

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH LAURENCE E. SHERR

CONDUCTED AND EDITED BY THOMAS A. SCOTT

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Part I – Thursday, 20 September 2012
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TS: The interview today is with Laurence Sherr who won the Distinguished Research and Creative Activity Award for 2012. Laurence, we've started all these interviews by simply asking folks to talk about their background, where you grew up, where you went to school, things of that sort.

LS: Okay. I was born here in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1953. I lived in the area of Atlanta now known as Midtown, near Grady High School. It was, at that time, a mixed neighborhood, so a lot of Jewish residents and a lot of different kinds of people. When I went to elementary school, I caught a city bus to go there, and in high school, I was at Henry Grady High School. Grady High School was a naturally integrated school in Atlanta. That's because, at that time, there were still some dividing lines between where the races were living. On the upper side of Ponce de Leon from Grady, there was an African-American section, but that fell within the normal boundaries of the Grady High School area for the students who came there. Unlike most of the high schools in Atlanta, which at that time were either white or black high schools, our high school was naturally integrated.

I can't remember the exact percentages, but it might have been 10 or 15 percent African-American, about that same number Jewish, and some Hispanic kids. So it was a very diverse environment in which to grow up and to be in high school. I was in the high school band, and in the band there were especially a lot of African American kids. We sat on the bus together, we talked, and that kind of diversity has informed my approach even to the present. I'm interested in people from different countries and cultures and nationalities, languages, and religions. I live in a section of Atlanta now that also has a great deal of diversity, Doraville, where there are a large number of Asians and Hispanics. I kid people. I say they still let a few of us black and white people live there.

TS: I was thinking in 1961 was when schools first started to desegregate in Atlanta, but it really took all the way to about 1972 before full integration came about in Atlanta. So you're right in that transition period. You would probably have been in about the third grade when they first started integrating the high schools, not even the elementary schools in 1961. I guess it would be about 1967 that you would have started at Grady High School.

LS: Yes, actually I started in eighth grade, 1966 to 1971 at Grady. I remember, at that time that you're speaking about, they started the bussing to get black kids into white schools and to get white kids to the black schools just to have things more

- mixed. When they started that, there was no bussing, in fact, at Grady, because it was already integrated. What it affected was our teachers. I can't remember exactly, but I think it was predominately, if not exclusively, white teachers. When they started the bussing, the students, like I said, weren't affected, but they did change some of the teachers. We had some African American teachers come in. It was a very good environment to be in, to have that level of diversity in high school.
- TS: What did you find in terms of the preparation for the students? If students had come out of traditionally black schools, were they at a disadvantage compared to students who had come out of traditionally white schools into the integrated setting? Or could you even tell at that age?
- LS: I don't remember. I couldn't tell at that age. It was probably a situation that the black students who came to Grady may have been—and again, I'm not sure—they may have been in an elementary school that was all African American. But by the time they were at Grady, it was just naturally integrated.
- TS: What about class? Was there an economic disparity between the white students and the black students?
- LS: There was some economic disparity, some social structure along economic strata. It didn't so much fall to white/black. I'd say more often than not the African American students that were there were probably in the lower part of the middle class, whereas some of the white students were born in the upper middle class. But there were still some white kids who lived in-town who didn't live in the Morningside area. That was my family, and it was very much a blue collar neighborhood. So the other people who lived in the center of the town, not out in what's now called Virginia Highlands—even Virginia Highlands was more in town—but not in the Morningside area and the Lenox area, that's where the lines broke more, the area in which you lived, which was in a way a demarcator of the economic level of that student's family.
- TS: Maybe shifting gears a little bit, talk about the Jewish community in Atlanta at that time. You mentioned you were in the Midtown area. I heard Craig Aronoff talk about being born right about where the old Fulton County stadium is today. Is that basically where the Jewish population was concentrated at that time in Atlanta?
- LS: Yes, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, a lot of the Jewish population was in the downtown area, near downtown where the stadium is now. My father's parents and he and his brother, growing up, lived right in that area. They had a neighborhood grocery store in an all black section on the corner of Martin and Crumley Streets which is near the parking lots for the stadium, if I remember correctly. They lived above the store. They were an immigrant family, so they

were perfectly at home in this neighborhood. My grandmother used to walk in this neighborhood, and everything was fine at that time.

TS: You talk as though you embraced the diversity. Was that typical of students at Grady High School or atypical?

LS: I'd say it was fairly typical. It was just our "normal." Actually, this, I think, was what probably shaded my perspective when I later went to university and left the South. For my graduate work, I was at the University of Illinois. There, I ran into people from Chicago who had been in the Chicago school system, for instance, and they had the perspective that because I or someone else was from the South, that we were, number one, racially prejudiced, and number two, less culturally aware and less sophisticated—all these perspectives, which seemed to me to be prejudiced. As I later found out, the situation at Grady maybe wasn't so representative of much of the South. Maybe, it was indeed a special situation for us to have that kind of diversity. But to us, it's just what was there, and it just seemed normal. It didn't seem special because we didn't necessarily have other things to compare it to.

I will also go on to answer your other question about the Jewish community at the time. My grandparents and my father lived in this store. Right in that area, Central Avenue, I believe, right downtown, there were various Jewish social clubs and Jewish organizations. A lot of it was there. As the area changed and the city developed, as you know, the inner city in the 1960s became more African American in terms of people who were residing there. The Jewish people ended up moving out to Morningside, out to various other areas of the city. Even by the time I graduated high school in 1971, in the area that's now called Midtown, the area around Grady, there weren't too many Jews living there. In terms of that neighborhood, it was only me and one friend of mine who lived a block away who were still in that neighborhood. Most of the Jewish people had moved out to the Morningside/Lenox area or even further out.

TS: Did you feel perfectly accepted as part of a Jewish minority in Atlanta or did you experience any discrimination as you were coming along?

LS: I didn't experience any direct discrimination as a result of being Jewish. I did experience some bullying as a result of this socio-economic status that I mentioned because I was part of a lower socio-economic rung in the eyes of the other high school students. Not as well off as some of the others. There was a certain breaking along those class lines, and I was not entirely comfortable. Most of the Jewish students were in the upper rung, who came from this area that I've described, and I was more of an in-town kid. My parents were still struggling. My parents were both immigrants. My father came from Poland in 1937. Luckily, they had some relatives in the United States, so they were able to get out. The discrimination was bad, the persecution was bad, but this was before the final solution, the shipping of Jews to concentration camps

TS: Before Hitler marched in.

LS: Right, before Hitler marched in, so they were very fortunate. My mother didn't have such fortunate circumstances. She is fortunate herself in that she survived, but she was the only one in her family who did survive. She was born in Germany, and the persecution became so bad in the small town that she lived in that her family had to leave. They lived on the main street of the town. The situation they lived in was they had a general store, and the second floor of the building was where they lived. About 1937 or '38 the windows were broken in their house, and on the fence it was painted, "A Jew lives here." According to some of the oral histories I did when I went there in 2009 to work with some townspeople to create memorial events, they thought that my great-grandfather was so well admired in the town that the people in the town wouldn't have done this. It was probably some kind of Nazi sympathizers or Nazi party members that came in from outside the town that did this.

At any rate, my mother, when the Nuremberg laws came into effect [1935], was no longer allowed to go to school in her town. She had to get on a train and go to Nuremberg, a city nearby that had a school for Jewish kids. Eventually, after this incident happened at their home, they moved to Frankfurt because there was some relative safety in numbers in the larger city of Frankfurt. She was there during Kristallnacht, November 9 and 10th, 1938. She remembers sitting in the apartment—it was a second story or upper story apartment—and looking out and seeing the synagogue burning. She heard stories of her grandfather being pulled down and people pulling his beard. Her father was taken off to a concentration camp, as were, I think, 25,000, if I remember correctly the number of Jewish men and teenagers who were rounded up.

TS: In 1938?

LS: In 1938, on Kristallnacht. At that time the Nazi policy was still one of encouraging Jewish emigration. Again, it was before they developed this idea of the final solution and closing off the borders and engaging in genocide for those who were in their country or in other countries they had conquered. So they were able to get papers for my grandfather to get him out. I'm actually named for him, his name was Ludwig Bacharach. My mother wanted to Americanize that, so she named me Larry when I was born in 1953—I later changed that to Laurence—because it was too soon after the War, and the name was too Germanic. After the War, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, things Germanic were not very well embraced by the American public with the memory of the War so recent.

TS: Even though you're Jewish.

LS: Right. So to continue their story, they were able to get a transit visa to Bolivia. The family was getting ready to flee Germany. In early 1939 there came the

opportunity for my mother to leave the country, and she left on a *Kindertransport*. This was a program that the German government developed where if the family stayed behind, a child could go to a foreign country for some kind of refuge. She thought she was going for a summer camp or something like summer camp. January 6, 1939 was the day she took the *Kindertransport* from where she was to Zurich and then on to a children's home in Heiden, which is a small village outside of Zurich in Switzerland. She went to Switzerland even though the majority of *Kindertransport* children went to England. That was the most usual destination for them. What she thought was going to be a few months—like going to a camp is how she described it—turned into a refuge during the War. She never left Switzerland until after the War. Her family fled to France, and they were on the run in France. Her father, my grandfather Ludwig, was captured. He was put into a detention camp where he caught polio. He was released with polio, and he died one day later. We have the death certificate from the Rothschild Hospital outside Paris.

My grandmother and aunt, my mother's mother and sister, were then on the run for about three years. I've been able to reconstruct a map showing their route because as they were fleeing the Nazis, they were always sending my mother postcards. From these postcards I was able to document the date they were at a location. It shows them going more into the southern part of France, coming back up again towards Paris, and then winding their way, slowly, slowly getting closer to Switzerland. One of the last postcards we have is from Valloire in France, in eastern France not far from the Swiss border. We think that they were trying to escape to the safety of the neutral country of Switzerland, where my mother was. They were captured. They were sent to Drancy, which is the holding camp, the transit camp, that's right outside of Paris, and from Drancy to Auschwitz where we surmise that they went to the gas because there aren't very many records. My own research stems from this background, in part, and I'll talk about that more, hopefully, as we go forward. I did some of that this summer, and I was able to find, when I was in Yad Vashem in Israel this summer, the transport list that showed them leaving Valloire bound for Auschwitz.

TS: That's great. I really want you to keep talking on this because I know that it is related to your scholarship, and that's what you got the award for. So I think it's very worthwhile to get that story in. How old was your mother at the time that she was in the *Kindertransport*?

LS: The *Kindertransport* was January of 1939. She was born in October of 1931, so she would have been eight years old.

TS: Wow, not even quite eight. October of '39 would have been eight years old.

LS: Yes.

- TS: So seven or eight years old and away from her family, I guess, permanently. That's a very tender age to be separated from your family.
- LS: Right. She was in an orphanage called Kinderheim Wartheim, a children's home—a waiting home or a temporary home where there were other Jewish kids that had also either escaped or been sent on *Kindertransport* or had somehow gotten out, but it was mostly German kids. There were children there who spoke the same language and had the same religious background, and she grew up in that setting.
- TS: How did she get to America?
- LS: After the War, the situation of many Jews in Switzerland was such that they were no longer so welcome. The Swiss did indeed open their borders to provide some sanctuary, but it was very difficult to attain Swiss citizenship at that time. She was in touch with various organizations that were resettling orphans, resettling survivors, and she had a couple of uncles that lived outside New York. So it was decided that she would come to the United States and live with one of those uncles. But then the uncles couldn't agree which one of them would take care of her, and she couldn't decide between them. She didn't want to be involved in the strife. So, when she got to New York, they said, "Well, we need to find another place for you." She said, "I don't like New York, all the buildings"—because she had grown up in the Swiss countryside, in beautiful, rolling hills right above Lake Constance on the border of Germany. She said, "I want to be in a place where there are trees and grass and flowers." So they sent her to Atlanta.
- TS: She would still be a teenager at that time.
- LS: Yes.
- TS: What year did she get to Atlanta?
- LS: In 1947.
- TS: Sixteen years old.
- LS: Correct. And not speaking English.
- TS: I guess not. Your father got here in '37. Where did they go when they first came to America?
- LS: They had some relatives that lived in Pittsburgh, so they settled in Pittsburgh. They were working there. At that time the air quality in Pittsburgh wasn't so great because of all the steel mills and other manufacturing that was going on there. My father had asthma, and so he had some difficulty in breathing the polluted air there. They were searching for a place where he could have better air

quality, and they found Atlanta. They sent him on to Atlanta, and then his family ended up moving here as well.

TS: What year would that have been?

LS: I don't know. I think it was during the War. I think it was probably early or mid-1940s.

TS: So they opened up a grocery store as soon as they got here?

LS: I believe so, yes. They got set up in a grocery store. I believe there was one other relative. I don't remember whether they came before or after my parents, but another family was here in Atlanta too and also was in the grocery business, if I remember correctly.

TS: Did you hear all these stories while you were growing up? Did you care about these stories at that time? I read something in your website that made me think that you developed a professional interest in these things at a later date, but maybe not all along.

LS: That's correct. It's very usual among families of children of survivors that the children don't hear so much about what their parents' youth was like.

TS: Because they wouldn't talk to you about it?

LS: Correct. They wanted their children to have a better life than they did. Why should they expose their children to the horrors and to the death and the destruction of the genocide that they experienced? They wanted their children to grow up in a safe, secure, supportive environment, in a world where they could live without the discrimination, without persecution, without fear of death just based on their birth heritage. The reason I know about this and not only have experienced it is that in reading accounts and in interviewing others—I've heard and read from many that this was their practice. Why would they expose their children to all this darkness? They wanted to expose their children to light, to let them have a better chance. It was also, I think, psychologically, somewhat difficult for those people who had survived to go back and grapple with the events of that time and try to relive that in telling their children the stories from their youth. [Talking about the Holocaust] wasn't so usual.

It wasn't until I became older and interested in this that I started asking my mother more about it and finding out more details. She gave us some very basic outlines that she had been in Switzerland, and she showed us a few pictures of Switzerland, but she never really talked about her feelings as much. One thing she did talk about, an important story I think, is the story of her journey to reunite with her parents. I mentioned before the postcards that her parents were sending her as they were in France. In the postcards they said, "We're waiting to bring

you here. The reason we haven't left yet to go to Bolivia (or to somewhere else) is because we're waiting for you to come join us." They had received different advice there. They had heard that there were a lot of fascists in Bolivia. They didn't know if they'd be any better off there than they were in France, and there was some doubt as to whether they should go, but also they were waiting for my mother.

My mother made plans to join them. A chaperone was found, because she was still a young girl, to go on the train. They went to Zurich. They were in the train station in Zurich ready to go across the border from Switzerland into France, so that my mother could join her parents. While they were in the train station, they found out that the trains were not going to be going because the border had been closed between Switzerland and France, and the trains could no longer make the journey. In some ways it was one of the saddest days of my mother's life. Here, she had been wanting and waiting as somebody separated from her parents to rejoin her parents and her sister, and she couldn't do so. Yet it was that that saved her because if she would have joined them, she would have likely have befallen the same fate.

TS: It was Nazi occupied France at that time.

LS: Absolutely. And it's amazing to me that in Nazi occupied France that my grandmother and aunt were able to survive for three years on the run. My grandmother was a seamstress, a schneiderin, and she was able to . . .

TS: What was that word again?

LS: Schneiderin. A Schneider is a German word for tailor, and "schneiderin" is a female tailor or seamstress, a dress maker. I did hear some stories from my mom that her mother had said that she had sewn some hats for some ladies to earn some money, and she was able to put together some kind of living that way. They also found some other relatives of my mother that were in France, and they stayed with them temporarily, but they were always on the run. They evaded capture for three and a half years, and that's pretty remarkable.

TS: What did your parents think about the segregation in Atlanta? Did this background of persecution that they had endured have any effect on the way that they perceived race relations?

LS: They didn't speak about it very much directly. The store my father had on Martin and Crumley Street—he moved out of that store because that store was not enough to support [him] once my father got married to my mother. His parents were still in the store, and his brother was in the store, and his brother, I believe, had gotten married at the time. So there were three different families, and there just wasn't enough business to support three families. My father as the oldest of the two brothers and as one who had probably more experience with the store—

experience with being a butcher and cutting meat—that was part of the job of a neighborhood grocer at that time to prepare fresh cut meat—he got a store that was in a different section of Atlanta, right across from Herndon Homes, which is now in the area right behind the Coca-Cola Tower and the Georgia Tech campus. It’s right there near Marietta Street and North Avenue. In both of those stores the clientele, the population around there, and the workers in the store besides the family members like myself, were all black. So we were all constantly surrounded in the work environment by African Americans.

I was, as the oldest son, someone who came into my father’s business at eleven years old. I started working in the store, and, as a teenager, I worked in the store constantly. Every weekend I was there helping him and after school. In the later years in high school, I was there. So there was a lot of interaction with African American people that way. My father was very friendly to them and would try to encourage people to shop at his store rather than going to a larger grocery store. He would extend credit to people, and many times that credit wasn’t paid back. But he tried to interact with the people in the neighborhood, and he was accepted in that neighborhood as someone who was there and part of it. In the late 1960s I would sometimes deliver groceries, and I would walk through Herndon Homes. That was at a time when a single white person wouldn’t be walking on the sidewalk, not even then, but as I walked in the middle, through the courtyards of the Homes, people would know me. They would say, “Oh, he’s Sherr’s son.” And I was okay. There was that aspect which was okay, but it was, of course, a time in the South where there were certain racial stereotypes. So sometimes you would see a little bit of use of language that would be a little different than what we would use today in terms of what we would consider politically correct.

TS: We would all be shocked if we dropped back into the 1960s suddenly again. We’ve forgotten some of those things over the years, I think.

LS: Indeed.

TS: Were you parents affiliated with any particular synagogue in Atlanta?

LS: They were. There was a small synagogue named Beth El.

TS: House of God.

LS: Ahh, very good. It was at the bottom of University Avenue right where the street dips down where the creek is and then comes back up. It was a very small neighborhood synagogue, and there weren’t enough families to really keep it going. So when it came time for my Bar Mitzvah, which was 1966—about 1964 or 1965, they moved over to Shearith Israel, which is still there. It’s a very established Midtown synagogue, and I was bar mitzvahed there in 1966. Our family remained members of that synagogue up until my father’s death earlier this year.

TS: Was that Conservative or Orthodox?

LS: It was Traditional, which is a little more observant than Conservative. The true Conservative movement today, the one that's called the Conservative movement—at least, currently, they believe in gender equality. I can't remember if back in the 1960s that was their platform or not, but, when we got there, there was still some separation between men and women. They had what they called family seating on certain holidays when men and women could sit together, but they also had the separate sections for those men and women who wanted to sit separately. They could sit separately. At that time in terms of coming up to the bimah, reading the Torah, opening the Ark, it was only men. Later on they moved from being Traditional to being Conservative, and then there was more gender equality.

TS: I was amazed that at the Western Wall they would still separate by gender, and the women's section was very tiny compared to the men's section.

LS: Yes.

TS: You went off to Duke. How did that come about? You got a degree from Duke.

LS: I had a peripatetic college career. I was a young man in search of meaning who couldn't decide what I wanted to do with my life.

TS: I bet you've got long hair; you've got a beard even today. It would have been the time for you to have been a radical hippie or something.

LS: Yes, indeed. That indeed is something that I did. I graduated from Grady High School in 1971. I was very interested in math and science and was awarded a science scholarship through a competitive scientific project that was there at the time that was available to students. I put in a particular experiment, and I won a prize. I think it was called the Franklin Foundation Scholarship. It gave me \$1,000, and I was accepted into Georgia Tech, so I went to Georgia Tech for a year. Engineering didn't resonate with what I was searching for. I didn't know what I was searching for, but engineering didn't seem to satisfy what I wanted to do. So for my second year I decided to switch to more general studies, and I transferred to Georgia State University. I went to Georgia State University for two quarters until they caught up with me because they told me that by the junior year, which I was approaching, I needed to have fulfilled a certain number of Core requirements. I wasn't ready to declare a particular degree program at that time. I said I just wanted to continue general studies, sampling courses. They told me to comply or leave. So I left.

I didn't know what to do. I had been influenced by some people who were rock musicians. I thought maybe I could somehow do something with music. That

seemed like an interesting career path. I had played music in high school, but had quit just because of disinterest. I played clarinet in the Henry Grady High School band from eighth grade through the tenth grade and eleventh grade. Boys at that time who played clarinet were teased as not being man-like. It wasn't considered a male kind of instrument. So I switched to the saxophone in the eleventh grade, and by the last year I really dropped out of the music scene. I was never a very serious student. I was doing it, I guess, because other kids had done it. It seemed like a good group to be in. It was fun to play music, but it was never something I took seriously. I didn't take many private lessons. I didn't study it. I didn't practice very hard.

But the band was very interesting. As I mentioned, the degree of diversity in the band—one of my band mates, someone that was playing clarinet in the Henry Grady High School band clarinet section with me, was Yoki. This was Yolanda King, Martin Luther King's daughter. She was there at Grady High School. I don't remember this, but my mother remembers Coretta Scott King coming to PTA meetings at the school. So that gives you an idea, going back to the idea of diversity, of the kind of students that were there. At any rate, I quit music. I was at Georgia Tech one year, Georgia State two quarters, and then I was ready to drop out of school entirely because I didn't know what I wanted to do. I thought I might want to be a surveyor, so I could be spending time in the outdoors where I could see the sky and trees because I really like nature. I just didn't know what. As I said, I had been hanging out with some musicians, was listening to rock music, I indeed was into this whole hippie movement, and I thought being a musician might be interesting and cool. At twenty years old I picked up my clarinet, instead of electric guitar—a lot of my friends were playing electric guitar; that was the way to go if you wanted to be a rock musician—but I picked up my clarinet thinking I could maybe be in a band like Frank Zappa's band when he had some woodwinds. I started teaching myself the clarinet.

I went to what was then called DeKalb Community College, and they had an open door policy. The first quarter there, the final quarter of my sophomore year, I simply took clarinet lessons, and I played in the band. I wasn't even good enough to play in the band. They simply gave me some charity and let me sit in the band there. I started practicing half an hour a day, an hour a day, two hours a day, and by the time I finished the two year program at DeKalb Junior College, I was practicing four hours a day, trying to make up for lost time. So I improved very rapidly. I was fortunate to be advised by the chair of the department to look into Duke University. I had applied to some other universities to complete my undergraduate degree, but Duke was a place he had been. So I interviewed at Duke University. I interviewed at UNC Greensboro and some other places. Duke had a program where they were doing a semester abroad the very first semester I would have been going there. So instead of going to Duke for the next semester of school, I went to New York and met the people in the wind symphony and spent a semester in Vienna with the Duke University Wind Symphony. I did a semester abroad, and it was a wonderful experience, one of the best experiences

of my life to do a study abroad. That was 1975. In January of '76 I came back to Duke, and I took two and a half years there to complete an undergraduate degree in music where I started focusing not only on clarinet but also on music theory and composition. I graduated with my B.A. from Duke in 1978, seven years for an undergraduate degree because of this wandering.

I then went to graduate school at the University of Illinois where I was in music theory at first because I hadn't built up enough of a composition portfolio starting late as a composer. So I got my master's degree in theory. I then took another study abroad program, a program at the Banff Centre School of Fine Arts, outside of Calgary in Alberta, Canada, and was there for a year in between my master's and doctoral degrees. That was again a very wonderful experience because I had the opportunity to compose music, which was performed by the performers there, and to go on tour and to perform as well. It was a great experience. I came back to Illinois, started to work on my doctoral degree, and I completed my doctoral degree in 1988—seventeen years of time in undergraduate and graduate work.

TS: Well, it only took you ten years from your A.B. degree to your doctorate; that wasn't bad. I have heard some interesting stories about where Marietta High School and Lemon Street High School integrated with regard to the bands. Lemon Street had a great marching band. Marietta High School did too, but the music was very different. One guy almost dropped out of school because he just couldn't stand the white people's music. How was it with your experience? Even though you eventually dropped out, was there a clashing of cultures with regard to the band or a clashing of music styles or how did they work that out at Grady?

LS: At Grady, again, we considered it normal. The black high schools at the time, the high school bands were all black. They had the best, in our view, the best marching bands because they played well, and they really had a very kind of funky marching style where instead of just marching straight up and down, they would put some groove into it and some swivel and some real expression. We just marveled to see their marching band lines and their formations because the kids were so expressive in the way they did that. So that is what I think a lot of the white bands emulated, what the black bands were doing. At Grady, again, because we had this integrated situation, I think we tried to do some of that style. We tried to have some of that, especially the black kids in the band. This was more natural to them than to us white kids. But we were influenced by them, and, as I said, everyone admired what the black bands were doing because they were just so great on the field. So we tried to capture some of that.

TS: Were your parents musically inclined?

LS: No. My father liked to listen to opera, and he could do the synagogue chanting very well. He had a melodious voice, but they didn't perform music, and they didn't necessarily go to concerts, so it's something that I found on my own.

TS: I see. Well, you completed your doctorate in 1988, what happens then; where do you go from there?

LS: In 1988 I had some choices that ended up being a model for what I ended up doing with my current research, although I didn't know it at the time. One reason it took me a while to complete my doctoral work was that I branched off. Most people who get a DMA in composition will do two projects for their DMA, two final dissertation projects. One is a piece they compose, a large scale piece, and the other is most often a kind of musical analysis, a theoretical analysis of a work by some recognized composer. I went a slightly different route for that second project, and I did more of an historical research. I was very interested in dance, and so I decided to investigate the genesis of the ballet *Agon*. This was the last collaboration between [Igor] Stravinsky and [George] Balanchine. Although Balanchine set many of Stravinsky's works, there were, I think, only three occasions where they collaborated together in the creation of a new work.

Stravinsky was elderly at this time, and so I investigated the genesis of the work. It was a ten-year period of gestation from 1947 to '57, and Stravinsky's style changed radically at the time. So what I had done for that research was to start not only looking at the published literature, but start looking at archives. Stravinsky had passed away, and the archives were in dispute, where they were going to go, and so they were temporarily housed at the New York Public Library while courts were deciding between various bidders, between his children and between Robert Craft, the man who had been his assistant. So I went to New York City and started looking at these archival materials. Also what I did at the time was to try to track down witnesses, people who were still living who had worked with Stravinsky, had worked with Balanchine, who could give me eye witness accounts. Even though I had no training in conducting oral history, I learned on the ground. I learned in the field by being out there and tracking down people and doing basic detective work to try to find people who could give me eye witness accounts—and then persuading them to meet with me and interviewing them and recording their interviews. In fact, I was taking a kind of shorthand that I developed.

So, basically, this work was more in the field of musicology than in the field of composition. I came out with a research interest, and my dissertation committee advised me to turn my dissertation into a book—to take the next couple of years, do some additional research, and bring forth a book about the genesis of this ballet, especially since I had interviewed quite a number of people with eye witness accounts, and I had material which was not published anywhere. I considered taking this track as a person just out in the world with a doctoral degree, but there wasn't financial support for me to do that research, and I came out with student loans. Also, I had devoted so much of my time to being a musicologist over the past few years to finish that large dissertation project—which is much different than most composition dissertation projects—that I

hadn't been composing as much. I really wanted to get back to composing. I decided I was going to be a free lance composer.

At the same time I was applying for college teaching jobs. I looked at various cities that had active new music scenes. New York, of course, is a great place to be, but it's a tough city to break into because of the cost of living there and the level of competition. I looked at Boston, I looked at San Francisco, I looked at Portland, and I also looked at Atlanta because it seemed to have a new music scene that was starting to grow, and it's a place I knew. I ended up moving back to Atlanta. I was very fortunate. My parents allowed me to live with them, so I lived back at home for a few years while I was getting my feet on the ground. So rather than immediately having to take a job as a bank teller or a grocery clerk or whatever, I was able to explore getting work as a musician. The first year I only made a few thousand dollars, but every year I built it up and made more and more until, after a number of years, I built up a successful freelance career and was able to move out and be on my own and be a freelance musician in Atlanta.

I was composing works. I'd gotten various grants from the Fulton County Arts Council and the Georgia Council for the Arts. The City of Atlanta Bureau of Cultural Affairs had also provided grants for me to write works for various groups in Atlanta. My music was starting to become known among some of those groups. I was teaching clarinet at various programs after school and at various high schools and middle schools. I also had a clarinet studio in my home. I was teaching some adult education courses. It was just a whole package of different kinds of things that a freelance person does. All the time I was still applying for college-teaching jobs. It was very competitive at this time. This was 1988 when I finished my doctoral degree. So from '88 to about '95 I was freelancing. I did have a one-semester visiting assistant professorship at New College, which is in Sarasota, Florida, a very liberal, independent school with a small student population. I loved teaching there—very small classes, so there was a lot of student-teacher interaction there.

I came back to Atlanta and resumed the freelance career. Eventually, I found some part-time college teaching. I decided that's what I wanted to do. After working with elementary and high school students, I felt that the age group which I could have the greatest impact on—where I could be most effective—would be college age students. So I was teaching at Clayton College on an adjunct basis. Then I found out something more about Kennesaw State University. I came up here. I met with [Joseph D.] Joe Meeks, who is now the dean of the College of the Arts, and told him what I could do. At that time, the Department of Music was a department, not a school of music. The Department of Music was about to come up for reaccreditation.

The national accrediting agency was looking for various initiatives for reaccreditation. Among those initiatives was what they called diversity or inclusion. Since I had organized a Klezmer band—I was playing Klezmer

music—I told them I could develop a World Music course, and, of course, I could do music theory. Technology was another thing that that national accrediting agency was looking for. I told them I could teach a technology course, I had used computers in music all the time, and that's before it was as common as it is now, and so I fit a need that was here. I then stopped teaching at Clayton—this was '96—and I started teaching here in January of '96 and taught on an adjunct basis for a couple of quarters. You've been around a long time. You remember we were on the quarter system then. In '96-'97 I was also here on an adjunct basis, but my adjunct load kept growing and growing because there were so many things I could do that were needed, and I was doing them. Eventually they opened up a full-time search, and I was a candidate for that search. In the fall of '97 was when I became tenure track.

TS: When did you become composer-in-residence; was that on an adjunct basis in '96?

LS: Yes, because Dean Meeks knew what I was doing, that I was getting some national exposure, and that I was writing music both for professionals on the outside and music that could be performed by KSU faculty and students. He offered me that title. I think the reason is that it would help me as an adjunct person to have this title—help me gain some recognition—and it would also help Kennesaw State University—we were Kennesaw State College then, as you remember—get some recognition, as I was going to these national conferences, and as I was getting this profile of my works being performed. So I was getting my name in the newspaper. To have Composer-in-Residence of Kennesaw State University after that would gain some media attention for the college.

TS: Well, Joe Meeks has been very entrepreneurial for a long, long time and a fabulous fundraiser for the College of the Arts and the whole university.

LS: Absolutely! Indeed.

TS: You mentioned your band, Oy Klezmer!. What does that mean? Is it a Jewish band?

LS: Yes, it's a band that plays Eastern European Yiddish music. We started around '94 I believe, '93 or '94. I got together with a couple of other performers who were also composers, Chip Epstein, on violin and Susan Clearman on accordion, and proposed to them that we start a band to play this kind of music. This music had almost died out in the late 1970s, early 1980s, when the children of immigrants rejected the music of their parents and were instead wanting to have, at social functions, rock and roll music. Why would you want Old World, instrumental music when you could have Elvis or the Beatles or whatever? So the music had almost died out, but then it caught on again. In the mid to late 1980s there was a resurgence of interest in this kind of music. I started listening to it, actually, when I was in graduate school. At the University of Illinois there was a

very large and very highly accomplished department of Ethnomusicology. My fellow grad students were going off to India or they were going to South America. They were bringing back groups playing this ethnic music.

I was really intrigued by it. It was a whole new sound world for me, and I really wanted to find out more and to be involved in it. At first I thought I would learn to play the sitar, which is an Indian classical instrument—playing Indian classical music, particularly Hindustani music, the classical music of North India. But to become a proficient sitar player requires years and years and years of study and immersion in the culture and in the study of their musical styles. I came across, in the collections at the huge music library at University of Illinois, some Klezmer music. I listened to some recordings, and I decided that here's music for an instrument I already know. I could do this. When I got back to Atlanta and was doing the freelancing, I decided to start a Klezmer band. I approached these two people, and that became yet another part of my freelance career, another way to earn money on the side and to have fun doing it. It's great music to play, a lot of fun. So the word Oy is a Yiddish word that means "oh" or "whoa," but when you say it with the name of the band or the name of the musician, it becomes something that makes people smile.

TS: Is this where you start rediscovering your German roots with this?

LS: There's a very interesting story of how that happened. Where I went to grad school at University of Illinois, the main thrust of the compositional style that was being engaged in at the school was avant-garde, was new, was cutting edge, something that no one had thought of before, pioneering, exploring new frontiers. Everyone had to do something new and different. Music that was recognizable or so simple that you could whistle a tune, that had a tonal basis, was not part of that aesthetic. When I first came back to Atlanta and was working in freelance, I was writing this very modern style music, very avant-garde music. There was this wall that was existing between the music I was composing and that professional groups were playing, and the Klezmer music, this very folksy, earthy music of eastern European Yiddish culture that I was performing in my band—I really kept a pretty separate wall between them because of that aesthetic that I had been schooled in as a graduate student and what most living composers then who came out of university were practicing. They were writing music that was forward looking and not music that reminisced about styles of the past.

I was writing an orchestra piece about the arts festival at Piedmont Park. The third movement was titled "Midnight Dance." I was trying to capture some of the feelings I had had of being at the park and the arts festival. And in the evening or after dark, there were stages that were illuminated where dancers would be dancing. As I was writing some melodies for that movement, the melodies I was writing, came out as Klezmer-sounding melodies. I at first put them aside. I thought, "I cannot use this; this is too"—based on my University of Illinois grad school training—"this is too derivative." It's pandering to the public, based on

that aesthetic from my schooling. “I can’t write something that is so simple, that is so direct. I’ve got to write something that’s more sophisticated, more complicated, and more complex.” I tried again to write something new, and these melodies kept coming out. At that point, what I decided to do was to break down the wall because composers in the past, of course, had done this. Stravinsky and Dvorak—many composers—had used folk music and taken that into their classical music. I decided to take the folk music of my own ethnic background—it also connected with my religious background—and let it come into my classical music. That was a very important step in my musical evolution because it changed the kind of music that I was writing. I not only was writing very contemporary avant-garde music for the concert hall, but I was writing music that was in some way influenced or based on Jewish musical styles. Later on, when I became more interested in music of the Holocaust and decided to write Holocaust memorial works, I then embraced these Jewish musical styles to use in writing Holocaust memorial works.

TS: Early in my career, I fell in love with a book by Oscar Handin—he was second generation Russian Jewish, you know, child of immigrants and a professor at Harvard, who won a Pulitzer Prize for a 1951 book entitled *The Uprooted*. Basically, he says what you’re saying, that the first generation came to America and made all the sacrifices, and then their kids wanted to reject everything that was ethnic and be 100 percent American. Then you had to wait for the grandchildren to rediscover those roots. But somehow or other you made it in the second generation back to those roots.

LS: Indeed. There’s even a word in Yiddish for it, it’s called a “griner,” which is a cognate of what is said. It’s someone who’s green. It means someone who’s a recent immigrant, who still has Old World ways and Old World values and Old World speech and Old World dress and that was not hip. It wasn’t cool among young people to look like that. They wanted to look like their fellow Americans, so they indeed did reject it all. It took a generation, basically, after that for people to say, “No, we don’t want to lose that; we actually do want to reconnect with what came before.”

TS: And you did it through music.

LS: Indeed.

TS: Handlin talked about how people wouldn’t want to take their friends home to meet their parents if they spoke broken English.

LS: Right, exactly.

TS: Okay, you’re on tenure track by 1997 at Kennesaw. I didn’t realize that this is really your first full-time teaching job here at Kennesaw then, I guess.

- LS: The semester as visiting assistant professor at New College was a full-time job.
- TS: I guess I should say tenure track.
- LS: This is the first tenure track job, correct.
- TS: So you found a home at Kennesaw in '97.
- LS: I indeed did.
- TS: That's actually not that many years back, but I guess we've had about fifteen years that have passed since that time.
- LS: Right. I'm in my sixteenth year of tenure track work.
- TS: It's phenomenal what you've accomplished here. Just looking at your website, it's just so impressive to see all of the things that you've done, all the awards that you've won, all the grants. I hardly know where to begin talking about all of these things, but why don't we start out by talking about what you were brought here to teach.
- LS: I was brought here to develop a course in world music. World music was a popular way to designate a course that was basically an introduction to ethnomusicology. The field of ethnomusicology at that time was somewhat distinct from musicology. Musicology was thought more, at that time, to focus on western European classical music. Ethnomusicology was a study of the folk music of other countries that were outside of the western European canon. But it could also be classical musical styles. In Korea, Japan, in India, there are very well established classical musical, court music styles. It's teaching students to look at music from the perspectives of not only the particular music that's being played, but also from the perspectives of other disciplines, particularly anthropology, sociology, and linguistics, learning how music is a part of culture.
- TS: Why do you think it's important for students to know something about ethnomusicology?
- LS: At that time when I developed the course there was no world music or ethnomusicology course here at Kennesaw. It's now a requirement for music majors and an option for other students. The answer to your question of why is it important for students to know this is because it expands their viewpoint; it expands their world horizons. I can't remember the exact year. It might have been '97 or '98, '99, somewhere in there when I developed that course, and I taught it for the first eight years of its existence. This was before we had the QEP initiative of global learning that we now have. But it was satisfying all the same goals for student learning that we now embrace as a university in our global learning initiative. I don't have to go over all those because you certainly know

those—giving students a global perspective, letting them have empathy and understanding for others, letting them have a broadened, global view, to see themselves as a citizen of the world, a global citizen, to let them understand how to better engage with and interact with and appreciate people from other countries, cultures, religions, et cetera.

TS: Do you teach composition as a course?

LS: I do. I teach both studio composition and this year we've developed for the first time a class in composition. Actually, it did exist once before, but this is a class for people who are majoring in composition. We have a new B.A. degree that has an emphasis in composition. There are so many students that I simply can't teach them all one-on-one in studio, like music lessons are often taught. I have them for the first year of their study in a class as a group together, and then after they finish that, they'll come into studio with me where we'll have one-on-one lessons. I teach composition. I teach junior level music theory courses: Form and Analysis is one of them, looking at the formal structure of works; and Instrumentation and Arranging is the other, how to create a work for various ensembles with different kinds of performance forces, how to transcribe something from one medium to another. Those are the courses I teach.

As well, I teach a course I developed about four years ago—I'm teaching it now for the third time—called Music and the Holocaust. This is a very unique course. There are not many universities in the U.S. that I have found that teach a course such as this. I developed it in the interest of pursuing further research into it myself and to share with students the wide variety of music that was made during this time. Students come into the course, and sometimes people ask me, "How can you teach a course on music in the Holocaust? What does music have to do with this period of great world upheaval, of world war, of genocide? How is music a part of such an environment?" The students, at least, by the end of the course, say, "We can't believe how pervasive music was and how important it was in all aspects of this." What I do is I try to expose students to the lives of particular musicians—the stories of musicians that lived in Germany or that lived in other conquered countries—and to look at the lives of the musicians and to the music they made. It's a lens if you will, to see what was happening, historically, politically, sociologically. Through this lens of music students are able to get an understanding of the history and politics of this time.

TS: It sounds like a great history course if you really want to get a feel for what life was like in that period, what people were thinking and going through.

LS: Right. During the first part of the period, 1933 to 1941, there were various organizations in Germany. One was called the Kulturbund, and this is an organization where Jewish performers performed for Jewish audiences. This was something that gave Jewish performers a way to make a living and have a vocation at that time, where there were increasingly fewer opportunities. Also it

gave Jewish audiences a chance to go to concerts. Why would the Nazis allow this? Two reasons, one was it accomplished the goal of segregating the Jewish performers out of the Jewish performing organizations, out of the Jewish orchestras, and getting the Jewish audiences out of the concert halls in Nazi Germany. Also it served as a brilliant propaganda tool that they could use to show the world, “See how well we’re treating the Jews, they have their own performing organization.” So we study the history of the Kulturbund. We also look at the role of music in the ghettos. Music was very much a part of ghetto life in the established ghettos in Poland, in Lithuania, in some of the other countries, in the Czech Republic. We look at music in the camps. Even there, students are surprised to learn about the level of musical activity that went on in these killing factories, which was what many of the concentration camps were. Even at places like Treblinka, which, unlike Auschwitz—Auschwitz was a mixture; it was both a concentration camp and a slave labor camp; so the people that weren’t sent to the gas chambers, they were employed as slave laborers in armaments factories and munitions factories and other kinds of manufacturing processes—but in Treblinka there was no industry. It was just simply a death camp, just to kill people, but even there, there was an orchestra that they used for various purposes. We look at the role of music and the kind of music that was made throughout this period as a way of understanding the history.

- TS: How did they get instruments into those camps? Did they bring them with them when they came?
- LS: They did, and they were confiscated, but then the Germans who established the orchestras got the instruments to the musicians. Sometimes when a German commandant had established an orchestra and needed instruments, they would send for them—as you know Jews who came in brought with them all their luggage and their things. Of course, they were confiscated. So they went into the warehouses, and they got those instruments. Or, they purchased them in some cases, from musical dealers.
- TS: So they’re entertaining the commandant as well as themselves?
- LS: They did provide entertainment for the commandant and the SS administration. That was very commonly done, especially at places like Auschwitz, [where they gave] a Sunday afternoon concert. I uncovered an SS photograph of a Sunday afternoon concert that was given outside the gates of Auschwitz near the commandant’s house. Can you imagine how much work that entailed? They had to carry all those chairs and all those stands and all the instruments out. They had special white uniforms. There are three extant photographs of the men’s orchestra in Auschwitz I, the main camp, and in two of the photographs you see the prisoners in their striped uniforms—the prisoners with the standard prison garb on. But in this one photograph of them outside the gates, it shows them in white uniforms that they wore special for this entertainment for the camp commandant.

Their daily duty was to play for the prisoners who were leaving the camp to go to work details and to come back.

The Nazis, masters of efficiency, discovered if they had an orchestra playing at the main camp gate, or, at a similar location in Birkenau, the companion camp a mile and a half away, if they had the prisoners march five abreast to an upbeat march tempo—they had the orchestra playing upbeat march tempo music—that they could more efficiently get all the prisoners out of the camp and more efficiently count them as they were marching five abreast past the musicians than if they didn't have the music there. So the musicians' job was to play for this procession of prisoners out of the camp every day going to the various factories and work details. Then for them dragging back in with the dead, with the sick, with the wounded, they still had to march in time to the music.

TS: Not unlike black history and the role of music in slavery and railroad building and everything else.

LS: Exactly.

TS: I think one of the most sobering things for me is that you might have a commandant who has the sensitivity to appreciate great music on one hand and on the other hand can do all the horrible things that they did.

LS: And that was one of the roles of the musicians in the camp. In the evenings sometimes when they would be rehearsing, an SS guard—there are eye witness accounts of this, there's transcribed testimony—an SS guard would come in who during the day had been with a whip or stick, had been beating, killing, directly killing people, and he would listen to some music in the evening and would shed a tear and regain some humanity. So in a way it was a psychological release for that guard. I have the students grapple with this. What was the role of the musicians? Did they provide more help or more harm for the other prisoners? Some of the prisoners hated hearing that march music. It was like torture to them to hear that all the time, to hear that music drummed into their heads every day. But for the musicians in the orchestra performing, it was a means of survival. It gave them a greater chance of survival. That's what I think the first thought in every prisoner's mind in the concentration camp was—survival—that's what it was all about. I have the students grapple with the ethical question. These musicians knew they were aiding Nazi aims, yet they were surviving themselves. They might have been helping other prisoners survive. How do you see the ethics of that? We discuss that in class.

TS: I think I started out with Bruno Bettelheim trying to comprehend that survivor mentality. I think now he probably missed more than he saw by a great deal and that maybe music was one of those ways that you maintained your humanity while you were trying to survive.

LS: Exactly, right. So this course has led me to a new area of research that ties back in to what I described to you I was doing in graduate school with an interest in musicology. Before I started teaching this course three or four years ago, my main work in terms of research and creative activity was as a composer, writing new pieces for ensembles and performers, both inside and outside of KSU, trying to explore new ways of writing music that had a sound that was somewhat accessible to general audiences, not trying to stick with the total new and avant-garde approach that I learned in grad school—still trying to find ways to explore new ways of saying things, but in a way that could be apprehended by a general audience. I continued my musical explorations of ways to find new sonorities and use them. That was my research and creative activity up until I started teaching this course. As I started, actually, about a decade ago, writing some Jewish pieces and Holocaust memorial pieces, I became more interested in this phenomenon of music during the Holocaust. I started to investigate it, so I could bring some new material into the course.

As I said, there were not a lot of models to go on for this course being taught. In 2009 I went to Germany and gave some presentations there, and that's a good story to tell you about, but let me just keep going. The summer before last, I was in the Czech Republic, and I did research in the archives in Prague at the Jewish Museum, which has a very large collection. I went to Terezín. This was the site of the Theresienstadt concentration camp—Terezín in Czech, Theresienstadt in German—where, as a propaganda tool, the Nazis allowed music, theater—they allowed theatrical plays; they allowed artists to make drawings; they allowed musicians to perform and composers to write; so there was a lot of new music that was written there, premiered there. There was music that was performed there, great masterpieces from the past. I visited this location, did archival research there, and went on to Auschwitz, and did research there. That's why I've gotten this great interest in the music that happened in Auschwitz. There's a personal connection as well, as I told you. That's where my grandmother and aunt perished, so it was also a personal journey to go there. Then I went to Vienna and did some research in the museum there. This past summer I was invited to Israel where I gave a talk at an international conference on Holocaust education and then did research in the archives of Yad Vashem. It's a campus that has the world's largest Holocaust museum and some of the best archival materials.

TS: I was there at the museum in May.

LS: Right. Because of this course I now have this interest and two specialties, really. One is in how to teach this course, how to teach a course in music and the Holocaust; so I've given papers on that at a national conference of the College Music Society, a national professional society for college music teachers, and also, as I said, this past summer at Yad Vashem in Israel, this international conference where I taught other educators, other teachers, other people in the field, how you can accomplish this teaching of history and politics and sociology through the lens of music. Next summer I'm going to be going back to the Czech

Republic where I've been invited to give a talk at an international colloquium on spirituality and music. They've asked me to speak about some of my Holocaust memorial works.

One area of specialty is how to teach the course. Another is, as a generalist on this topic, I'm trying to find out more and more about it. There are many specialists that know, say, just about music at Auschwitz or music in this particular ghetto or a particular genre. I don't have that degree of specialty that I've written a book about one of those topics. I've been meeting with many of those people and talking to them, but I have more of a general interest in the broad range of music across the whole of the time from 1933 to 1945 and after in memorial work. So I continue to research that. I'll follow that research this next summer when I'm back in the Czech Republic. This ties back into the musicology work, the research work I was doing in grad school. I never thought I'd ever come back to that. I thought I was just going to go on to be a composer, but now I've come full circle, and I'm doing both, composition and creative activity—I think that is what gave me the recognition at the university level, the Distinguished Research and Creative Activity award this year, because I was doing both historical research and international presentations, and composition, that was being presented nationally and internationally. So it was both research and creative activity.

TS: You've also won a couple of the Foundation Prizes over the years which are for specific publications or specific works.

LS: It's compositions that I won those for.

TS: I believe, what 2003 and 2005 for those.

LS: Correct. And I previously won the Distinguished Research and Creative Activity award at my college level twice. Other university awards I've won, if you're interested, are: I got one of the SALT [Student Assistance for Leadership in Teaching] grants; I have gotten faculty incentive grants and a faculty leave grant [Faculty Enhancement Leave program].

TS: Leave meaning travel?

LS: It means you can be away for a semester or during the summer.

TS: Oh, a sabbatical?

LS: Yes, they weren't calling it that at the time.

TS: Half of a sabbatical.

- LS: Right. I used it for a summer program. I didn't actually take a semester off. I haven't taken a semester off since I've been here.
- TS: That was a summer in 2006. Let's see, where did you go on that one?
- LS: I believe that summer I was at two artists colonies where I was on retreat to write works, where I could really have large uninterrupted blocks of time to concentrate on writing a new piece. In the art world, to be creative, it's hard to do so when you just have an hour here and an hour there like you do during the academic year. So I went to have those large blocks of time. As I remember that summer I was at the MacDowell Colony, a very prestigious art colony in New Hampshire, and also at the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts.
- TS: You've also won some pretty prestigious composition competitions over the years. Do you want to talk about that a little bit?
- LS: My solo violin work, *Four Short Pieces*, was one of the top winners of the Association for the Promotion of New Music Composition Contest in New York City in 2009. As a result, it was performed at a concert at the Tenri Cultural Center in New York City in the fall of 2009, and I was a guest at the concert. Another work of mine, *Flame Language*, a Holocaust memorial work for voice and orchestra, won the second prize, the runner up prize in a national composition competition.
- TS: You've won more awards than we can almost talk about here, I think, over time, but a good many of them have come since you've been at Kennesaw on the faculty here.
- LS: And that's one thing that I would like to address. You had asked me at one time or had mentioned that you were interested in what I found invigorating about being at KSU, what kept me here, why I'm still here and not at another university. One thing that I very much like about the environment at Kennesaw State University is that there is great support for faculty work, for teaching, but also for scholarship, research and creative activity. There are a plethora of grants and different kinds of support one can apply for that will support a faculty member in pursuing their particular research interest or passion, and I think that's fantastic. It's a great environment to work in.
- TS: I think it's probably part of the cultural shift that we've had at Kennesaw throughout our history, particularly, since we became a university right after you got here in '96. I think in many ways the arts and music have led the way in changes on our campus. Where do you see your career going from here?
- LS: I hope to maintain activity at the international level over the next five to seven years of my career and beyond. I would like to continue speaking at various international conferences, international events, to be able to share the research

I've done and the creative work I've done because, sometimes, when I speak, it's about my research, but more often now I'm speaking about this course I've developed, Music and the Holocaust, or about my creative work, so, for instance, in the Czech Republic next summer, I'll be speaking about spiritual dimensions in my work *Flame Language*, which is based on poetry of Nelly Sachs which has some universal meanings, some universal implications. I think the festival organizers were interested in that.

I would like to continue doing things like that. I would also like to continue doing research abroad, going to other centers, especially in Europe, but in other countries as well, where I can find archival documents that relate to my interest in music and the Holocaust, and also continue the very important work over the next few years of interviewing survivors. We are at a point in history where living witnesses, people who were there during the Holocaust, are probably not going to be with us very many more years. The people who were old enough to remember events at the time are quickly reaching old age and many have already died. The opportunity for researchers now to interview these people and to pursue oral history, to find out an eye witness account of what happened, is a very pressing matter to pursue. That time is now because in ten years it's going to be mostly gone.

TS: Any great composers who are Holocaust survivors?

LW: The composers who were able to survive the Holocaust were the ones who were able to get out early. This is part of the information that I impart to the class about emigre performers and composers and that I will be giving a lecture about in November as a Kristallnacht commemoration. We are having an event that is cosponsored by the KSU School of Music and the Museum of History and Holocaust Education, which is going to be a lecture-recital. The first half of the program, I'll speak about *entartete musik*, what the Nazis labeled degenerate music, composers who were either of Jewish background or were modernists. They put this label on them; it was a blacklisting. On the second half of the concert it will be a performance of that music. I'm doing something similar at North Georgia College in February, a lecture-recital of this type. The composers that I will speak about there that were able to get out early and continue creating after the Holocaust include a wide array. Darius Milhaud came to the United States, a French composer. He continued composing. There are whole hosts of performers who came over.

Many of the great composers who were captured were executed, but let me go back one second. Some of the other famous composers [include] Arnold Schoenberg, Jewish background. He was dismissed very soon after the Nazis came to power from his teaching post at the Prussian Academy of Music. He came and lived in Hollywood and finished his career here. Stravinsky, even though he wasn't Jewish, was labeled a modernist by the Nazis, and he eventually emigrated to the United States. Paul Hindemith came and taught at Yale, German

composer. He even tried to work his way into the Nazis' favor by writing music for the Luftwaffe and trying to convince them that he could be a good German, but he had many counts against him. He had worked with some jazz influences, his wife was Jewish, and the Nazis just did not accept him, so he emigrated and was a great 20th century composer. There are many others—a number of great Czech composers like Viktor Ullmann and Hans Krasa died after being in Theresienstadt and composing a lot of music during the War. They were eventually shipped off to Auschwitz and other camps in the east where they were executed or died.

TS: What is the impact of the Holocaust on music do you think, Holocaust memorial music for instance? How would you describe it as a type of music?

LS: That's two different questions, so let me address them both. One of the main impacts of the Holocaust for music is similar to that which happened, I think, in the sciences. Once the persecution began in Germany and other German-occupied countries, there were many great scientists like Einstein, of course, the most famous example, and also many great musicians who emigrated, who got out, and who had the fame and the means to get out while the persecution was bad and before they were prevented. Conductors like Otto Klemperer and William Steinberg and Bruno Walther, violinists like Fritz Kreisler, Rudolf Serkin, a pianist—I could go on and name dozens and dozens of very famous names that emigrated. The result was a culture drain, a brain drain if you will. Up until that time there had been many centers of music, but Berlin was a center of modern theater; certainly Vienna was a center of music, Germany was considered a very important country musically, many great composers there, performers.

With the War, with this persecution, many of the Jewish or modern composers and performers came to the United States. So there was a real shift of culture away from Germany and away from Europe to the United States. That was one impact of the Holocaust. Another was the decimation of Jewish musicians in the ranks of German musicians. Many Jewish musicians died in the Holocaust, so you have a stop in a way to culture or a cessation of culture, which resumed after the War, but not nearly as strong. Music publishing had been primarily the province of German publishers. They had been the strongest publishers up to that time. After the War the publishing was spread more widely across Europe and the United States. So I think that one consequence of the Nazi regime and World War II was a shift of the centrality of music being in Germany and Europe towards the United States as many great Germans and musicians from other countries emigrated to the United States because of the Nazi policies.

TS: I was thinking that the role of Jewish publishers and song writers in Tin Pan Alley, going way back to the late nineteenth century—their impact on American music and the American music industry can't be overstated throughout our history. But you're saying that after World War II or even during World War II the immigrants coming in from Europe were our gain and Germany's loss.

LS: Exactly. The great composers I mentioned who came from Germany and Europe, Paul Hindemith, Igor Stravinsky, came to this country. Arnold Schoenberg came to this country. Some composers never left; they either died or were killed. Franz Schreker was a German composer who was teaching in a German academy like Schoenberg was. When the Nazis came to power, he too was released from his position, but he was older already, and he did not survive the end of the War. So his career was broken by the fact that he could no longer get published or performed. The other impact was, temporarily, at least, the Germans, the Nazis, rewrote musical history, so composers who previously had been admired were forbidden either because they had Jewish background or because they weren't approved. An example of that is Felix Mendelssohn. Even though he was a practicing Christian—he was christened—he had a Jewish background, so he was subject to ridicule. Even in musicological circles they showed deformed pictures, caricatures of him.

Composers like [Gustav] Mahler suffered the same fate because the Nazis wanted to Aryanize music. They wanted to make it the music of the master race and not a province where the Jewish race—that's how they labeled Jews, the Jewish race—had any influence. So they sought to erase all influence of anything Jewish. This went to the extent of when they staged the Mozart *Requiem*, they took out any words that referred to Jewry or to Old Testament. [George Frideric] Handel, who was not Jewish—but even in the restaging of his works, they took out references to anything Jewish or Old Testament. They recast his oratorio, *Judas Maccabeus*, as *Der Feldherr*, the field marshal, so it became the story of, instead of a great Jewish warrior back in ancient times, the story of a great German general.

TS: That's almost unbelievable isn't it? You were going to tell a story about going to Germany in 2009 a little bit earlier.

LS: Yes. In 2009 I was contacted by a woman from the town of Egelsbach. This is the town where my mother grew up. She had found my name online by doing a search for my mother. On my web pages about my Holocaust work, I have some information about my mother. She and the townspeople were going to engage in a project of installing *stolpersteine* in their town. *Stolperstein* literally translated means stumbling stone or stumbling block. It's the project of German artist Gunter Demnig, and what he's done throughout Germany, and in other European countries as well, is to put a brass cap on top of a cobblestone in front of a house where a Jewish person or Jewish family lived. He felt, as I understand, that while there were many Holocaust museums and memorials, that there wasn't enough cognizance, there wasn't enough consciousness, of the fate of Jews that had been living among the people in the cities and towns, in everyday life. So by having the *stolpersteine* in front of various residences and stores, people could see who lived there. The *stolperstein* typically read, here lived 'the name of the person', when they were born, and then what happened to them and such like that.

There were no *stolpersteine* in Egelsbach, in this town, and they had commissioned this artist to come and install a set of *stolpersteine* for my mother's family. She contacted me to invite me to come to this. I said, "Fine, I'm glad to come to that. I know you're doing this to raise consciousness, to bring historical awareness, to let people who live in society today be more aware of what happened in history. I do the same thing, but through music and through speaking." I proposed to them that we stage some events, and indeed we worked together and staged some events. We had an event in Egelsbach, and we had another event in Seligenstadt, which is the town my grandfather was from. My grandmother was from Egelsbach, and my grandfather was from Seligenstadt. These are towns that are about thirty to forty-five kilometers from Frankfurt. In both places we staged an evening event that was a combination of a talk—I gave a talk about my family history—and the plight of the people in the family, what had happened to them. I talked about how I had started composing Holocaust memorial music, and then there was the live performance of some of that music in both of those towns. Other people also spoke about historical matters at those events. It was a way to bring this awareness to people in the town, but also a way, I think, to work with those people from the town to create this.

It created some reconciliation. The woman who worked with me in Egelsbach—her name is Gaby Melk. She is about my age, a little bit younger maybe, five, ten years younger, and her father was still living. That meant her father was about the same age as my mother. He would be in his mid to late eighties now, and he was therefore alive, and maybe he was part of the Nazi youth; we don't know. He didn't talk to Gaby any more about what happened in the Holocaust than my mother talked to me. So that phenomena that I spoke about earlier that we find in children of survivors, we also find among children of bystanders and children of perpetrators. Their parents may not tell them everything that happened. I think many people just wanted to get beyond it, not go back, not remember. It was such a horrible time. We went and visited her father, and I asked him what he could remember, and he didn't open up very much.

I felt that it was important for me to go there. There are some Jewish people who believe that it is still undesirable to interact with Germans, it's still undesirable to drive a Volkswagen, it's still undesirable to fly Lufthansa, it's still undesirable to wear Birkenstocks because of what the German people did. I considered that attitude, and some of my relatives, I sensed, had that attitude. But I thought it was more important to go and to engage and to educate and to bring awareness, and by doing so, this is, if I remember correctly, Goal Two in our global learning awareness goals—to demonstrate some kind of reconciliation, demonstrate engagement and interaction with people of other cultures. By showing my students how I had engaged with people from the very culture, the very town—the ancestors of these people, the parents of these people whom I was working with, this church group—they had been there at the time when my grandparents were persecuted and my mother was persecuted in that town. It was a way to really engage with my own family history, but also to engage with people from a

different country and a different perspective that had been on the opposite side of a conflict.

TS: You had mentioned in your write-up on your Holocaust memorial work that part of what you're doing is creating greater awareness and fostering tolerance.

LS: Absolutely. One of my primary goals is to indeed foster tolerance. By seeing how Jews and many other groups of the Holocaust who are also victims—by seeing how these people were persecuted, I hope that it makes students and the general public today more aware of how negative a force persecution is when it is a force that is operating in a society. I think by seeing how persecution affected the lives of others in the past that students and the general public, when I speak to the general public, can gain some insight, gain some understanding, into intolerance, gain some insight into persecution, gain some insight even into stereotyping, and to see how they, living in today's society, could hopefully be more tolerant, more accepting, more engaged with others than people in the past may have been.

TS: Are there any Jewish families living in those communities any more?

LS: No, there are no Jewish families in Egelsbach anymore, and in Seligenstadt I don't believe there are any or not many. I can't remember about Seligenstadt; it's a little bit larger town.

TS: What was it like in the thirties? Were your parents the only Jewish families?

LS: No, there were other Jewish families there too. When I was there in 2009, they laid down two sets of *stolpersteine*. One was outside this house I described where my mother lived. There was a general store on the lower story, and the family living quarters in the upper story. It's still the same thing; it's a grocery store in the lower story and then there are now eight or ten stories above it of apartments. In front of that they put out *stolpersteine* for my mother's family, and in a different location in town where there had been another Jewish family they put out *stolpersteine* to commemorate that family.

TS: How are people like Gaby Melk received by others in the community? Are they considered dangerous radicals or do they represent a majority of opinion in Germany nowadays to want to preserve that Jewish heritage?

LS: I think there is an interest in the current generation of people in Germany, people who were the children of people who were alive at that time, in other words, children of perpetrators, children of bystanders, perhaps children of rescuers, maybe children of victims. If their parents were part of one of the other groups that were persecuted, whether they were Jehovah's Witnesses or leftists or intellectuals or Slavs or Poles or homosexuals—there were many other groups who were persecuted. I think there's an interest in recognizing what the Nazi

regime did and not just forgetting about it, not just sweeping it under the carpet and not necessarily being culpable for what their grandparents did and not themselves being personally responsible for it, but engaging with it and admitting what happened, not trying to gloss over or sweep it under the rug. Gaby—I was a guest at her house, and she took me to Frankfurt—we went to Frankfurt, and we visited a Jewish museum there, we visited various memorials there. She helped me organize the event in Seligenstadt where I met another woman who was a host there. They went to the house where one of these women lived, and there was an older woman who had known my grandfather when he was a boy. She’s a very old woman now. I found the people to be very welcoming and very interested in the history. I don’t know if it represents a majority or not, but there seems to be a great interest—there was a huge amount of press coverage. For those two events there were probably a dozen newspaper articles. I was interviewed several times. There were articles in the press with pictures and quite a bit of coverage of what we were doing. There seems to be an interest in engaging with this aspect of their history.

TS: At least according to *The Wall Street Journal* there’s a controversy in Germany nowadays of a judge that’s getting ready to arrest rabbis, I guess, for circumcising children.

LS: Yes, I’ve been hearing some about that controversy.

TS: They think it’s barbaric to circumcise, and so they’re trying to outlaw it.

LS: Right.

TS: I was thinking he had a lot of nerve to try to do that. I’m probably getting near the end of the questions. I’d love to talk to you all day long. I know you’ve got a meeting coming up, but maybe just to wind it up—do you have master’s programs in music at this point?

LS: We hope to soon.

TS: Okay, that may be another avenue, but maybe just talk a little bit about how you integrate—you do a lot of scholarship, a lot of service, and a lot of teaching. Could you just say a little bit about the importance of integrating all three together in your career?

LS: Students learn by modeling often as much as they learn by direct instruction. They look to their faculty instructors as mentors many times, and they see how they’re operating, what they are doing, how they’re existing as a professional. I think that one can have an impact on students that way. I try to model an integrated approach. I try to share with students how my research, how my inquiry into what happened historically, informs my own work. As a composer, I utilize a wide range of influences, and some of those influences can come from

my own familial and ancestral background. I encourage students also to look into their own background. Do you have some Scotch background? Do you have some Japanese ancestry? What can that tell you about who you are? Does that connect with you in any way as to your own cultural perspective on the world? Is there something you can pull from that to help inform who you are as a performer, as a composer, as an interpreter, as a conductor? Is there a way you can find something that relates to what you're doing as a musician and helps to enrich it, whether that be some historical research or some genealogical research or whether that be pursuing a certain cultural phenomenon that interests you? How can you bring something new and different, how can you combine different influences in a way that will help you find your own unique voice? These are the questions that I like to pose to students and ways in which I try to help them integrate these in some way, similar to the ways that I have integrated things. I think that way they'll have a more enriched life.

Very often students get focused on one particular field of pursuit. "I'm going to be the greatest violinist there ever was." And that's great. They will want to practice and really be fantastic violinists. But what can they learn from the culture in which they live or from some other culture in the world, or from their own cultural background? What can they learn from any of the sources that would enrich what they do as a performing artist, as a conductor, as a performer, as a composer, as a theorist or researcher? I try to show them ways in which they can bring something from another discipline or some other less narrowly focused pursuit to enrich the pursuit that they are engaged with.

TS: This has been fascinating all afternoon. I think the only thing that could have improved the interview was if I had thought to tell you to bring your clarinet with you! Thank you very much. I think Kennesaw has been very fortunate to have you here for the last sixteen years.

LS: Thank you, I appreciate it.

Kennesaw State University Oral History Project
KSU Oral History Series, No. 112
Interview with Laurence E. Sherr
Conducted, edited, and indexed by Thomas A. Scott
Part II – Thursday, 21 July 2016
Location: Sturgis Library, Kennesaw State University

TS: We did an interview with Laurence in 2012 when he had won the Distinguished Research and Creative Activity Award. Last year he was the recipient of the Madhuri and Jagdish N. Sheth Distinguished Faculty Award for International Achievement. I actually did a little research to find out who Jagdish Sheth is. He is on the business faculty at Emory University and obviously international. He was born in Burma in 1938 of Indian parentage. They fled the Japanese during World War II back to India and then to America. He's been very successful and has a foundation that has created the distinguished faculty awards for international achievement at the University of Illinois, University of Pittsburgh, and apparently similar awards at a bunch of places. I thought I'd ask you if you know anything about how we got this award, and how we established contact with Professor Sheth?

LS: I got to meet Professor Sheth when I was at the awards ceremony. The 2015 award that I won was the second time the award had been offered. It had been offered the prior year in 2014, but as I understood it, at that time it was an honorary title alone. It did not come with a cash award. When I applied for it for the 2015 consideration it was the first time it was awarded with a cash award. I think it is now established, and it will be awarded annually with funding that he set up. He is a distinguished international traveler and really wanted to promote the idea of international outreach and cooperation and scholarship at KSU. I didn't realize that he had also established that similar kind of award at other institutions.

TS: Well, he has at least two foundations [the Madhuri and Jagdish Sheth Foundation and the Sheth Family Foundation]. That's why I was wondering if you had any idea whether our KSU Foundation applied to his foundation or somebody on our campus had written a proposal for this award or how it came about.

LS: I don't know, but if you did want to pursue it, the person that would probably know that the best would be Lance Askildson [vice provost for global affairs and chief international officer]. He seemed to be quite involved with this. He was the one who was helping to administer the award. Apparently, the review was done by a faculty committee, but when I spoke to him, he was the one who seemed to be very involved with the award.

TS: That's a neat award to have on our campus. I was looking back at the interview we did in 2012, and I asked you at that time about your plans for the future. From what I can tell, you've been right on target of what you said you wanted to do.

You had talked about wanting to maintain activity at the international level, which you have certainly done, and you mentioned speaking at international conferences. I want us to talk about that because I know at least two big ones where you've talked. I suspect there were a great many others as well since 2012. You talked about continuing to do research. Particularly, your Music and the Holocaust course led to a lot of research that you're doing in archives and abroad, especially in Europe. You also wanted to continue interviewing survivors. I'm positive that you've continued to do all of those things. You're obviously not a person that gets distracted easily from your goal of what you plan to accomplish.

LS: Yes, I feel very fortunate that my work has evolved to a place where there is a quite resonant synergy about the activities I do. I think that's one reason that there's been so much international interest in what I do. There are other people and groups all over the world who produce Holocaust remembrance concerts. There are certainly researchers that are far more accomplished than I am in Holocaust research. One of them was one of my fellow speakers at the international conference I spoke at called *Recovering Forbidden Voices: Responding to the Suppression of Music in World War II*. This was in New Zealand in [August] 2014. His name is Michael Haas and he has a book called *Forbidden Music: [The Jewish Composers Banned by the Nazis]* published by Yale University Press [2013]. He is certainly a much more distinguished researcher than I am, and I could name a host of others.

There are also people who write Holocaust Remembrance Music, and there are people who have some specialty in teaching about the Holocaust. But to my knowledge I'm one of the only people that synthesizes those four different activities: composer, concert producer, researcher, and pedagogue, and I guess a fifth one would be lecturer. Because I'm able to do that I can bring something unique to concert series, to universities, to municipal organizations, and to civic groups. I've been getting invitations to museums. I've been getting invitations from all of these kinds of institutions to present my work, to present lectures and concerts, often in combination. I've evolved some projects where a lecture is combined with a concert. It will be an evening concert with embedded commentary that I give along with presentations about historical material. So it is bringing history to life. It's building a bridge back to this era of the Holocaust through the arts, so that people can identify with it.

TS: It's almost like you're both right-brained and left-brained. I think maybe sometimes people that are really, really creative have all their smarts on the one side of the brain, so maybe they can do the composing but not the lecturing or research. It sounds like you have a very well-balanced brain.

LS: I feel very fortunate that I am able to work in those areas, that I have capabilities of working in those areas. Sometimes I have regrets, I will admit, in that if I were devoting all my time to composition then certainly I could write a lot more music and compose a lot. If I were devoting more time to research then I could

accomplish more in the research than I do. But it's, as I said, a very unique position to be able to balance that. My composition is informed by the research I do. The research is motivated by my aesthetic activities, what I do with composition. My lecturing draws on both my compositional work and my research. For instance, you asked about some of the international conferences. At the *Recovering Forbidden Voices* international conference in [Wellington] New Zealand I was invited to give a keynote address [August 24, 2014]. For my keynote address [entitled "Creating Connections to Forbidden Voices: Strengthening the Legacy of Music Related to the Holocaust through Composition and Education"], I was specifically asked to include content both about my compositional work and about the pedagogy I had developed to teach about the music in the Holocaust. The other people that gave keynote addresses lectured more on their research, so it was this pulling together of these different strands that I think got me invited there and has gotten me the international recognition.

TS: You used passive voice; how did that come about? Who invited you, and was it something that they just called you up out of the blue and asked if you could come or how did that come about?

LS: From the *Recovering Forbidden Voices* conference in Wellington, New Zealand in 2014, yes, that was organized through the [Koki] New Zealand School of Music. There's a course there that they have about music and the Holocaust. They had found out about my work from someone in Prague that had heard my compositions and had spoken to me in Prague about my work. That person told them about my work, and they looked into it and found, "Oh this person is perfect; he really fits the conference." So they invited me.

TS: You might talk about Prague too because I guess if we're going in chronological order, 2013 is when you go the Czech Republic. Was that something you were invited to or how did that come about?

LS: The Czech Republic is a country that I have been to four or five times in the last decade. It is a country that is incredibly rich in culture and musical arts, and they are also interested in history. What got me interested in the Czech Republic was the Theresienstadt ghetto or concentration camp, in the Czech city of Terezín. At this camp they had incarcerated many artists, painters, writers, literary figures, composers, and performers, and it was being used as a "model camp." It was used for propaganda purposes. The inmates there, the prisoners, had it slightly better. It was very rough, but still they had it slightly better than some of the other concentration camps. They were allowed to pursue their art, so there were works of art, there were paintings done, there was poetry written, there were plays written, and there were musical compositions and concerts. A lot of this is archived. I wanted to find out about the camp for the course I developed, the Music and the Holocaust [MUSI 3316] course. I wanted to find out more about the camp so I could teach about it. Of course, one can read about it in books and

volumes and online, but I wanted to go and find out directly by going to archives, looking at archival materials, by going to the location and taking my own pictures, and by doing oral history, by interviewing people who had been in the camp, who had witnessed the things directly, so that I could bring primary source materials rather than secondary source material to my students.

That's what first interested me in going to the Czech Republic and particularly to Prague, where they have the Jewish museum there, which has archives. Then Theresienstadt, what's now called Terezín in the Czech Republic, is about an hour northwest from Prague, so it's an easy bus ride to get there by being based in Prague. The first time I went to Prague was for this research. Then I decided that if I'm going to go there and do this research, I'm also a composer, so why don't I try to do a musical program there? So fortunately through some contacts I was able to find a classmate of mine who had been in Duke University back in the 1970s. She and I re-established contact, and we put together a joint concert [*A Holocaust Remembrance: Czech, Dutch, and American Chamber Music of Two Generations*] in Prague. It was performed under the aegis of the US Embassy, and it was tremendously successful. It got a good review, and I worked with Czech musicians some of whom I've now worked with on return visits. That was in 2011.

I was also able to go to a music festival in Kroměříž, which is in the eastern part of the Czech Republic. I was at the music festival and wrote an article about the arts at the music festival. From that initial visit in 2011 I've made return visits, and in some years I would put on a concert or just do research or I went back to the music festival at Kroměříž a second time. So all of these things kept me returning to the Czech Republic. One of the people I met in the Czech Republic is a good friend of mine now named Vera Egermayer, Egermayerová as they say it in the Czech Republic (and the "a" has a right leaning accent on it). She grew up in Prague, and at five years old in 1945 she was taken to Terezín, to the Theresienstadt ghetto as a child prisoner because she had Jewish ancestry. At five years old, she was incarcerated, January of 1945. The Nazis, as you know, at that time had almost lost the war. It was very close to ending by that time. The Russians had already advanced by that time to Auschwitz and in Poland. The Germans were being hemmed in, but they were still incarcerating people in the Czech Republic. She was taken as a child, a five year old child to Theresienstadt and was there for the last six or seven months of the camp. Anyway, after the war she ended up moving to New Zealand. Now she lives part of the year in New Zealand and part of the year in Prague.

She was the one that, having attended my 2011 concert in Prague—and then in 2012 I believe I went back and met with her and told her about my work and she was very interested in what I was doing—she then told the people in New Zealand about my work. That's what led to the New Zealand invitation. Then once they heard me, they invited me to come back. So I was just back to New Zealand this past summer of 2016. I just got back a couple of months ago from concerts in

New Zealand and Australia, and I was back at the New Zealand School of Music. I gave a major lecture there. I lectured to some classes there, and I worked with performers there.

TS: You were there in the wintertime.

LS: Yes. It was actually the fall and getting into winter.

TS: That's not too bad then.

LS: No, and I just missed the worst weather by about a week. After I left they had gale force winds. So it's a long answer to your question, but I just needed to pull in all the threads because there are a lot of threads that weave together to make this story.

TS: Was she the only survivor that you were able to interview of the artists' camp?

LS: No, I interviewed a number of them. I interviewed a woman named Eva Hermannová who later worked at the Prague Opera. I interviewed her two years in a row, and she told me she participated in some of the choirs at the camp. So she told me about that. I interviewed another woman that was a survivor of the camp and also survived Auschwitz and other camps. This past November I went back to Prague. That was for a concert for my new project, which I'll tell you about in a moment. In late October and early November 2015 when I was in Prague, I interviewed a woman who was a child artist who was in the camp. She has drawings from the camp. She was an eye witness, so she recorded some of the events in the camp. I'll tell you the story in a minute. Her name is Helga Weiss, and she had a very interesting drawing she made as a child. It's a line drawing, and it showed some bunks with children lying on some of them. It showed some men with a saw sawing off the wood at the top of the second bunk. This happened the summer of 1944.

The Germans had shipped some Danish Jews to Terezín to Theresienstadt, and the Danish Red Cross wanted to come and visit to check on the condition. So the Germans saw this as an ideal opportunity to use the camp ("See how we're treating the Jews") as a propaganda tool. The Nazis made films showing an idealized version of living and working conditions in the camp. Before the Danish Red Cross visit and the 1944 propaganda film was made, efforts included beautifying the ghetto and taking down the fence around the town's central park. I have eye witness accounts of people telling me about this including Helga. So her drawing showed that the bunks were three high. It was very crowded. To make it look less crowded, what they did is they came and they sawed off the rung that attached to the top bunk, so they could take away the top bunk. Then they would only be two bunks high. She recorded that in her drawing, and that was done before the Red Cross came.

- TS: I think in some ways it's dangerous to get too much into the psychology of pure evil, but I have been wondering while you were telling that why the Nazis even cared about PR, given the fact that they were trying to exterminate the Jews as an ethnic group. Why would they even want to show that they had a model camp?
- LS: Right. It was in part to cover up the crime because they weren't admitting . . .
- TS: But we're talking about the end of the war at this point maybe.
- LS: Yes. They were still trying to cover up and to have some propaganda. Propaganda was incredibly important to them. They had a whole ministry of propaganda.
- TS: Well, that's true, they did.
- LS: Joseph Goebbels was their minister of propaganda, and they worked assiduously on that. Part of my research has to deal with music as propaganda: what music was supported and encouraged and what music was blacklisted and suppressed. I give a whole lecture on suppressed music and art during the Nazi era. So, yes, even though they were losing the war, they were trying to continue to have propaganda and to cover up the crimes that they were doing, so that they might not be held so culpable, so they might not be attacked as much because they could say the Jews were being treated well.
- TS: Yes, if they're at the point that they know they're going to lose, it would make sense, wouldn't it?
- LS: Right. So, yes, they did quite a lot of work to propagate propaganda. They were very interested in that, and it was a very important part of their political process.
- TS: Well, you certainly have a project that is focused on something about which there is a great deal of interest, but also very timely, as you mentioned in the earlier interview, since the people that you can interview are getting fewer and fewer all the time.
- LS: Right.
- TS: Tell me about your new project in the Czech Republic and Poland in 2015.
- LS: The new project grew out of my cello sonata and all the other work I'd done.
- TS: Right, because you did the performance down at The Temple [in Atlanta]. Was that 2015?
- LS: It was March 23, 2015. In 2014 I was completing the *Sonata for Cello and Piano*. It utilizes five musical pieces that have identification with the Holocaust. Four of

the pieces are songs from ghettos and concentration camps and especially from the partisans. I decided to include the songs so I could, as I said before, build a bridge to the past. My piece written in the present would allow audiences to connect with these creators that were alive during the Holocaust. By having performances of my piece I can inform the audience about these song writers, these poets that were alive and working, and how music was important. Students coming to my Music and the Holocaust class think about music as entertainment. That's how we generally conceptualize it.

TS: Before they get in the classroom?

LS: Yes, before they get in the class. We generally conceptualize music as entertainment in our society. But I talk about music for these people in the Holocaust and how it was much, much more than entertainment. It was a means of survival. It was a means of identification. It was a means of getting in touch of feelings. It was a means of venting frustrations. It was a means of healing. It was a means of having solace. It was a means of encouraging revenge. I could go on and on and on for all the purposes that it served that were very basic, that go down to the very base level of survival. Music was as important to these people as food at times in order to encourage resistance. So I wrote the cello sonata incorporating these pieces. Then out of that grew the project that I entitled "Music of Resistance and Survival." The cello sonata was premiered on January 15, 2015 at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. For that I started to give lectures. I gave a lecture prior to the concert about suppressed art and music during the Holocaust. I gave another on Music at Auschwitz. In the concert I started making commentary. What we do in the concerts is we have someone perform the songs, so it's not just me talking about the songs, but you actually hear the songs that are done. So we did that there in January.

Then in March I had this big concert at The Temple. We actually did two concerts. One was done in the morning for teenage students, and one in the evening for the public. I raised enough money that we were able to make a good video recording of that, and that's now online. That's part of my educational initiative. The title for that concert was "Music of Resistance and Survival." That's now become the title of my whole "Music of Resistance and Survival Project." What I did in the middle half of 2015 was pull together more information and do more research about the creators and pull together this whole project. And I started putting proposals out. In the fall of 2015, within two weeks, I had several performances. The first was at the International Summit on Civil and Human Rights that was organized here at KSU by our Center for African and African Diaspora Studies.

One of the evenings, I did my integrated ["Music of Resistance and Survival"] event. I would talk about each of the creators, and then a singer would perform the song of that creator. Then I'd talk about the connection of the songs to my cello sonata, and then my cello sonata was performed. It was about an hour-long

evening. We did that, and the very next evening I left to go to the Czech Republic. I got to the Czech Republic and worked with the cellist and pianist there. We did the presentation concert in Prague. Then the three of us went to Wroclaw, Poland. It's something called "Days of Mutual Respect." We performed at a conservatory there, a very beautiful auditorium. There are pictures on my website of this. We did the same thing. I did the concert with embedded commentary. We did some of the source songs, and then my cello sonata. That took me through 2015.

TS: I guess I should ask, do you ever have time to sleep?

LS: Sometimes, not very much.

TS: That's fantastic. You know, some people go off to conferences, and you go off to Europe to do a performance and a lecture.

LS: And research.

TS: And then rush back home to meet your classes, I guess.

LS: To meet my class and start planning the next one. Are you ready to move to 2016?

TS: Sure.

LS: Okay, so in 2016 what I did was to start setting up this three-week tour I did of New Zealand and Australia. It took quite a lot of doing to get that all set up. It was quite involved. I need to take a step back. On January 24, 2016, I collaborated with the Atlanta Opera and the Breman Museum of Jewish Heritage. We put on a concert called "Pure vs. Degenerate: The Nazi War on Music." It was comprised of commentary by me and Arthur Fagan, the Atlanta Opera Music Director. Both of us are children of survivors, and we gave commentary about music. Then they had a singer and a pianist they had brought in to perform these pieces that we spoke about. We did that in January, and then in April I left for this tour. I got to New Zealand—you travel overnight, and it's a thirty-two hour trip. I got there on a Tuesday in the evening. Then on Wednesday [April 27] I was at the Holocaust Center of New Zealand [Wellington, New Zealand] giving a lecture on my cello sonata ["Remembering the Silenced Voices of Holocaust Song Creators: Weaving Songs of Resistance and Survival into a New Cello Sonata." That lecture talks about the historical sources of the source material and how they are related to the sonata.

On Thursday I rehearsed with the performers, and on Friday I was interviewed by Radio New Zealand, and that was broadcast nationally. That's online; one can find that interview. On Saturday we got ready for the concert, and on Sunday [May 1] we had the Australasian premier of my cello sonata and a concert by

Inbal Megiddo, the cellist at the New Zealand School of Music. Her pianist was Jian Liu. They gave a concert, and that Sunday I gave a pre-concert lecture for it. We got a great critical review of the concert. On Monday, I'm just telling you day by day because it was such a jam-packed time, I went up to Auckland where I started to rehearse with a different cellist and pianist, a cellist of the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra. On Tuesday I continued to rehearse with them, and on Tuesday evening I took a bus down to Hamilton, New Zealand to get ready for my lecture there because on Wednesday morning—I've got to tell you about Wednesday, May 4. This was an incredible day in my career. I started out at 10:00 in the morning giving a lecture on my compositions to a class at the University of Waikato in Hamilton, New Zealand. I met with a composition professor and a student, had a quick bite, and at 12:00 I got to the performance hall. I give a half hour pre-concert lecture about the same thing ["Remembering the Silenced Voices"], and then at 1:00 o'clock is the concert ["Sonata for Cello and Piano"].

Then at 2:00 o'clock I change very quickly from my concert clothes. There is a driver waiting for me who takes the backroads to rush me from Hamilton up to Auckland a couple hours' drive away to try to beat some of the rush hour traffic. They get me into Auckland. I do a very quick change and get to the final rehearsal for a program that night. At 7:00 p.m. that night we had Yom Hashoah, the Holocaust Remembrance Day. So in Auckland we had a community Yom Hashoah event, a memorial service at 7:00. Then at 8:30 I gave my program in which I gave my lecture which is called "Strengthening the Legacy of Lost and Forbidden Voices from the Holocaust: Laurence Sherr's New Cello Sonata." That's the title I gave, but the actual "Music of Resistance and Survival" concert that I did was through this consortium of groups in Auckland. If you go to the Compositions and Lectures page under my Holocaust Music menu, at the very bottom of that, there's a poster of this Holocaust Memorial Concert.

TS: I was looking at that earlier.

LS: That's from Auckland and so that was an incredible day, two different sets of concerts and lectures, multiple lectures in two different cities in one day. That was one of the fullest days of my career. There was no rest for the weary. The next day I flew back down to Wellington to get ready for a major lecture there. On Friday [May 6] I gave a lecture as part of their Music Forum series at the New Zealand School of Music. In a concert space I gave a lecture about "Music at Auschwitz," one of my research specialties. Then I flew back up to Auckland, and on Monday [May 9] in Auckland I did two presentations for students, one of which is a Power Point, and the second was with live musicians. Then I flew to Brisbane, Australia on Tuesday, and on Wednesday [May 11] I gave the same lecture ["Remembering the Silenced Voices"] in Brisbane, Australia at the University of Queensland. On Thursday was the performance. I gave some commentary during that, and on Friday I did a master class. On Saturday I met

someone from Melbourne to plan some future concerts, and on Sunday I collapsed.

TS: I guess so. What's in the future for you?

LS: We are seeking to set up some more concerts and lectures. There's interest in several places. There's nothing that's absolutely definitely set yet, but we have inquiries and interest from a number of places. I'm fairly certain something will happen in San Francisco. I'm speaking to people in Melbourne, Australia. There's some interest in Philadelphia. The University of Wisconsin is a good possibility. I forgot to tell you about a big development in 2016. I was concerned about having enough money for the trip to New Zealand and Australia. It wasn't an inexpensive trip. I was very fortunate. There weren't many places to apply to, but I received a very large grant.

TS: I wanted to ask you about that.

LS: From the SNCF.

TS: I had to look online to figure out what that was.

LS: Société nationale des chemins de fer français [National Society of French Railways]. "How did that come about" is your question.

TS: Yes, how did it come about?

LS: I had been doing research, and I found that at the end of 2015 the French government entered into an agreement with the U.S. Department of State because during the Holocaust the French railroad system, which was a nationalized railroad system, had been used to transport many people to their deaths.

TS: Oh, to the concentration camps.

LS: To the concentration camps, out of France and into . . .

TS: Including your grandmother.

LS: Exactly! My grandmother and my aunt were captured in the south of France and were transported to Drancy, the holding camp outside Paris, and from there to Auschwitz. Now, the SNCF has been doing a lot of publicity, and their directors have been giving speeches about it. Yes, it's a gray area, and many of the people in the SNCF were sympathetic to the partisans. They were fighting. They were secretly sabotaging and giving information to the French partisans who were sabotaging the trains. They were resisting the Nazis, but there are some that accuse the SNCF of being culpable for transporting. It's a gray area.

- TS: Well, it is gray because what choice did they have?
- LS: Right, and that's what they say. The Germans came and took over and said, "Okay, we're using your tracks. We're using your locomotives. We're using your facilities to carry out what we want to do, whether it's transporting war materials or soldiers or Jewish civilians or Gypsies to concentration camps. So I contacted the SNCF America. I don't know the exact story. I think they were bidding to build some commuter rail in Maryland, and some Maryland survivors said, "No."
- TS: I saw where they had some in Washington, D.C.
- LS: Yes, around the Washington area.
- TS: But it's Maryland?
- LS: I think so. Someone said, "Wait, why should we award you the contract when your company was part of this machinery that transported my parents, my siblings, myself, maybe, among those deported to the camps?" So SNCF came up with some money that they gave. It was about \$4 million—\$2 million each to France and the U.S. to Holocaust educational initiatives. But it mainly went to the USHMM, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, to big established museums. I had written them and gotten no response.
- TS: Them meaning
- LS: The SNCF America. I'd written to their director, the president in America, and had gotten no response. Then one day out of the blue when I was wondering how I was going to fund this trip, he called me. It was just weeks before I was ready to leave on this trip. He called me and said, "We would like for you to submit a proposal. We get many, many proposals for Holocaust education, but what we like about what you've said so far is that yours is unique. You bring together research and music and aesthetics and art, all together, to accomplish Holocaust education." So they were interested in that because there are not as many people doing that, I guess. So I worked together with people in the College of the Arts Development Office and put together a proposal, sent it to them, and got funding. I got a grant of \$34,000 that would help fund my Holocaust educational activities, specifically for this "Music of Resistance and Survival" project. I was very pleased, and it certainly helped a lot. And it's not only the money that will allow me to travel and to make these presentations, but it's the validation, the recognition from external organizations.
- TS: Well, maybe it opens the door for other possibilities as well.
- LS: That's what I'm hoping. What I have found is when I approach these institutions or they approach me there is great interest in having these events, the combination

- of lectures and concerts. They often can handle the local expenses to hire a hall, hire a piano, do the publicity, and rent space if they need to. But sometimes the biggest expense is bringing me in, the travel expense, especially if it's international travel. So what this grant will allow to happen is to have funding so that I can offer these places, that if they are willing to fund the local part of it, then I can come in at no cost to them.
- TS: Wow, that's a good deal for them and for you.
- LS: Exactly. I'm hoping that will lead to some future concerts. I have several in the pipeline now, at least proposals.
- TS: I was thinking in "Music of Resistance and Survival" your focus is the Holocaust, but that's not very different than what Oral Moses has lectured on with regard to African American music and the spirituals and hidden meanings.
- LS: Absolutely. A student in my course did a paper that examined those parallels of the symbolic nature and the coded meanings of enslaved songs and in songs that were used during the Holocaust. So, yes, there's a lot of parallel about being imprisoned and wanting freedom, wanting dignity, and being marginalized. Sure, there are tremendous parallels. And even beyond that too there are some [professional] conferences that I see going on now. For instance, they'll look at the suppression of music under Stalin and under Hitler, and look at similarities and parallels there.
- TS: It's amazing how many great 20th-century composers and musicians had Jewish heritage. I wonder how far back you can take this. Can you take it all the way back to the Babylonian captivity, for instance? How far back does it go that being part of a holocaust over the years helped to spawn good music?
- LS: Yes. I am aware of it going back to the Renaissance. Of course, it may have happened before that. Jews, as you know, were marginalized in Europe. They were treated as others, and they had a hard time. Then in the Enlightenment, of course, there was some loosening of strictures, especially in the [Habsburg] empire under Emperor Joseph II. There was the Patent of Toleration [1781 for non-Catholic Christians] and [Edict of] Tolerance [1782 for Jews], where they were allowed some freedom of religion and association and of profession. I think at that time Jews began to emerge. There are some like Salamone Rossi [violinist and composer, c. 1570-1630] from earlier that were Jewish, but there were still some hurdles to be accepted. But [after the Enlightenment] there were a lot of Jewish musicians who became very well known, composers and performers. Probably one of the earliest ones that's known after Rossi was Felix Mendelssohn [1809-1847]. His family converted when he was very young [age seven].
- TS: He's of Jewish heritage?

LS: I believe his grandfather, Moses Mendelssohn [1729-1786], was a very well respected scholar. So Jews started to achieve some accomplishments, although there was still persecution and there was still the inability, for instance, of a conductor to really ascend. For instance [Gustav] Mahler [1860-1911] had Jewish background, and he converted to Catholicism. I don't know if he could have been the conductor of the Vienna Philharmonic [1898-1901] or of the New York Metropolitan Opera [1908-1910] being Jewish then. Just like composers who were gay at some point. They couldn't be out, or they could be out, but if they were, then they might not be able to achieve as much professionally. So they chose to hide that part of who they were, so they could achieve a professional level of accomplishment that was similar to what they could achieve if they didn't hide it at those times. So, yes, Jewish people have accomplished a lot.

What's very interesting: The Holocaust in particular had a tremendous impact on the development of music history in the twentieth century. This is the conclusion I arrive at by the end of my lecture on suppressed music during the Nazi era. I'll save you the whole lecture and just give you one of the conclusions, and that is: because of the suppression of music by the Nazis, not only in Germany but through all of occupied Europe, there was a tremendous change in the musical center of the universe. Before the war a lot of the musical centeredness in Europe was in Germany and Austria and in German-speaking countries. With the suppression of music, many composers were killed, especially those famous composers that were in Theresienstadt. But many of those of means fled—composers and conductors and performers who couldn't have accomplished as much had they not left. For instance, [Igor] Stravinsky had to flee Europe. Paul Hindemith fled. Where do they come? The United States.

I saw some figures, and they're not exact, but the majority of musicians who fled Europe came to the U.S. There were about 10 percent or so, some estimates say, that went to England, 10 percent went to Palestine, maybe half fled to the U.S. Some of them went to South America or wherever. So what happened is that the center of the musical universe shifted from Germany and Austria to the U.S. because: who did you have in the U.S. after the war? You have Arnold Schoenberg and Igor Stravinsky, two of most important composers of the twentieth century, living in Los Angeles and Hollywood. You had Paul Hindemith, the famous German composer, teaching at Yale. You have a whole host of Hollywood composers that came over that changed the Hollywood sound. People like Erich Korngold [1897-1957] helped to establish the Hollywood sound, especially after he was invited to work in Hollywood by producer/director Max Reinhardt [1873-1943], who had come earlier from Germany. Max Steiner [1888-1971] was the composer of the film score for *Gone with the Wind*. All these composers helped to establish this big lush orchestration of the Hollywood sound, which has now had resurgence in more recent films. People like John Williams knew their music and studied that music. All of this made a shift of the center of the musical universe from Germany and Austria to the U.S.

- TS: It's amazing, isn't it? And the same thing happened in science, as you had mentioned in your earlier interview as well.
- LS: Yes, exactly, good memory.
- TS: Well, I read it over last night and again today, so it's not so much my memory. But it's obvious how enthusiastic you are about all the things that you do. Have you felt supported by Kennesaw for what you do?
- LS: Yes. Getting the Distinguished Faculty Award for International Achievement in 2015 and a few years back getting this Distinguished Research and Creative Activity Award, getting other grants to help me travel, and my director of the School of Music [Stephen W. Plate] supports what I do, and my dean [of the College of the Arts] supports what I do. At the March 23, 2015, Holocaust Remembrance Concert, the dean, Patricia Poulter, was one of the speakers. It's great that they understand what I'm doing, and they support it, yes.
- TS: You've been here twenty years now. Do you see a change in the culture in twenty years' time, of what we are today compared to what we were in '96?
- LS: Tremendous change. You could speak to that yourself. It's a huge, huge change in terms of the diversity of the campus, the size of the campus, the quantity of different majors and courses and degrees, with all the graduate degrees now especially. The quality of what we do having gone up so much, it is just tremendous what's going on here now and the potential we have.
- TS: What about the Atlanta area and Cobb County and what-have-you? Do you feel that this area is receptive to what you're doing?
- LS: The Atlanta area is very receptive to what I am doing, yes. I haven't tried so much specifically in Cobb County. We did the concert in The Temple in Midtown Atlanta because we wanted to have something that was in the central part of Atlanta that would appeal to in-town audiences that might not come out to KSU. But we've been doing a number of concerts at KSU. We'll be doing one this coming spring. I'll be teaching my course again, the Music and the Holocaust course in the spring term. On March 23, just coincidentally, 2017, that same day two years later we'll be doing a concert here. I don't know the exact title yet, but it's going to be something like "Suppressed Voices" or "Suppressed Songs of the Holocaust" or "Silenced Voices." We're going to present songs. It's going to be an evening of songs, songs that were by composers who were suppressed, and it'll be a combination of classical music and some of the music from the ghettos, the concentration camps, and the partisans. Right now I have Oral Moses singing and Judy Cole is going to accompany. We may bring on some other singers as well.
- TS: Okay, great. Have we left out anything of major significance that you've been doing that you'd like to talk about?

LS: I think that covers most of it. What I have done on all these trips: When I encounter survivors I will interview that survivor and bring that material to the other lectures I do. So my lectures are constantly evolving as I bring in this material. A big project I had this summer—it's not quite as jazzy but it was important—I made a completely new website, and I did that so that I could communicate to the broader public what I'm doing. I now have a page called "Music of Resistance and Survival Project" that details that particular project. I just created in the last week pages for some of my Holocaust Remembrance compositions. So if someone wants to find out about them, they can go to that page. They can see a video, they can see pictures of people who have performed it before, and they can find out something about it. That's one way to try to disseminate my music and my research and my other work through this new website.

TS: We don't have a doctoral program in music, but I'm just wondering if you're a mentor for any of the aspiring scholars that are doing this kind of research.

LS: Not so much this particular kind of research. My teaching at KSU is more in the area of young composers writing works for the concert hall. Now we're actually expanding and connecting with the great programs we have on the Marietta campus in video gaming. The actual name of the program is Computer Game Design and Development, CGDD, and I'm going to be meeting with some of those people, but we've already started some connections where my students are now very interested when they come in, not so much in writing for the concert hall, but in writing for film and video games.

TS: How about that? I hadn't even thought to ask you about your reactions to the consolidation because I don't think they had a music program down there.

LS: Not to speak of. They had a few courses.

TS: But it's amazing how popular that gaming program is down there.

LS: Yes. I just had a student that graduated last December, and she did her capstone project, her final project, by collaborating with two different students. She collaborated with a student in the arts program who was doing some filmmaking. So my student wrote music for the student's film. Then there was a student in the CGDD program who was doing his final project to create a working video game, and she created the music for it. How cool is that?

TS: That's great. Well, I guess I'm out of questions. This again was fascinating, and I'm really impressed by all that you do and really happy that you're at Kennesaw.

LS: Thank you. I'm very glad to be here and glad to have people like you who are pursuing oral history here.

KSU Oral History Series, No. 112
Interview with Laurence E. Sherr
Conducted, edited, and indexed by Thomas A. Scott
Part III – Thursday, 21 February 2019
Location: Music Building, Kennesaw State University

TS: Laurence Sherr is the recipient of Kennesaw State University's Distinguished Professor Award for 2018-2019. It is the highest award on our campus these days and goes to one faculty member who displays excellence in teaching, scholarship, and service, who integrates those three things together, and who has a national or international reputation for excellence. So why don't I just start by asking you, what does winning this award mean to you?

LS: It means a number of things on a number of levels. The recognition of what I have achieved in my work is welcome. It helps to validate what I have done, especially since the work I do is so well matched to the award. The award criteria state, as you just mentioned, excellence in each of those three areas, but they are also very much looking for the integration, the cross-pollination, the connection between them—how one not only connects to the other, but enhances the other. My work is in that vein. If you would like, I can certainly talk about it, but the recognition of that bundled cross-fertilization between these areas of my work helps to validate what I do. It helps to provide recognition among my peers here in the School of Music, and here in the College of the Arts, and I think even more importantly for the College of the Arts, in the University.

The College of the Arts at one time was one of the smallest units. I'm not sure if it still is, but at one time, as you probably remember, the arts were part of Humanities and Social Sciences. Then there was a split [in 1998] where the School of the Arts was a nascent, inchoate unit that got established.¹ We've become a strong unit on campus now. Over the last seven years, three professors from the College of the Arts have won the University Distinguished Professor Award, which I got this past year.² I think it helps to show those in the university, and those in the public sphere, that it is not only the people in the sciences, who are publishing articles or writing textbooks, but it is also people who are doing artistic work that are achieving high levels of recognition, bringing recognition to the University, and contributing to their students, the university, and the community. It says that the Arts are important.

¹ Editor's note: The School of the Arts was elevated into the College of the Arts in 2005.

² The faculty members from the College of the Arts who have won the KSU Distinguished Professor Award are Karen Robinson (2011), Harrison O. Long (2014), and Laurence E. Sherr (2018).

TS: Well, great. Why don't we start talking about some of the things that you've been doing? You have been speaking and your music has been performed all over the world. The last interview I did with you was in July 2016. We discussed what you were doing over in New Zealand, and Australia, and other places. Since our last interview, you have spoken on "Suppressed Music and Art during the Nazi Era" at several places, including the William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum in Atlanta on September 8, 2016. On December 13, 2016, you delivered a lecture accompanied by a live performance in Jerusalem at the Academy of Music and Dance. Maybe we could start with those. What were you up to? How did you get these invitations? Just approach it the way you would like to approach it.

LS: I believe in the last interview we spoke about my Music of Resistance and Survival Project. That is a key focus of my work. It represents an integration of teaching, scholarship, and service. It was launched in 2015. As I mentioned in the last interview, in 2016 I had gone to New Zealand and Australia. There is a cellist at the New Zealand School of Music [Inbal Megiddo] who is originally Israeli. She studied here in the United States at Yale with a very famous cello teacher there, and she is working now at the New Zealand School of Music in Wellington.

I met her at the 2014 conference that I was invited to as one of the keynote speakers. At that time I was in the process of writing a cello sonata, a piece for cello and piano [*Sonata for Cello and Piano—Mir zaynen do!*]. She liked what she heard, and I actually collaborated with her. I said, "Here are some sketches. Can you play these things for me? Let me see how they sound." She said she liked it and, once I finished the piece, I should get it to her. She really liked the piece once I finished it. I think I've already described that piece to you—how it integrates songs from the ghettos, the camps, and especially from the partisans into the fabric of the sonata for cello and piano. In the Music of Resistance and Survival Project what we often do in a concert is to have a singer sing the songs live, and then the cellist and pianist will perform my cello sonata. All this is with my commentary about the creators of the source material before each of the source songs is sung.

Another option that we use for that kind of concert is to have me do a preconcert lecture where I just play recorded examples of the source songs and talk about the creators. Then the cellist and pianist will play my sonata as part of their program, a whole program of mixed chamber works. That last option that I just described is what was happening in New Zealand in 2016 where I reconnected with this cellist. Then we met again in Jerusalem, to get to your question, in December 2016. So there were two different kinds of concerts there. One was a cello recital that she did at a civic chamber music series, and that provided an opportunity for research. That's a tangent I'll go off on in a second, if you like.

TS: Sure.

LS: She had arranged that concert. This is often what happens. I'll be presented or either I'll create an opportunity, or someone else will create an opportunity for me to have a concert or a lecture or a research opportunity. In my application for the University Distinguished Professor Award, I mentioned that as soon as I have one opportunity at a location, I try to find other opportunities. What happened in Jerusalem is a good case in point to illustrate that. She had arranged this chamber music concert where she was playing my piece on this civic chamber music series. I had in Jerusalem established some contacts from previous research there. I utilized those to eventually get a lecture recital at the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance. So on one day she did that civic concert [December 10 at the Eden-Tamir Music Center], and a couple of days later [December 13] I gave a lecture about my Holocaust remembrance music, and particularly about the source songs in the sonata. Then she and the pianist [Jian Liu] came into this seminar room, and they performed the piece for the students and the faculty there. It was that that took me to Jerusalem. While I was there I did research in Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center.

TS: It's a wonderful museum.

LS: Yes. It's a museum, it's an archive, and it's a repository. They have exhibitions, and they have a study center. It is a whole campus. There are lots of different units and buildings. Yes, the museum is wonderful. I was there doing both genealogical research and research on music and the Holocaust. As I talked to you before, the main focus of my research is on Holocaust music.

TS: Was this your own genealogical research or research on other people?

LS: My own, and other people too, not so much genealogical research, but more historical research about creators of music and lyrics during the Holocaust. It was very interesting. When I was in Jerusalem for the civic series that I mentioned, the organizer of it was a man named [Alexander] Alex Tamir. He was a member of a piano duo [with Bracha Eden] for many years that toured internationally. They were on *The Ed Sullivan Show* [in 1958]. He is quite a bit older now [born April 2, 1931]. He is a survivor of the Vilna [Lithuania] Ghetto. That's an area in which I have a lot of interest because my Music of Resistance and Survival Project uses several songs that came out of the Vilna Ghetto. Just before World War II, it was part of Poland. Then it changed hands very quickly. It was part of Poland; then the Russians came in and took it [on September 19, 1939].

Then when they did Operation Barbarossa and invaded the Baltic States, the Germans came in, and they took it [on June 24, 1941]. It was during the German occupation that the Jewish partisans were very active. One of their activities, in addition to fighting against the Germans, was that they used music. Music was a very important part of their identity. And so I take that music, the original songs, and use it in my source material. The man who organized the concert—Alex Tamir's original name was Alexander Wołkowyski. I have a video I've

developed for my interview with him. I showed it to my class just before we met. I finally now have an edited version of that video interview I did with him.

When he was about eleven years old, about 1941 or 1942, in the beginning of the ghetto, he wrote a song. That song is now one of the famous, well-known Holocaust songs. It's called *Shtiler, Shtiler* and means "quiet, quiet." It's a witnessing song to what was going on and the people that were being taken out and shot in the woods. He was a young boy. As he recounts in this video interview I did with him, he was playing the piano. His father gave him a one-stanza poem and said, "If you can, write some music for this." So he wrote some music, and then later other verses were added. Some historical information says that it won a prize in the ghetto. He ended up getting out of the ghetto and surviving. This has now become a famous Holocaust song. What I was able to do through interviewing him was to establish the provenance, the authentic information about the creation of the lyrics. Like I said, I was just showing this to my class before I met with you today.

The historical sources that I had referenced, most of the published historical information, says that the creator of the lyrics was this man named Shmerke Kacerginski. Kacerginski was one of the partisans in the Vilna Ghetto, and he survived. He later collected songs after the Holocaust. He was an authority on this music after the Holocaust. One thing that he did was to visit DP camps, displaced persons camps, after the war, and he collected songs. The songs he collected were published in a number of volumes. The most famous of them is called *Lider fun di getos un lagern*. It's Yiddish. It's similar to German if you notice. It means "songs from the ghettos and camps." He collected these, as I said, in the DP camps, and he published them. So his publication is one of the authoritative sources of information about music from the Holocaust. In his publication he included the song *Shtiler, Shtiler* of this man I'm telling you about that I interviewed. But in his publication, he said that the lyrics were by him, himself.

TS: Oh, really?

LS: Oh, yes. The lyric attribution says music, Alexander Wołkowyski, lyrics Shmerke Kacerginski. I'm sure as a historian you've run into this where someone after a fact states it incorrectly, and then the historians that come after just keep replicating that incorrect information.

TS: Well, I guess I shouldn't ask why he would claim authorship of something he didn't write.

LS: Well, I'll explain in a second what happened, but that is what he told me in this video interview. I had gone in there looking at half a dozen very authoritative websites. For instance, Yad Vashem has a site. It has a display about this song on their site. Again, I just showed this to my class, and on the Yad Vashem site,

which is usually very well-researched, it says, song *Shtiler, Shtiler*, music, Alexander Wołkowyski, lyrics Shmerke Kaczerginski

TS: They took it from his book.

LS: Exactly. What this interview established, what he told me, was that what happened was his father, Noah, gave him this one-verse poem in Polish. He wrote the music to it, and then Kaczerginski came in, translated that first verse into Yiddish, added verses two and three, and then used the same music for verses two and three as for verse one. Most of the sources today say the lyrics are solely by Shmerke Kaczerginski. After I had the interview with Alex Tamir, and he told me his father, Noah Wołkowyski, wrote the first verse, I did some more research, and I found that there are a few sources that say the lyrics are solely by Noah Wołkowyski. Nobody has the correct information, which is, I'll repeat, verse one in Polish by his father, Noah Wołkowyski, and then Shmerke Kaczerginski came in and translated verse one into Yiddish, added verses two and three. So that's what the correct attribution should be. I just told my class, I've got to try now to get this information out to correct the historical record.

TS: Wow. Why did he change his name from Wołkowyski to Tamir?

LS: He told me this. After the war, he got out of Lithuania, or Poland, or wherever it was at the time, and he was able to make it to Palestine. He came to Palestine in 1945 right after the war. He became a musician. He was traveling as a performing pianist. He said he was on a plane. He told me the story. There was somebody on the plane who said, "Wołkowyski? You're an Israeli now. We want you to represent Israel. That's not a very Israeli name. We want you to have a more Israeli name." So he said, "How about Tamir?" Which is, I guess, a more Israeli name. And so he took that name.

TS: That's a great story, and it also is a good illustration of how you're tying teaching, scholarship, and service together.

LS: Right, exactly. I'm guessing that's why I got the award this year because of that very tight integration. I went there for a concert, for creative activity, and I integrated into that scholarship and teaching because I was teaching the students in the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance. Also, by getting this information, I can now provide service to the field. It's just one example of how things are all woven together in my activities.

TS: Are the French railroads still paying for your travels?

LS: SNCF America provided a grant, which I told you about before. What they did with that grant is they donated it to KSU. It was made as a gift to the KSU Foundation for the purpose of supporting my teaching the Holocaust through musical activities. What they liked—the president of SNCF America told me,

“We get lots of grants for Holocaust education, but what you’re doing is unique. You use music as a vehicle to teach about the Holocaust.” When I have this Music of Resistance and Survival concert, what happens is it’s not just simply a combination of historical information and music. It is not even necessarily the synthesis, but it’s how each of them enhances the other.

When people hear the historical information, they see the media that I’m projecting with my slide presentation about these creators. Then they hear their songs, and it enhances the historical information. The appreciation of the music is enhanced by all the historical information. So both of the aspects work together. That is generally what I like to do now, is to have an integrated concert with commentary and music. That’s what I’ve done here for my teaching as well. Every time I teach the Music and the Holocaust course, I stage a concert where there’s that. That’s one of the things that's happened since then. We can talk about that too.

TS: Right. Well, I was just thinking how interdisciplinary your approach is. Getting people to learn history and retain it is always a challenge. But everybody is interested in music. When you can combine those two together, it’s memorable. It’s going to stick with them far better, and maybe we ought to be doing that more in the classroom. I know one professor who can play guitar, and brings a guitar into his classroom, to teach about civil rights through music.

LS: Right. So, anyway, I could talk at great length about any of these activities, but I just chose that Jerusalem one since you had mentioned it because that gave a really good example of how those things were integrated and overlapping.

TS: Well, I’m going to skip over 2017. You may want to bring back something from there, but I want to jump ahead to your doing presentations and performances in Poland in 2018. Given the controversy about Poland and suppression of knowledge about the Holocaust lately, and their problems with Israel, and so on, there have to be some interesting stories about your going over there in March of last year and to Kraków. Why don’t you talk about that a little bit?

LS: I was invited by the Galicia Jewish Museum in Kraków to present two of the three events they staged for the weekend in March that was commemorating the 75th anniversary of the liquidation of the Kraków Ghetto [in 1943]. Coincidentally, it was a couple of years earlier than that, I think, when the ghetto was established, also about the same time of year, following the Nazi occupation. The museum is in an area of the city called Kazimierz. It’s an area where there are synagogues, there are buildings, and there’s a graveyard. There are several synagogues that were there before the Nazi occupation.

TS: But no more?

LS: No, no, they're all still there. What the Nazis did was unlike in other areas. They usually found the quarter of the city where the Jews were living, and then they would bring people from other parts of the city and the surrounding areas. That's what they did in Warsaw, for instance, to establish the Warsaw Ghetto. But they did something very peculiar and different in Kraków. They moved people across the river from Kazimierz to an area called Podgórze, and so that's the area where the Jews had their ghetto. So the buildings in the original Jewish quarter were not destroyed. Now it's an area of a lot of nightlife and restaurants and all in Kraków. There's a lot of activity there.

TS: So other people took over those houses?

LS: Yes, yes, and they were preserved. That's where the museum is.

TS: Well, that's one way to preserve things, I guess.

LS: Right. You and I were talking just before we started the recording about the Schindler factory. The Schindler factory was across the river on the same side as Podgórze, so that the Jews that were in Podgórze who were working there could get there easily rather than having to cross the river. At any rate, they invited me, and I told them I can do a range of things. I had met with them before when I had been to Kraków for both research and for the Jewish festival they have there. What they had on the Friday night was my lecture, the "Suppressed Music and Art during the Nazi Era," that you had mentioned that I had given at the Breman Museum. That's one of the lectures that I've given most frequently, probably in addition to my Music of Resistance and Survival event. I gave that lecture on the Friday evening.

TS: On a Friday evening, part of the Sabbath?

LS: Yes, the anniversary, if I remember correctly fell on the weekend, and...

TS: You had to do it.

LS: Yes. There was just a general audience there for that. Observant Jews obviously wouldn't have been there. Then the next night we gave the Music of Resistance and Survival concert in the museum, and it was a great honor to be there. I worked with Polish musicians. There was a piano and cello duo that performed my sonata [Marek Szlezer (piano) and Jan Kalinowski (cello)], and there was a theater singer [Urszula Makosz] and her husband accompanist, who sang the source songs. So it was a great honor to work with them and to be there for that event.

TS: Did I see that your commentary included a discussion of the creation and liquidation of the ghetto?

- LS: Yes, I wove it into both events. For the Saturday night, when I was talking about the Vilna Ghetto, which is where a lot of the songs I use come from, I said, “There was also a ghetto here in Podgórze.” I had some photos, and I had a very famous song that came out of the Kraków Ghetto. So I talked about that song some.
- TS: Well, of course, the Nazis marched into Poland in 1939. Does the ghetto have a four-year history?
- LS: No, they didn’t start the ghetto right away. [The official start was March 20, 1941]. A lot of times, when the Nazis occupied different countries, they didn’t start the ghettos right away.
- TS: They weren’t that efficient?
- LS: They weren’t that efficient. What they started right a way was the suppression of Jewish musicians and artists and the suppression of Jewish culture. They labeled composers *entartete*, degenerate. They limited what Jews could do with all kinds of rules just like the Nuremberg Laws in Germany. Well, those laws didn’t cover citizens of other countries. They were only laws for Germany. But the rules had the same effect. You couldn’t own a radio. You couldn’t be out past 10:00. You could only shop for groceries between 4:00 and 6:00 p.m., et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. You couldn’t go in a public swimming pool. There couldn’t be any relations between a Jewish person and a non-Jew. I mean, all the range of things that they had enacted in Germany, they then put on the citizens in Poland, in France, in Holland, et cetera, all the countries they occupied. So those restrictions came first, and then eventually the restrictions kept getting more and more. Many of the ghettos were established around 1941, which is when Warsaw Ghetto was established, when the Vilna Ghetto was established, and the Kraków Ghetto was established.
- TS: Is 1943 when the Russians moved in? Were they there that early?
- LS: No. This was when the Nazis were liquidating the ghettos. That’s when the Russians were on the way, and very close. [Soviet troops entered Kraków on January 18, 1945]. Every spring we have Yom Hashoah, the day of the Shoah, the remembering of the Holocaust. It is a commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in April 1943. The Nazis had started mass deportations, and they reduced the Warsaw Ghetto from over four hundred thousand people by deporting people to Treblinka and to other camps. They reduced it down to various levels, down to fifty thousand, thirty-five thousand. And so then the remaining young people said, “Look, they’re just going to kill us all. Let’s take up arms against them.” It was April 19 to May 16, 1943, when the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising occurred. The Nazis put that down by fire, burning the ghetto and destroying the whole ghetto.

Then in 1944, there was an uprising in Warsaw itself among the Polish citizens [August to October, 1944] because, you mentioned the Soviet Army, there's a river [the Vistula River] that runs through Warsaw. It slants from upper left to lower right, from northwest to the southeast. The Soviet Army was on the northeast side of that, on the other side of the river. So the Polish Army thought, "Okay, if we rise up against the Germans, the Soviet Army is right there, and they will come." They didn't. The Soviet Army waited. The Germans put down the Polish uprising and completely destroyed the center of the city. It was almost completely erased. And then the Soviets came across. The destruction of ghettos was part of the Nazi race, genocide plan. Also, I wonder if it wasn't hastened by the advancing armies on all sides, the Russians on one side, and the British and Americans from another.

This is what we try to teach students in the course. We teach them about these important dates in the Holocaust by how they affected musicians, what was happening to musicians at the time. When we talk about the Warsaw Ghetto, or the Vilna Ghetto, we talk about what the musical conditions were because music was very important. It was part of the identity of people trying to preserve their self-identity. It provided hope, it provided solace, it provided escape, and it provided a rallying cry for the partisans. There was even conflict within Jewish groups around music. I just talked about this in my class. The Nazis were, as you know, quite efficient and quite clever in their governing. They used propaganda very effectively. Joseph Goebbels was designated as the Minister of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment.

Another thing they did very well was what we today refer to as "divide and conquer." What they did in the ghettos, and they did this sometimes to an extent in the camps as well, is they established a Jewish governing body. The name for that is Judenrat. For instance, how that manifested in the Vilna Ghetto was that the Judenrat's political aims at the time were to help preserve the people, to give the people in the ghetto a chance to live. Their idea was, "We have to cooperate with the Nazis, so they won't come in the ghetto and kill everyone. We've got to try to save the people in the ghetto." It makes sense.

TS: If it worked.

LS: If it worked. The partisans, the young people who wanted to take up arms, said, "No, you're wrong. No matter what you do, they're going to kill us anyway, so we should take up arms against them." Okay? Now at the time nobody knew which side was right, right?

TS: Right, yes.

LS: So the Judenrat was trying to suppress what the partisans were doing. They didn't want them to smuggle arms in. They didn't want them to have action against the

Germans because if they killed some Germans in a car, then the Germans would come and take people out of the ghetto and kill them.

TS: Well, I'm sure a lot of people were in denial that anybody could be as evil as the Nazis were.

LS: Right. So how that manifested in music was that most people in the Vilna Ghetto experienced music in the theater because they had an active theater. The Judenrat said, "In the theater, no partisan songs allowed; no songs that say we've got to take revenge, we've got to kill the Germans, we've got to rise up and fight, and we can no longer wait." They didn't allow that. They censored that Jewish music in the theaters. The partisans had a whole different kind of music that was wanting to cause people to rise up and join together and fight. Here we see music representing societal structure and representing political and historical forces.

TS: Wow. What better way to bring this alive to people that are under the age of twenty or whatever today, than to see what was going on through the lives of real people that were impacted by all this and were making the music.

LS: Exactly. So you skipped over 2017. Can I mention one 2017 event?

TS: Sure, sure, you sure can.

LS: Let me just give you a little explanation. I call my course Music and the Holocaust. That is what it was originally called for the first number of times I taught it after 2010. Over the last few years it has been cross-listed with the Music Department and the Interdisciplinary Studies Department, so the full title of the course is MUSI 3316 Music and the Holocaust, PAX (Peace Studies) 3780 Trends in Peace Studies. So it is cross-listed as I said across both departments.

TS: Trends in Peace Studies is a generic I assume, where you could throw in anything.

LS: Right. They have been using it as a course. I have students that are in Integrative Studies in the Interdisciplinary Studies Department. What I do every time I teach this course is to produce a concert. In 2017, I produced a concert called *Songs Not Silenced: Music Forbidden in the Holocaust*. I used the same approach, which I talked about in my Music of Resistance and Survival concert. I talked about the creators and songs of various composers, and then we had singers sing them. We had my colleagues, Jana Young soprano, Oral [L.] Moses, bass-baritone, singing the songs, and then Judy Cole was playing the piano. We gave that concert where I had the big screen up in Morgan Hall in Bailey Performance Center. I projected images and talked about each of these creators and the historical and political circumstances surrounding their creation of the songs. And we hear the songs. What AIB TV did [Atlanta Interfaith Broadcasters] is they took the footage and they made an hour-long TV special that is still available

online, which has an hour worth of excerpts from the concert that was much longer than that.

The reason I mention that in 2017 is, as I said, I'm teaching the course now. So on March 26, 2019, we're going to do another concert, again, here in the Bailey Performance Center. This time we're using student groups, so it's with a student class that's playing chamber music. They're playing music that was suppressed during the Holocaust, written by both Jewish composers and non-Jewish composers, but composers whose music was prevented from public hearing by the Nazis.

TS: I was thinking while you were talking that it makes perfect sense to put it with peace studies because I know your goal is to promote tolerance.

LS: Absolutely!

TS: On the other hand, those partisans would say that the only way to establish peace was to take up arms and fight the Nazis.

LS: Yes. We do want students to learn, as I tell them, to build a bridge rather than a wall, to learn how to cooperate with different people. We even talk about contemporary politics some.

TS: I can see some parallels.

LS: Yes, indeed. I frame it as not necessarily right and left, in our country Democrat and Republican, but as some other people have framed it, as a consideration of different perspectives from those labeled populists and those labeled globalists. I tell the students right out, "I'm putting my cards on the table. I'm a globalist." Because this course was created back in our former QEP, Quality Enhancement Program. It was a QEP program, and it was about global learning. So I created this as a global learning course. The KSU administration said, "We want to teach students to be good global citizens, to learn to interact with people from different countries, religions, races, ages, economic statuses, social networks, sexual orientations, whatever, however the ways we are that we differentiate ourselves. We want our students to be successful in a globally connected world." I tell the students, "That's why this course was created, and that's where I am. I definitely believe in being a globalist because I think that's going to help you in your job prospects when you go out into the world."

TS: I just wondered if you have any opinions on the controversy now that is going on in Poland about the anti-defamation law that criminalizes speech that blames Poland for Nazi atrocities in Poland during World War II.

LS: That law that came into being through the Polish Parliament, and had, as I remember, only just been instated when I was there in 2018.

- TS: Did you have any problem with it?
- LS: I did not have any problem with it. There was a lot of outcry in Israel and in the press that it was a suppression of free speech and that it was a distortion of history. But the Polish government at that time had gone to—I'll use the terminology I just used—more of the populist or nationalist perspective. They were trying to protect their reputation and not have anyone say anything bad about Poland. What they did object to, and I understand, they objected to the terminology “Polish concentration camp.” They didn't want anyone to say those words.
- TS: They wanted to say Nazi concentration camp?
- LS: Yes, Nazi or German Nazi, or German Reich concentration camp. The camps were in Poland, but they weren't Polish concentration camps.
- TS: Okay, that's fair.
- LS: Yes, that's fair. That was one of the rules, and so I had no problem with that. There was another rule, which talked about if any Poles were responsible for Jewish deaths. I don't remember the exact law, but it was something along that line. And there, I mean, Poland has a long history of anti-Semitism, and there were plenty of Poles who suffered, and there were plenty of Poles who collaborated. It's not an easy or simple situation. It's a complex situation.
- TS: Just don't paint everybody with the same brush.
- LS: Right. It's a myriad of different activities. More Jews died in Poland, I believe, than in any other country in World War II because Poland had the highest Jewish population. I've heard different figures 3, 3.3, 3.5 million Jews before the war, and 90 percent of them lost their lives. Only 10 percent survived. Even after the war, the Polish anti-Semitism and conditions were so bad that only 10 percent of that number are still in Poland. The population was quite decimated. In my comments I was talking about history. I didn't have any problems. No one said anything to me. I gave my lectures, and I was mainly talking about German oppression. What I was talking about with the ghettos didn't get so much into the Polish activities and the Poles who carried out pogroms right after the war, for instance, or during the war.
- TS: Okay. Just this year you've had a big trip to Italy and to San Marino. What were you were doing over there? Of course, Italy was the country of Mussolini during World War II, but there was a lot of resistance to Mussolini too.
- LS: Yes. The Italians whom I interacted with made sure I knew about that because of the nature of my work. I was invited for International Holocaust Remembrance Day. This is another annual commemoration; it was designated by the United

Nations. It is January 27 each year to commemorate the liberation of Auschwitz by the Russian army. In the U.S. it doesn't seem that we celebrate International Holocaust Remembrance Day so much in January. We more do Yom Hashoah, which is April or May usually [27th of Nisan] to commemorate the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. But this is an international day, and it's commemorated in many other countries. I was invited for the national day of commemoration in the Republic of San Marino.

TS: Who invited you?

LS: The person who invited me teaches at the Conservatory of San Marino. He's an Italian composer who lives and works in San Marino. I had met him at an international festival in the Czech Republic. He knew about my work, and this Music of Resistance and Survival event was a good match for the national day of commemoration. The concert actually took place on January 26, the day before. That's when we got the theater, and we could stage the event. In connection with that I was able to have a couple of other events, so I gave my lecture on "Suppressed Music and Art during the Nazi Era" at a speaking series in Bologna because that's where I was staying. Then I had a master class in composition ["Composition Styles in the Work of Laurence Sherr"] at the University of Cesena [Bruno Maderna Conservatory of Music, Cesena, Italy]. So that was something different that wasn't my Holocaust work. I was primarily in Italy for the purpose of this Music of Resistance and Survival event in the Republic of San Marino. But I was able to add on another Holocaust music event, the lecture on "Suppressed Music and Art during the Nazi Era," and another event that wasn't about my Holocaust music, but it was about my concert hall works.

TS: I saw that you did a talk on "An Introduction to Klezmer and Gypsy Music."

LS: That's the lecture that has to do with Jewish music, which I gave in Bologna, and then in Cesena I gave the master class about the styles in my compositional works. It was again something where I was able to piggyback one event on another because I have this range of things that I can offer when I go some place.

TS: Well, you had a compact week it looks like. What do you do about your classes when you go off to these places? Do you have to cancel some classes?

LS: I almost never miss a class. When I've gone off for tours before, if it's a smaller number of students, especially if it's all music students, I can get them to meet an extra time in advance, so we have the exposure. For the time I was gone to Italy and San Marino in January, that's when I scheduled the visit to our Museum of History and Holocaust Education, and also a guest presentation on doing research for their final project.

TS: Well, good for you! You've taken care of it then.

LS: Indeed.

TS: Well, you've got a whole bunch of things coming up. There's a performance in the Bailey Performance Center on March 26.

LS: Right, that's what I spoke about. That's going to be called "Suppressed Music of the Holocaust," and that's the one I spoke about with our chamber groups playing music by various composers who were suppressed. One of those composers is Viktor Ullmann, who was a Czech composer who was incarcerated in the Terezín or Theresienstadt Camp and created music there. It was one of his string quartets that he wrote while he was in the camp.

TS: Was that the "model camp"?

LS: That's the model camp. You know your history well. Yes, it's in the northwest Czech Republic. The Germans used it for propaganda purposes. He was there, but he was deported in the fall of 1944 to Auschwitz, and gassed [October 18, 1944], and did not survive. So we do one work by him. Also related to Auschwitz, we're doing a work by a composer named Szymon Laks, who was a violinist and conductor in one of the orchestras in Auschwitz. He was actually in Birkenau in the men's camp there, and he survived. He wrote a string quartet in 1945 right after the war, and we're going to perform at least one movement from that. We've got a piano trio by Mieczysław Weinberg, who escaped from Poland to Russia and was a friend and colleague of [Dmitri] Shostakovich. So those are some of the works that we have on the program. We have others as well. That's coming up, and I'll be doing a presentation for that.

TS: Fantastic! It must be rewarding to know that your compositions are being performed all over the world all the time as well.

LS: Yes, it is very gratifying. This cellist in New Zealand who I have been working with [Inbal Megiddo]—I just learned from her that she performed a movement from my cello sonata in Hong Kong this past fall. I hadn't known about that, so that was exciting. I'm going to go to New Zealand this summer. As you know, the University Distinguished Professor Award came with a cash prize. I'm going to use that to help fund a project that I'm going to undertake to aid in the archiving of my compositional work. What I'm planning to do over the coming years is to produce two CDs, one of my Holocaust Remembrance music, and another of my chamber music. In late July, I'll be going to Wellington, New Zealand, and I'm going to be working with faculty members at the New Zealand School of Music who I have met before. So this cellist and pianist [Jian Liu] who have performed my cello sonata now in New Zealand, China, and Israel are going to have a concert there of my Holocaust Remembrance works.

It will be a whole concert of my works along with my commentary like I told you. I'll do the commentary in the concert. Then immediately after the concert we will

use the performance hall there and make recordings of the same four works for an eventual CD release. It's going to be my *Sonata for Cello and Piano—Mirzaynen do!* Then there's a composition called *Flame Language* on poetry of Holocaust survivor, and Nobel Laureate, Nelly Sachs for mezzo-soprano, clarinet, cello, piano, and percussion that we'll record. I have a solo cello piece. That same cellist will do it. Then I have a new short cello and clarinet duo, which was just premiered at a concert at the Breman Museum by musicians from the Atlanta Symphony this past December. They'll also perform and record that. So those four pieces will be four of the five or six eventual pieces on that first CD to be released.

TS: Wow! I was doing my math. Since this is 2019, we're seventy-four years from the liberation of the concentration camps, the end of the war, which is to say that Holocaust survivors have to be at least in their 80s today. But you've probably still got another decade or so that you might be able to interview some of them.

LS: Yes, most of the people who were at teenage years at that time would have to have been born in the late 1920s or early 1930s. There are not as many of those people around anymore. Those who were youngsters, who were, say, born in 1935 or 1940, are still around, and I know some of them. But their memories are less. If you were a five-year-old child in 1945, at least my experience of the ones I've talked to, you don't remember quite as much from that time.

TS: Do you think you've gotten as much as you're going to get from your interviews?

LS: Oh, no, I'm going to still try. Tom, I'll tell you, it's one of my great regrets that I don't have enough time to do more now. The benefit of what I do is that this cross-pollination, which I talked about in my work, is very enriching. It's very gratifying. It keeps me completely occupied. The detriment is that I don't have enough time to full-time pursue being a composer because I want to spend part of my time doing Holocaust music research. I want to spend part of my time mounting and producing concerts. I want to spend part of my time archiving. And even among the Holocaust music research, do I work in archives? Do I try to pursue and do as many interviews of survivors as I can? I'm doing both traditional archival and published research history as well as fieldwork through interviews, which I'm sure you're familiar with doing both of those kinds of things. It is one of the great challenges in my life. There is not enough time to pursue all of that with the same rigor and passion that I would like to. There are simply not enough hours in the day.

TS: I can understand that. We're an R2 [Research 2] at Kennesaw.

LS: Recently.

TS: Recently, we're calling ourselves an R2. We are not an R1. Is Kennesaw a good fit for you, maybe I should ask?

LS: Yes, Kennesaw State University has provided me opportunities over the years to grow. So, along with the institution's growing emphasis on scholarship, I have been growing as well. When I started out, like most people, I was getting local and regional interest in my work. It built up to national, and now, thankfully, I have a lot of international interest in my work. This is now what is expected of faculty in an R2, and so the parallel between my growth and the university's growth was fortuitous and fortunate. The support that I've gotten has been incredible with the various awards that I've won along the way, each of them providing some recognition and usually some funding to then help me carry out my work. I think you know all of the awards that I've gotten. I've gotten two Foundation Awards, I've gotten the 2012 Distinguished Research and Creative Activity Award from KSU, I got the 2015 Distinguished Faculty Award for International Achievement, and I've gotten the Faculty Enhancement Leave and some other CETL grants.

TS: We covered some of them in previous interviews. You've received a lot of awards.

LS: Right, and that has helped me to carry out my work. A very important award I got is not one that is still here. But you may remember back in, I think it was about 2010, there was something called the Holder Award, which I received when I was just starting my Music and the Holocaust course. At that time I was basing it mostly on published material that was in our library or the libraries online, but that award gives me funding that allowed me to go overseas to work in archives overseas and bring back original source material, documents that could enrich the teaching in that course.

TS: Well, I guess we should say we ought to thank [former KSU Foundation chairman Thomas M.] Tommy Holder for making these awards so generous, especially the Distinguished Professor Award.

LS: Right. I wish that they had been able to continue the Holder Award. It went away after that time. Anyway, I think that it is a good fit for me at Kennesaw. One reason I mentioned the awards is not to be self-aggrandizing, but to be able to make a case to my director of the School of Music because, as you know, our legacy and our continued focus is on teaching. We have a long and storied history being an institution of teaching.

TS: It sounds to me that you are still excited about going into a classroom.

LS: I am, but if I were required to do the kind of teaching that I did when I first started, the four-four model, four courses per semester, that would not allow enough time to do the research.

TS: No way. How many courses are you teaching now?

- LS: It varies, but I teach two courses per semester, plus I do a lot of administrative work. I have a lot of supervisory work that I do. I'm the coordinator of the theory-history area. I supervise our music technology lab and hire and supervise the students that work in there. I serve on various committees. For instance, I'm chairing the study committee to prepare a master's degree.
- TS: With all your research, performances, lectures, and committee work, a two-two is still a heavy load.
- LS: Yes, it still keeps me plenty busy. It's not always exactly two-two. It depends on how many students I have. I have always one classroom course per semester, and then I have studio students, for composition. Each student that you meet one-on-one counts as a part of course load. Sometimes I'll have more students than will equal a single course load, so I just have to deal with however many students we have. So, anyway, the reason I mentioned the awards is it allows me to make a case to the administration, "Look, I'm out there. I'm doing this research. I'm getting this international recognition. I'm getting Kennesaw's name out in lots of publicity." It allows me to say, "A four-four load for me wouldn't allow me to do that." It provides some justification because there are some chairs that just want to get the courses covered, and want you to teach. It's allowed me to make a case that, "Please allow me some time to do the research, so that I can accomplish these things."
- TS: Sure. One thing I wanted to ask you about teaching is that you were doing study guides for teachers on teaching Music of the Holocaust. Is that what they were?
- LS: There have been a number of things that we have done. For the Music of Resistance and Survival concert, I created a student version of that, which we have given. When we did the 2015 concert that I mentioned in connection with my class—that was done at The Temple [in Atlanta], and we did two concerts that day. In addition to the evening concert we did a daytime concert for teenagers. About eleven to eighteen was the age range. I've given that also in New Zealand, but since then I did a presentation for even younger children at a school in New Zealand. So I want to reach people of all ages. I worked with the [KSU] Museum of History and Holocaust Education, Catherine [M.] Lewis and the people that she supervises, and we did create a teacher's guide for grades five through twelve to teach about the Holocaust through music. There's an electronic version of that on my Music of Resistance and Survival page, along with at least half a dozen other teaching guides that various states and organizations have developed.
- TS: Well, I know you're 66-years-old. What are your long-range plans? Are you going to keep doing this for as long as you can or what?
- LS: I don't have an exact date in mind, but I want to do this another five or six years at least. I'm in my 24th year teaching here, 22nd full-time because I was adjunct at

first. I think I want to get to somewhere between 25 and 30 years—that would be good. I enjoy the teaching I do, and I enjoy working with students. I enjoy the research work I do. As you know, there are lots of expectations for professors now, reports and committee work, and such like that. That's all part of it. That's what one has to do as well. I have no immediate plans for retirement. I'm going to keep working for, like I say, five or six years more, and we'll see after that. Maybe after that I'll do what some of my colleagues have done, which is they don't immediately go into full retirement. They'll go to an adjunct position and teach lesser number of courses and still stay connected with the university for some few years.

TS: Great! Well, is there anything else that we should have talked about today?

LS: I have another international trip this coming summer. I have a concert of a guitar piece of mine [*Blue Ridge Frescos*] in Paris in June. I am going to go there for that concert [on June 2 at the American Cathedral in Paris]. And then I'm going to take that guitarist [Romain Petiot] who is playing my piece really well. He sent a video from his performance at a music performance in the Czech Republic last summer to me, and it was a really strong performance. So I'm going to go to Paris and go into a recording studio with him after that and use that recording for the eventual CD of my chamber music. I got invited to that Czech festival again in mid-summer, but I simply can't do everything. I had to decline that one.

TS: That's too bad.

LS: There are, hopefully, some other opportunities coming up. I'm really looking forward to releasing this CD. For my trip to New Zealand this summer I'm now starting to try to piggyback and get other concerts and other lectures. I'm sure other things will be announced as we get closer to that.

TS: I think your ancestors who ended up in concentration camps would be very proud of you.

LS: I hope that it's some healing to them and to those who suffered, that this work I do can help people to remember. I think it's important to remember, so that we can not only know what happened in the past, but to be aware of any parallels or situations in our own lives and in our own countries and histories that may be something we want to be on the lookout for.

TS: Fantastic! We'll end it at that point.

LS: Okay.

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