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Joseph Gurt, October 3, 2019

Matt Jones
Eastern Michigan University

Luis Peña
Eastern Michigan University

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Oral History Interview with Joseph Gurt (JG)

Interview conducted by Historic Preservation graduate students Matt Jones (MJ) and Luis Pena (LP) on Thursday October 3rd 2019.

Transcribed by Grace Pare

MJ: It is Thursday October 3rd 2019. This is Historic Preservation graduate student Matt Jones along with fellow Historic Preservation graduate student Luis Pena. Today we are in the Ann Arbor home of Dr. Joseph Gurt, professor of music at Eastern Michigan University from 1967 until his retirement in 2000. During his time at EMU, Gurt was renowned as a teacher with students coming from all over the world to study under him and also as a concert pianist performing in the U.S, Israel, Australia, Taiwan, Hong Kong and on stages from Carnegie Hall to Lincoln Center.

JG: Yeah, in that complex in Lincoln Center. Lincoln Center Library. By the way, I don't have a doctorate. Sorry about that.

MJ: No, we'll take care of it. Alright. Gurt received Emeritus status when he retired in 2000. Thanks for allowing us to come out.

JG: My pleasure.

MJ: Well, we like to start out way back in the beginning. Can you tell us about your upbringing? Just where and when you were born? Who your parents were?

JG: Okay! Actually many years ago I was born in Poland. It was in 1933 and when I was 4 years old my family moved to Australia where I grew up and I went to High School and a couple of years of University before I came to Julliard School where I graduated in 1959 and then between 1961 and '63 we were in Israel for two years. At that time one of the things I did was I was a pianist for the Habima Theatre which is Israel's national theatre

in which we did I think the first big musical in Israel it was called "Irma la Douce" and I played in that show for over a year and then we came back to the States and soon after that I came to EMU. I came as assistant professor and it was quite a small music department at that time. It grew a lot in the next few years and it was under Howard Rarig who was the department head. He stayed for three years then he went on to USC where he became head of the music school. My next department head was James Hause, who was department head almost until I retired. That was my story at Eastern. I was in some chamber music and my very first trio was called the Delphi Trio or something like that. The trio lasted for a couple of years and then we disbanded. Much later I joined the Alexander Trio with two other members, who are still at EMU. We continued playing after my retirement and we still see each other socially.

MJ: Can I jump in for one second?

JG: Sure you can!

MJ: Let me go back...

JG: Oh, go back alright.

MJ: We have questions about a lot of those groups you played with, but what did your parents do for a living in Poland?

JG: Scraped along. Very difficult society. But in Australia my father worked as a paper and twine merchant. He worked for somebody else for quite a few years, eventually starting his own business, which was reasonably successful. What's the next question?

MJ: What about your mother?

JG: In those days, mothers were basically home, you know, looking after the children. A very important job, doesn't get paid though. Of the two parents, my mother was the more musical one and I guess I inherited whatever talent I have mainly from her.

MJ: Was musician an acceptable career to both your mother and father for you?

JG: Yes. They encouraged me, you know. I started poking around at the piano at an early age and they supported me and as it happened, a world famous pianist called Ignaz Friedman was stuck in Australia during the second World War and we moved from Melbourne to Sydney where he lived and I studied with him for four years. It was sort of amazing. That's called dedication on the part of my parents. Then we came back to Melbourne and I went to high school there, graduating in 1950.

MJ: What kinds of things did you learn from him? From Friedman?

JG: Mainly, interpretation. I was a kid, I was eight and a half when I first studied with him and we just did lots and lots of repertoire. The first week I learned the notes, the second week I memorized and that's how it was. We did a lot of music that way and he gave me lots of experience learning fast. Much of what he did I have sort of forgotten, at least at the conscious level. That I know much of it is still there somewhere and he taught me how to analyze music too as well as to play. Then after I stopped studying with him and went back to Melbourne, I think my parents had to go because of financial reasons. Then I studied with another teacher who was very good. His name was Roy Shepard. He was a student of Alfred Cortot, a very famous French pianist pre-second World War and I stayed with him, actually, until I left to go to America in 1953.

MJ: I'm interested when you say interpretation the first thing I think of are the recordings that I've heard you play on, and there are several in our collection in the Archives just from the late '60's and early 70's. It's you playing with, I think his name is Armand Abramson and I think Edward Szabo is that another one?

JG: That's right and also Alfio Pignotti was the violinist in my first trio.

MJ: Okay.

JG: Pignotti and then Szabo and me, we were a trio for a while. Several years.

MJ: The reason I think about it is that listening to those recordings, I was never formally trained as a musician, but interpretation puts in mind the way I hear you playing on those

recordings, it seems like it's so much more about tonality and the emotion behind the piece and not so much about, I mean you obviously have technical skills that I could never dream of, but that stands out. Is that what you mean by interpretation? The ability to sort of inhabit....

JG: Well, ultimately it does. But more specifically my teachers showed me what the main themes were and also important counter themes and how to meld it all together and having to do with the structure also, which he showed me, you know. It's not just a matter of playing notes. You've got to know what the notes mean and some of it can be described verbally but some of it is just in the musical language and he was a marvelous, Friedman was a marvelous pianist and sometimes he played a little bit for me and I said mmmm! I gradually got better as I went along, you know.

MJ: Are there pianists who are at that level who don't have those interpretation skills?

JG: Everybody interprets a little bit differently. We're all different humans and we all feel a little bit different. If you get four interpretations, four good pianists playing the same piece, each of them will sound a little different because each one will want to bring out a different aspect of it and at that level it's just a matter of taste.

LP: Do you think some of the interpretation too transcended phrasing and period appropriate interpretations of the music? Do you think it was an emotional level as well?

JG: Well, all art speaks emotionally as well as physically, you know, technically. We all have different approaches but of course it's all recognizable and the differences aren't that great they're very subtle and you know as I said which themes you want to bring out, what the relationship of the structure is, within a structure, that kind of thing. As one of my teachers said, the score is the blueprint you the artist has to make something of it.

MJ: Okay, okay. Do you remember some of your first performances? I guess the... go ahead.

JG: I don't remember. You're talking about high school or...?

MJ: Sure. Do you remember how you learned to handle nerves?

JG: Nerves. In those days naturally one gets a little excited when you're playing, but I never really suffered from excessive nervousness. I was just lucky. Maybe I didn't realize what I was doing and then through my life, you know when you go on stage you sort of...

MJ: Adrenaline?

JG: Yeah, but if you understand what you're doing you can control your nervousness and you just, after a while you just get into the music and it just goes.

MJ: Yeah, okay. That makes sense. Well I read in an interview with you that you said that somebody asked you about what happens if you forget something on stage and you said that you forget parts on stage all the time but that you're just able to just improvise your way out of them and I can't fathom being on stage with a lot of people in the audience and improvising on a classical piece.

JG: The thing is, my memory is pretty reliable. When I occasionally I play wrong notes, I guess we all do that, but real memory lapses are pretty rare. When they happen you just have to fake your way out. You'd better or else you stop and get the music or something but that rarely, rarely, rarely happens among artists, among many artists. If it does they fake or improvise their way out of it and find the path and then it goes along.

MJ: Along with that quote was a review of a concert on the EMU campus but I can't remember which one and I liked the quote it was about your playing and it was "imagine someone typing 200 words per minute on a large black and white wooden typewriter. Instead of words coming out, beautiful and bright music fills the emptiness of space. Gurt was always in complete control."

JG: Somebody else said that (laughing). Well it was very nice. Always in complete control is a bit of an exaggeration but you wouldn't want to go out on stage unless you were fairly certain of what you were doing and that helped me, you know.

MJ: Alright. Well, you were the first member of your family to go to Julliard and your son came after you.

JG: That's right.

MJ: Tell me about getting into Julliard. Was that the first time you had come to the States?

JG: Yes.

MJ: Okay. Did you have any first impressions of the States or of Julliard?

JG: Yes. I went by boat. It was way before airplanes made it big. I went inside the harbor and, well you see I saw the Statue of Liberty and then I saw those great big skyscrapers and I said wow!

MJ: Were you by yourself?

JG: Yes. I was by myself. Yes, but I was lucky enough I had an aunt and uncle who were living in New York and I stayed with them for quite a while and they were sort of like parents. The aunt several years earlier had visited us in Australia and stayed a while. So I knew her and we hit it off. So I commuted about almost an hour each way to the Juilliard School, but it was like being at home almost.

MJ: What about it was like being at home?

JG: The whole family.

MJ: Oh, I see. Okay. So what about Juilliard? What were your first impressions of that? Were you nervous to walk into that place?

JG: I was too dumb to be very nervous. I just played and it went reasonably well. I got in. But the quality of the students was sort of something else. But I found people at my level and I found some friends, you know.

MJ: Okay. What year did you come?

JG: 1953 and I finally got out with my Master's degree in 1959. In those days it was the terminal degree.

MJ: Okay, okay. What was the competition like there? Was it intense competition?

JG: Yes. Yes, and I was somewhere in the middle, I wasn't one of the top.

MJ: I see. Did you know you wanted to be a teacher then?

JG: Well, I think so. I knew that I wouldn't be at the top level concertizing all the time and so being a teacher was the only career choice. Since my teachers were also performers so I had role models to follow. I was also very lucky in that after my Juilliard years, I found a private teacher who knew exactly how to guide me and although I graduated from the Juilliard School I had some areas where I wasn't secure technically and she cleaned them up for me. As a result I became a better teacher and I also enjoyed teaching. It's said that some teachers wish they were playing the piano instead of teaching. I wasn't one of them. I enjoyed teaching for its own sake as well and playing the piano. That combination which I enjoyed is basically my story.

MJ: Okay, okay. Do you think that that kind of competition, that level of competition among students, helps students?

JG: It helps some and it sort of discourages others. Possibly that's the way things are, but you know, some people just say forget it and leave the profession.

MJ: Okay. Did you encourage that when you were teaching at Eastern?

JG: I encouraged...my approach was I'd take each student where they are, you know, the level at which they reach me and I try to work with that student to make that student better and most students have appreciated that.

MJ: Yeah, I've read a few articles so I'm going to quote you a little bit while we're here but another thing I read was....

JG: I'll deny I said that but go ahead (laughing)

MJ: When you said that, I think the quote was, this won't be exact but you said you described your love of teaching students whether they have a lot of talent or a little talent...

JG: That's true. That's true.

MJ: ...and that teaching was never a vehicle for your own success and that you did it for the students.

JG: Well that's what it's about, isn't it?

MJ: Do you see a lot of music, piano teachers that do the opposite? How does a teacher use their students to achieve their own playing success?

JG: I don't think that way and to ask me that question doesn't really mean anything to me because I see it, I see myself as a vehicle for the student to improve and my students recognized that I have this in mind and that's why, you know, I have a relationship with those students very often years and years after they no longer study with me.

MJ: Okay, alright. Well did you have any prior affiliation with EMU before you got here?

JG: Nope.

MJ: No?

JG: It was in the Juilliard Placement Bureau. The person there told me there was an opening at the Juilliard School and I applied and they told me to audition and one of the teachers at EMU, his name was Tom Hardison, he must have been a student at the Juilliard when I was a student because he sort of knew me. I don't have a very good memory of those things, but he was good. He was good, he played really well. A couple of years after I got there he retired, he was very young, and took an entirely different step in life. He became a Buddhist monk, but I always remember him as a role model of sorts as I was becoming a teacher at Juilliard.

MJ: Okay. So who was your contact at Eastern? Why did you choose it?

JG: It was in the Placement Bureau...

LP: Did they have a bulletin that they posted of opportunities for the students? At Juilliard?

JG: A bulletin, yes. There's also an office.

LP: Oh, okay.

JG: And they told me.... I asked them when I was graduating to be on the lookout for jobs and they did and I got that one.

MJ: Okay, and you said the Department head was who?

JG: Howard Rarig.

MJ: Howard Rarig?

JG: Rarig. I think. And there was Tom Hardison there was also Herschel _Pyle_____ who was in class piano and he was there for many, many years. There was also Emily Lowe who was a voice teacher. She had a large role I think in hiring me. I'm just guessing but I think so.

MJ: Okay, okay. Where was the Music Department housed at that time?

JG: Alexander. The old Alexander I think it's been torn down or something. It was the corner of Perrin_____ and Cross.

MJ: Okay, okay. What were those working conditions like in there? Did they have enough instruments? What was it like?

JG: Well, don't forget it was a small department at that time and they had enough for a small department because as it grew they had to buy all kinds of equipment. In those days there wasn't a shortage of money. You can't imagine that these days. I know neither can I, but there was money and they used it to buy pianos and all kinds of equipment.

LP: Do you remember what kind of pianos they had at Eastern when you arrived?

JG: Well they had a Steinway Grand of course in Pease Auditorium and I think they had Grands, smaller Grands, in the teaching studios for pianists. I normally taught on a Grand I know the other Tom Hardison taught on a Grand also and not necessarily a Steinway Grand but later on, many years later, they decided to become an all-Steinway school which I think is marvelous.

MJ: Well do you have any first impressions of the Music Department when you showed up? Was it something....

JG: I had nothing to compare it with. That's the first time I had auditioned at a University so I arrived sort of late in the morning. I flew from New York and I did a bit of work in the studio with Emily Lowe because part of my assignment was to be an accompanist and so I accompanied one of her students and then we had lunch and I was hungry so I had a good lunch and later on Emily Lowe said one of the reasons she was in favor of hiring me was because I wasn't so nervous that I skipped lunch or anything. I didn't know I was supposed to.

MJ: Have you ever been nervous?

JG: Well, not desperately nervous, you know. I don't suffer from nerves. Naturally, you know, adrenaline runs and it did on that day, but I actually had some music prepared and I know that at least one of the pieces was very much liked by the faculty and that's the reason I guess why they hired me.

MJ: So when you got there you had been hired already?

JG: Oh, no.

MJ: Oh, you were just going for your interview?

JG: Yes!

MJ: Wow and you had to sit down and audition in front of....

JG: Yeah, I had to play. In the morning I played in this one studio with a voice and I had to read music and all that kind of stuff. Then we had lunch. Then I played solo for about half an hour, 45 minutes something like that and then I was driven in car around Ypsilanti also they took me to Ann Arbor, the music school at U of M, you know just to acquaint me with....And I had just come back from working with a cellist in Quebec, Canada and I was talking about them. Must have impressed the people I guess but I was basically being my normal self. Trying to put my best foot forward of course but you know. So, anyway they hired me and they gave me tenure and they promoted me and all that. They finally let me retire in 2000.

MJ: Okay, well do you have any idea how the music department at Eastern was perceived by other schools? Where it fit in?

JG: It was a small department. There were only two piano teachers at that time, me and Tom Hardison. Gradually it grew. They hired a couple of years after me a very good pianist Dady Mehta who retired a couple of years after me and still performs. Then they hired another person, Garik Pedersen, also a fine pianist. In other words the faculty grew....what was your original question?

MJ: Just how the department....

JG: Ah, yes how it was seen. Well, Eastern always had a good reputation as a teacher training college and it still does, but some more than that and I think it has a good reputation among similarly sized schools. I mean, obviously not as good as, not as advanced as the U of M because that is a doctoral program and all that kind of stuff and it's well known, it's famous, so the people who can get into it usually, not always but usually do. But as our reputation grew, sometimes students made the other choice and came to us and not only in piano but also in organ and I don't know other instruments, you know. But we had a good reputation and if we hadn't been seven miles from U of M we would have had a better reputation.

MJ: That comes up a lot in a lot of our interviews. Just the seven miles from U of M. What if, you know, what if we weren't seven miles.

JG: Face reality. We are. But we still did well, you know.

MJ: Do you think that students coming to the Eastern music department could find a similar caliber of instruction as they could at somewhere like University of Michigan?

JG: Probably different. I think at Eastern the teachers are really interested in teaching. Some of the teachers, I don't want to....at the U of M, those who have careers of their own and, maybe, I don't want to say, you know, what I'm going to say.....

MJ: Alright, well you've been in a lot of faculty ensembles. Was that required?

JG: No, it's not required. Not everybody who has been around a while is interested in performing. Right now I think the faculty at Eastern is really excellent. There are a couple of excellent pianists but being in a faculty ensemble, unless you're hired for that, which I don't think is the case and it wasn't the case before, is something that we wanted to do ourselves because there is an awful lot of repertoire for a piano trio and we just did it and it's also good recruiting, you know, we go to little places, play, and some of the students say hey they're good maybe I'll go there. That's the idea and I think it sort of works.

MJ: So, the name I saw associated with yours the most in the things I was reading was Jerome Jelinek.

JG: Yes! Jelinek Gurt duo.

MJ: Can you tell us about him?

JG: Yes, he was a U of M cellist and for some reason he was looking for a pianist. He called me up one night and came over and we played and he said why don't we do that permanently you know? And so we did, we went through lots and lots of repertoire for many years. For many years it was just us but there was also a violinist with whom we played trios. You can't get away from that, but Jelinek retired and a year or so after that I retired so. Unfortunately he's deceased, but after he retired he no longer played whereas I still played for several years after I retired. Played EMU too with the trio and a little bit of other stuff. But then it stopped and, you know, I got old you know and as I said last time I played was two years ago. Last time I played with the trio was about five years ago or even more but I had already been retired for ten years.

MJ: Do you miss it?

JG: Yes and no.

MJ: What don't you miss about it?

JG: What don't I miss? Practicing.

LP: That's a very good answer.

JG: Well, you know, I was going to say I've paid my dues. I've done my thing you know? Then we have a family as you know, well as you may or may not know, After the kids were gone, my wife and I just decided we'll live it up a bit. So we went on trips. Many to Europe, a couple to Australia where believe it or not I still have a couple of relatives. In other words I started thinking differently.

MJ: How?

JG: Well, less about playing. Spending time otherwise. You know? I'm not wedded to the piano.

MJ: Sure.

LP: Do you think that that kind of separates you from other musicians then?

JG: Possibly.

LP: Yeah, I've known some that, you know, don't care about anything else. Just the music.

JG: Well, yeah. I know. No. As a matter of fact there were some people, I won't mention any names at all, who, like what you said, and they are so interested sometimes their marriages had problems and I saw to it that every night I came home and had dinner with my family. There were some nights where I had to play in the evenings. Alright, that happens. But my priorities were family first. (phone begins ringing) Quiet.

MJ: You can get that if you like.

JG: No I'm not going to. They'll leave a message.

MJ: Well what do you miss about it?

JG: EMU?

MJ: About playing. Especially about playing in ensembles.

JG: The last time I played was a year ago. The music is great and you know when I bothered getting down to practicing it works you know, my hands still do it. It's just that I've become lazy in my old age. Yeah.

MJ: I think you deserve it.

JG: Yeah! I'm glad you said it.

LP: And I think playing an instrument needs so much maintenance like you were saying. If we could all just sit on the bench and play like we'd been practicing every day that'd be one thing but practicing is a whole other thing it seems.

JG: Well, yes. Yes. Practicing is learning new material. It's sort of painstaking but it's worth it. But, you know....

MJ: It's a lot of work.

JG: Well, yes and priorities change in life. That's really what it is. I have nothing against playing the piano or practicing at all. Anything like that, but, you know....

MJ: You've got other stuff to do.

JG: Yes.

MJ: I get it. Well, moving back to EMU, did you have any favorite faculty members to play with?

JG: Well, my trio was all EMU. Dan Foster as violin, Diane Winder as cello, we did a lot of playing.

MJ: Well we interviewed Glenda Kirkland last year.

JG: Yes, yes. She's good.

MJ: She's good? She's amazing. We couldn't get her to sing for us but we tried. I don't know if she appreciated being asked.

JG: Well, you know as I was saying priorities change, you know and there's a certain necessity of doing it when you're working and I always loved it but it's still work.

MJ: Well, Glenda.... She was faculty at some point and she was a voice instructor later. Didn't she come back to the school to teach?

JG: I think she might have been a graduate, if I'm not mistaken, the very first year she might have been a graduate assistant but she rapidly became faculty. I think, you know, it's a

long time ago and she was always the star because she's so good and an excellent teacher too.

MJ: When they're that good does it make it easier to accompany them?

JG: Probably. Well they know what they're doing and that always makes it easier.

MJ: Another student talked about you using the Taubman technique? Can you tell us about that?

JG: Well that was the lady I told you about. After I graduated from the Juilliard School I bumped into her by chance because a friend of mine got me to accompany her. She was a cellist whose mother studied piano in Dorothy Taubman's studio, and when the daughter, the cellist had problems and went to Taubman for help. After working with her and solving these problems Dorothy Taubman started looking for me, you know, looking at me and said why don't you do this? And I felt it was worth my while to study with her and I'm glad I did. It was one of the better decisions of my life because she taught me how to move my fingers in a coordinated way. No pain, no strain, and that made me a much better pianist and also a better teacher as a result.

MJ: I got the impression that the student I was reading about was unable to play at this point.

JG: That's possible.

MJ: And you, using the Taubman technique, were able to get her back to the keyboard.

JG: Yes. Afterwards you should tell me her name.

MJ: What's that?

JG: Afterwards you should tell me her name just, you know, so I'll think.

MJ: Oh, okay. I don't have her name.

JG: You don't have her name?

MJ: No, I don't have her name but....

JG: There have been several students like that and that's one of the reasons people come to me. Even now at this advanced old age of mine I've got a student who has had,

whatever it is, one of her fingers on the right hand doesn't work properly. I work with her, she's making good progress and I hope one of these days she'll be able to play as well as she was hoping to.

MJ: What kinds of things do you actually do? What's the practice?

JG: Okay, well, the whole thing is coordinating the hand, arm and the fingers, hand and arm coordinating so that the weight is always directed into the key properly. So never like that, you know? It's always, if it's all working, it feels good. It doesn't feel strained and really that's what it's about.

MJ: Okay, okay.

LP: Was the technique in a book at all or was it all, you just taught it orally?

JG: In a word, well no. Actually eventually it became, there was a, what's it called, video tape. There were four or five video tapes. When I first met her back a long time ago in the early 60's or something like that she said she was writing a book. Forty years later she's still writing the book and it still hasn't been written. There's many pages but the final version is still to be written and I don't think it ever will be.

MJ: Well I know you were supportive of AAUP. Did you have a role in the organization of the Eastern chapter?

JG: Not really.

MJ: Okay. Do you remember any of those faculty strikes?

JG: Oh, yeah. Wasn't fun. The best one was the one that lasted 40 minutes.

MJ: Tell us about that

JG: Well, about 8:30, first classes were at 8, I walked from home to the picket line at about 8:30 and two minutes after that somebody came saying it's all been solved. Wonderful. But there was another one that lasted, how long I don't know....

MJ: Was it 1976? Was that the one?

JG: Maybe. Maybe. But a week or more or something. It was awful. But we were on the picket line.

MJ: Do you think that the administration responded to it in a good way?

JG: Oh, I would say that well there was a difference of perspective shall we say but everybody settled ultimately. I don't know. That's way above my pay grade.

MJ: I know that, yeah, I know that faculty and administration it's like they're in their own worlds. They don't seem to cross a whole lot.

JG: Probably.

MJ: Yeah.

JG: But I don't know anything about that, you know. I was a faithful member of the AAUP yes.

MJ: We spoke to Sally McCracken recently too. She is something.

JG: She certainly was but then she changed sides.

MJ: Really?

JG: Well she went to, was appointed Dean or something, she was appointed to the administration at one time. She was entitled to it and a raise but she went back I think....

MJ: She was chief negotiator I think for Eastern.

JG: For AAUP. So I really don't know. Her name came up, well, she was famous, you know, I don't know what she did but it's not my business.

LP: Did those strikes, besides the strike happening obviously, affect the climate for teachers on campus?

JG: After the strike everything was forgotten. We all did our best.

MJ: The forty minute strike that you mentioned, I know that sometimes they happened right before the beginning of the semester, like the night of.

JG: Well, I'll tell you something. They told us it has to be at least a day or so after classes start so that the students come and the strike starts before classes start they might simply go away. So there was, it's done only in the semester but not the first day or two.

MJ: Did students ever care that their instructors were striking? Did they ever feel like well we paid for this, we paid for education and now you're not even....

JG: Well, it was only for about a short time but we made up the classes.

MJ: Oh really?

JG: Yeah.

MJ: How?

JG: How. First of all by lengthening the class time from 10 minutes between classes to 5 minutes between classes over 14 weeks does add up. I gave makeup lessons, you know, so they got what they paid for and I think other teachers did the same.

LP: In that vein, because you mentioned lessons, did you strictly give lessons when you were at EMU or did you teach any theory classes or history classes?

JG: I taught occasionally maybe piano literature and maybe piano pedagogy and I taught an accompaniment class which I did many years.

LP: Okay.

MJ: That seems like a really interesting class to take just because of the communication skills.

JG: Yeah, and sight reading skills too.

LP: Pianists have such a big role. Comping or being in a trio like that.

JG: It's true. That's right.

MJ: It's just the phrase "sight reading" scares me.

LP: And you said it a couple times, we talked about it, the nerves and stuff too, I was just curious when you get up on stage even if it was sight reading do you look at it like you're playing or is it like work for you when you were playing the piano?

JG: You mean when I was....

LP: I guess in any capacity. I guess in an audition even let's say if they had....

MJ: How much enjoyment is there you mean?

LP: Yeah, one time someone said to me, I used to play trumpet, and they said to me you have to look at it like you're lucky you have the best gig in the world. You get to go and play every day and I thought well I don't know.

JG: Well, ultimately I enjoy it. When we gave concerts, you know, trio concerts, yeah you get a real rise out of that because, yeah rush, because we're practicing and it's marvelous music. It's work of sorts but it's very enjoyable work let's put it that way.

MJ: Well I wanna talk a little bit about Carnegie Hall.

JG: To be precise it was Carnegie Recital Hall. It's a small hall in the same building and it seats about 500 or something.

MJ: But it still must be a milestone of sorts?

JG: A milestone of sorts.

MJ: How did that come about?

JG: I decided to do it.

MJ: Did they reach out to you and ask?

JG: No. You hired the hall and invite critics.

MJ: Oh.

LP: Wow.

MJ: How was it received?

JG: Reasonably. Reasonably, and I had a nice crowd and it went well. The concert went well.

LP: Playing these kinds of concerts were they traditional concerts and were you bringing the music out with you or were you doing memorized?

JG: That was memorized. It was all solo. Generally when you play solo you play memorize. But my memory is reliable, you know.

MJ: There's a photo of you on that stage standing and it looks like you're receiving an ovation.

JG: Possibly.

MJ: It's a great photo. In the tux and everything it's really great. Do you check your emich email often?

JG: I don't think I have. Not for years. I'm not sure that I'm on their server anymore.

MJ: You are.

JG: I still...?

MJ: Yeah, I sent you one yesterday just not knowing if you would see it or not but I can send you these photos.

JG: Yeah.

MJ: Okay. We have quite a bit of stuff. But was it after you do some of these concerts is it ever hard to go back to teaching? No?

JG: Two different things. Yeah. Usually the concerts are on Sunday afternoon or something. Monday I'm back, you know, the usual. No, it's two separate....

MJ: You said you do get kind of a rush from playing concerts like that, do you get any kind of rush like that from teaching?

JG: If a student does well yeah.

MJ: Okay. Okay.

JG: The rush. There's a different kind of rush.

MJ: Sure, sure. The same kind of gratification.

JG: I get satisfaction if the student does well, yeah sure.

LP: Would you say, and this might be a baited question, but do you think you liked teaching more than performing?

JG: It's two different things. What do you prefer: ice cream or steak? You know what I'm saying.

MJ: Well we only have a couple more questions. Do you think you have a greatest contribution to EMU?

JG: 32 years. Or 33 I think something like that.

MJ: Okay.

JG: Well, I was part of a good team, you know, we put EMU on the map. So there.

MJ: Alright. Before I end it I wanted to go back because I forgot a question and we're going to have to go back a little ways. But you got to Eastern right before a pretty tumultuous time.

JG: Oh the 60's.

MJ: Yeah the late 60's on campus there were the Black Student Association demonstrations, anti-Vietnam.

JG: One night us faculty had to go, volunteered, I don't remember I wasn't in the dorms I don't think. I don't remember where I was, but I was not alone and the faculty had to sort of calm down the students.

MJ: What had been happening?

JG: It was a long time ago. I don't remember exactly but it was tumultuous as you said. We were on the side of the students, most of us, but at the same time trying to calm them down, you know. That's what I remember. It was so long ago.

MJ: Yeah I always find it interesting that they brought in faculty to calm the students down and it almost seems like it was the faculty and students versus the Ypsilanti Police Force because the police were coming onto campus and there were reports of tear gas being shot into dorms. There were...

JG: Very little of that but I think there was one report of it if I'm not mistaken.

MJ: I just think it's so interesting that the administration or whoever suggested that the faculty should go calm the students down was relying on the faculty and not any kind of peace keeping force.

JG: Well we were the peace keeping force. Unpaid.

MJ: I agree. I agree with it. I like it. I like that story.

JG: But I remember there was one night in which I think as you said police were on campus. I really don't remember. We couldn't go home directly, I used to live in Ypsilanti at the time. The police were I think in the streets and we weren't allowed to go directly home. We had to go a roundabout way, you know. But that's basically all I remember. Nobody liked people getting hurt. That was our job to stop that, you know. To not stop it but calm the students down.

LP: Do you think that promoted a sense of unity between the teachers and body of students?

JG: I hope so. I hope so.

MJ: How did you see the department change from the time you arrived and then 2000? You said it grew?

JG: Well it grew a million times. It grew a lot and it became more different. How can you say that? Well, once it grew past a certain level it was no longer a few students and a few teachers. It became much more being and a little less personal relationships.

MJ: Does that have an effect on different goals and objectives that the department has when things kind of like a familial atmosphere?

JG: It was less familial.

MJ: It was less familial?

JG: But still, our department wasn't all that big. So it's a larger family instead of a small one.

MJ: I think that's shown all over the campus. That trajectory is common for a lot of departments, for the relationships between faculty and administration, and that's kind of

been a running theme with our oral histories, just what the effect of that has been. As the school grew a lot and administration took more of a corporate stance.

JG: When I was a student studying psychology there were two kinds of societies. There was gemeinschaft and then gesellschaft transactional relationship. Ours became slightly more transactional. But still I don't think it was like big universities which is all transactional.

MJ: I'm not sure how much you keep in touch with the school since your retirement.

JG: At first I really did but as years went on it became less and less. I hardly go there now.

MJ: What will you go there for if you did?

JG: Well, concerts. They're about the only thing I do.

MJ: Any concerts you'd recommend us to go see?

JG: I think that, you know, the chorus and the orchestra, both of which are good, you know. Also faculty concerts. They're first class usually.

MJ: I'd love to see it.

JG: Go!

MJ: Okay, I will.

LP: Another question about as the size of the school of music grew. Did the scope of things that were acceptable to teach grow as well? Did you guys incorporate a jazz band or modern music into the repertoire?

JG: Yes. The jazz band, while I was there, don't forget I haven't been there in almost 20 years. In the 90's I think, a jazz band, jazz program came into being. Then I think. I may get the years wrong.

LP: No, not a problem.

MJ: Okay. How are your jazz skills?

JG: Me, very, very old fashioned and no good. I grew up in the 40's and I used to play, you know, I was a classical pianist, but I used to enjoy listening a little bit to the jazz of that day and I used to be able to do that but of course that's ancient history these days.

LP: Well, coming to America and New York specifically were there a lot of talk of jazz amongst people your age playing the piano as well?

JG: Then, not that much because the Juilliard School now has a jazz program but then it didn't and don't forget it was 60 years ago.

MJ: Well I only have a few more questions and they're broad ones or I could tell you some more of your quotes if you want.

JG: Whatever. You're the boss.

MJ: So we ask these of every interviewee and the first is what do you think some of the weaknesses of EMU are now or were when you were teaching? We mentioned the seven miles from U of M.

JG: Yeah that's true. It was a small department, therefore didn't, many things were just too small to do. But it grew and you were able to do it. Yeah, no most of the time I went into my studio, I taught my students and I went home.

MJ: Okay.

JG: I didn't bother with those kinds of questions. That's probably a lack in my character.

MJ: No, no, no. I think you just had stuff to do probably.

JG: I did.

MJ: You're a busy man.

JG: I did a conscientious job too and I practiced of course because I was also playing.

MJ: And your son was playing.

JG: Yeah!

MJ: Who's better?

JG: He. No contest. And I'll tell you something, the skills that I got from Taubman I taught them to him until he went to college and that kept him out of trouble, you know, musical trouble. Pianistic trouble. Because then he went to the Juilliard and he won all kinds of competitions.

LP: Do you like having your son play piano?

JG: Yeah!

LP: Did you guys play together often when they were growing up?

JG: We used to. We used to.

MJ: Okay.

JG: There were a couple of years where I was a member of the Michigan four piano ensemble. Michael, me, a guy from the U of M and a person who organized it, her name was Fedora Horowitz which is no relation to the famous pianist.

MJ: I know that name though.

JG: Not the famous pianist Vladimir Horowitz. No relation. But Fedora and I we gave a couple of concerts at the EMU and also in Orchestra Hall we used to play.

MJ: Oh, wow, okay.

JG: Four pianos.

MJ: Four pianos. Alright.

LP: That's something.

MJ: What differs in your style from you and your son? How are you different players?

JG: He is more brilliant, you know. He's just a great pianist but we were together and we did a good job because when you're playing with somebody else you listen and he was very good at listening and I'm able to listen also. So we melded.

MJ: Okay. Well how about any of the strengths of the music department when you started and when you retired?

JG: Well, we were always the music department that cared for the students and, you know, that I think is the main wonderful thing about EMU.

MJ: Do you have any inclination that it traverses across departments too?

JG: I would imagine but I have no definite knowledge of that one way or another.

MJ: Okay. Alright well why did you retire when you did?

JG: Well I was getting old. I was 67 and after a while, you know, after you do something for 33 years it gets to be sort of same old same old but I know every student is different, it's all different, but still I felt the time had come for me to retire. As it happens, the first couple of years the students who started off with me I kept teaching them until they graduated. I was a part-time faculty for about 3 or 4 years.

LP: Just to carry the students that you started with out through the rest of their time. Okay. That's awesome.

MJ: Do you still have a relationship with students?

JG: I have a few. Some of them are even former EMU students, believe it or not. They're now taking private lessons. There are two that are former EMU students and one, no, I have four students, big deal, but two of them are EMU graduates. The other ones are not.

MJ: Alright. Okay. Well is there anybody else you think we should talk to?

JG: Have you worked with Dady Mehta or Garik Pedersen?

MJ: No.

JG: I would imagine that they would love to be interviewed.

MJ: Okay.

JG: What about Tony Iannaccone?

MJ: No.

JG: He's taught theory and composition. Was a wonderful teacher. He retired after me I think.

MJ: Okay. Okay. Alright. Well we will reach out to them. Is there anything else you'd like to say on the record here? Anything we missed? I mean I'm sure we could have talked about a lot more things.

JG: I have nothing to compare this with. I thought I had a wonderful time talking to you guys and I thank you for doing that.

MJ: Okay. Well thank you for having us.

JG: My pleasure.