

Interview with Jerry and Ouida Mintz¹

Music 194rs: Leonard Bernstein's Boston

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Interviewers: Stephanie Lai, Corinna Campbell, Katherine Chen

Location: Adams Coolidge Room

Transcriber: Stephanie Lai

Minor editing by Elizabeth T. Craft

KC: Hello? Hi.

JM: Ok. Are you ready?

KC: Yes, we're ready.

JM: Okay, well, I hope you're able to hear okay with both of our phones are on, and you're... We'll see, I guess.

KC: Okay, yeah.

JM: Okay, who are the other people you're with?

KC: I'm here with Stephanie Lai and Corinna Campbell.

JM: Stephanie, did you say?

KC: Yes, Stephanie Lai and Corinna.

SL: Hello, Mr. Mintz, how are you?

JM: Sorry, what's the last one?

KC and CC: Corinna Campbell.

JM: Only one person talking. I'm sorry, who?

KC: Corinna Campbell.

JM: I got the Campbell part.

KC: Corinna.

JM: Okay. So it's Corinna, Katherine, and Stephanie?

KC: Yes.

¹ Timecode is in five minute increments.

SL: Thank you very much for your time.

JM: Okay, yeah I'm not in very good shape. I - I'm a little sick from my, uh, trip to India. I just got a bad cold. But my mother's ready to talk to you. Do you want me to get her on right away?

KC: Yes.

JM: Or do you want to do background stuff first?

KC: Okay.

JM: Which do you want? We might as well get her on.

KC: Okay.

JM: Okay, hang on.

JM to OM: Turn the music off.

OM: What?

JM: Turn the music off.

OM: How come?

JM: Off. [Laughs]. All right, are you there?

KC: Yes, we're here.

JM: Hello, are you there?

SL: Yes! We are.

JM: You know what? I know what happened. Oh boy. Never mind. I'm going to have to give her this phone, and... in order to... and then pick up a different phone. Hang on.

JM to OM: I have to give you this phone. That's on line 1, so hang up. Hang up. I'm going to disinfect the phone before I give it to you.

JM to KC: You'll have to hang on for a second.

KC: Okay.

[Silence]

OM to JM: Well, what are you going to be using?

OM: What? I don't hear you.

SL: Hello?

KC: Hello?

OM: What am I supposed to do?

JM [slightly indistinguishable]: Just talk. They're on right now.

KC: Hello?

OM: Hello? This is Ouida.

KC: Hi, how are you?

OM: Okay. How are you?

KC: Pretty good.

OM: What can I do for you?

KC: Well, my name is Katherine, and I'm here with two other classmates, and we're enrolled in a Harvard class exploring Bernstein in Boston. We would just like to know, um, -

OM: Could you talk a little louder?

KC: We just wanted to know your experiences with, um, Bernstein, um, your memories of Bernstein, um, during your teenage years.

JM: That's pretty general.

OM: I can't hear her that well.

JM: Oh, you couldn't hear her?

OM: No, I didn't hear the question.

JM: Oh, they just want to know about your experiences with Bernstein during your teenage years. Um... I might have to hang up if, uh -

OM: Well, all right. I dunno...Do you want to ask me any particular questions?

JM: You - you've got her book, right?

KC: Yes, we do. We just want to know when was the first time you met Lenny.

OM: I met him at my teacher's house, Gebhard.

JM: When was that? How old were you?

OM: Fourteen.

JM: So that would've been about... uh... 74 years ago.

KC: Okay. And, um... we just want to know about Gebhard.... What was his teaching style, what did you learn from him?

OM: Are you asking me?

JM: Yes, of course.

OM: What's that?

JM: What was Gebhard's teaching style? What – what kinds of things did you learn from him?

OM: Oh! Well, he gave me a basic knowledge. One thing I was very happy about, I didn't have to study scales because... oh, well, scales maybe... he asked me to play by myself, but he taught advanced students – [5:00]

KC: Okay.

OM: - And so I didn't have to do exercises.

KC: Okay. Um, were there any specific techniques that he emphasized?

JM: Any, piano techniques that he used?

OM: Well, he had me write down things in a notebook when I first started.

KC: Hmm, hmm.

OM: Actually, I, uh, was probably one of the youngest students he ever taught. So he wasn't quite sure, but he liked me well enough to, uh, teach his daughter.

JM: My mother taught his daughter... Have you guys read the book?

KC: Yes, we have.

JM: Okay. How many – how many people are in the class?

KC: There's about... maybe twenty... twenty or so.

JM: So, are you sharing one book, or are people buying it? [Chuckles]

KC: Yeah, we're just sharing one book.

JM: You're sharing one book.

OM: Oh, poor things.

[Mutual laughter]

JM: Well, yeah, I mean, you can get books from us too. We can make a deal if you want to get some -

KC: Okay, yeah, that'd be great.

JM: Hmm-hmm.

KC: Also, what were the lessons like with Gebhard? What were your impressions of Gebhard as a teacher?

OM: Well, you didn't read Lenny's foreword that he wrote for Mr. Gebhard, right?

KC: Um, yes.

OM: The foreword that he wrote was for a book that Gebhard wrote.

JM: *The Art of Pedaling*?

OM: Yes, *The Art of Pedaling*, which I have. I think it's beautifully written, and it was just the way I felt. So if you want to know, read that.

KC: Okay. We're just wondering if Gebhard had a lot of assistants at that time, and did you know an assistant by the name of Helen Coates?

OM: I didn't hear that.

JM: Yeah, they want to know about his assistants. You want to know about Helen Coates?

KC: Yes.

OM: She was a very fine teacher more than a pianist. I don't think I ever heard her play. Um, but she was so impressed with Lenny that she became his secretary for life. And so it was very fortunate that he recommended her to teach...

KC: Uh-huh.

JM: That- that... you mean that Gebhard recommended Helen Coates to teach Lenny.

OM: To teach Lenny before he came to him.

KC: Oh, okay.

JM: So one thing that you may not realize is that Gebhard didn't take Lenny right away.

KC: Oh, okay.

OM: He thought he wasn't ready for him.

JM: So that's why he sent him to Helen Coates. But my mother was actually ahead of him. She was actually studying directly with Gebhard and played with orchestra before Lenny did.

KC: Wow.

OM: I played a few times with orchestra. Mendelssohn, Beethoven...

KC: Mm-hmm. So do you know why Gebhard didn't accept Lenny at first?

OM: Do you play the piano?

KC: Yes, I play the piano.

OM: Uh-huh.

JM: Did you hear the question, Mom?

OM: No.

JM: Do you know why Gebhard didn't accept Lenny at first?

OM: He wasn't ready for him, he said.

JM: She told me that he said he was a faker. [Chuckles]

OM: He said he didn't practice enough.

KC: Oh, okay. And we're just wondering if he had other assistants during that time, other than Helen Coates?

JM (correcting KC's pronunciation): Coates.

OM: Gebhard – yes, he had three assistants.

KC: Who were they?

OM: Oh, I don't remember their names anymore.

KC: Oh, okay.

JM: Just give her a minute.

OM: Julia Lubin is one.

JM: I've never heard you mention her before.

OM: Mildred Spiegel studied with her.

JM: Rubin.

OM: No, Lubin. L-U-B-I-N.

JM: Oh, Lubin. I see.

OM: Lubin is one. And – uh- I can't remember the others.

JM: And Mildred studied with her?

OM: Yes, and she wrote Chapter 7; I asked her to. And I re-wrote it. 'Cause I wanted to have the person who was very close to Lenny when they used to date and play piano together all the time, and I felt she deserved it.

JM: There's a possibility that she's still alive, but we doubt it. [10:00]

OM: I don't think so. I haven't heard from her for a long time.

CC: Uh, Mrs. Mintz, I was wondering if you could tell us a little bit about, uh, any recitals that you, that Gebhard's studio put on, or any things like that?

JM: They want to know about the recitals Gebhard put on.

OM: Well, there are a couple of them in the book. Uh, there's a program, and I was on, and Lenny was on. Uh...and of course, we played every year. I studied with him, and, uh, for ten years, and Lenny didn't study quite that long because he left to go to New York. And he was teaching, uh, in fact, we just got his card. Do you want to talk about the card, Jerry, which he was teaching at - .

JM: We actually found a card at Leonard Bernstein's teaching studio. That was 1941, I think.

OM: It was. It was.

JM: He was busy doing that. I guess he continued taking lessons.... But he learned a lot of things from Gebhard. And then of course, he did study with other teachers at Curtis. It tells you in the book.

KC: What kinds of things do you think Lenny learned from Gebhard?

JM: Say it again?

KC: What kinds of things do you think Lenny learned from Gebhard?

JM: What do you think Lenny learned from Gebhard?

OM: What did Lenny learn? Well, I know he learned the Ravel Piano Concerto, which he played with the New York Philharmonic. And he studied that. That was one of the large works.

CC: Any technique stuff that you think – that Gebhard might have been –

JM: Any techniques that Gebhard might have taught Lenny?

OM: Technique? Oh, you can't really... I don't see how you could say that. What special techniques? Well, yes, I could say ...he believed in using your whole arm when you play *forte*. Not just your - from your wrist down. Your whole arm and back. You use...in a downward movement, starting high wrist and then coming down.

KC: Okay.

JM: We're learning from her. [Chuckles]

JM: So, did - you guys read the whole book? You read about the time that Lenny was playing Copland, you know, the first time, you know -

OM: *El Salón México*.

JM: - and the police came in the middle of the night to throw him out.

OM: That was *El Salón México*. Lenny played his arrangement on my piano for the first time.

JM: The neighbors complained.

KC: Can you tell me more about that?

OM: Well, he decided that he wanted to, uh, make an arrangement for piano, Lenny did. It was written for orchestra, but he thought that people should have something to play outside of Listz, uh, at the concerts for the encores, and so that's why he decided he would modernize this system because he got tired of hearing Listz's Rhapsody for encores.

JM: Apparently the neighbors thought he was too loud.

[Laughter]

KC: I read in your book that you and Lenny participated in many music contests. Um, can you tell more about those contests?

OM: Well, you can tell him.

JM: Hahaha. Well, you know, it's interesting. We're doing a musical based on her book-

KC: Hmm-hmm.

JM: -and using songs that my mother wrote. [15:00]

KC: Oh, okay.

JM: And, uh, it'll be performed... uh, we'll probably have it ready by end of July; it might be late August. July or August. We're not sure.

OM: I thought it was earlier.

JM: Well, when we looked at the schedules for different places, we realized it may have to be longer, we'll see. And the big speech in part of the beginning is the contest that they went to. 'Cause this was a pivotal moment in his life. Uh, what happened was that there was a contest being put on by a Boston newspaper and something else. What – who was putting on the contest, Mom?

OM: Um, Victor Records.

JM: And the – and the Boston newspaper?

OM: *Herald*.

JM: *Herald*. Okay, and so, the prize, the first prize was to get toplay... to conduct the Boston Pops.

OM: And, and the questions were about naming the excerpts that they played.

JM: In other words, it was a “name that tune” type of thing. And they had, oh, tons, of people, hundreds maybe, that went to this contest. And my mother got [unintelligible] and Lenny got in, and his prize was to conduct the Boston Pops at Tanglewood, which was the first time he got to conduct.

KC: Wow.

JM: And he wouldn’t have won if my mother hadn’t been listening to records before that and warned Lenny about one in particular, which she thought was going to be a trick question.

OM: He spent all day at the beach, and I was singing melodies that he had never heard before.

KC: [Laughs].

JM: And one of them was the Brahms Violin Concerto, which you would think might be a symphony, because it goes on and on before the violin comes in.

KC: Oh.

JM: And so that was one of the questions, and he got it right. And so afterwards, he jumped up and said, “Thank you, Ouida.”

KC: [Laughs]

SL: What year was this? Do you remember?

JM: What year was this, Mom? How old were you?

OM: That was in the ‘40s.

JM: Well, well. So, what do you think?

OM: Oh no, that was earlier than the ‘40s.

JM: Yeah, okay. So how old were you then? Were you teenagers?

OM: I was older... I think I was engaged at that time. So that was in the late ‘30s.

JM: Late '30s.

OM: Early '40s.

KC: Okay.

JM: Yeah. Probably late '30s. '39. '38. '39. So that was a pivotal moment in his life.

OM: I should mention that my student is directing a musical. A student that I taught for ten years.

JM: Yeah, one of her students at C.W. Post has, uh, helped me write, uh, the book for it, and we're using about, so far, about 28 songs in it.

KC: Wow, that's great.

OM: He became one of my best students.

KC: [Laughs]. Um...

OM: He's a wonderful accompanist.

KC: Great.

JM: Yeah, if you want, we can let you know when this is going to be on. Although maybe it won't matter at that point, the course perhaps will be over.

CC: It'd be wonderful if you could let us know when that is.

JM: Yeah, we will let you know.

KC: Thanks.

JM: We have your email address, Katherine.

KC: And we're just wondering, Ouida – if -

OM: Jerry.

JM: Yeah?

OM: Have you – uh....what is it? Have you... that magazine? You can have it – for nothing, they will send it to you.

JM: There's a, there's a Leonard Bernstein magazine that they've put out. Do you know about it?

KC: Uh, no, we don't.

OM: I think it's *Preludes and Fugues* and.... It's here if you want.

JM: *Preludes and Fugues* - is that it? Something like that. Anyways -

OM: I have a magazine you can find the address in.

JM: They put all these kinds of events that are going on. Oh, you know what? We should put something in the magazine when we know when the musical comes out.

OM: Oh, we'll tell them.

KC: Okay. [Laughs]

JM: [Laughs]

KC: And we were just wondering if you have any memories of Bernstein you would like to share with us?

JM: Well, there are lots. It depends on how well you've read the book. You know, there was the last concert that I actually went to with my mother.

KC: Oh! Can you tell me more about that?

JM: We always went to see him at Tanglewood every year.

KC: Hmm-hmm.

JM: And we went to see him after he got out of his car, you know, and he arrived there at the shack, and we went over to see him, and he gave my mother a big hug and a kiss. And, uh, she asked him, "How have you been?" And he said, "Oh, I've been so sick, Ouida." And of course, there had been a lot of speculation. And I said, "Has there been a diagnosis?" And, uh, he said, "Oh, if only they would tell me."

KC: Oh.

JM: And at that point, we knew it was something very serious. [20:00]
We talked with him for a while. And uh, you know, when we were going back to our seats, my mother had tears in her eyes. She said, "That's the last time we're going to see him."

KC: Oh.

JM: And he was dead two months later.

OM: Yet he was able to conduct Beethoven's 7th symphony.

KC: Wow. Huh.

JM: And one of the things she commented on is that there's a funeral march in it.

KC: Uh-huh.

JM: He wasn't even strong enough to conduct his own piece. Somebody else had to conduct that.

KC: Oh, wow.

JM: That was his last concert.

KC: And we're just wondering if you have any impressions of his family? Have you met his father Sam, or mother Jennie, and also his brother and sisters?

JM: What do you remember about his father and mother, Mom?

OM: I remember his mother better than his father because she used to be with him when he gave a concert. Uh, and I didn't see his father much at all. I met him once.

JM: But you knew his father when you were seeing Lenny, right?

OM: No, not that much. He was in the cosmetic business. He wanted Lenny to be in it, but of course, he didn't want to. And so, when they hollered at it him for doing that, he said, "Well, how did I know I was going to have a Leonard Bernstein?"

KC: Laughs. So when you were a teenager-

OM: His mother – [coughs]. His mother was a very nice person. And she was a better mother than he was a father.

KC: Hmm-hmm. Why is that? Why do you think that is?

JM: She was pretty old, wasn't she?

OM: Oh, his mother lived to be almost as old as he -

JM: Older?

OM: No, no. He was 72 when she was 90-something.

JM: She didn't outlive him, did she? She might have.

OM: No, she died after he did.

JM: After he died. Really? Wow.

OM: She was very sympathetic as far as wanting to be a musician. Because she believed in him.

KC: Hmm-hmm.

OM: Hello? Are you there?

JM: Any more questions?

CC: I guess, well, if you have any more thoughts. Uh, we're looking at two issues in particular.

OM: I can't hear a thing.

JM: Hold on, just be quiet. Let me hear.

CC: The three of us, who are here today, are focusing on two issues in particular.

JM: Yup.

CC: And one is looking at the Samuel Bernstein Hair Company and how that affected Leonard Bernstein's life. The other one is looking at his early piano educational influences. And so, uh, we've talked a bit about Gebhard, but if there's anything else that we should know or uh, you could help us with...

JM: Can you think of any other early piano influences on him, besides Gebhard?

OM: Oh, he went to Curtis and Vengerova was his teacher there. Vengerova – that's in the book too. I don't think they got along too well.

KC: Do you know why?

OM: She wanted him to change his whole technique. She didn't like the way he held his hands. And she had her own ideas when she didn't agree.

JM: So he didn't do it.

OM: Yeah.

JM: [Laughs.]

KC: So what were her ideas?

OM: What?

KC: What were her ideas?

OM: That I can't tell you.

JM: She wanted him to hold his hands in a different way. Okay?

CC: Did Bernstein ever talk about the teachers that he had before Helen Coates and Gebhard?

JM: Yeah, what about the teachers he had before Helen Coates and Gebhard?

OM: Oh, I can't tell you who they were, but he studied a very short time before he went to, uh, Coates.

JM: So he hadn't really been playing that long.

OM: She was practically his first teacher.

JM: Oh, okay.

OM: He gave concerts on the radio, by the way, when he was first starting, because he was so good. [25:00] And his favorite piece was *Malagueña*.

CC and KC: [Laughs]

OM: Uh, he played in a contest with me, and I played Chopin's Scherzo in B flat minor at Jordan Hall, which is in the book. That's the whole story.

CC: We also know he started teaching at a very early age. And we were wondering if he ever talked about his experiences teaching with you.

OM: What's that?

JM: Did he ever talk about his experiences teaching when he was really young?

OM: About what?

JM: His experiences teaching. He started teaching at a young age.

OM: When he was teaching?

CC: Right.

JM: Yeah, when he was teaching.

OM: Very little. I don't know much about that. I don't think he taught much.

CC: Uh-huh.

JM: My mother's taught about 1,000 kids.

CC: Wow. That's quite impressive.

SL: Was there any sort of rivalry between you and Lenny?

JM: Yeah. [Laughs].

OM: Oh, he was jealous of me. That's why he sang, "Ouida's going to play with Theida."

JM: He was going around saying, "Ouida's going to play with Theida." And Theida was the first conductor that she played with, and she got to play with orchestra before he did. He was running around backstage saying, "Ouida's going to play with Theida."

OM: I played before he did. I don't think you got it right. I played about a year before he did in Jordan Hall. And he wasn't gonna let me get ahead of him. So he told the conductor that he wanted to play the 1st Beethoven; I played the 3rd Beethoven concerto.

KC: Uh-huh.

JM: So I think that that rivalry actually was an important thing. He really thought her as a rival with my mother. But after she gave a couple of concerts with orchestra, she decided that she didn't really want that life, and she didn't like the stress of it.

OM: He loved it; I didn't.

JM: So, you know, the book and the play are about how they diverged in their lives at that point.

CC: Was he competitive with other students?

OM: What's that?

JM: Was he competitive with other students?

OM: He was competitive with everybody.

KC, CC, JM: [Laughs]

OM: He wanted to be ahead of everybody.

JM: And you know, he got there.

OM: And I think, I won out [laughing].

JM: [Laughs] Yeah, she got the last laugh. She's still around.

SL: Did you keep in touch with Lenny throughout his career, even after adolescence?

JM: Yeah, they were in continuous touch. And as I said, we'd see him every year. She sometimes went down to his place in New York City and so on. We would see him at his various concerts.

OM: Yeah, I went to his home... He listened to my songs. I'm a songwriter. And he, he uh -

JM: She feels like he was trying to steal them. [Laughs]

OM: He'd spend so much time studying them that I'd have to take them away from him.

[Mutual Laughter]

CC: Did anything ever show up in his compositions that seemed similar?

OM: Yes, there was one interval that he liked in, in a song.

JM: Yeah, yeah. "Don't Let Trouble Trouble You," right?

OM: Yeah, right.

SL: Could you please sing it?

JM: Oh, well, I can't sing it very well. Why don't you sing it, Mom?

OM: [singing] "Don't let trouble trouble you. Be happy while you live." It's that note. Oh, wait a minute.

JM: "Like you're blowing bubbles, you will blow your troubles away." It's that one note.

OM: That was the note that he liked. [Sings] That note.

JM: So that note – that showed up in some of his works later on.

OM: [Singing] “If you have some fancy dreams, maybe they will come true. Take some time out for a dream or two.”

CC: That’s great. Thank you.

[Laughter]

OM: I’ve written about 100 songs.

CC: Wow.

OM: And we’re gonna use about 25 of them in the musical.

[30:00]

SL: What was the name of that note, or that interval? Was it a major sixth or seventh or-?

JM: What do you call that difference between those two, Mom?

OM: What’s that?

JM: What do call that note, the difference?

OM: Uh, that’s, uh, step and a half.

JM: Step and a half.

OM: Step and a half apart. The interval.

CC: I guess one other question about the musical. How did you patch together a storyline for it?

JM: Well, we – we based it on the book, and then we just picked out songs that related to her life and the things that happened. So some of the songs she wrote, like after my brother died, you know.... And as a result of that, we changed things up a bit... We’re still finishing it up. But we’ve got the basic storyline’s done.

CC: Great.

SL: What compelled you to create a musical?

JM: This was entirely the idea of her student. He came to us with it. And we’ve been working with him on it. You know it’s interesting, of course, the play starts with the line from Lenny. “Ouida, when I grow up, I think I’m going to do something in music.” And it ends with this kid saying the same thing, a 5-year-old. [Laughs]

OM: He didn’t say that at five.

JM: I know, but that's what he's writing. [Laughs]

KC: And what were your motivations to write the book?

OM: What?

JM: Why'd you write the book?

OM: That's a long story. Well, first of all, after my husband died, I met somebody else. And he's in the book. That's Ray Sanderford. He was learning how to use the computer, and he decided to write a book with me. I wrote it, but he put it together.

JM: I had already gotten my mother started on it; she doesn't like to give me credit, but, uh...

OM: Oh, yes. It was Jerry's idea.

JM: We already had quite a bit down. And she dictated it. And then Ray came along, and basically heard what we were doing. And he's the guy who actually, in his seventies, he's the one who actually formatted the book and put it together.

OM: It was fortunate that I knew so many important people, especially Mike Wallace. I played violin duets with him.

JM: Yeah, I actually handed that book to Mike Wallace in the *Sixty Minute* studio.

KC: Wow.

JM: He endorsed it.

OM: And Paul Simon. He, uh, recorded my songs, Paul Simon, and he sang them with me. [Laughs]

JM: We have about 15 songs of Paul Simon singing my mother's songs. And he played some duets with her.

CC: Wow, that's awesome.

JM: We call it [unintelligible].

OM: This was early in Paul Simon's career.

JM: She paid him \$10 a record.

OM: He used a different name then. Jerry Landesburg.

JM: Paul Simon's his real name.

KC: Um... okay, I think we're running out of questions.

JM: Okay, well, if you have any more questions, you can email me and I can ask her and send them back to you.

KC: Actually, we have one more question. When was- when were you, Ouida, born?

JM: 1917.

KC: 1917. All right, great. Thank you so much for your time.

JM: Okay, are you going to write this up?

KC: Um.

CC: We're using this for, um, a class project. And so, we're -

JM: Well if you have anything written as a result, you can send it to me.

CC: Certainly. I guess you saw the permission form?

JM: Yes.

OM: What are their names, Jerry?

JM: Yeah, I have their names.

CC: Certainly, if we use any material from this, we will contact you and double-check.

JM: Is this a regular class that they do every year?

CC: No, this is a special thing. I don't know if there'll be a follow-up; it might just be a one-time thing.

JM: Well if there is, tell them to buy books from us.

[Laughter]

CC: Okay, we will.

KC: Great. Thank you so much.

OM: Okay. Bye-bye.

CC: Thank you very much.

[35:00]

OM: What?

CC: Thank you very much.

OM: You're welcome. Nice talking to you.

KC: Nice talking to you.

OM: What are your names?

JM: They're Katherine, Stephanie, and Corinna.

OM: Okay.

[Laughter]

KC: Thank you.

JM: Bye-bye.

SL: Thank you.

(Interview ends at approximately 38:40.)