

Interview with Mr. Lynn Chang, violinist
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Transcription by Derrick Wang from video recording (cassette also available)

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[0:00 Video camera on]

DERRICK WANG:

...I guess I have to announce this thing, right? ...So...yes, I do, I do. Today is Wednesday, May 3. The year is 2006. The time is 8:30 PM—this is for posterity—

LYNN CHANG:

OK.

WANG:

—and I am Derrick Wang, and I and Shira Brettman are here in the Mather Senior Common Room at Harvard University interviewing violinist Lynn Chang about various matters Bernstein-related, including but not limited to his early work and the Piano Trio. So, take it away, Mr. Chang.

CHANG:

Well, you want me to talk about the Piano Trio.

WANG:

Talk about...well...

CHANG:

Well, OK, sure. Um, I actually discovered or heard about the Piano Trio about three or four years ago, when I came across a program in which, ah, was to be played the Violin Sonata by Leonard Bernstein and, um, I had never heard of this piece before, and I was wondering, “Wow, I didn’t know this even existed!” And so I went and did a little bit of

research, I went to the Leonard Bernstein website and found out that, that indeed it was, was a work that, that had been written, and it had been written for a person named Raphael Hillyer, who, I later found out at the time was a violinist, of course we know Raphael Hillyer as the founding violist of the Juilliard String Quartet, and of course, and he's a friend of mine, and so I called up Rafe, and I said, "Tell me about this fiddle sonata, I'd like to play it if possible." And he said, "Well, I've got the music but I—listen, can you not play it?" And I said, "Why?" and he said, "Well, I'm going to be turning 90 this year, and I'm going to be having the Violin Sonata done in honor of, you know, because it was written for me and it's gonna be done in this concert in Paine Hall, but what you can do instead is the Piano Trio; why don't you do that instead?" And I said, "Piano Trio? I've never heard of the Piano Trio." And he said, "Yes, he wrote it the same year as, or before, the fiddle sonata, and it's a wonderful piece; I've played it, so um, if you have problems getting the music, I can lend you my parts, but they're all scribbly and barely legible." So I did some research, and I actually found that it actually had been published, I'm not sure exactly how I got them but I got an edition of the parts, and it's actually not only been published but it's been recorded...by the Ahn Trio, and I managed to hear it as well as play it and the school that I teach [at], the Boston Conservatory, actually had a Bernstein year three years ago, and I ended up playing it then for the first time, and I actually ended up playing it again several times after that, and I think...It's a charming work, and I've done a little bit of research as to the, um, what I think is the, the idea for the inspiration for that work.

I was reading, um, actually, Peyser's book, and there's an incident about Bernstein and his, uh, composition class, he was in that composition seminar taught by Walter Piston, and [clears throat] I think Harold Shapero, who you interviewed, I don't know if he talked to you about that, but he was in that class as well as Raphael Hillyer. In that class, one of the first assignments was simply to write a fugue, and, uh, Bernstein—but the catch of that was that the subject of the fugue had to be something that you, uh, wrote—you did *not* write—it could be any theme, melody, whatever just something you did not write so when Bernstein came in eventually with his fugue, he used the long slow melody from the Saint-Saens cello concerto, I think it goes *da-ya-da-da-da-da-da*...so of course,

they played this in class, and when Piston heard this, he said, “You know, Mr. Bernstein, this is not an appropriate subject for a fugue,” and according to the book, and [s]he quotes Harold Shapero as saying that Bernstein slammed his hand [*slams hand on table*] on the desk and said, “Well I think it’s appropriate!” So you know that even then that the kid had some kind of chutzpah.

So, ah, apparently this next assignment that came later in the year was some assignment and—and Hillyer tells me this story—um, the assignment was given out on a Monday, and, uh, this time the assignment was sort of open. You could write about anything, you know: concerto, sonata, symphony, oratorio, opera, whatever, but it was the start of a long-term project. Assignment was given on Monday, and Rafe tells me, “We walked into the class on Wednesday carrying our scraps of paper, you know, we’d scribbled down ten, fifteen, twenty bars of whatever ideas we had. Lenny, he comes in with this entire Piano Trio, you know?” And if you look at the Piano Trio, you look at the first movement, and it’s all fugues. And my idea is that because he had such a, um, kind of failure with this earlier compositional assignment which was to write a fugue, that he tried to remedy that by—in this Piano Trio, in the first movement—by writing a substantial and probably more correct fugue, and when you listen to it, you’ll find out that it actually is much more fugal and certainly even Bachian in its scope, and a little pompous, but you know that’s, that’s—what else do you expect from a 19-year-old Harvard undergraduate? And, uh, so I think personally that that is Bernstein’s answer to Piston’s, you know, um, criticism.

There are three movements; the second movement is a wonderful, humorous, witty, delightful scherzo in which you could almost hear slight elements of—um, or germs of—the future tunes he was to write for his Broadway shows, you know? I think it’s a delight to play; the audience always chuckles after you finish it, and that’s a lot of fun.

WANG:

Great. If I could interrupt for one moment, if we might pause just for a second to check our equipment, that would be great.

[6:38 A few minutes later...]

SHIRA BRETTMAN:

Recording.

CHANG:

Recording.

WANG:

OK!

CHANG:

Are we on? OK. So, what am I gonna...? I—

WANG:

You just finished telling us about the scherzo, the second movement.

CHANG:

Oh yeah, the scherzo is a delight if you analyze it—I don't know if I ever took the time to analyze it that much—but I think it's in a somewhat unconventional form, but you'll find out if you look at it. It's not ABA form, I think it's like an ABCBA thing, but it's a little bit different, it's like an arch form, it goes ABCBA or something like that, it's somewhat unique in that aspect.

The last movement is a, uh, actually begins quite dreamily, uh, if - I don't know if that's such a word – but it begins, it's almost French-like, which is not surprising considering that Bernstein's favorite work at the time was Ravel—didn't he play the Ravel piano concerto?

WANG:

He did, the G major.

CHANG:

Yeah, yeah, he played the Ravel piano concerto, which he loved, and, ah, boy, I hear the beginning of that, the last movement, I hear a little bit of Ravel in there. But then, that's just the slow introduction and then it goes into a much more, um, substantial theme which just goes on—it's not that the last movement doesn't really develop that much, but it has a nice catchy tune to it and ends with a big flurry at the end, and so that's basically the...

My suspicion is that he didn't write it in two days, that he had it going since—we later found out that he had written this for the Madison Trio, he wrote this for some friends—so I have the feeling that he sort of, had this bubbling or percolating in his mind and then simply finished it off in the last couple of days and submitted it as that composition assignment. So, in my opinion, this is his—at least according to the Leonard Bernstein website, even though his, they call it “juvenilia,” I like to call it his “unofficial Opus 1” because that's his first complete composition. And I think it stands pretty nicely by itself, it works pretty well.

Um, uh, I think the other thing that Mr. Hillyer was telling me about—and when you talk to him you'll find out—uh, there was an event in Bernstein's life at the time, um, the Boston Symphony, uh, used to play, I guess, “run-outs” in Sanders Theater every couple of concerts, so they would play how many, two or three times in Sanders, so it was a great opportunity for undergraduates to go hear them or college kids or anyone in Cambridge to go hear them.

WANG:

Could you explain for the uninitiated such as I what a run-out is?

CHANG:

A run-out? Well, it's anything outside your home base. For example, I belong to the Boston Chamber Music Society, and we play our concerts at Jordan, mostly at Jordan Hall, and we play them sometimes at Sanders, but a run-out is like a...

WANG:

An away game?

CHANG:

A one...yeah, an away game. You run out to like Lincoln-Sudbury and you play a concert there and then you come back and play at Jordan Hall, that's a run-out. You run out and play, run through the concert, usually the day before or so, so that you have it.

So the Boston Symphony had these run-outs, I think they'd run to New York and play, they'd play at Carnegie Hall, but at the time, they had a series at Sanders, and um, uh, Bernstein had um, I guess he shared his subscription with some friends and I guess it was his turn or something to go there, so he went with his friend Raphael Hillyer to this concert, and this was the concert at which Dimitri Mitropoulos was conducting, um, and it was the, they played the C#-minor string quartet, [Opus] 131, I believe, by Beethoven, and uh, on that concert also was the Ravel um, uh, piano, uh, concerto, which we know earlier was one of his favorite pieces, a piece that he played. Um, and I think on that concert Mitropoulos, who was a conductor, was also a great pianist, he also was a ...so he played that concerto and conducted from the piano and, um, it was a great concert, uh, and it was the concert according to Hillyer that inspired Bernstein to become a conductor. At the time he was a serious pianist and so, um, he said, "I'll never forget the expression that we both had after that concert. We were just sitting there absolutely quiet; we didn't want to break the silence, because the atmosphere that had been created by that orchestra was so, so unbelievable. It was one of those great concerts and you can't say anything afterwards, and even years later, when I'd run into Bernstein, you know, we would, he would say to me, 'Wow, wasn't that a great concert,' you know," and so I think, um, uh...

The other thing that Hillyer told me was that Bernstein had a reputation of, of, they thought, “Well, have you heard of this kid Bernstein, he will never amount to anything because he’s got his hands in too many things, he’s doing this, he’s doing that, he’s running a show, he’s playing piano here and, uh, he’s brilliant, but he’s got his fingers in too many pies, and it’ll, he’s spread out too thin, and we don’t think anything’s going to happen of him, so I had no idea that he’d become the great figure that he ended up being.”

Um...uh...you want me to continue on with my reminisces? Or just stick with the Piano Trio, or his Harvard days, or his early youth...

WANG:

We can do a lot of things...but if we take one more short break for a number of reasons.

CHANG:

Sure. OK.

[12:35 Moments later...]

CHANG:

What—

WANG:

OK, so, as we were, at the Piano Trio, you mentioned that you had performed it, if you could possibly tell us a little about your performance, the details, um, you know, um...

CHANG:

What, the performance?

WANG:

Well, when was it, where was it...?

CHANG:

Oh. I've played the piece already four, five times now. I played it again three years ago at the Boston Conservatory, which was having a Bernstein year, and then I played it later that summer at a summer festival in middle of Massachusetts called Musicorda. Um, the cellist at the time was Peter Rejto, and the pianist was Michael Adcock.

WANG:

Could you spell "Rejto," please?

CHANG:

R-E-J-T-O, "Redge-toe," OK, and then Michael Adcock, who actually went to Peabody. Yeah, um, the, um, and then I played it...ah...I played it again...ah...I think I played it once at Paine Hall, I was invited by one of my students to give a recital at Paine Hall and so I played it there with an Artist Diploma student whose name I actually, I can't ...Agneshka, and I can't remember her last name unfortunately.

WANG:

Eye-nesh...

CHANG:

Agneshka, who's from Poland, and the pianist's name was Jung-Ja Kim. J-U-N-G, J-A, K-I-M

[DW attempts to spell, with mixed results]

CHANG:

...who's on the *[DW's still spelling]* J-A-K-I-M. And then I...

WANG:

Who's on the what, I'm sorry?

CHANG:

She's on the faculty of the Boston Conservatory. We did it, we actually did it there, we did it once at the Saint Paul Academy, so I've played it around a lot and then I recently played it once, um, uh, at, in Tucson, Arizona, at a festival there, at the Tucson, actually that was just in February, and the pianist there was Lydia Artymiw, and the cellist again was Peter Rejto, so I, so I've played it about five times or so, you know, so it's a lot of, it's a lot of fun.

WANG:

So...yes, this has all been in the past few years...

CHANG:

In the past three years, yeah sure.

WANG:

And um I guess I'm wondering: this [Trio] doesn't seem to be very well known, relatively speaking, right?

CHANG:

Oh, no! People who come up to me say, "Wow, that's a delightful piece, I never heard of it before, I didn't even know he wrote a Piano Trio!" Of course, nobody's aware of the piece. It's completely, um, it hasn't ach-, reached the public domain yet at all.

WANG:

How do you present it? I mean, is it...

CHANG:

Present it?

WANG:

Does it...I was...

CHANG:

Well, actually, to tell you the truth, I think before most of the performances I've actually given a talk and called it his "unofficial Opus 1," and I think most audiences love to hear the story about how it was originally a composition assignment that he wrote, you know, that he completed as an undergraduate, and that, um, uh...and they like to hear the story, at least that I like to tell about how he had problems with fugues, fugal writing in the beginning, and how the first movement is a fugue and that, and, uh, hopefully that, that conflict he had had, whatever he had had with Professor Piston was resolved, and he still, you know, later years, as you know, he thought very fondly of his all his music professors here, um, so that's, that's all I ever say is, you know, how that piece came into being.

WANG:

Does it I'm wondering does its position in sort of official "juvenilia" affect how you present it or how you perceive it...

CHANG:

Oh, I never call it juvenilia, I simply call it his, I simply refer to it as his, you know, Opus 1, basically, it's his first complete—I believe, and until I hear otherwise, I'm willing to call it his "unofficial Opus 1."

WANG:

How do you feel about the piece in terms of standing alone in the repertory? Do you feel that it's something that you can just put on a program or...

CHANG:

Well, I've done it, played it on a regular program with other pieces, and I think it, um, it stands pretty nicely, um, and I don't think—you know, programming is a very, very complex art, but—I think for what it is, I think it's delightful, I think audiences generally tend to react to it very positively, um, I think, um, it really helps to know in general, and

specifically with Mr. Bernstein, the kind of aspects that go into it. For example, we know that this is a very youthful work; we know that it's a very, that it has a kind of upbeat quality to it, and so when you're playing it you tend to imagine yourself as a, you know, having a lot more, um, youthful energy and, um, a kind of, uh, sort of pseudo-naïve quality about it, because it obviously is tremendously sophisticated but kind of has a pseudo-naïve quality that...stands on its own. It's very honest music, and it's...you try to make it as delightful and convincing as possible. That I think is the role of the performer as far as that works. You can't approach it like some kind of late Beethoven string quartet, or even Schubert song like that; it's not like that, it's very fresh, and it's very, you know, youthful, so...

[18:43]

WANG:

Are there...

CHANG:

Yeah?

WANG:

Sorry.

CHANG:

Go ahead.

WANG:

Are there influences that you detect, or that you think are significant, or that affect your, um, interpretation of the piece when you're playing it and/or studying it? You mentioned Ravel slightly earlier...

CHANG:

Yeah, right, right, there is that Ravel, there is, well, um, I know that when we, when we play the fugue, it's always good to get—you know, in any kind of fugue—it's always good to think about Bach, you know, because he is clearly the greatest of them all. And so we try to, every time I've played the fugue I've always tried to think in terms of a Bachian profile, about structure and presenting the subject as it is and whatever episodes and whatever transitions there are, and it's actually written fairly classically that way, and so you'd think of that in that style and I think it helps, uh, the, helps the performance.

There are moments when it comes to a complete climax in the first and, and even in all movements in which it has all these big climaxes and you say to yourself well, there's a part in the last movement, um, where—the *second* movement—where the piano goes *oom-pah oom-pah oom-pah*, and the violin goes, *da, da, yum-di-di-ya, dum*, and I can't help but think this is some kind of colle—some kind of Hasty Pudding song or something, you know, it has this kind of *oom-pah oom-pah oom-pah* quality, and you think, “Oh, well this is great for, you know, this would be a great Hasty Pudding song, to use, with that kind of wit and humor there, you know. It's basically a rah-rah college theme song kind of there, um, but, uh...I think that's the ...that's it for the Piano Trio; I think that's the best I can think of...

WANG:

Are there any particular challenges you've come across...

CHANG:

Technical? Musical?

WANG:

Just—musical, something, just wondering if...

CHANG:

Ah, not really. There's nothing really particularly tricky about it, ah, I mean there are some kind of, uh, fundamental, um, pseudo-jazzy rhythms that come in and out, but it's

nothing compared to what we're used to. As Mr. Hillyer told me later on, his next work that he completed for Mr. Hillyer, the fiddle sonata, is very different from this trio in that it is a much more serious work. I think Bernstein is trying to become much more serious—as a composer—and I know that Hillyer told me that, um, in that work, they were all quite obsessed with Hindemith at the time, and I didn't even know that, because I had heard the work performed before I spoke to him about it, and that was the first thing I heard, was: "Oh my God, there's a lot of Hindemith in there," and he subsequently told me, yes, we were all very obsessed with Hindemith at the time, and that sonata shows it, you know, so that piece doesn't have nearly the kind of upbeat, humorous, youthful quality that the Piano Trio does; that's clearly a more fun piece, you know, so to speak, you know, than the – and of course when he reaches to his official, generally considered official Opus 1, and that is the Clarinet Sonata, that is clearly influenced by jazz, that has a big jazz following, and I think it was shortly after that that he began his work on the *Jeremiah* Symphony, if I'm not mistaken. Yeah, so that was, and you can see that he's really maturing as a composer at that time.

Um, did you, I don't know, did you read his senior thesis?

BRETTMAN:

Parts of it.

CHANG:

Did you make any sense of it?

WANG:

I think so, there are some...

CHANG:

About eth-...I actually just skimmed through it too, I think, I think his overall conclusion was that there really wasn't any, the idea was ethnicity in music, right?

BRETTMAN:

Well, and I think American nationalism...

CHANG:

Yeah, nationalism in music...

BRETTMAN:

... being rooted in quote-unquote “Negro rhythms”...

CHANG:

Right, right, and he said there really isn't any such thing, and for a long time in his life he said no, nationalism doesn't even exist, and at the time one of the biggest pieces of the time was this piece, was a piano trio by Copland called *Vitebsk*, and he quotes the *Vitebsk*—“well, possibly *Vitebsk* might have a little of the Jewish flavor in there, but no other piece has some”... And I remember he, I once read a pamphlet that he wrote on the “New World” Symphony, and he went, he analyzed the whole symphony from bar by bar, talking about how not one single n—“What's so American about this? There's not one single pie- —not one single fragment, phrase, even that beautiful second movement, he said that could be at home in downtown Prague. What, what are we talking about? Possibly the only thing is the last movement when the cellos and basses go bum-bum-bum-bum-bum-bum-bum-bum—ok, well, that's probably boogie-woogie—but other than that, nothing else is American about that entire thing.”

Even in his first, um, he had a thing about that, even in his very, very first Young People's Concert, I don't know if you ever heard that, saw that...I saw that, I grew up watching the Young People's Concerts, I came of age during the '60s, when Bernstein started giving the Young People's Concerts. And the very, very, very first show, he gets up there and plays, and has the orchestra play the uh, *William Tell* Overture, you know— [sings fragment] – and of course at the time the biggest TV show that everyone was watching was a show called *The Lone Ranger*, which used that music, and he stopped after twenty bars and said, “What was that, boys and girls?” And they all screamed out,

“*The Lone Ranger!*” He said, “Wrong!” And the question behind that whole...TV show was “What is Music?”, trying to answer the music, and the conclusion he gave is that music isn’t about anything, it’s about, it’s just notes and you can make it whatever you want it to be. It doesn’t, there is no prov—Of course, I don’t know why he said that, because almost every piece he’s written is “about” something, you know...

WANG:

That’s true.

CHANG:

So there’s a lot of hypocrisy in the guy’s life [laughing]. Almost every one of his pieces has a certain programmatic element to it, but he maintained at least in those days that there was no programmatic anything to anything, no programmatic element to any of his music.

[25:47]

Um, later when he, ah, when I was an undergraduate, he came and gave the Norton Lectures, and I remember, he came to Music 180, and he listened to um, a Schubert piano trio and the cellist was a freshman named Yo-Yo Ma, and...there was a piano quartet by Mozart, and he was working with the piano quartet, and, uh, of course it got around that Bernstein was going to be visiting this class, and so a lot of people came in; there were a lot of visitors, a lot of distinguished visitors whom none of us knew who they were.

He started talking about how to play the Mozart, in his sort of Bernsteinian manner and one of the visitors raised his hand and said, “Listen, I don’t really think you should be playing it in this fashion. You should be playing it with less vibrato, you should be playing it in a much more period fashion, less vibrato, tapered phrases, *da, da, da-da-da-da*”...And Bernstein politely disagreed with him, and they got into this big row, on and on and on, and finally Bernstein decided to pull rank by saying, “Listen, if—there’s just no way I could ever conceive of this piece, in fact, if I was to get in front of the New

York Philharmonic, there's no way in the world that I would conduct this piece in this way." There was quiet in the room [*Laughs*] and the guy just sat down.

And afterwards someone came up to me and says, "Do you know who that person was that was arguing with Bernstein?" and I said no. "That was Franz Bruggen," the great, great period recorder, recordist, who had gotten this, and of course that was just the beginning of the period instrument movement, and he was arguing for the fact that Mozart should be played in a more, in a less Romanticized style, but, you know, Bernstein wasn't part, wouldn't have any of that.

Later on in the year, the class gave a concert, a 180 concert and in those days the president was Derek Bok, loved music, and he had the 180 class come and give a concert at his house, and he would invite various faculty and probably potential donors to come to the concert, and at this concert, Bernstein came and he was sitting in the front row next to Bok, and I had played this concert, on this concert the Schoenberg *Phantasy* (which is the last piece Schoenberg wrote), and of course I had been studying this with the professor in the class at the time, Leon Kirchner, who of course studied with Schoenberg, and on that concert was the same Schubert trio from, that Bernstein had listened to with Yo-Yo Ma as cellist, so I played the Schoenberg, and then after intermission came the Schubert, and during the Schubert, um, I was sitting there listening to it and all of a sudden I heard this big snap, this big [*claps hands*] crack. I said, "What was that?" I thought somebody's string had broken, and I looked up and I saw they kept playing. And what had happened was that Yo-Yo was playing so vigorously that he actually hit his cello and it knocked a corner of the cello off the instrument, OK, and you hear this snap, he actually hit the instrument, and, uh, afterwards I was talking to Yo-Yo and Bernstein came up to us and said, "Listen," he said to me, first he talked to me and he said, "Listen, I love the way you played, but every time I hear Schoenberg, I just want to run to the nearest window and jump out." That's what he said, and then he said to Yo-Yo, he said, "Listen, Yo-Yo, I love the way you said [*makes noise*] "\$#!" to yourself when you knocked the corner of your instrument off (Yo-Yo started cursing a little bit to himself),

and Bernstein said, “I love the way you started cursing yourself when you knocked the corner of your instrument off,” and then he walked away!

And, ah, at the time he had yet to give his first Norton Lecture, or maybe he had given one already, one or two of them, and I had no idea that actually what he said to me was essentially the subject of his thesis for the Norton Lectures, that music sort of ended with Mahler and that he foresaw a new tonality coming from the...chaos of atonality and serial music. That was his whole thesis for it, and when he said that to me I had no idea that was what he was thinking of for his entire Norton series. And, ah, so that, those are my fondest memories of Mr. Bernstein [laughing].

[30:26]

WANG:

So you were in Music 180...

CHANG:

Yeah, I was in 180.

WANG:

What year was that...just...

CHANG:

That was '73, that was the fall of '73...either fall of '72 or spring of '73. Um, you know, after that concert, there was a, uh, party and Bernstein was there standing next to Earl Kim, who was one of the professors here, he's since passed away, wonderful professor, and Earl was going on and on about the piece he thought was the greatest piece ever written, and that was *The Marriage of Figaro*, and it was *Figaro* this and *Figaro* that, the greatest, on and on and on and on and on, and Bernstein's quietly listening and finally Bernstein stops and says: “Oh, for goodness sakes, Earl, it's all Broadway.” That was it! [Laughs] I just thought that was the greatest comment: “It's all Broadway.” [Laughs]

So uh, those are just my, just about all my personal remembrances of Bernstein, you know, of those years and my experience with the Piano Trio. Do you have any other...

WANG:

Um, yeah, well, the Violin Sonata you mentioned, have you played that one as well?

CHANG:

No, no, I have the music to it, and I've heard it, but I have never played it, but it's actually a very nice work, as I said earlier, a very different kettle of fish from the Piano Trio. The Piano Trio was a little more accessible and more, you know, delightful, it's clearly a, it's not a fluff piece, but it's a more upbeat piece, it's a nice piece. The fiddle sonata, I think Bernstein makes an attempt to be a more, you know, a more serious composer; he's making an attempt to be—um, well, as we know, very, very influenced by Hindemith, and of course we don't think of Hindemith as having a great sense of humor [*laughs*], so, so I think, I think he was, he was into that, you know.

Of course we know that Bernstein his whole life wanted to be taken as a serious composer; he was always, even at the end of his life—ah, one of the members of the Israel Philharmonic once said to me, you know, he was nearing his end, he was close to the end of his conducting career, he was conducting the Israel Philharmonic and this violinist told me, Mr. Bernstein came and he said, “You know, I just so want to be remembered for more than just writing *West Side Story*, I mean doesn't anybody—I really want somebody to like my music, to be taken as a more serious composer than simply just writing, just this one great, great, as good as *West Side Story* is...”, you know, and that's, that's all there is.

The only other story that I can tell you about Bernstein, if you really want to know, involves his final day on this earth, and that was told to me by the composer Bright Sheng, who is a wonderful Chinese-American composer, but Bright had been working with Bernstein, ah, on – Bernstein had asked him to orchestrate his *Arias and Barcarolles*, I

think one of his final works, making him orchestrate it, and so Bright was bringing it in to him, and, um, he went and delivered, he had been seeing Bernstein pretty regularly, and by this time, Bernstein was very sick and, um, he rang his, he called to see if he was taking any visitors, and they said, “Well, why don’t you come, he’s not feeling too well now, but why don’t you come later on in the day --” (this is the day he died) “-- why don’t you come around one or two o’clock in the afternoon?” So he showed up and Bernstein was there, he was alive, he was sitting there, and they let him in, and so they bring him to visit Bernstein, and there – and he describes to me – there Bernstein was, sitting there in front of the television watching *Live from Lincoln Center*, and on the air was Yo-Yo playing the Rachmaninoff piano sonata with Jeff Kahane. And there’s Bernstein sitting there with an oxygen tube into his nostrils and in one hand a glass of scotch and in the other hand a cigarette [*laughs*]. This is the scene he described. And he’s listening to Yo-Yo playing the Rachmaninoff sonata and he says, “Huh. There’s a lot of Schumann in that piece.” [*Laughs*] That was his comment; I don’t know where that came from. And then he talks, and he talks a little bit about the transcription that Bright was doing, and then he leaves. And then, um, right after, as he was leaving, he ran into, I think, Adolph Green, who was one of his childhood friends who wanted to see him, but then they didn’t let him in because Bernstein had a little bit of a relapse. At the time that Bright saw him, he was quite lucid, and he was actually thinking quite well, but, um, apparently what had happened was is that he went into some kind of convulsion, the doctor was there, they gave him a shot, and just as they gave him the shot, his last words were, “What’s this?” and then he just collapsed and died and that was it, you know. They gave, they were giving him some sort of shot to try to...and that’s the story that, um, you know, Bright tells me...so...um...any more questions? [*Laughs*]

[36:11]

WANG:

Well, I guess, have you...played, um, any, performed any other Bernstein works...the Serenade...

CHANG:

Well, his greatest work, yeah, is the Serenade, which I have looked at. That's a pretty good piece, you know. I think it's generally considered to be his best, you know, serious work. I think it's a pretty good piece, you know, and I think it's um—he hasn't written much more other than the Trio and the Violin Sonata and the Serenade, there's not much more for solo violin. There's certainly no chamber music; primarily I do chamber music, and that's all there is for chamber music, unless you wanted to transcribe, you know, some of his, you know, show tunes.

WANG:

Mr. Hillyer mentioned having transcribed the Clarinet Sonata for viola.

CHANG:

Oh, right, right, right, and of course Yo-Yo transcribed it for cello, and actually he told me that he had asked Bernstein if he could do, and Bernstein said: "Sure, why not," you know, and he's actually recorded it, on a recording, with, his *Made in America* CD—he plays the transcription of the Clarinet Sonata for cello. So, uh, that's, I wish he had written more for violin or solo violin or chamber music, but he never wrote a string quartet or a piano trio, any of that kind of stuff, so we just, that's all we have to go for, go with.

WANG:

Do you have any plans, do you think, to be performing the Violin Sonata at any point in time, or...

CHANG:

Not in the foreseeable future, no, no. Although I probably will look at it again seriously, you know. Great.

WANG:

Is there anything that I haven't asked you that you would like to talk about? And Shira?

CHANG:

Shira, do you have anything?

BRETTMAN:

Actually, I have no questions...

CHANG:

You really, seriously? Um, OK.

WANG:

So, there's nothing...

CHANG:

I think that's...

WANG:

We've covered your experience with the Piano Trio,

CHANG:

Yeah.

We've covered your, um, experience with getting through the Violin Sonata to get to the Piano Trio, we've talked about your Music 180...

CHANG:

That's already much farther...he's already...you know, fully into his...

WANG:

But still, I mean, that's a great story we haven't heard so far.

CHANG:

But the Harvard stories I tell you I think are really nice, about what he said to me and Yo-Yo and Earl Kim.

WANG:

Did you attend the Norton Lectures?

CHANG:

I went to, yeah, I went to a couple of them. They were very interesting; actually they got better as they went along you know. You see, the ones that appear on the—he was actually much more informal and, um, the ones that survive on the tape are all quite serious, and they're all very nice, but in reality when you went to the lectures they were actually quite amusing, and he threw in a lot of jokes. He was once talking, I remember that he was, it was one of the Tchaikovsky symphonies, *da, da-da-da, da-da-da-da*, but he started singing, "Hooray for the gay liberation!" That's all I remember. But the first lecture I remember being quite, quite complex, but as it went along, his subject and thesis was beginning to come through, and I think they became much more interesting as they went along, you know. Yeah, they were actually – it was quite a year, the year that he spent here. He was actually, he really got into activities—he spent a lot of time, I think he attended a lot of concerts when he was here, you know, and did a lot of things, you know.

WANG:

Um, when you were preparing these early works, did you have occasion to speak to, um, other people who had participated...besides Mr. Hillyer?

CHANG:

No, because I don't know of anybody else who's played this, except for that recording of the Ahn Trio, and I don't know of any other people who've played this piece...

WANG:

Well, that, as well as original—

CHANG:

I tried to actually contact Mildred Spiegel, but I was unable to, I was unsuccessful with that. Maybe you could do that.

WANG:

Well, we're trying...

BRETTMAN:

I tried calling her number...got through...

CHANG:

Is she still in Boston, isn't she, or New York?

WANG:

I believe she's upstate New York, or...

BRETTMAN:

She's Westchester.

CHANG:

Westchester, right, right. You never reached her? Does she have an address? Phone?

BRETTMAN:

Yeah, I have her phone number. I just keep getting voice mail.

CHANG:

Really. So there is an answer there.

BRETTMAN:

Yeah.

CHANG:

Oh.

BRETTMAN:

But I got her number from um, one of the people from Sharon so...

CHANG:

Really.

BRETTMAN:

...interesting stories.

CHANG:

I don't think there's, um, I don't know where she is now.

BRETTMAN:

Maybe—I think she goes to Florida in the winter, just assumed based on, you know, the community...

CHANG:

And you never heard back.

BRETTMAN:

No. I never actually left a message, because I wasn't sure if it was her, it was a like, an automated recording, it wasn't like "Hi, you have reached Mildred Spiegel"...

WANG:

"Hello, you have..."

CHANG:

You never left the...

BRETTMAN:

No.

CHANG:

Well, if you get desperate, you can leave a message.

BRETTMAN:

Yeah, I'm going to try again and hopefully get in touch with her this summer.

CHANG:

Right, right. Great. Good.

WANG:

This has been really helpful.

CHANG:

Well, I don't know if it's, you know...

WANG:

Well, I mean, we've learned, the thing is with the Piano Trio is that there's not much out there, and so anything we can probably find—do you, is it possible, I guess there are probably programs from your performances in various archives or, I mean they're obviously not like seventy years old...

CHANG:

There are some programs. Yeah, you could...

WANG:

...could track the limited performance history of this...relatively early work.

CHANG:

You can ask, well, we just know about the first two performances by the Madison and then by Raphael, I don't know if he played it with the composer; he may have. I know he played the fiddle sonata with the composer, but I don't know if he played the Piano Trio with the composer. You'll have to, if you, if you, you might ask him about that. I don't know if he did, he may very well have done it with the composer, they were very good friends, you know. Great.

WANG:

Great. Well, thank you again. I guess, do you want me to do something about what time...

CHANG:

(As camera is shut off)

Wow, I didn't know this was going to be so...

[END 43:02]