

**Interview with Mr. Raphael Hillyer, violinist/violist**  
**Music 194rs: Leonard Bernstein's Boston**  
**April 28, 2006 / ~4:10-4:45 PM**  
**Aldrich Room, Eda Kuhn Loeb Music Library, Harvard University**  
**Professors Carol Oja and Kay Kaufman Shelemay**  
**Class Interviewer: Derrick Wang**  
Transcription by Derrick Wang from cassette recording  
Minor editing by Elizabeth T. Craft

[COUNTER: 000]

*(As interviewer and interviewee move to a computer)*

[016]

RAPHAEL HILLYER:  
...without bothering other people...

DERRICK WANG:  
*(Displaying images on computer)*  
...have some of the images that I don't have printed out. So...

[031]

HILLYER:  
So what is your topic?

WANG:  
So my topic is...

HILLYER:  
Oh, the Trio.

WANG:  
Yeah, the Trio.

HILLYER:  
And you say you have a copy of it?

WANG:  
Um, there, I have the library copy...[unintelligible]...website here, images of the original...

HILLYER:  
Oh, really? I'd like to see these because I, I haven't seen this since the early days...

[045]

WANG:

So, yes, that's, this is not...this is the first half of the notebook, and the, his earliest version, so, I'm wondering if any of this looks familiar...

HILLYER:

Yeah, I played, I played it, you know, with Mildred Spiegel and, and, uh, Jesse Ehrlich.

WANG:

Please feel free to sit down, as well. Um, this, I'm not sure, this is in C# minor and does not, is not related in any way to the final [RH: I see], um, product, but I read that you had mentioned that Piston had assigned, Professor Piston had assigned the harmonization of a melody...

HILLYER:

Yeah.

WANG:

...that may have...that then turned into some kind of piano trio? I was wondering if this sketch was related at all.

HILLYER:

Oh, I can't tell you that. [*Laughs*]

WANG:

I see, I mean, it's up here, it's written, "To the Madison Trio: M.S., D.R., S.K.," which I imagine stands for Mildred Spiegel, Dorothy Rosenberg, and Sarah Kruskall, but this, of course, does not resemble the, the final product. And the same, it just goes on in this vein for a little while, um, there are, there are...and this is another sketch here...which, um, just...

HILLYER:

This is part of the trio?

WANG:

I think it's part of the original conception, it's still sort of C# minor-ish, and then there's sort of this dance...

HILLYER:

Can you, can you keep it still for a...

WANG:

Oh, sorry...I'm sorry, I...this, none of this is, ends up in the, uh, the, final version, this here, um, there are some resemblances as far as...

HILLYER:  
I, I can't tell...

WANG:  
...um, very slight as far as the contour of the melody. Later there, that is what ends up being the second movement, um, I believe, in the final version, and also ended up as, um, incidental music in *On the Town*.

HILLYER:  
What he told me, as Bernstein told me, that he had, as I say, cannibalized his own early things [DW: Right] to use for later things, but he didn't exactly tell me what, what he had used these early things for...

WANG:  
Yes... You mentioned that this piece was "born in this very building." Could you maybe talk about that?

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HILLYER:  
Uh, we all had a class with Professor Piston in harmony, and, uh, the assignments varied from day to day—sometimes we were supposed to analyze a Bach prelude from the Preludes and Fugues, and sometimes we had to do harmonizations of a tune that he would give us, or sometimes we'd have to... well, I think that was mainly one of the things we had to do, and so for all of us, except Mr. Bernstein, we dutifully did the assignment, which was to harmonize something. But he almost invariably brought in a whole piece, a whole composition, so that, that's really, then I'm not sure what happened, I don't remember, except that this piece, of course, the Trio, became a real work which we performed up in the, in the hall...

WANG:  
Uh, which hall?

HILLYER:  
The one right here.

WANG:  
Oh, Paine Hall.

HILLYER:  
Yeah.

WANG:  
Oh...

HILLYER:

And we used to...

WANG:

Do you remember the date of that?

HILLYER:

Oh, absolutely not. [*Laughs*] It was probably 1939, I guess, perhaps, because I came down here to study at the end of '38—'38-'39, '39-'40—so it might have been, it could have been '38, '39, or '40. Do you know dates, um, of these manuscripts?

WANG:

Um, not so much, the actual piece is, um, catalogued as having been completed in '37, but it's also listed as having been premiered by the Madison Trio...

HILLYER:

'37... Actually I guess I came down, and I graduated from college in '36, so I was here '36 fall, '37, '38, yeah, I guess it was '38 that I finished.

WANG:

Now, you were a graduate student...

HILLYER:

Yeah.

WANG:

...at the time...

HILLYER:

I was a graduate student.

WANG:

...that, um, Leonard Bernstein was an undergraduate...

HILLYER:

He was an undergrad. He was...

WANG:

Were graduate students and undergraduate students usually in the same classes?

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HILLYER:

I don't think they made any restrictions on that. I can't say about usually I know...this is the only class that, that may have said anything like that because the other things I took were history and I took counter-, you know, medieval counterpoint, orchestration. I don't,

I don't think it, it was ever mentioned whether one had to be a graduate student or shouldn't be a graduate student.

WANG:

Was, what was the subject of Professor Piston's class?

HILLYER:

This was harmony. [DW: Harmony.] For which he later, from which he later wrote a book called *Harmony*.

WANG:

I have that.

HILLYER:

You have that.

WANG:

It's what I learned from. So, um...

HILLYER:

We didn't have that book when we were in class; it was just, you know, he, he sat at the piano and played the things that we had composed, or harmonies, and told us what was wrong or what was satisfactory.

WANG:

I see. Were you, um, were you and other students, um, composing at this time for Piston?

HILLYER:

I was not composing. But there were other people who were. Uh, there's, um, Harold Shapero, who's...appears, I think, in this Bernstein thing quite, quite a lot. [DW: Yes.] Uh, Irving Fine...um, there was a student who later became a well-known musicologist named Jan LaRue, J-A-N, Jan ["yahn"], and then LaRue, L-A-R-U-E, he became a very well-known musicologist.

WANG:

So how did you end up playing this piece? I mean, you mentioned that sort of...

HILLYER:

We just, you know, he said...

WANG:

...did this grow out of his class exercise, or was it something...

HILLYER:

This was something he wrote, he brought into class. I think he was probably composing, either writing it down or not writing down, but composing all the time, because things were, you know, they were, you had the feeling there was something cooking, always.

WANG:

I see. Um, were you, did you ever have a chance to look at some of his original rough drafts of it, or did he bring it to you in completed form?

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HILLYER:

I think everything was just a rough draft, I think he just wrote very fast. He wrote a violin and piano sonata for me, which has not been published, but it's available through the Bernstein Foundation. Um, that I don't remember seeing the manuscript of either.

WANG:

I see. So...how did the rehearsal and performance of this piece come to be? Did he just ask you, or...

HILLYER:

Well, we played a lot together [DW: I see], and so it wasn't like some special thing—we played sonatas together; later on when he began conducting around the college and doing things like *The Cradle Will Rock* or whatever, I think this, the, uh, Aristophanes' *The Birds*, he wrote the music for. You know that from your...study. [DW: Class. Indeed.] That was...I played in that. I think I was the lead violin, or only violin, or something like that, in that performance.

WANG:

Um, and so, um, basically, I was just very curious about this piece in particular because there doesn't seem to be much written about it, even, uh, um, some excerpts from Mildred Spiegel, so...mentions...

HILLYER:

Is Mildred still around? She still alive?

WANG:

I believe she's currently residing in New York...I've been told by some of the...

HILLYER:

New York City? Because...

WANG:

Um, I think in upstate New York...

HILLYER:

Yeah, the last time I talked to her she was in one of those very nice suburbs.

WANG:

We are trying to interview her as well, possibly sometime next week.

HILLYER:

Yeah, that would be great.

WANG:

So, um, so yes, I mean, but, uh, in her, uh, short recollection of Bernstein that's published, um, obviously she had a lot, uh...

HILLYER:

She has a lot of letters.

WANG:

A lot of letters, a lot of stories about Leonard Bernstein but the Trio was sort of mentioned in passing, you know, like "he wrote a trio which," you know, "we performed," that kind of...so, um, given that, um, I've sort of been digging into this, and doing a lot of, um, some analysis in terms of what got discarded in the original sketches and where he was trying to go. Um, I was wondering if you had any thoughts about Leonard Bernstein's development as a composer during college.

HILLYER:

Um, you know it's very tempting to, to say things that, that come to mind, but I, I think what's important is to, to be very specific and, and know what you're talking about [DW: Yes.]; I don't want to make things up.

WANG:

Right. Um, were there any...

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HILLYER:

And so, I really can't, I don't have a great memory, and, uh, my memory is that we, that I played it with Mildred and one of our cellist friends, I think Jesse Ehrlich, E-H-R-L-I-C-H, with whom we played quite a bit together, I mean, Bernstein and he and I played together quite a bit, just around here. Um, whether we played this...I think we played this trio, or *a* trio. Um, he was composing, uh, he wrote, I think, the songs for various friends, I remember rather strongly than that, because one of the songs was for his, uh, roommate, who had very unfortunately died suddenly from his, one of these terrible diseases, uh, and that's mentioned in one of the biographies, so that's about it, I'm pretty sure.

WANG:

Um, were there any particular influences that he was talking about at the time?

HILLYER:  
Oh, *yes*. Jesus.

WANG:  
That's one of the branches of...

HILLYER:  
I think he was influenced by Hindemith in the beginning, and we were talking about one of his pieces once as we were driving together somewhere, I think it was the Clarinet Quint—the Clarinet Sonata that he wrote for David Oppenheim, he said, [*Laughing*] “Don't you think this has a lot of Hindemith influence in it?” I mean, he was very well aware, but he was also a tremendous Copland fan after he met Copland, and, uh, I think that Copland was a big influence, but, you know, Piston used to say that Bernstein didn't study composition with anybody, he just, just *had it*, you know, that was his great natural gift, but, uh, he did take almost everything after he wrote after th—he met Copland, he took things to Copland to look at, and he would tell him, Copland would tell him, this is OK, this is, you could do better on this, you know.

WANG:  
Would he ever bring things to Piston?

HILLYER:  
He didn't tell me that he did. Um, Bernstein had very powerful likes, and when he got excited, he g—really, you know, it was just like being in seventh heaven, and meeting Copland was just a tremendous, exhilarating event for him which we all felt because he would just say, you know, “Just imagine, I just met Aaron Copland and we're going to have lunch together,” so I mean, you know, unbelievable happenings. Uh, I think that he may have shown things around, but I think Copland was a person that he looked up to very, very much and, uh, I don't recall. You know, he would tell me a lot of personal things but I don't remember him saying, “I showed this to Piston.” He could well have done that, but I don't know. you know, and I don't want to say that he did.

Piston was a very, very, he was a wonderful man, and a fine teacher, but also a very sharp-edged teacher. If he didn't think somebody was doing well, he really would say rather disparaging things right in class, which I used to feel. Maybe it was not the right place to do it, um...and I know he was quite surprised when Bernstein brought a piece in, you know, instead of just eight bars, but I don't, I don't recall that he showed him a finished piece.

WANG:  
I see. Um...

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HILLYER:

He may have shown, when he met Mitropoulos, for whom he also had a great, you know, great big excitement, he might have shown him things, but...

WANG:

Uh, I don't know if it would be of any use to, or interest, if you would like to see any of these...?

HILLYER:

See this?

WANG:

Or I don't really know if anything stands out to you, I don't know if, did you ever, did, is this the kind of thing you were shown?

HILLYER:

Well, he didn't show me a piece and say, "What do you think of this;" we—he'd bring a piece in, and we'd play it.

WANG:

I see...and this is from the second movement [RH: Mm-hmm...], the one that goes *dum-dum-dum-dum* [etc.]... "March"...pizzicato, and...

HILLYER:

I really don't remember.

WANG:

Um, do you mind if we could have a few more minutes and just move back over here?

HILLYER:

Oh sure.

*(Trying not to disturb person at next computer)*

PERSON:

Oh, I'm done, actually.

WANG:

Oh, you're finished. Well, we can probably...

PERSON:

I like listening in.

HILLYER:

[*Unintelligible*]...get back home.

WANG:

...That's true. I was wondering if you had any last comments about the Violin Sonata, um, as that's...

HILLYER:

Oh, the Violin Sonata's a very beautiful piece, I think, and a few people have played it and, uh, wrote that, one of the excellent outstanding violinists in our country, Arnold Steinhardt, first violin of the Guarneri Quartet, found it somehow, I don't know how, and has played it, and I think he was, told me he was going to record it, and I don't know if he did, but he, he loved it.

WANG:

Did you ever perform it after your time at Harvard?

HILLYER:

Mm...I don't recall that I did.

WANG:

I see.

HILLYER:

Um, I may have; I know that I, I made a viola arrangement of the Clarinet Sonata which was supposed to have been published, but I don't think they ever did it. I mean, in fact, Bernstein suggested that once, and he wrote, wrote in my clarinet part, he wrote a few suggestions about what the violist should do in that particular place.

WANG:

I see. And the same, I imagine, applies to the Trio, or did you ever perform that, after, outside Harvard...

HILLYER:

You mean, you mean the Mildred Spiegel trio? No, no I didn't.

WANG:

These pieces were, I assume, intended for...

HILLYER:

Well, you know, in those days, he didn't, he didn't know, I mean, he didn't say, "I'm going to be the great Leonard Bernstein." [DW: Right.] And he didn't know that this is going to be identified as "juvenilia" or anything like that; he said, he said, "I just wrote this last night," or whatever it is...and there it is.

WANG:

I see, and one final question. I'm planning to interview Mr. Lynn Chang [RH: Yeah?] next week, and he had mentioned briefly when I, he came to the concerts for the, um, chamber music class that, uh—Eva just spoke to you [about] and I was in that as well...

HILLYER:

I wish I had known about those, but I didn't.

WANG:

...um, I'd played the *Quartet for the End of Time*...

HILLYER:

What do you play?

WANG:

I play the piano...and so afterwards, um, I saw Mr. Chang, whom I'd been in contact with, and he said that he had been performing the Piano Trio, or he had performed it recently.

HILLYER:

You mean this Bernstein Trio?

WANG:

Yes, and he said it was on your recommendation, because he had...

HILLYER:

Really? [*Laughs*]

WANG:

...he said he had wanted to play the Violin Sonata, but at the time, it wasn't quite clear to me, it was being performed, that there was some conflict, and that he instead decided to play the Piano Trio [RH: Mm-hmm.], and I think he mentioned your name as the one who suggested it. Do you recall that at all, or...

HILLYER:

No. Um, I can't imagine why he didn't play the Violin Sonata unless there was, uh, somebody else playing it. I haven't, I would sort of think that I would hear about somebody's playing it if they did, because my name is, you know, the dedication on the top of it, but, uh, but he's a very busy artist, and he could have done a lot of things that I don't know about. [*Laughs*]

WANG:

Well, I'm sure you have places to be going, and this was a little impromptu, I was just walking in and one of my classmates said, "Oh you want to talk to Mr. Hillyer? He's right here," and I said...Thank you so much for your time, and for...

HILLYER:

Well, I probably...there are a lot of things we did together; we were roommates at Tanglewood, so I saw, you know, I saw the burgeoning of his conducting career.

WANG:

I was wondering if you might sign this formality.

HILLYER:

Yes, I got a letter from uh, Miss, uh, Miss Lee about signing things. So what is this?

WANG:

Um, this is, the, uh, permission form, um...

HILLYER:

Yeah, I think I...this is the third one.

WANG:

...that we contact you for "permission to cite your materials for public presentation and publication."

HILLYER:

Yeah.

WANG:

Yes?

HILLYER:

Yeah.

WANG:

All right...if you could sign there...your name...

HILLYER:

Above?

WANG:

Yes, please. [*RH signs*] And once more.

HILLYER:

Same thing?

WANG:

Same thing. [*RH signs again*] Wonderful. I have...information...

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HILLYER:

Let me take your...you're Derrick, what is your last name?

WANG:

Wang, W-A-N-G.

HILLYER:  
W-A-N-G.

WANG:  
Yes...D-E-R-R-I-C-K. Oh, wow. Most people spell it the other way.

HILLYER:  
What's the other way?

WANG:  
D-E-R-E-K. It's how people generally misspell my name, but...

HILLYER:  
Oh really?

WANG:  
...I've very glad that you've done it on the first try!

HILLYER:  
So this is Harvard. Are you a graduate student?

WANG:  
No, I am an undergrad, but I am a senior, forced to graduate...and I'll be going to graduate school.

HILLYER:  
Here?

WANG:  
Um, no...Yale School of Music, for composition, in the fall.

HILLYER:  
Who teaches that?

WANG:  
Um, it's, uh, Ezra Laderman [RH: Oh.], Martin Bresnick, and Aaron Jay Kernis.

HILLYER:  
I know, wait a minute...I was at Yale for a long time too. Derrick...

WANG:  
Actually, if, um, I could fill this out now because I...

HILLYER:  
Oh, you mean my address?

WANG:

Yes, so I can give you a copy of this as well.

HILLYER:

All right, it's [*DW repeats after RH*] 10 Emerson Place, Apartment 20C, Boston, Mass., 02114.

WANG:

Um, are you available by e-mail at all?

HILLYER:

Well, my wife has an e-mail thing; I don't have one of my own.

WANG:

All right. That's...

HILLYER:

Is there some occasion when you think you might...?

WANG:

No, it's just on this form, so...

HILLYER:

I think I'd leave it off because she has a very crowded...

WANG:

So I'll run off a copy of this and...and give it right back to you.

*(DW does so)*

HILLYER:

So this is for me to keep? OK, thank you.

WANG:

Thank you very much for your time.

HILLYER:

Well, it was very nice to meet you.

WANG:

You too.

HILLYER:

I guess there's going to be a lot of activity in the fall, when this whole...

WANG:  
Yes...I'm also the...Music Coordinator...

HILLYER:  
Oh, really?

WANG:  
...for the...so I'm doing some arrangements for the...

HILLYER:  
Well, would you keep me informed about public events?

WANG:  
Oh, certainly.

HILLYER:  
Because, uh, I'm sure there are going to be too many for me to go to entirely, but I'd like to go to one thing, anyhow. OK. Did you hear the Arditti Quartet here?

WANG:  
Um, no, unfortunately...

*(They move to exit. Almost inaudible speech, of which the following comes through)*

HILLYER:  
I didn't have the...I didn't...either...I admire them a [lot]...

WANG:  
*(After retrieving RH's walking stick)*  
Is there anything else?

HILLYER:  
*[Inaudible]*...places...building...

WANG:  
They're building everything...we're surrounded.

HILLYER:  
Is it noisy?

WANG:  
Um, it was last year. It's, it's getting a little better. They put out signs telling us when there'll be lots of noise, you know, which months to expect...

HILLYER:

...They're doing exactly the same thing where I'm living, too, so when I saw it, it seemed like just coming back home. Well, OK, Derrick, nice to meet you.

WANG:  
You too.

HILLYER:  
Good luck—

WANG:  
And thank you very much.

HILLYER:  
—on your Bernstein project.

WANG:  
Thank you.

HILLYER:  
Sounds as if everybody in the building is working on it.

WANG:  
Something like that, yes.

[*RH laughs*]

[POSTLUDE: a few minutes later – COUNTER: 459]

WANG:  
I hope all of that just got picked up, um, for posterity's sake, and I probably should have done this at the beginning, but impromptu being what it is: my name is Derrick Wang, I am in the Aldrich Room of the Eda Kuhn Loeb Music Library, in the Music Building at Harvard University and today is Friday, April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2006, and the time is about 3:44...4:44 [PM]...because I, I can't read the clock. Great.

[END: 465]