

“Green Mountain Chronicles”
Oral History Transcriptions, 1981-1989 (bulk: 1987-1988)
MSA 199 & 200

Introduction

This transcription is one of approximately 42 transcriptions of interviews with individuals conducted primarily in 1987 and 1988 in preparation for a radio program sponsored by the Vermont Historical Society entitled “Green Mountain Chronicles.”

Scope and Content

The transcriptions in this collection represent interviews of approximately 42 individuals conducted primarily in 1987 and 1988 by Mark Greenberg, Mary Kasamatsu, Eleanor Ott, and Tom Davis in preparation for a radio series entitled “Green Mountain Chronicles.” The series of 52 five-minute programs was broadcast by commercial and public radio stations throughout the state in late 1988 and early 1989. The earliest interview in the collection was conducted in 1981; the latest was in 1989.

The interviewers spoke with well known Vermonters such as Governors Philip Hoff, Deane Davis, and Madeleine Kunin; lesser known personalities such as Catherine Robbins Clifford, one of the first women to hike the entire length of the Long Trail; and historians such as Weston Cate. The following inventory of the collection highlights the major theme(s) of each interview. The following list of program tapes gives the title of each radio program.

The goal of the radio series was to tell the history of Vermont in the twentieth century using archival sound recordings and recent interviews. The project was undertaken by the VHS in celebration of its 150th anniversary in 1988 and was funded by a \$14,000 grant from the Vermont Council on the Humanities and Public Issues with additional support from New England Telephone Company.

MSA 199, Folder 0 contains background information on the project. The VHS website at www.vermonthistory.org/gmchronicles contains a list of the Green Mountain Chronicles radio broadcasts and audio files of those broadcasts.

Effrain Guigi
October 17, 1983 for Spotlight

Mark Greenberg
Interviewer

MG Why don't we start with some background about you and then we will speak in a little bit about the Vermont Symphony also. Tell me a little bit about yourself, where you are from, what your training is?

EG Well basically my musical training was done in Argentina. In those countries still it is for free when you go to the conservatory or the university. So at 12 years old, I entered what you call the high school of arts and music actually over there it is called a conservatory. I knew over here I wanted to be a musician and I was very lucky perhaps that very young in my life I was already playing with ??? the greatest conductors, Carrien, Fudvengler and Eiscliber. They all came to Argentina and I was first ??? of the symphony orchestra. I was 15 years old then already I had a great opportunity to learn a lot. They also held seminars in conducting and compositions etc. Well I have to say that basically my musical training, my musical approach, I have learned in Argentina. Most my teachers were from Vienna or Germany. They were refugees. Excellent musicians ??? musicians. So when I came to this country, ??? ??? invited me to the contemporary music in ??? and I always wanted to leave at the time because of fascist dictatorship of Rome where we were requested to belong to the ??? party. I took advantage of this visit by Copeland and basically moved to the states.

MG This is Aaron Copeland right?

EG Aaron Copeland yes. He has helped a lot of ??? American musicians, young musicians. One of the best things ??? validated my degree and go on with composition and conducting eventually in a year I had my debut and got calls for contemporary music. I was for a few years working with the ??? festival teaching and conducting and also playing in Puerto Rico until eventually this opportunity came up here in Vermont where they needed a professional conductor. They wanted actually to make the whole thing very professional. They were looking for a conductor. In my relation with Vermont, it has been for many years back when I started conducting in New York contemporary music, I was conducting a downhold the music in old times. Columbia University the composers readings. I did get this call to come to Bennington College to conduct the Composers Conference in the summer. At the time I was playing extra clarinet with the New

York Philharmonic so money wise it was a big decision but you think why did you study music and what do you want to do so eventually that is why I started coming to Vermont. When they needed a conductor, they tried several, they offered me the job and since then it has been 8 eights that we are working here trying to develop a symphony orchestra in the State of Vermont.

MG So you came here in '74?

EG Around '74, yes.

MG When did you leave Argentina?

EG Well the last time that I was there was in '68.

MG Did you know as a child that you were going to be a musician?

EG No. A musician yes. At 8 years old, I thought of playing clarinet and I knew immediately that that's what I wanted to do make music, absolutely yes. I never had any doubt in my mind, yes.

MG Had there been music in your family?

EG No not especially no. I ??? inclination.

MG Is it possible to articulate what attracted you to music and clarinet?

EG Well very likely it is that we all need something in life that is going to center our life. Some people choose religion or some people choose something else. Some people choose the arts with a painting or a sculpture or who to hell needs a sculpture or painted or one more conductor, one more musician. Yet we discover that that's what we like to do in life and somehow you just do it.

MG And you decided to be a clarinetist?

EG Well at the time that is what I was studying and I became very early a professional clarinet player. I was first line player in symphony playing with Carrien, Fudvengler and Kempler and all those great conductors that used to come there. So it was a great experience. You learn a lot with the tradition, you are playing tradition. They

brought it there. They brought it with them. So if you had a chance to play along with those few ??? conductors, you might consider yourself lucky because you grow a lot in tradition and the classical repertoire.

MG So their style and approach has you feel has influenced yours.

EG Yes absolutely. Absolutely. There is no question that in order to learn how to interpret the classics, Mozart, Haydn and Barrow and Brahms, yes you have to get it straight from, well they said straight from the breast.

MG You I understand, your speciality is contemporary music?

EG Well actually that's the way I started conducting in the other states. They needed, in New York it was needed. Somebody read very fast and prepare the pieces in a fast way. Everything has to do with economics. You don't have that much money for contemporary music so you got to do it fast. A lot of new schools so somehow I had the facilities so that is where I started them.

MG Are there particular composers whom you have specialized in?

EG My goal was always that I would like to get at some point to that very stage where you know how to interpret any composer ??? Orienchant up today and I feel I can do a job basically on that.

MG Has this inclination of yours, this tendency towards the contemporary composers, has that influenced the nature of the Vermont Symphony?

EG I don't think so at all because right here in Vermont, I mean you have to be extremely careful how you program for any solution. If you are in Africa or if you are in New York, if you are not in America or if you are in Vermont. So you have to program according to the need and demand of the audience. You can sneak in some contemporary music and we have invited for a few years a leading American composer to conduct some music with the orchestra. Like you have to go out of your way and make an effort to have contemporary music brought to the audience. It is not particularly enthusiastic audience that wanted you find. But if you find enough of curious people who would like to know what is going on today in the music world.

MG It must be real different having an orchestra in a predominantly rural state like Vermont then being in the metropolitan area like New York?

EG It is true. It makes it much harder especially for the managers and for the board. They have to raise much more money because first of all the orchestra it is not based in one city. The musicians they come from all over Vermont and then a small percentage from outside Vermont. So you have to pay them mileage. You have to bring them into a place and rehearse. If we had been all in one city, we could rehearse more often and without such big expense. But in the case of the Vermont Symphony, you have to spend a lot of money. You have to be very careful scheduling in order to get. And also you have to do the ??? in a minimum rehearsal time because you have to get them together from all these great distances. Furthermore we play all over Vermont and it is much harder than if we were just based in a city and just played in that very city. This is a much more complicated operation.

MG Are there facilities all around the state that are adequate to a symphony orchestra?

EG Well I would say that people always react very positively when you go and play in a high school hall. They do have those, every high school, in every town there is a high school with a beautiful hall and you can play for a few hundred people. Here in Burlington we play at the Flynn Theater. It has capacity for perhaps 1,400 people. So I think it serves for most of the purpose here.

MG Is it difficult to attract high quality musicians to an orchestra such as the Vermont Symphony?

EG Well that's a good question. I think we have been very very lucky. When you become a professional musician and you enter one of those everyday orchestras for the years, sometimes you even forget what you study music. Or if you are free lancing in New York and you have to make a lot of money you might go on and play some commercial music just to make money. We are very lucky that here what we do is provide the good musicians that are in this area and all around. We provide them with an excellent opportunity with good music making and I guess that is why we may be so lucky that we do have excellent musicians playing for us.

MG Does the repertoire have to stick closer to a tried and true traditional acceptable repertoire?

EG Well if you look into what has been played in Vermont in the last 50 years, you would be very surprised at playing Beethoven 9th Symphony was a first and playing Modigliani 1st Symphony was a first and you still have plenty of room here to play for the first time the very traditional repertoire of the orchestra.

MG So it is not as if you have been playing those same things over and over?

EG Even some Tchaikovsky symphonies might be the first time ever played here so. There is plenty of room. See if the orchestra goes once a year into a town, they want to hear the pleasure in the ??? by recognizing something. If you go one time there, they will not recognize something they know. They want to enjoy it that way. So once in awhile we are able to sneak in a contemporary piece, a short one because we absolutely feel that we have to do it otherwise you would have been living in Beethoven times and because he was contemporary you didn't play his music. So we should do it and it works alright. There is plenty of repertoire to be played for the first time in Vermont.

MG Are there certain pieces that the symphony has become known for?

EG Well I guess I am being told over and over that we have developed a very special style. Perhaps a special voice and I think it has to do with the respect for the style of the composers. We are extremely careful in playing Mozart more than Tchaikovsky. There is such a thing as a style the same as in painting. If you see a Renoir, you know immediately this is his style. So if you play ??? like Tchaikovsky, it won't be an impressionistic piece of music. So I guess we are pretty well recognized perhaps by this how you can call it quality of respecting and trying to be used as faithful as possible each composers style.

MG So rather than the orchestra having a style of its own?

EG Well the orchestra might have a sound of its own. When we went to Plymouth, Massachusetts and we played a Rossini there, the critic mentioned the silky, velvety sound of the strings. We worked very hard to get that thing. It might not be very important but when we went to Plymouth, it was because they used to contract the

??? for many years. Once a year somebody left money to bring an orchestra and an opera singer or something, so when the money wasn't a lot it became too expensive. We did get a calling. See we got a good review, so we felt pretty good about it.

MG Is there a way you could describe your style in conducting?

EG Well it's I guess that's what I try to do. Let's say that the easiest because music is ???, the easiest might be to compare with drama. If you were a drama director would you interpret Shakespeare and Moliere and any contemporary. The way you feel it, you would try to interpret the author idea or conception. Well in my case, I am 100% trying all the time to serve the composer. To serve the world of art other than using it for my own feelings.

MG Your own feelings must come through some way?

EG Well it is pretty much like when you are an actor. You can say to be or not to be. You can say it in a very romantic way or in a very classical way or you know. Yes your feeling. Yes but should be basically your feelings adjusted to what the playwrighter wanted to say. You can change by just saying it in a different way. You can change it a lot. And there is a lot of similarity because you talk about 10 point on stage where they talk fast or slow. You talk about high pitches or low pitches. You talk about colors, so there is a lot of similarity. What happens is that music is obstruct. It is much harder for people to perceive what we are talking about.

MG Are you the boss when it comes to making decisions about how something will be done?

EG Well if you are talking about the actual interpretation you have 80 or 100 musicians in our case we have less ??? everyone has their own opinion how the phrase is set up then it won't work. The job of the conductor basically is to unify. A work of art has a unity. Diversity but unity. It is up to the conductor to really dictate. The fine art conception of the piece actually is the only things why you should be on stage.

MG You said that you were brought here at the time that the orchestra wanted to become professional? Can you give me a little bit of the history?

EG You understand that for many years it was a beautiful community ???, it also makes perhaps that you do have some professionals also. I understand that at some point you know time changes and need was for a much more professional approach. The board at some point decided that the orchestra was losing a lot of ground and they wanted to make it 100% professional and they opened up the whole position. They looked for and tried several people and I was invited to go.

MG Who had preceded you? Do you remember?

EG Well the founder of the orchestra was Allen Carter. He has a lot of merit because he kept going for 40 years. He started it from nothing. At the time he was old and he himself did agree on the need to do something about the orchestra.

MG This is the 50th year is that right?

EG It should be next year, yes. September is...

MG Next September.

EG Next September, the 50th Anniversary, yes.

MG So the concert that is coming up, is it this week, this Saturday?

EG Yes on the 22nd of October, we have a concert in Burlington at the Flynn Theater. On November 9, we have an excellent soloist, ???, plays a lot in Europe as a soloist. They will very likely get him to play with us a very unusual piece, really hard, ??? Concerto for ???. We also have the Brahms Symphony on the 4th. We also have a very strange happening is that we agree on presenting an excellent first rate dance choreographer who is going to do a couple of pieces in the middle of the program.

MG Who will that be?

EG Robert Small. It is by courtesy of General Electric and affiliated artists.

MG Does the symphony do any progress school programs per se or are you involved in any music education?

EG Yes, absolutely. It has always been a priority for us. Morris has been very successful in organizing small groups and for awhile we did put this emphasis

and now the full orchestra is going back to the schools. It is not a good idea to first introduce a few with the quintet and the strings ensemble whatever and afterwards a full orchestra goes there and it is a complete experience for the kids. This is one of our first priorities absolutely.

MG How do the kids react?

EG Well it is always very interesting. Our approach is that we are not to go down to the level, but to bring them up to our level and we try to make them very active and to have them participate. So we have a lot of questions. We play something and ask them, do you know the composer, do you know the piece etc. There is a saying that even if you gain a 10% of kids for the cause of good music, it was very much worth it.

MG You said before something to the effect of a piece of sculpture or painting, is it you don't need one?

EG Who needs one more sculpture. How do you make a living? My point was how do you make a living? You don't see it advertised.

MG No I understand. But take it from the other side. That is could you state the case of why you do need sculpture, why you do need music...

EG Oh of course. Of course we do need all of the things. We do need all of the arts. There is, okay, do we have time for a minutes little story?

MG Sure.

EG They say that five great men in the history of mankind are in France a lot. The history of mankind but perhaps they were all along. So it says that Abraham said that men were only spirit. All spirit. Christ comes and says it is all love. It is all heart. Marx comes and he says man is stomach. Freud comes and he says many sex. Eisen comes and says everything is relevant. Actually why they are all wrong. They were all wrong. Perhaps it is because the man is the sum of so many diversified facets. We do need spiritual, intellectual, emotion in our life. The way you say it is not only with breath you live. Now perhaps the thing that differentiates the more from animals is exactly that. They cannot create. Maybe some of them they might even have some intelligence and some ???, but it is recent of course, but then we can create and elevate ourself. We can make life much more beautiful. We

can express with art things that perhaps ???.
It makes us better also. Better human beings. So we
did need the arts absolutely.

MG During the time that you have been with the Vermont
Symphony, have you seen a change in the audiences that you
have played for. Have audiences been developing
becoming larger more critical?

EG Yes of course, yes. We saw through the years developing
a larger audience. Faithful audiences. I was very
happy the first time after we played one of our first
concerts once we made some changes in the orchestra.
When somebody came and said it is not anymore, it is
not charity anymore to help the Vermont Symphony. We
do find a lot of people who have moved to this area
from the big cities, from Cleveland, Washington,
Montreal, Philadelphia and they were used to listening
to symphony orchestra. They do comment that we are
delighted to hear that they just feel that we are pretty
much filling the ????. They don't miss it. Saving
???, we know exactly what ... Cleveland or
Boston, we know all of that. Yet somehow it serves
the purpose.

MG Do you think that many farmers and workers come to
hear the Vermont Symphony? Is it a white collar,
upper class?

EG No I don't think so. I don't think that it has anything
to do with upper class or a lead or any of that. Also
we have developed a ??? and we play them especially
in the summer and we have thousands of people coming.
So I don't think there is such a thing as a very
special lead. Also we do go to schools meaning
those kids are going to become tomorrows audience.

MG Okay, is there anything in particular that you wanted
to say, that you wanted people to hear.

EG Well thank you. But what I want to say is that if
you do believe in the course of good music, that it
is important to develop and to have in the State of
Vermont good music well then ??? us and also
be sure that in this country all the arts are
most supported by the government. We do get some
help from the Vermont Council of the Arts. We do
get some help from National Endowment, but basically
70 or 75% of all the budget comes from small
contributions. We rather see 400,000 people send
in \$1.00 than one man send in \$400,000. We want
to see everybody involved.

Effrain Guigi
Page 10

MG Am I right that Vermont is unique in having a state orchestra?

EG Well perhaps what it is, unique it is that it was the first orchestra that was thought and started that way to serve the whole state. Perhaps today you have more than one orchestra doing this. But serving the whole state only one orchestra, Vermont is unique yes.

MG Well great, I think we pretty much covered what I need and thanks a lot.

EG Thank you Mark

Hi, this Effrain Guigi, the conductor of the Vermont Symphony Orchestra. For 10 years, the Annual Liberal Arts Concert has been bringing music, poetry, dance and theater to Central Vermont. Have them celebrate the arts by making a contribution today. Remember every dollar that you give, will be doubled by a generous matching grant. And for every \$25 donation, the art donor will receive a ticket worth up to \$5 at any Onion River event. Remember you got to have art, help them.

MG Room ambience for the Guigi interview.