of soft cover, that they would give them the one thousand copies that they usually publish, and would finish the publication complete and thereafter have title to it. So that's what was done: the first one thousand copies by the University of California Press, and the copies thereafter by Mills. That is the story of how it was first published. Now they published, I think, twenty-five hundred copies. I'm not sure about how many copies. All but a few were sold. I

bought the residual amount, perhaps I have six of the original copies, but the others are all over the world, in libraries and so forth.

Then, just to get on with The Diatonic Modes: I finished, it was out of print for all these years and there were many requests for copies of it. They weren't able to be supplied, of course, so I had a friend, Herman Langinger-- Do you know Herman Langinger?

WESCHLER: I've heard his name.

VINCENT: With the Highland Music Press.

WESCHLER: Didn't he have something to do with the New Music Quarterly?

VINCENT: Yes, that's he. He was the original engraver for that. That's right. Good for you. Yes, so he had had his feet wet in kind of high music before, you see; not just a street publisher. So he wanted this book.

He said, "If you will rewrite it and bring it up to date, I'll republish it, reprint it, we'll retype it, and everything."

So it was done. It's been out over a year now.

WESCHLER: Was it well received when it came out originally?

VINCENT: Well, it has never been properly publicized. He doesn't have the distribution, and this is what he's trying to get. It sells some, and in good places, but it has not been reviewed in the proper places. This disturbs us, and

it disturbs Nicolas Slonimsky very much because, I think, Nicolas regards it as a rather important book.

WESCHLER: Was it at the time it came out in 1951 well received?

VINCENT: Very well received, yes.

WESCHLER: Do you think it's been influential on composing at all, or more on theory?

VINCENT: Yes, I've had many attestations to that from strange sources, even from Alfred Newman, who called it his bible.

He said, "I keep it on my desk all the time."

After his death, his wife told me, "Yes, he kept that book on his desk; he referred to it as his bible."

But that's just one epitomization, you might say. Many people have said this.

WESCHLER: How about in your own music. What effect has it had?

VINCENT: My own music epitomizes it. I mean, my own music follows in that line. I'm not trying to illustrate an idea. I'm simply doing what comes naturally. This is what comes naturally to me. I found the perfect language for the music I wanted to write. I'm one composer who has done that. So I see no reason to change.

It's hard to classify me. I think some people call me a classical composer, which is too broad, of course, but

others think I am romantic. And yet, almost invariably, people who are more knowledgeable realize there is a certain Americanism in it, too. So I think it's just John Vincent, American, writing music, you know.

WESCHLER: You told me a story off tape last time about something that [Mario] Castelnuovo-Tedesco had told you in this line. You might tell it for the tape now. Do you remember? He heard a piece of yours played.

VINCENT: He heard the music for the ballet Three Jacks, and the ballet suite that I did for [Alfred] Wallenstein. He heard that broadcast. He heard it and didn't know what it was, so he left it on.

He said, "I was more and more interested and more and more amazed." He was very flattering. He said, "This music never ceased inventing. It just went on and on and on; the invention just did not cease."

Which pleased me.

WESCHLER: He mentioned also something about he figured it wasn't American, or--

VINCENT: He figured that it was American, but he couldn't figure by whom. [to nurse] Can you disturb us as little as possible? Thank you very much, I know you will.

WESCHLER: One question, just a general kind of issue that occurs to me as you talk. Just what [is] your conception of the relationship between theory and composition? Or

another way of phrasing that is, to what extent do you think students of composition should also be students of musicology?

VINCENT: Well, I don't think anything is absolutely necessary. One, to be a composer, one must write music, and one can do it without the study of anything, or one does. And there have been some cases where they've done pretty well that way. It might be argued they'd do better if they had studied more and know more, but sometimes the instinct is so strong, that a man like Mozart, did he really ever study? No, he just did. Others less so.

If men are not really well trained, I mean not fully trained, if they lack something in orchestration, or they lack something in manipulation of voices or counterpoint, if their horizons were broadened, they could do better, I'm sure. I think a great many of the younger generation of composers are not getting a thorough traditional background. Now a traditional background, like studying Greek and Latin as a necessity to becoming a writer, is not perhaps necessary, but certainly a good strong insight into grammar and rhetoric, you know, would help, because you can trap yourself and make errors and not know how to extricate yourself if you don't know grammar.

WESCHLER: Specifically, talking about composers trained at UCLA, or here in Southern California, is there something

just as a level of curriculum that is lacking?

VINCENT: You see, we're getting off the track where we're leaving Harvard and getting here.

WESCHLER: Well, that's OK. We'll get back, just as long as we're here.

VINCENT: If you want me to answer that question, I'll be glad to answer it. There is a great diversity in the education, and no two schools parallel one another as far as I know. USC and UCLA have been the strongest influences in the past, and UCLA was quite strong for two or three years with Schoenberg, you see. Then he retired and I succeeded him. It is a matter of record that he never taught the twelve-tone system at UCLA. He taught it on Sunday mornings at his home, and they came to his home on a special class, you know, most of them did. Not only UCLA students, but others.

And USC, particularly under Ingolf Dahl and Halsey Stevens, followed a more Hindemith and particularly Bartokian style and taught that. So we were turning out young Bartoks all over the place here; fifteen, twenty years ago, some of them very promising, and still are, maybe.

And at UCLA, I was the main composition teacher for several years, from, say, 1946 to '52 when [Lukas] Foss came. That's when they gave him a class. And I don't know if he followed any particular system except his own genius

system. Of course, he was a genius. I was the first one to say that, regardless of anything else. But I think he has followed no particular system, taught as he felt that day. Now UCLA's music department has been very loathe to put anybody in charge of anything, theory, or piano, or voice, or anything. They don't like to do it. They hire a good teacher and say let him teach. I think that's been a disaster in composition in that the student cannot move from one teacher to another with any degree of judgment about what they're going to get.

I taught all systems. I mean, I taught twelve-tone systems as well as diatonic. I gave a model to follow. I mean, it might be Bartok, it might be Beethoven, it might be old or new, Schoenberg and so forth. I turned out a remarkable series of students with diversified styles. And to name some of them around here: [Richard Mark] Grayson; Dan [Daniel Aaron] Kessner (he was a student also of someone else there at UCLA, though); Don Ellis, way over in left field, you might say, but he was a student of mine; Lloyd Rodgers out at--

WESCHLER: Northridge? Cal Arts?

VINCENT: No, I have no students at Cal Arts [California Institute of the Arts] although there is a story about Cal Arts that I have to tell you sometime. Well, I'll make you a list of them.

WESCHLER: We can cover that in more detail as we get closer to it.

VINCENT: Richard Hoffman was a student of Schoenberg's up until he died, but he was my student at UCLA also. He took a degree there and is teaching at Oberlin. He's a dyed-in-the-wool twelve-toner. And the most avant-garde composer, I guess, in the world is La Monte Young. You know that name?

WESCHLER: I've heard it, sure.

VINCENT: He was my student and came out of those classes. So my teaching ranged wide, which I have always been proud of and felt that it was the thing to do, and I would do it again. But other teachers felt that their own way is the right way. Some of them would say so, "The only way is the way I'm doing it. I've found the right way, and, if you don't do it that way, you will not succeed."

Well, what are the young composers to do? And so, I think, perhaps UCLA has not pursued the wisest course there. USC, I guess Halsey Stevens has now retired, he's ill, and they have embarked on Humphrey Searle, who's a twelve-tone composer from England, there this year. What they're going to do permanently I don't know, but they are going to have a hard time replacing Ingolf Dahl.

TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE TWO

DECEMBER 13, 1976

WESCHLER: We talked yesterday in considerable detail about the diatonic theory and how you developed it, and you ended with the story about how your demonstration of the theory in front of Walter Piston's class was certainly partly responsible for your going on to win that prize, the Paine Fellowship.

VINCENT: John Knowles Paine Fellowship.

WESCHLER: Right. So you might start with that and what you did with that.

VINCENT: Incidentally, it was the same prize that Piston had won earlier and had gotten him to go study abroad. He studied with Boulanger, you know, so I was going in his path. Yes, I think that had a great deal to do with bringing my capabilities, or whatever they were, to the attention of the Harvard faculty. I said, I'd won a fellowship in my second year at Harvard. I had only money enough for the first year, but the second year was paid for by a scholarship that I won that first year. Then I got the John Knowles Paine traveling fellowship, which took me abroad; it was eventually to take me abroad two years. It was [for] one year, subject to renewal on certain conditions, and I did get the renewal.

WESCHLER: Well, why did you choose to go to Paris rather than Germany, at that point? I guess, now that I think about it, it's obvious. Germany in 1935 probably was not as musical [a] place as it was in 1930.

VINCENT: Yes, and Paris was the exciting place at the time. Most of the new things were happening in Paris, and this new teacher, [Nadia] Boulanger had arisen. There was no one internationally to challenge her. Strauss was not going to teach anybody. Resphigi did some teaching, but not much, and he wasn't a very good teacher. I hate to say that, but he wasn't. I mean, I didn't study with him, but I knew a few people who did. There was nobody in England [of] sufficient stature or interest; no new ideas coming out of England. The center of the world artistically suddenly seemed to be Paris, and so it was the natural place to go to.

WESCHLER: When you say "suddenly," do you mean as opposed to five years earlier it would have been Berlin?

VINCENT: Well, before the war, before the First World War [it would have been Berlin]. And it took it awhile to get started. I mean to say, music is always a little slower than anything else, and it lags behind the other arts a few years. But by the late 1930s, there had been a few Americans in Paris. George Antheil was the "Bad Boy of Music"; Piston had been there; and Copland had been there; Harris had been

there; Thomson had been there. So many people. So many expatriate painters and poets. So it was a kind of Mecca. It was a lively place. Gertrude Stein was there. So it was quite a place for Americans.

So when the opportunity to study abroad came-- You had to apply for the John Knowles Paine, and I applied actually to study with Boulanger, the teacher of Piston in Paris. She was his teacher; it was sufficient recommendation to me. In retrospect, I don't think I made a mistake. Since I was going abroad, I think that was the thing to do, though I have my fingers crossed about certain things about Boulanger which will come out, which I want to say.

So I had my two years at Harvard studying hard and taking their courses. They didn't have a large curriculum. Their seminars weren't innumerable, and so in two years I'd about gone through them. Any further work at Harvard would have been on my Ph.D. Strictly speaking, I would have selected a thesis topic and gotten to work on it, and gotten down to more serious work. I did pass my languages at Harvard, foreign languages.

WESCHLER: Which languages?

VINCENT: I took French, German, and Italian, and passed all three. That was under Leichtentritt. Leichtentritt had just come. He had come to Harvard as a young man, and then had been a German musicologist, and then come freshly

to the United States when musicology was a fresh word. It was unknown in the early twenties; it was hardly a word. It did not penetrate. Suddenly it became the word in academic circles, musically speaking. And sometime I'd better fill you in on the state of music in America in the universities and the state of music in the United States, because it had a great deal of influence on what I did when I was perspicacious enough to see what was going to happen and angle my career in the correct way.

WESCHLER: How so? Why don't you mention that right now?

VINCENT: Well, I'm a performer, you see. I was going to be, if possible, a symphony performer. But at that time symphonies weren't prospering so much. Only a half dozen orchestras provided a salary large enough to live on. There wasn't a large calling for flute players as such. Nevertheless, we who were brave, young at heart and foolish, devoted years to becoming virtuosi, which I did, and I think I proved by playing in the Boston Symphony that I was, and I could have pursued, until my lungs might have given way, a successful flutist career.

But, the point is, other matters intervened and made me want to go towards composition, spiritually. It wasn't that I was forced economically or something. I took the least likely of the two economic choices. Certainly composition offered less choice, no choice, of making a

living at composition, some choice in making a living in playing, you see. I had to do teaching in order to get enough time to compose. As soon as I entered the teaching world by way of the high school, I saw that the future was-- They were going to need a lot of teachers of music in college and universities. Eventually, right then, I could get a college position without having a college degree at all, if you knew music, because too few people who knew music had college degrees. But I saw immediately that you were going to have to have an A.B. and then an M.A., but eventually a Ph.D. was going to be required. So I determined from the beginning that I should work toward a Ph.D. as rapidly as I could.

WESCHLER: And that was relatively unusual at that point?

VINCENT: Very unusual. I mean, I would give myself credit for having the foresight into conditions that were going to be, come about ten or fifteen years later. And so I began. When I went to El Paso, Texas, I think I told you that first summer I went to Chicago and studied. The second year, I went to Chicago and studied at Northwestern University. In the third summer, I had gotten this position at George Peabody College, still without a degree. But then I refused that job which they offered me and asked if they could make it so that I could study, and they made it a teaching fellowship. All this was due to my wisdom

and foresight, and it really was, it really was. There can be no other. I mean, I can't escape the conclusion that I was wise. And so I aimed toward that and got it as rapidly as I could, and got into schools which counted, which were good. Now we're back to--

WESCHLER: OK, let's come back to, how did you go to Paris?

VINCENT: Well, I was married, of course, and had a child. This was my first wife. Later we were divorced, but then she got cancer and died. She was a violinist.

WESCHLER: What was her name?

VINCENT: Her name was Amelia Bartlett. And my eldest son, who lives here, he's an engineer at Litton, is a son by her. We three went by ship to Cherbourg and on to Paris in August of 1934.

WESCHLER: I've got you for '35. I think it's '35.

VINCENT: Yes, August '35, you're correct. And we found an apartment and then I contacted Boulanger and made arrangements to take composition privately with her, and also her class at Ecole Normale de Musique. She had a weekly class there composed of international [students], mostly French, but there were, there was a Latvian, there were two from Israel, there were Dinu Lipatti from Rumania, who became a well-known figure and died tragically, a tremendous musician, and several others, plus some hangers-on who kind of drifted in and out of the order.

WESCHLER: Do you have any particular memories of Dinu Lipatti?

VINCENT: Oh, yes.

WESCHLER: As a young man while at. . . .

VINCENT: Yes, he and I were close friends, yes.

WESCHLER: What was his personality like in those years?

VINCENT: Well, you see, he was a hunchback, and it gave his personality. He was very heavy around the-- He reminded me of an American bison. He wasn't tall, but he had this heavy build and protruding backbone; but [a] very forceful and very strong face. And very direct. A tremendous pianist, a tremendous musician.

WESCHLER: How did he deal with his being hunchback? Was that an issue for him?

VINCENT: Never. I never heard anyone even mention it. I'm sure they did, but I never mentioned it and--

WESCHLER: It didn't seem to affect his personality?

VINCENT: I entertained him in my apartment. I remember we had chicken. Out of politeness we got a whole chicken. I thought we were doing pretty well, and out of politeness I asked him if he would carve. I don't know how that happened. That shouldn't have happened because it embarrassed him. He cut it in two and put one half on one plate and one half on another plate and there was no more. He didn't know how else to divide a chicken. So I had to intervene,

and of course there were other foods, but it was amusing.

WESCHLER: Was he a passionate sort of man or a calm?

VINCENT: Yes, he could be very passionate, and he became very vociferous occasionally. He was a godson of [Georges] Enescu, and I met Enescu through him. In fact, Amelia took violin lessons from Enescu through this connection. But he wrote on one of his pieces that he presented to the class, "Nationalism in music is supreme," or something like that. And this brought up some talk in the class, and he got very vociferous about it. He practically pounded on the piano. He became very-- I never saw him display such ardor and such fire in speaking as he did on that occasion for that cause. On occasion he could be quite-- But as a performer he was as cool and collected as anyone I've ever seen. I mean, no technical problem ever seemed to faze him. He seemed complete master of the piano.

WESCHLER: That was already clear in those early years?

VINCENT: Oh, yes. Do you happen to know some of--

WESCHLER: I've heard recordings of his music, fantastic.

VINCENT: Yes, amazing performer. And he wrote a work for class which I wish could be heard played. He meant it to be for orchestra and I think [he] did orchestrate it. But he transcribed it for piano, and I wonder if I can call forth the name of it. It was something like a Rhapsody on Rumanian Airs, or something of that sort, tremendously

virtuoso piece. And I thought it tremendously attractive, not at all avant-garde, but very worthwhile. And I have not seen, in all of his publicity and all the talk and writing about it, any mention of this. I think it's a piece which I'm sure must exist, which should be played and known. It's a good piece.

WESCHLER: Well, maybe somebody will be pointed to it in having read this. I want to talk in detail about Nadia Boulanger. For starters, what kind of teacher was she?

VINCENT: Well, first let me say, I think it was very interesting-- My first interview with her. She lived at 36 rue Ballu, towards Hermitage, I think. And it was non-descript on the outside, like so many places of that sort, concealing a very nice apartment inside. Anyway, she lived there--I guess she lived there--maybe still does. She held forth in her living quarters and the room in which she had her music. She saw me in the music room and talked with me and found out I was from Harvard. There was a letter from Piston to explain my situation. From that moment, she set a very high price on lessons, twenty dollars a lesson, which was in American money. And I came to know-- I thought that was high then for France. I had been led to think it was high, and my stipend was only $1,700 to live and eat and travel and everything. So you can imagine one lesson a week at twenty dollars.

WESCHLER: How many hours was that, one hour?

VINCENT: Supposedly an hour. Sometimes it was shorter, or sometimes it was a couple of hours. It depended. She was not short that way. But I did resent it very much when Vincent Jones, whom I met at Harvard, I think I mentioned him to you, came. He was on sabbatical, but he came and stayed a couple of months in Paris and he went to her and said he was only going to be there a short while but would like to take lessons from her. She was conscious, I'm sure, that if you made the price too high he might not stay with her, because he was not there really for that. So she made him a price of ten dollars. And I resented that, you know. They said she would pinch a centime so that it would squeal, and I guess she would. She was pretty smart in her financial dealings.

WESCHLER: What kind of background did she come from?

VINCENT: She was half Russian. Her mother was Russian and her father was French. He taught at the conservatory. She was tall and rather dark; handsome rather than beautiful. But maybe beautiful and not handsome. I don't know. She had the kind of beauty-- She always said, "Why do men always want to touch me?" She never married, and I guess men must have found her attractive, but she never seemed to have any boyfriends. Oh, yes, she did, yes, she did. She made a trip with Raoul [Pugno], the two-piano team; they made a

trip to Russia, and I'm sure were lovers. I mean I can't prove it, but I'm sure they were. And he died. And I guess like so many people, [she] decided that was it and she never seemed to have any interest in men as such any more.

But, well, to say what she was like, she was a complex person, and you can't say it all just like that, in black and white. She was an inspiring teacher. In fact, perhaps her greatest gift to her students was to give them some kind of inspiration, give them some kind of idea, make them feel that what they were doing was worthwhile. She did impart that.

WESCHLER: How did she do that?

VINCENT: I don't think she did it consciously, I think she just-- Her own life was dedicated to music, and she did it so intently and with such devotedness.

WESCHLER: Enthusiasm?

VINCENT: Yes, but her enthusiasm was limited. I mean to say, she, like most Frenchmen, didn't know much German. She didn't know Brahms at all. Once, we were talking about symphonies in her class. She said, "You know, there haven't been many symphonies written in recent years." And at that time Sibelius was reaping the benefits of his great-- You know, that was the crest.

I said, "What do you think of Sibelius?"

She said, "I was in London once, and I heard one of his symphonies." And she said, "I thought it was good, but, well--" That's the way she [disposed of] Sibelius.

And at one time she got off on a kick. I don't know how it came up, maybe I brought it up. Anyway, she played a couple of Brahms quartets at the piano. That's what she loved to do, sit at the piano and read score in class. And so none of them had ever heard any Brahms music. And this was incredible, you know.

WESCHLER: They would know French music, of course, and Russian music.

VINCENT: They played Beethoven, Mozart, Haydn, and so forth, and certain composers. Strauss was coming down and having big concerts of combined symphony orchestras and so forth. There was a lot going on. There were seven symphony orchestras in Paris at that time. But they did not play much nineteenth century German music.

WESCHLER: Well, getting back to her, you said she was inspirational.

VINCENT: Well, that was one, that was her big thing. She was a lousy teacher of harmony. She either taught counterpoint well, or somehow she got credit for teaching counterpoint well.

I'll have to tell you this story. She wanted to look over all my music that I had ever written, so I brought in

a stack, I think at the second lesson. She looked over it, and she said, "Well, you're talented, I'll have to take you, yes, you're talented, yes, yes." She said, "Your counterpoint is excellent. I find that you're very well prepared in counterpoint. But I find some very strange things in your harmony. I don't think you know harmony. We're going to have to start over. I think the simplest thing to do is get Dubois." Dubois was a popular French instruction book in harmony at that time. I didn't even know it. And so I said to myself, "Well, this is hell on wheels, but, here I've been teaching college, teaching people at college, and got A's in harmony, and honors in theory at the conservatory, and, if this is the way to do it, I'll do it." So I bought Dubois, and I took about the first six or eight lessons and did every exercise in the first six lessons and took them to her the next lesson.

She looked through them and said, "Very good, very good." So I took another six or eight lessons and did all of them. That was a tremendous amount of work. I mean, this was three or four months of work for an ordinary student, but it came easily to me. I did it and well. I wanted to get on. This time I took some of them and made little pieces out of them. I took the harmonic structure and made little piano pieces out of them. It was the theme with the harmony and I followed it out and did imitations and so forth, made

little pieces out of it. I thought that might interest her, that I would take the trouble to do that. It interested her when she saw it.

She said, "Well, that's all very well, but you still have lost the way." She said [that] we'd been doing this two or three lessons now, but "we've lost the way and we've got to come back. We've got to go back and start again, because you've got to subject yourself once in your life to absolute clarity."

Well, I thought, OK. I subjected myself under Chadwick, I'll subject myself here. So I went back to the first lesson again. I took about six lessons. This time I did them absolutely by the book, absolutely strict, voice leading, everything, no originality, just staid.

She looked at it and said, "Very good indeed, very good indeed."

So I just took the next lesson the same way. About the third lesson I was biting my nails, just going crazy.

She said, "You know, it is so sad." (I remember her words.) "It is so sad, because we have done this twice, and still your harmony puzzles me. There's some elements in it which I feel are not according to Dubois; there are things in it which I don't understand. Why are you doing it your way?" She said, "We must start again."

I said, "No, we're not going to start again. I will walk out of this room and never come back if you ask me to do that. But I would like to study with you. What I would like to do is to write my pieces of music and bring them to you and you can say anything in the world you want to. Mark it bad, good, mark it wrong, anything else, say anything you want to about it. But let me become a composer, let me not write harmony exercises. I've been through that, and I think I know."

I think I knew, by this time, my modal predispositions, which showed in everything I did, just part of me. So I began writing.

She said, she actually wept, "You defy me." She said, "You are one of the few students that defy me, one of the few students in my whole life who ever defied me." She put a handkerchief to the corner of her eyes, and turned her head, I don't know if she actually wept or not. Anyway--

WESCHLER: Would it have been weeping in astonishment or in anger, or--

VINCENT: Well, just in hurt. She was, oh, she was feminine, she played the feminine. Oh, she was prim!

Anyway, so she agreed to that, and I brought my music back. We got along famously for the next two years. On down the road is an incident which goes with that. I think it was the beginning of the next year, the second year. I

worked on a string quartet during the summer, 1936.

WESCHLER: This is the quartet that's recorded on Contemporary records?

VINCENT: I worked on the string quartet. And at the time my lessons began with her, I was working on the fourth movement. I'm not sure I worked on it in order, but I was working on the fourth movement. The first movement, the beginning is in the Locrian mode. Now I use that as--

WESCHLER: This is from your book. I know that it exists.

VINCENT: It's a fugue in the Locrian mode. So she said, "Well, I'd like to play this for the class."

At the class to which we went, she sat down and played it. To the class she said, "I want you to hear something," before she played it. And she leaned back and the class didn't say anything. Nobody knew what to say. They knew they were expected to say something but nobody-- So she said, "I'll play it again. Now listen carefully." She played it again and they still didn't get it. She said, "It's in the mode si," mode of B. Do you understand that?

WESCHLER: Right, I understand.

VINCENT: The mode si, which is the Locrian mode, which is the way they call it in France.

They didn't know anything about this at all, so they didn't recognize it, but she did. Well, at least, I don't know whether I had written it there. She read and appreciated it. And she played it with gusto. This intrigued her. By

this time she had become accustomed to me and my harmony. Now this was quite a while. It was a year and some months. But again, I had a minor triumph in my own particular way.

But there were other instances in which she said that certain composers, certain students of hers, did not ever learn one thing or the other. Jean Francaix was a student at that time. Do you know that name? He was not in our class, but he was studying with her, Jean Francaix. She said, "Now, he came to me knowing harmony. Where he learned harmony I don't know."

But if you know his harmony, it's such trivial harmony. It's perfectly good, I mean it's clean and nice. But Mozart would have not been ashamed to write it, and it hasn't advanced much since then. And then on the other hand, she said-- Another composer who was the antithesis of that-- I can't even think of him.

WESCHLER: American, French?

VINCENT: No, he became, he was part Russian and became a conductor because he finally didn't make it as a composer.

WESCHLER: Conductor where?

VINCENT: In Paris, and he was even at Bayreuth for a short while and got fired. The name will come to me; I haven't called it up in a long time. Then he enjoyed quite a flare as a conductor for awhile and then seems to have dropped out. Of course, in my opinion, he never did have it. I mean, in

those days he never did have it. I reviewed some of his music. One of his pieces I reviewed for the Boston Evening Transcript. A performance was given over there and I reviewed it. I went up to Brussels to review it. [Vincent probably refers to Igor Markevich (b. Kiev, July 27, 1912)--Ed.]

WESCHLER: We'll catch it. So how did she respond?

VINCENT: She said that his counterpoint was good, but she could never teach him harmony. There are other evidences of that. So I think inspiration was her best thing, and probably counterpoint, and oh, I'm about to miss a point, a very important one. The fourth point.

I would say she was very good in what I called musical architecture, the proper sequence of big events and small events. I mean, letting down tensions and building up tensions, bringing things to a climax and having a coda occur at the right time, with its climactic coda and so forth. I think she had a very good sense, and I think it's unusual for a woman, because this is precisely what I don't find in most women. If they don't have this sense of musical organization, which I call musical architecture, architectonics, call it what you will-- [It] amounts to so much; it's so important as form. But it's the larger application of the principles of form, not just finding out what the symphonic form was in Mozart's time and doing

that, you know, which so many people did, successfully, of course--whether that's legitimate or not. But there are principal forms from which you can derive what to do, when, and how, and how to go about things and how to bring about results. You see, if you keep tension too high too long, you lose its interest and it's hard to get it back. If you let interest die, and even sort of help it die, then you relax the tension. Then you're having the audience eating out of your hand. You see what I mean? So if you can do these things successfully-- But most composers today just don't seem to have much sense of what I call the essentials of form.

But I think Boulanger did impart that and how she imparted it, I think, was to call attention to these factors in pieces, how the composer did them, or how you yourself did them in a piece, how you were being successful, rather than having a textbook on them or anything of the sort. So these are the four things.

WESCHLER: Who were her favorite composers in terms of how she particularly--?

VINCENT: Oh, Stravinsky. He could do no wrong. He taught her class twice while she was gone so I was his student a couple of weeks, twice.

WESCHLER: What was that like?

VINCENT: Well, that was a very interesting experience. I

was writing the third movement of my string quartet at the time, and he heard it. This was played at the class--only at the class--not by me.

He said, "Tres bonne idee, tres bonne idee." And I got acquainted with him at that time, and our acquaintance carried over. If I'd known then that I would wind up with he being in Hollywood and I'd be here-- But he recalled, so our friendship continued.

WESCHLER: Was he a dynamic teacher in those lessons?

VINCENT: No. Not at all. He may have listened and said, "Good idea," or "Oh, yes, very nice," or "Well, why don't you write something else?" Or something. He didn't really step out to be a dynamic teacher.

WESCHLER: Were you in awe of him at that time?

VINCENT: Yes, I think so.

WESCHLER: He had that kind of reputation at that point?

VINCENT: Oh yes, yes. He was supposed to be a roaring lion you know. He really wasn't. That's my story.

WESCHLER: How do you think Boulanger affected you? You were writing your string quartet. Is there any particular passage in the string quartet that you can refer to to show us how she changed your own composing in any way?

VINCENT: She didn't change a thing in it. She played the slow movement from the score, and she played the wrong bass, and I didn't correct her.

I always wondered if she knew that she was playing the wrong chords. She told me, one time, "Ravel didn't have a good ear." She said, "One time I deliberately played some wrong notes in the bass, and when I got through playing I asked him how he liked the performance, and he didn't say a thing about the wrong notes."

Well, I thought maybe he was too nice to say anything, and so I didn't quite dare tell her that she played the wrong notes in the bass of my string quartet.

WESCHLER: Maybe she was testing you.

VINCENT: I thought that at the time, but I didn't want to reveal myself. Anyway--

WESCHLER: Do you think, was she internationally regarded, or was it primarily Americans who gravitated towards her? It certainly seems to be an American fetish.

VINCENT: The Germans didn't come there much; but, as I say, there were Israelis, there were Latvians, there were two from, what's that country on the Spanish peninsula besides Spain?

WESCHLER: Portugal.

VINCENT: Portugal. There were two from Portugal, young men. There were two young men from-- Is it Paraguay or Uruguay? Maybe it was one of those two countries, and I'm silly, because I was there and conducted. There were two students from this country at the Ecole Normale de Musique

at that time. I saw them around the halls and so forth. When I got to this country they had programmed a piece of mine for the piano, and the young man who had been selected withdrew just the night before the concert. Said he couldn't play it, he didn't know it. This man who conducted the orchestra said, "I'll play it." He hadn't practiced it; he conducted the orchestra, and he said, "I'll play it." He came forward and he said, "I knew you slightly in Paris." I said, "I remember you too." I can't remember his name now. He didn't play it very well, but I appreciate [that] he came forward and he had the courage. But he was in Paris at that time. It was his brother, the two of them.

WESCHLER: Sounds like a tremendously international community in Paris.

VINCENT: Yes, it was, that's what I say. There were several Englishmen there, the present, what's his name? I can't think of his name, he's Master of the Queen's Musick now--the new one. He was in class with me. And there were two or three Englishmen. As a matter of fact, I don't suppose more than half the class--

TAPE NUMBER: IV, SIDE ONE

DECEMBER 14, 1976

WESCHLER: Yesterday, when we were talking, we spoke a good deal about the situation in Paris, and about your studies with Nadia Boulanger. I thought we'd continue talking a little bit about Paris. One thing you just mentioned offhand yesterday which intrigued me was the fact that Paris had seven orchestras going at that time. I take it there was a very vibrant kind of musical life there.

VINCENT: Yes, these orchestras were all vying with one another, of course. These were largely conductor personalities at work, somehow getting funds from the government and whatever to give concerts. And so one had many concerts to choose from. I went as often as I could to both the symphony concerts and to the opera, and to the opera comique. The opera comique actually gave fresher fare than the opera. The opera was almost always the run-of-the-mill thing.

And as for associating with the musical life of the city, I felt that I never achieved, nor did I particularly try to achieve, any great courtesy or activity with people like Gertrude Stein and other celebrated figures that I knew were there. One reason is that I had decided that I would try to get as far away from American circles as possible,

and travel maybe in French circles. This proved very difficult. I cultivated some Frenchmen, but found, as most Americans do, that you don't get very far. The French, in this regard, are most standoffish. I would get acquainted with somebody, do the most I knew, which was, finally, to invite him to my house for dinner. He would come and that would be the end of it. I mean, you might expect him to reciprocate, you see, or something, but it didn't work out that way.

I did, of course, associate a little more with the foreign students from other countries, particularly those in the Boulanger class, and a few Americans whom I happened to know in other fields.

I also might say that my resources, amount of money, did not permit me to go high society or to the finest restaurants all of the time. It was fairly reasonable, and it was a little cheaper to live there than it was in the United States at the time, but it wasn't so cheap that you could just go there on a thousand dollars and become a millionaire or splurge. I had to watch it very carefully. Of course, as I say, I had only $1,700 for that year.

WESCHLER: And a family.

VINCENT: And a family. The second year, my wife and child went back to the United States, and then subsequently during that period we were divorced. She went through with

the divorce while I was still abroad.

Although I got the stipend again, the income had shrunk to $1,500. So I was really going in the hole. I had to borrow money. I borrowed money from my father and from my brothers. My son, my little boy who was five at the time, had had a double mastoid operation, and this was expensive and there were other things. So my total outlay wasn't the $3,200 of the stipend, but all I could borrow. In other words, I was pretty much in hock when I finally returned to the United States.

WESCHLER: What kind of living situation were you in in Paris?

VINCENT: The first year we had a nice apartment. An American, an engineer, who had lived there since the [First World] War, wanted to come back and spend a year in the United States, and I rented his apartment while he was gone.

WESCHLER: Where was that, what part of Paris?

VINCENT: That was over on the Left Bank, but over near the big cemetery. I'll have to think of that. The second year I moved across to the Right Bank, and I took a room not too far from the Arc de Triomphe, down toward the Bois. And that worked out pretty well. I mean, it was a different environment. Being alone, I did not need the bigger apartment that, you know, we had before. So my living quarters were very simple and did for me.

WESCHLER: I don't know to what extent you want to talk about your personal life, but was the divorce a terribly difficult thing at that time, or mutually agreed to?
VINCENT: It was terribly difficult for me, yes. I'm sure it always shocks everyone. The last I saw of my little boy on the train leaving was one of the most heart-breaking things I've ever been through. The divorce was more or less inevitable, and through no fault of mine or hers. I think we were simply born not to be married. She was a nice woman, a good violinist, a musician, and her lacks seemed to me--and I say it to you off the record--that I realized and felt constantly that I was growing and she was not. That I was destined to do things in situations in which she could not really accompany me. Now that's a terrible thing to say, because it sounds so terribly selfish of me, but it eats away at you daily. Each social contact with people, and you feel that this person has not achieved the sophistication or the knowledge of the world. I mean, general education and so forth. It's a continual sort of embarrassment. I felt this keenly and never told her that. I certainly never told my son, whom that would hurt a great deal for me to tell. But that was the fact of the thing, that was the bottom issue of it, the reason we couldn't get along.
WESCHLER: Did you keep in close touch with your son in later years?

VINCENT: Oh, yes. In fact, I paid alimony after I got back and began to earn. I paid it, not a large alimony, but an alimony for years, some years. As I say, she became a music teacher in Portland, Oregon, in instrumental work. I told you she was a violinist, and did well at it. Then the cancer became so, the cancer of the breast, and so she became bedridden and died. I contributed as I could to that, helped with that.

Nathaniel Reed Vincent [the son] had lived with her. I remarried, and later he came and lived with us for protracted periods, went to UCLA for a year, for instance, maybe two years. He was at Bowling Green for a couple of years. In other words, I saw him frequently and had him for long periods. Otherwise, he lived with her and went to school there. He's a graduate of Reed, a college in Portland, and is an engineer. It's advanced research in electronics, missiles, and that sort of thing for government research, which he's done since he graduated. He did not serve in the armed forces. Because he knew he was going to be drafted in a few weeks, because that was right in the middle of things, he came here to just wait until he was drafted. He applied at Douglas for an interim job, and they took him. They were so hungry for his type of man, they took him on, found him very good. When he was drafted, they interceded.

And his draft was cancelled, or whatever they do. So he never served in the services. He went with Douglas and was with them until three years ago. They fell on fallow times. He went first with Hughes, and now he's with Litton.

WESCHLER: Getting back to Paris, you were mentioning in addition to other things that you were working on your diatonic theory in Paris. What kind of work did that consist of? What were you doing day-to-day? Where were you studying?

VINCENT: I studied mainly at the Bibliotheque nationale, which is like our Library of Congress. I studied at other places, the music library at the conservatory, which is very famous by the way and has some very fine things, and even at a library called Bibliotheque-- Well, it had to do with an ethnic library which has some specialized things which I at least sampled. Then I did the same thing in Germany at the Staatsbibliothek.

You asked me what kind of thing I was doing. I was reviewing music of all periods, by all the obscure composers, lesser-known composers whose style or idiom seemed to encompass different tonal media than major-minor. [This was] to see if they were using, by any chance, the modal background, this modal structure, which I think is the thing at the basis of all Western music, this diatonic structure. And so it proved.

I did a lot of church musicians who, because of their study, might have leaned towards using the church

modes. I studied the church composers who would likely have dipped into the church modes, the ones who were writing choral music and so forth in the churches. Also nationalists, composers of national music from various countries. Russia or Sweden, any of the nations where nationalism ran pretty high, you know. So I looked at the nationalist composers, too. Often the scores were not available in print. You could read in the dictionaries that they wrote such and such a thing, but you didn't know where to find it. So I had to hunt it out in these libraries where they would have such things available, which I did.

WESCHLER: You mentioned yesterday that you had special privileges at the Bibliotheque nationale. Off tape you mentioned that.

VINCENT: Yes. They have an enormous room which is semi-circular, desks, it looks like the Congress of the United States, these circular desks. I forget how many there are, 150 maybe. If you apply, in due time, they give you a desk. Then you may go there and apply for a book for tomorrow. Look up in the card index the book you want. I think you're allowed six, or some such thing. If one of the six are in, it will be ready for you the following day. Now you can use it at your desk and then return it. Some can go out under certain periods, but then they have to come back in

one day. This didn't suit my purposes because I couldn't get it down fast enough. I'd look at one piece of music and find maybe nothing there. So I made a special case and finally won my way into a room on the upper floor, where there were only six or eight people working at tables. We were accorded special privileges. I could get fifteen or twenty things at once and have them stacked on the desk. I could leave them there overnight if I didn't finish. This speeded up the process enormously. I've been told that that was rare, to be able to get that. But at least it did help a great deal.

WESCHLER: Do you think that you could have completed your diatonic theory if you had not been in Europe? Would there have been enough materials to work on here?

VINCENT: I think I did finish it in a sense. I mean, I brought it up to that date. I wrote a basic manuscript there.

WESCHLER: In Europe, or in Boston, still?

VINCENT: No, in Paris.

WESCHLER: Right. Could you have done it without having been in Paris and having the use of those ancient materials?

VINCENT: No, no. I didn't see how I could have ever done it without the resources there. In Boston, the library was wonderful. Maybe the New York Public Library, or the Library of Congress, could have given me a great sampling, but nothing

could have given me the sampling I got [in Paris and Berlin]. If one looks through even the published book, one sees that I have covered an enormous amount of music, absolutely enormous, music that people, even [the] most erudite people haven't heard of. They have heard of the composer, but never have seen any of his music. They say, "How did you get that and where did you find it?" This sort of thing may be available in the United States _in toto_, if you flew all over the country. But I doubt it. In other words, I doubt if I could have plunged into the depths that I did and found all this rich material without the resources of Europe.

WESCHLER: So you think this encyclopedic sense you have of a lot of music may be part of your friendship with Nicolas Slonimsky?

VINCENT: Oh, I don't doubt it. You see, I know a lot of music which he has never seen, and that intrigues him. Occasionally, I come out with something that he has use for that surprises him. Of course, I think he is so marvelous because he is incredible. Shall I say, his competence and his knowledge of things is incredible. He has a great advantage over me in languages. I struggle through several languages, English included, French, German, Italian. I can do something with Spanish, even something with Dutch, and I studied Latin in high school. It doesn't help much,

but with a dictionary I can manage. So I can't compete with him, because he is facile in most of these, you see.

WESCHLER: In any case, I'm sure you're one of the very few people that can come up with things that he doesn't necessarily know.

VINCENT: I suppose, and it's always a surprise to him, and a minor triumph for me.

WESCHLER: Well, getting back to Paris, one of the things that you had mentioned in passing was that you were doing some criticism for an American paper?

VINCENT: Yes, the Boston Evening Transcript, during that time, was the prestige paper of Boston. Since then it has failed and gone out of business. Moses Smith was the head critic of that. Knowing I was going to Europe, he engaged me to do some special articles on special events. I could do any article I wanted to and send it to him with the privilege of acceptance. I sent him a number of articles and he published them.

It was there that Nicolas saw my name and, I guess, realized that here was a man capable of some handling of what he wanted. So he wrote me. He was a friend of Moses Smith, of course. He wrote me and we began a correspondence, and we've had a lifelong friendship. I did do a number of things for him.

WESCHLER: What was the tone of your reviews? What would

it have been like for a Boston reader reading your reviews in Boston of Paris? Would it have been the kind of thing where they would have felt very much like that was the place to be and Boston was small potatoes compared to what was going on in Europe?

VINCENT: Well, Boston didn't take the idea of being small potatoes to anybody. Boston has always felt that it was the elite of America and was closer to the continent culturally than to the United States, and especially in those times.

WESCHLER: Would your reviews have mirrored that kind of feeling, that you were just reviewing one of the equal set of orchestras?

VINCENT: Yes, more or less. I would review it as if it were being played in Boston, expecting that kind of performance and focusing on the merits of the composition, speaking more technically than I would even to Los Angeles audiences today, for instance. You could do that in Boston, and so I felt no particular limits on my writing.

Many years later when I conducted in South America, I contracted with the New York Times to [review] the premiere of Don Rodrigo, the opera of [Alberto] Ginastera, which was premiered in Buenos Aires when I was there. I wrote this article, and it was published in a two-column display. So it resulted in his being offered to perform

in the United States, and is the basis for his becoming popular in the United States. He fully acknowledges that. In fact, he gave me a little figure from a sixteenth-century Argentinian church as a token of his friendship and regard.

WESCHLER: So your critical writings have been important in impact as well.

VINCENT: Well, I haven't done a great deal of it, but I'm happy with the things I did. Those articles have some notice beyond the ordinary.

WESCHLER: Were there any particular concerts that you remember that were overwhelming while you were in Paris, things that especially stand out in your mind, particularly maybe modern works?

VINCENT: Yes. I think I heard Stravinsky and his son play in a sort of preview of his Concerto for Two Pianos, in a quasi-private performance. And they performed it twice. I wrote a review of that, as an incident rather than as a concert. I wrote about the music, because it was a new departure for him. He was going back to Bach, as you may recall. So I think that was outstanding.

WESCHLER: In terms of the music, or in terms of the performance itself?

VINCENT: In terms of the music itself, yes. I think the biggest musical thrill I got was in George Enescu's opera,

Oedipe. You know that at all? Have you heard it?

WESCHLER: I know of it. I have not heard it.

VINCENT: The Opera put this on in a gala way. Personally, I think it's a great opera. It's an epic opera. I mean, it has none of the bedroom stuff, but it is an epic. I think it's one of the strong works of the twentieth century. It gave me, I think, my biggest musical thrill in Europe. I believe that's right.

WESCHLER: Was it equally well received by the critics in Europe?

VINCENT: Well, it had mixed reactions there. The critics are pretty much biased there. You can almost predict what they're going to write.

WESCHLER: Biased in what direction?

VINCENT: Well, each one is a paid, is owned by a political party which promotes certain special things. The critics become quite known for their biases. I wasn't sufficiently knowledgeable to thread through this, to find out all about it. I knew it existed and talked about it with my fellows and had a feeling for some of it, but I couldn't analyze it fully nor give a real critique of who or why. The same way when I reviewed the Ginastera in Buenos Aires. If they had reprinted from the local critics of Buenos Aires, it would have never gotten to the United States, because almost to a man they damned it.

WESCHLER: Was the situation of the arts highly politicized in France during the 1930s?

VINCENT: Oh yes.

WESCHLER: Are there any particular anecdotes that could illustrate that for us?

VINCENT: There was a tremendous epic struggle to get Stravinsky nominated to the famous--

WESCHLER: Academie Francaise?

VINCENT: Yes, the forty, the famous forty, and that failed. They took, I think, [Henri] Rabaud, of much less stature. But for days there were big debates, a lot of talk, and a lot of seething going on, you know. Those things in the paper, they'd take them to heart more than they do here, so there was a tremendous struggle.

WESCHLER: Was that politically based in terms of the nationalism, or just personal philosophy?

VINCENT: Well, personal, musical, political.

WESCHLER: What kinds of things were going on in France in those years? Was that the Front Populaire during that time?

VINCENT: Well, the first part of it was given over to what side you're on with the Spanish. That was the last part of the Spanish War, and then came the Mussolini adventure into Africa, which again the French seemed to try to rise above, stay aside from. Then 1936 got into 1937, [there was] more

and more threat from Germany. They, Germany, had been moving, see. After the Olympics, Hitler began to move eastward, you know. He first took over Austria and Czechoslovakia and so forth, so there was tremendous excitement, would he go back on his accords with the Alsace-Lorraine? Even while I was there, he moved in there. There was tremendous political upheaval going on.

In my apartment down on the Bois, every night there would be stationed the guarde civile, the civil guard in their uniforms, with trucks, I mean forty to fifty trucks, all these troops ready for any uprising in any part of Paris. And they were frequently called on. As a matter of fact, from the opera one night, I was in a taxi and suddenly I was in the midst of street fighting. All around me were these guardes civiles with their truncheons, beating people. They were fighting back and so forth and so on. In other words, there was tremendous turmoil in Paris.

I was wise enough to stay away from the areas where it was likely to happen, because you could just simply become embroiled and wouldn't know. And I was conscious of these things.

WESCHLER: Were you especially conscious as an artist? Were artists especially drawn into it, or were they maybe not as drawn in as other people? Was there a kind of

leftist leaning in the artist community at all? Or was there some sense that the artists had to go?

VINCENT: Well, yes, there were, and again I'm unable to pick up the threads with any degree of accuracy and give you a thumbnail sketch of the political situation in Paris, say, in June, 1936. It was June that I left Paris for the Olympics, you see, and I was gone three months. When I got to Saarbrucken, across the border, I was examined, of course, and they examined everything I had and were very suspect of a score that I carried on my back. I carried it; I had a bicycle. I rode from Paris to Berlin on a bicycle.

WESCHLER: Oh, really?

VINCNET: So I didn't have much luggage with me. I carried my score under my raincoat on my back. They thought that that was hiding it. So the Germans examined it for some secret signs or something. They held me for a couple of hours. Then I stayed there; it began to rain.

I stayed at the little pension, and the lady, the woman of the house, who owned it, said, "There are Germans here. Soldaten hier, there are soldiers here." That was the thing, not that they were Germans, but there were soldiers there. She actually said "There are soldiers here." She said this sotto voce, you know, as if she didn't want to be overheard.

Then, as I rode further north, I saw all kinds of preparations, marching in schoolyards with broomsticks, you know, and all kinds of military preparations. The autobahns were being built at that time, and some of them were already built. There were great columns of tanks and automatic weapons of all kinds, running along at sixty miles an hour. You'd hear them coming sometimes and get off and let them go by. I had a little camera with me and I snapped a lot of pictures of these things. I decided not to process them until I got back to Paris, and the night I got back to Paris they were stolen. Nothing else in my hotel room was touched. My money wasn't touched, but my camera and my film were missing. I don't know whether I had been followed, or whether that just happened. But I lost all my pictures.

WESCHLER: Did you have a sense of danger as you were taking the pictures?

VINCENT: Not while I was taking the pictures so much, but I did have a sense of danger a number of times. After the Olympics I was going west towards Hannover. I came into a little town and came upon a strange scene. There were people standing in a circle, perhaps one hundred feet around it. In the center was a corpse, a dead man. I was dressed like a German; I had on Kurzenhosen. I'm sure my speech would have given me away, my German. So I asked some

questions of what happened. And the man looked at me like this and turned away, walked away. I decided that it would be just as well if I wasn't mixed up in that, so I got out, just left the circle and went on. [There were] a number of occasions similar to this. It makes your heart bleed.

I've seen Germans on bicycles coming down the street, slowly looking ahead of them, and suddenly get off their bicycles and go into a little alcove between buildings and then look. You see them looking out like this until somebody has passed. He saw some person or figure ahead of him who meant danger. I saw signs on the outside of villages, "Jews are bad luck," and "Jews are not wanted here." I saw stores and shops looted and smashed. In other words, under these circumstances, one didn't know when one might run into some trouble inadvertently. So I had a sense of some danger, yes.

WESCHLER: What were you doing in Germany?

VINCENT: In the first place, I did want to visit it. And of course, the Olympics themselves were an attraction for me too. I had come from a family that enjoys athletics. I wanted to see, and I could see it free if I could get there.

WESCHLER: Because you had the press pass?

VINCENT: I had the press pass, something that I couldn't have bought, even with money. It was given to me free. So

I went, you see. Anyway, it was these two attractions, I think, besides the natural attraction to see Germany. So I took a bicycle and rode to Berlin. And then after the Olympics I rode west out through Hannover and into Holland and into Belgium, where I saw that I wasn't seeing enough of the country--I wanted to go through the Rhine country and so forth--fast enough, the bicycle. I was going pretty well but a hundred kilometers is about all you could do. And even that was a pretty good day. So I traded my [bicycle]. I found the exchange very good, and I could sell my bicycle advantageously. So I sold my bicycle and bought a one-rung motor scooter, [on] which I really could get around very much faster. Then I went along the Rhine. Then I went to Vienna and followed the Danube up to Budapest, staying in each place a few days, a week. Then north through Czechoslovakia to Prague, where I stayed a few days. Then back across Germany through Dresden to Berlin. And then back on down to Holland, Belgium, into France and on back.

WESCHLER: What a series of years to be doing that in. I mean, the late thirties. It must have been extraordinary.

VINCENT: It was fabulous, because the countryside as such mainly was undisturbed by the political goings on. But in the towns, and especially certain towns--certain sections were more affected than others.

WESCHLER: Was Prague, for example, extremely tense?

VINCENT: Yes, Prague was tense, but I didn't get much of it. I mean, I could avoid it. But they said it was much less gay than it had been. The gaiety had curtailed considerably.

WESCHLER: Did war seem inevitable at that point?

VINCENT: To me it did. I always thought war was going to, that it would happen. Then, after I left--see, I left France on May 7, no, I don't know what day it was, but I had my birthday on board the boat back to the United States in May, 1937.

WESCHLER: Did you leave mainly because your money had run out or partly because you didn't want to be around anymore?

VINCENT: Well, I had more or less finished my work. I finished the diatonic modes in the rough form. Boulanger's classes were over, and I was more or less footloose. So I had need to get back and get a job for the following fall, if I could. And I didn't have much time to do it in. May to September is a short while to get a job of the caliber that I was seeking. So I hot-footed back as fast as I could.

WESCHLER: Before you get back, there are a couple of other questions I want to ask. Mainly, could you describe the Olympics a little bit? That's fascinating.

VINCENT: Yes, well, it was. I had a press box seat on the right-hand side of the press box. They were all assigned seats. I was seemingly not more than 75 yards from where

Hitler was sitting on his raised box. I've often said that with the proper weapon I could have prevented a world war. I could see him very clearly. He didn't come every day, of course, but he did come quite frequently and appear for a short while and then leave. I saw the famous Jesse Owens.

WESCHLER: That must have been thrilling, to be an American.

VINCENT: Of course, that left a sour taste, because he didn't honor Owens the way he honored others, you know. I saw Owens almost fail to make his broad jump, his world record in the broad jump. I realized what was happening, what was going on.

WESCHLER: How so?

VINCENT: Well, you see, he had run a couple of races, the 220 or high hurdles or something. He had three jumps, and he had failed on two of them. He had one more jump left. I think his jump before that, he had fouled the line, he had hit. You know what that means? So this jump had to be perfect, and they wouldn't give him any time to rest after this race. I mean, he came right from the race to the jump in a very short time. Normally, out of courtesy or something, they give him time to recover and recuperate some. So here was this record jumper, faced with a very ugly situation. It was do or die. He had, in this one performance, under bad circumstances, had to come through.

He came through with the world record.

WESCHLER: Do you by any chance remember Hitler's expression during any of these things?

VINCENT: I'm not sure he was on the dais at that time, and I really wasn't close enough to see his expression.

WESCHLER: I see. What was your sense of Hitler's presence in a crowd?

VINCENT: He was certainly absolutely self-assured. I've never seen anybody more self-assured than he always seemed. He stood in such a way, I always thought he was imitating what his idea of a Roman emperor might do, you know, his imperial highness. He stood the part. He personified the part. I must say that he was a good actor. I felt that he was a most effective speech giver and campaigner. His speeches were much too long for me. They didn't seem too long for the German people. He could go on and on and on.

WESCHLER: Were you in crowds when he was speaking? Did you get a sense of his kind of magnetism that people speak of?

VINCENT: Yes, I was in a little inn in Potsdam. It had been snowing--

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WESCHLER: You were in Potsdam--

VINCENT: I left Berlin earlier that day. It was in October, and it was spitting snow and sleet. I was on my motorcycle, of course. I had goggles, but I didn't have any helmet like they have today. So I rode along. I suppose I made as much as forty miles an hour, fifty, possibly, at times. When I got to Potsdam, I was horrified. My face was all cut. The pieces of ice were hitting my face, would slice right back, and leave a little trail of blood. So I had a face that was decorated. I looked like an aborigine. I hadn't felt it because of the cold. I hadn't been aware of it at all.

Anyway, I was pretty wet, and I sought refuge in a little eating house, and ordered something to eat, lunch. The radio either was already on, or it came on, and there was Hitler's speech. I wanted to sit there quite a while anyway and dry off, so I did, and his speech went on and on and on. And the people, nobody left, everybody was paying attention. So this itself became an experience for me, not understanding but a bit of what he would say, only the more easily understood phrases. But the tenor of it you couldn't miss, you know. Yet everybody was hanging on every word. Very strange.

People said "Heil Hitler" at everything, you know. Instead of saying "hello," they said, "Heil Hitler." Instead of saying "goodbye," they said, "Heil Hitler." They said it in many other contexts. I had an amusing one. It doesn't matter where it was, but I was going along on my bicycle at the time. I was between the car tracks. Well, if you've ever ridden a bicycle when it's damp, and try to go across a car track, you're apt to slip. Now a car came up beside me on the right, and he wanted to pass, and there wasn't quite enough room. He wanted me to move over. That meant that I would have to get off the car tracks. They have right-hand drive, you know. That's right, isn't it? It doesn't make any difference. So he began to call me all sorts of names, "Schweinhund" and all different names that Germans call. You know, by [my] not getting over, he was just giving me a good talking over. Well, he didn't know whether I was German or not because, as I say, I was in German attire, and I'm sure I couldn't be told that way. It became embarrassing, because he just continued; it went on for half a block like this. Finally, I turned to him and held up my hand to him and said, "Heil Hitler." He immediately dropped his hand and raced off. He just raced off. That cured him.

WESCHLER: There's a question I've often asked musical people about Hitler. Hitler's passion for Wagner, for example, is

notorious. Do you think there was a kind of nineteenth-century romantic musical quality to the Nazi aura?

VINCENT: Oh, yes, he was using every weapon in the arsenal to whip up German nationalism. German pride, German achievements, German people and race, everything. The German opera seemed to him a continuum of this and an artistic revelation of this. Whether he liked the music that well or not, I don't know, but he certainly espoused it.

WESCHLER: You seem to have more of a taste for the French, the Russian side of music, than for the German side. Do you think this might have something to do with growing up and becoming a musical person in the thirties?

VINCENT: I really can't say. I mean, I like a lot of French music, and I like a lot of German music. The nurse this morning asked me [about music]. She's an unusual person, by the way. She taught drama for a while, and she reads such writers as Ruskin. I asked her what composers she knew, and she knows Aaron Copland, an American composer. She had, oh, six or eight of his records.

She said, "Well, what is your favorite composer?" Now, that always stumps me, because I don't know. You see, I say Bach, [like] I can say Shakespeare, and be perfectly safe. On the other hand, I think maybe, if I had to choose one composer, it would be Brahms. In the first place, he's

a first-rate technician, and that's not exactly what I mean but I have to respect that. His music is so clear and so, well, so expressive. I expect that after Brahms would be Beethoven. I mean, I like so many. Bach is always in the background there, because he's like a quarry which only part of was ever mined, quarried, brought up, you know. As if Leonardo da Vinci was turned loose on a quarry forever, you know. Anyway, I don't know. It's just--

WESCHLER: I guess another way of phrasing the question is--

VINCENT: I can't say that French composers, that French music is my favorite. I really can't say that. Of course, I like my own music better than any. See, I'm my own favorite composer. Every composer's that, I guess. The point is, you asked me what music stands out. In the first place, Brahms has enough music, in a large enough quantity. For instance, why not Tchaikovsky, who has an equal quantity? I like Tchaikovsky, but Brahms comes out first, you see.

WESCHLER: Did the debacle of German politics in the 1930s in any way impinge upon your sense of German culture?

VINCENT: No. I deprecate the purely nationalistic tendencies which one can read into some of the postwar music and some of the war music; but I think German composers sin less that way than some of the composers of the other nations, particularly the left-wingers. See, when I was in South America, young composers brought me their scores, and in

the scores would be written revolutionary mottoes. You know: "Down with this, up with that," whatever, in the score. I said, "It's not necessary to burden your music with that." They said, "It's necessary, absolutely necessary." I find that the leftists are more pushing toward their ideals through music than the Germans ever were.

What Germany lost after the war-- I'd like sometime maybe to write an article on the harmonic tendencies, the difference in what had happened, say, in France, to the harmony from before and after the First World War, and before and after the First World War in Germany. I think the seeds of this are not political at all, but musical. I spoke of Dubois writing a dreadful harmony, but at least it's traditional. The harmony they study in Germany mostly was Riemann and some others, but they began toying with the diatonic system in other ways which possibly either led to Schoenberg's denial of the tonal system in favor of the twelve-tone system, or there was a fundamental divergence there of a spiritual kind which is back of it all. In other words, I don't know whether Riemann could have influenced Schoenberg even vaguely, or vice versa.

But it goes back even before that to Strauss. Strauss had begun this, and other composers. They took a different, well, to call it by an easy name, a different departure from the diatonic. In other words, their method of

introducing more accidentals in music, which is a bad way of saying it, took a different route than did the French. This is an interesting point which has not been made in print as far as I know.

WESCHLER: Well, we'll have to wait for that. I gather you continued traveling around for a while when you had finished on your motorcycle trip. You came to the United States, or did you go to Paris again first? [The] motorcycle trip [was] in 1936 during the Olympics, right? When you were finished with that trip, did you go back to Paris?

VINCENT: Well, I had another year of study there, you see.

WESCHLER: Oh, I see. That was in between, of course, right? So then you were in Paris for another year, and in May you came back to the United States?

VINCENT; Yes, I came back to the United States specifically to find a job.

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