

Interviewee: JAY GILBERT WATT
Interviewer: MARY EMMA HARRIS
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[BEGINNING OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1]

MEH: [GIVES IDENTIFICATION]. Jay, how did you come to be at Black Mountain College? How did you hear about it?

JW: Okay. Well, how did I come to be at Black Mountain College was basically through meeting John Stix at a party my mother was giving up at Yale. He was a drama student then and—I think I had just gotten out of the Army. I was looking to go to a college. With my background, I wasn't about to get into the usual run-of-the-mill colleges, however. This was shortly after World War II, and they were all pretty full. They were not easy to get into. I wasn't particularly interested in going to, say, Penn State or NYU or something like that. I knew I wasn't going to any way get into Yale. And I didn't really care because that's not what I was interested in. I met somebody in the Army who was one of the brighter, brightest people I had met and he had [UNINTEL] University of Chicago. I later ran into him in New York. He was a director too—his name's George Morrison. And I—He got me excited about the University of Chicago. I was thinking very much of that, and John Stix had mentioned Black Mountain to my mother. She'd mentioned it to me,

so she invited him over, and he, he was really quite gung-ho about it. And he, he had—if not—they didn't have any theater program per se at Black Mountain so I'm not sure he majored in music but he knew a good deal about it—he was a French horn player, and I remember he played the Brahms Quintet at Black Mountain. That's what he said anyway, and why not? And he said one thing I should do is get in touch with them, fill out whatever the forms are and definitely I should go down there and be interviewed and see the college and interview them, for that matter. I was treated absolutely royally, I was escorted everywhere by Arthur Penn, who was in his last year as a student there, and he had his own little entourage, which followed him all over the place. He was throwing cocktail parties right and left for me and treated me absolutely royally and made the experience memorable, shall we say. Anyway, I was enthusiastic about the place and I—It wasn't only the arts program. It was the kind of people that were there I felt very, very comfortable with, even to the way they dressed. The area itself is gorgeous but the kind of informality of everybody, kind of [clunched (?)] down wherever they went to at a dining table, and [LAUGHS] [to quote (?)] P.G. Wodehouse, they would start throwing buns at each other or something like that and—I think I spent a couple of days there and I was pretty determined that's where I was going to go.

MEH: Where had you grown up? Where are you from?

JW: Pardon me.

MEH: Where are you from?

JW: I was raised by very proper English grandparents in West Philadelphia and then my mother had gotten ill. Divorced my father when I was very young. And she had moved to Tucson because of her health. And she came back and got me when I was eight years old, and I lived in Tucson for six years. At that time, she then came east for the summer, and I came with her. And she came to manage the summer theater in East Hampton. And I stayed with the grandparents again. Then went back to Arizona for another year. We came east, again to East Hampton, and I went back with the grandparents for another two years to finish high school, which I actually never did. I just couldn't take it anymore and—World War Two had just ended. The army was desperate to have people. They were offering thirty months of GI Bill for an eighteen-month enlistment. And I got in there and nicely enough ended up in a band, which was just lovely. It was an educational experience and it was a soft job [LAUGHS]. And it was fun. And so I had been—not through any cleverness on my own part, but I've been pretty lucky all along. And so I was all set. I had—The Black Mountain people loved the idea of somebody coming there on the GI Bill, so—As everybody probably knows, some people paid. If you could you paid; if you couldn't you didn't, and—It was still close enough to the time that the war had ended that—I think half the students probably were on the GI Bill. So—I forget what the question was. I wandered.

MEH: I was asking you your background.

JW: Oh, well that's it.

MEH: You had already studied music? You had studied music—

JW: I wasn't allowed to when I was a kid. Even from my mother's side. I'd borrowed a violin from a kid who hated—all the other kids were taking music lessons. They hated it. I was dying to take music lessons, and I wasn't allowed to because I "would just start and lose interest and that'd be the end of it." Anyway I did—I got whipped for [UNINTEL: SOUNDS LIKE throwing] the violin. Then later in Arizona—this was before my mother went through this transformation [LAUGHS] where the arts were all—I got the business: "No, you can't bring home a trumpet. You'll lose interest in it too fast." So I wasn't allowed to take any—So I had to do that on my own more or less, but I had a stepfather who—Yeah, that's right. I'm forgetting that. I wasn't allowed to have a violin. I wasn't allowed to have a trumpet, but I was allowed to have a set of drums, which is very odd because they make more noise and are more annoying. So I was banging away in there, let me see, taking lessons from a correspondence course. As a matter of fact, [every time I think about it (?)] [LAUGHS], I can say I studied with Gene Krupa because he's the one that was sending me '[plans (?)] [LAUGHTER] But anyway, and then I started taking lessons with a local drummer. You've got to remember Tucson at that time was—You don't have to remember. Tucson at that time had a population of about thirty thousand which is

kind of incredible, and so there were very few musicians around. But this guy played in a band at the Blue Moon Ballroom on Miracle Mile. And by this time I'm thirteen, fourteen, about thirteen, and a couple of times he arranged so that I would first sit in and the next thing I knew I was playing regularly on Friday nights at the Blue Moon Ballroom on the beautiful Miracle Mile. And then when I came east again, somehow the drums they were going to be shipped to me but they never were. And then I went to a private school where they basically didn't have any music education at all. And then—I don't know whether this is interesting or not but to me it is. When I got into the army, I was assigned to regular dreary things like fixing anti-aircraft guns and shooting them off and things like that. And we were stationed in El Paso, which was a rather miserable place, and a bunkmate had played trombone in high school and that's what I wanted to play. So I bought his trombone. And I arranged to take trombone lessons at the El Paso Conservatory and practiced every night [UNINTEL, LAUGHS] and about six months—no, three months after I'd started that, they were desperate for musicians in the Fourth Army Band. Now somewhere on my record it said I'd been a drummer. So they thought they were getting a drummer, but I insisted on being a trombone. And so they put me through a little class as a trombonist, and I had to start out at playing third trombone because I hadn't had that much experience, to put it mildly, and—It seems like a few weeks after that it was time to be

discharged. It wasn't—it was six, seven, eight months. But I got to play with the best band around, and we had full use of the swimming pool. [LAUGHS] And while other people were doing KP and things like that. And it was a nice hot climate. And it was also much more—That was at San Antonio. And then when I got out, I joined my mother up in New Haven, and that's when I met John and the rest you know.

MEH: [INTERRUPTION IN TAPING] So we had been talking about—When you arrived at the college, this will repeat a little bit of what you had just said, but—What in the atmosphere really appealed to you at the college, that first visit? That was the summer of '48 when Buckminster Fuller was there?

JW: It was before the summer.

MEH: It was before the summer. Okay.

JW: It was still, yeah, because I don't think a lot of those people that I met then—No, the regular faculty was there. Summer session—I didn't go to a summer session until gee, three years on. But I know now, you know, they were totally different than the—

MEH: So you enrolled for the fall?

JW: I enrolled for the fall, yeah. I was going—I still had it somewhat mixed up with a regular college, but—They presented it—It was a regular college in a certain sense. That's the way they—And I'm glad I did.

MEH: What do you mean by “a regular college”?

JW: [LAUGHS] That you go from September to spring, and then you go and do whatever it is college students do. And you stay for four years and at the end of it they gave you a slip of paper.

MEH: Did you—That first year—that was the last year that Albers and Dreier were there.

JW: Right.

MEH: What did you study? What courses did you take?

JW: I took—it's very difficult to—I took Harmony, Erwin Bodky. Oh, I took piano. I had never been able to take piano before. I took a musical, a musical history course. I took a course with Bill Levi in Plato's Republic. We sat and read the whole thing. Some others which weren't music. I took everything I could with music, mostly with Charlotte Schlesinger, "Bimbus" we called her, who was wonderful. And it's fortunate for me that things, that the sequence of events as far as time goes, that the teachers, that I got them in the order that I got them in because otherwise it would have been a "Damn the Torpedoes, Anything Goes" sort of style. And Bimbus was a thoroughly accomplished traditional musician. She was more than that. So I ended up studying theory first, which I'd got a good deal of. The army was excellent at basic theory, much better so than any kind of ordinary classroom situation would be. Because theory is the kind of thing that you have to memorize all sorts of seemingly irrelevant little bits of a chain, none of which make sense until you know the whole thing and you can see how it all fits together.

So there's a lot of—Basically it's kind of a drudgery discipline sort of business until you finally figure out what all this means. And once you do, you have a tremendous advantage over other people who have to stop and think what's five sharps, for instance, and that kind of thing. Or figure out what would a—what would a G augmented chord with a flat 13th or 11th be. I mean, that sort of thing, by then, is familiar to you as your own hand. So I had her first. I didn't really know what I was doing, and she had a class of maybe six people, all of whom had been studying music since the time they were that high. And I hadn't. I was new to it. And it was very difficult at first. And then gradually I caught up and caught up and caught up, and towards the end it was very rewarding. She was a very—I'll put it this way. She was totally intolerant with being slovenly in your work. She'd [SOUNDS LIKE manic] a good deal of work. She would not tolerate half measures, but if she knew you were doing the best you could, she was just unbelievably kind and encouraging. So I think very highly of her.

MEH: How do you remember Charlotte—Bimbus Schlesinger? What was she like as a person?

JW: Very private. I—Since I've read a bit of your book and some others, I realize that that year was probably a terrific strain for her. That was the last year. She was intimately connected to Albers and that—the—So I mean that was her home, and I think she probably knew she was losing it. I think she, she had some other issues which I don't know about, and

if I did, I wouldn't want to go into them. But she was, she was, she was very reserved, very withdrawn, but very kind. They don't seem to go together but they did in her case.

MEH: Where did she teach her class? Where?

JW: She had the apartment at the very end on the bottom floor that jugged out in the Studies Building. It was the nicest apartment around there. And she had—it gave her plenty of room to have the piano, do her work, and hold class. And I ended up with the apartment on the other—there were only two apartments in there. The last year I ended up with the apartment up top there. I was a long way from that then.
[LAUGHTER]

MEH: There was an apartment on the top floor of the Studies Building?

JW: There was an apartment on the top floor facing away from the lake. It was—I don't think it was at the very end. It was like near that same end of the Studies Building.

MEH: What was it like, a bedroom and a living room—

JW: Mine or hers?

MEH: Yours.

JW: You entered into a living room slightly—well it was wider than this. Maybe it was long and maybe two feet wider. A small bedroom. And then a john, a very small john, I think with a shower. And [LAUGHS] and an ice box. When I say "ice box" I mean ice box, and that's where it was kept. I don't know why. When you got the apartment, they would give

you breakfast. You could pick it up for the week and take it home. Keep it there. It was nice, though. I mean it was a lot nicer than what the other peasants had [LAUGHS].

MEH: This was your last year at the college?

JW: That was my last year.

MEH: How did you get the apartment?

JW: [LAUGHS] I don't know. You know, I don't. I really don't know. I guess—I would like to say because they treasured me, but I have no idea.
[LAUGHS]

MEH: So that first year you took music with Bimbus Schlesinger.

JW: Bimbus and Erwin Bodky. Oh, yes, it was a dreadful experience. Oh. Bodky—And I had my trombone with me. I used to practice that too in that strange—There was a strange place down in the woods, down from the, where the lodges were, you know where I'm talking about? On the other side, the whole other side of the campus. And it was called the Music—

MEH: Cubicle.

JW: Yeah, that's right. Cubicle, thank you. And the construction of that was very interesting. They had a piano in there the first year, which was crazy. There was no heat in the place, and you cannot keep an acoustic piano—and that's all there was then—in a place with no climate control at all. So that was useless. You couldn't—There was a piano in there, a useless piano in there. But two of the walls were cinder block, just

naked cinder block, and two of the walls were glass facing not at a 45 degree, maybe a 50-degree angle towards the out. And then the roof was very heavy hard wood, which meant that the sound was bouncing from these glass—[LAUGHS] you know, like a billiard ball caroming around in the place. And it was a wonderful place to practice the trombone. I hate to say—you talk about the bathroom—it was Bauhaus architecture of we're going to turn the advantages of the bathroom and glorify them to the end of the whole experience. I'm sorry, I got lost, whatever, whatever we were talking about.

MEH: We were talking about Bodky.

JW: Oh, yeah. So he had gotten—he wanted to play concerts and he was bored with playing them himself so he wanted to play a Hindemith trombone sonata, which I'm sorry I ever heard of [LAUGHS], and Hindemith was known—he was head of the music department at Yale. I understand nobody ever saw him there, but he specialized in something called *Gebrauchsmusik* which meant workaday music, which to him meant write for every combination of instruments in the world. Now it was not—It had been done but, number one, a piano and a—Still a trombone and a piano do not go well together. It's a bad combination. That's what I say now. Well, it wasn't that. So he wrote for—He would—And they published all his stuff just as wrote it on the—He was very fast. There's a reason I'm telling you all this. Hindemith wasn't at Black Mountain, but he would write on manuscript paper, and he would

photograph it. You would play it off that. And so I think he did some of these things without thinking very hard, because although he did not write in keys they were still tonally centered. And he wrote almost everything in sharps, and sharps—at least for this trombonist—were something you don't want to hear about. And the only way I could deal with it was say "Now let's see, this damn thing's in three sharps. What I'm really going to do is, I would subtract three, and I'm going to play it in nine flats," which means since there aren't nine notes, you've got two double flats and that's the way I had to play the thing, converting every—I mean doing this stuff in my head. And I wasn't—I wasn't terribly confident about this and Bodky kept saying "Oh yes, yes, you'll be fine." [LAUGHS] Well, come to the night, and I'm due to do this in the dining hall, and I was far from being an alcoholic at the time, but I did like to drink. And I was nervous. And so Bert Morgan—I asked Bert to give me a haircut, and he proceeded to cut big gaping holes in my head. And I sat down and said I'm going to have something to drink. This is getting too grim. And then so I had maybe three, four drinks in the afternoon and—I said "Well now this will never do. I can't go up there drunk." So I stopped drinking about three hours, four hours before the thing, but—I was sober but I was completely dehydrated. And you can't play the trombone without saliva. It's like trying to run a car without oil. And at the very end of it, it goes f-f, F-F, **F-F**. It's **F-F** down here. And I go Da da, da da, whoosh, whoosh [MAKES BLOWING SOUND].

Standing there dying to get these last two low notes out. And all I got was whoosh, whoosh. That's sort of the way it went.

MEH: What did Bodky say? How did he —?

JW: Oh, he was—“Oh that's wonderful. That's all right.” And he finally, he sits there the piano and he hears this whoosh whoosh and he goes bum, bang, bang. [LAUGHS] That was not one of my triumphs. There was a guy named Si Sillman, right? Well [LAUGHS], I think the only thing I remember him saying, he said “That was embarrassing!” [LAUGHS] So, after that I cut him out of my life. Actually, it's a good illustration. I think—here's a word I hate using, but it's the only word I can use, the “community” in general was—If you were trying—and what the hell you were getting amazing free entertainments of one sort or another—they were wonderfully supportive, in general. And yeah, if you, I mean there were some—there were lots of events that truthfully were embarrassing. But not very many people would have told anybody “this was embarrassing.” People were—Deadly enemies would be supportive over something like this, and that was wonderful.

MEH: So that year, was there a music chorus? A music group, singing, vocal?

JW: Oh yeah, that's right. Yeah. We did—We did some Heinrich Schütz—beautiful piece. And we did a good deal of Bach and stuff from the St. Matthew Passion. And we also did a good deal of the B Minor Mass. Yeah, we used to go around—I'd forgot that—we used to go around and sing—Yeah, I was a bass in that. And Bob Rauschenberg

was a star tenor. He had a good tenor voice. He knew nothing about music, but I think Bimbus must have taken him and gone over every note again and again until he had it in his head. Yeah, that was pretty successful.

MEH: Where did you sing?

JW: A couple churches in Asheville. We did it also at Black Mountain in the Dining Hall, some of them. Usually, probably they were linked up. We didn't have the facilities or the talent to do the whole, you know, B Minor Mass, for instance. So probably we did the *Crucifixus* and—Oh, Delores sang the *Agnus Dei*, I think, and probably one or two other parts. But it was not enough to fill up a whole concert so it was probably, that was probably part of—the audience that was sitting there got up and performed and then they sat down and maybe the other, you know, that kind of thing. [LAUGHS] They were not tremendous—you know, there wasn't a tremendous amount of people at these things. They didn't have that—I think the student body was about sixty when I first went there, at this time. And then we'd get some people from Asheville—not a tremendous amount.

MEH: Okay. So were you with the group when the chorus went to sing at the black church? Do you remember that?

JW: Where was that?

MEH: It was in Black Mountain, some area.

JW: Possibly. I don't, I don't—We did—You mean did we sing there with this group? Very possibly. We didn't go on tour or anything like that, but we did several churches around. I think it's probably the first time they ever heard anything except "Throw out the "Lifeline" and, you know, the regular, one of the known (?) hymns. But we did them.

MEH: Did you—Who were the students that first year, '48-'49, who were most interested in music?

JW: I can't remember who was there.

MEH: You mentioned—

JW: Most of the people that were in Bimbus's class left when she did. Dreier's son—was his name Ted? He was in the class.

MEH: What about Delores Fullman?

JW: Yeah, she left. Remember I mentioned she sang the *Agnus Dei*. Julie Light, she left. I don't know there was—I think, I'm not sure when Mark Hedden came. He wasn't there. He was in the choir. [LAUGHS] He never showed any sign of [LAUGHS] having taken the theory (?) course anyway. [LAUGHS] There were a couple of others, but whoever they were, they didn't—they didn't stay on. That was the thing. For me, it worked out very well. But if you had—At the stage I was then, it worked out fine for me, but if you were somebody like Delores—I think Delores—I certainly know Delores and Julie were like this with Bimbus so the idea of staying and waiting for an unknown quantity—quality,

was—And the rest of them I don't think were that involved in music.

They were just—it was just something they did.

MEH: That was the year that Charles Olson was coming down one weekend a month to teach.

JW: Was he?

MEH: Yeah.

JW; [LAUGHS] Good for him. [LAUGHS] I'm sorry.

MEH: Why, why—

JW: Olson [UNINTEL WORD, LAUGHS] as a seminal figure is just something I've never been able to figure out. Can we take a break for a minute? [LAUGHS]

MEH: [AFTER BREAK] Jay, explain your reaction to my mentioning Charles Olson.

JW: [LAUGHS] The name caught me. Oh, it struck me that when you said “that was the year that Olson came once a month” or something like that and [LAUGHS]—If it was the year, I was not impressed by Olson. And that would not have been a memorable event on my part, although he was a memorable man to look at. But once you get used to that—I wasn't bowled over with the guy.

MEH: You did not take his class.

JW: I just thought he was incredibly naïve. He—He had a wonderful quality. He was very enthusiastic, but like a kid you give a new rattle to or something. Naw, I wasn't there.

MEH: Did you take any art classes?

JW: [LAUGHS] Total disaster. I wanted to be—I wanted to take something that—No, I wasn't there. Which is odd, because I ended up doing graphics of a kind, but that's by the bye and much later. I didn't have any visual, visual sense—although there is a tie-in here which—I think it was 1945. I was spending the summer at East Hampton and that would have made me sixteen. And—Fifteen, at that time. And I, I did some kind of graphic. I sort of—Oh, I had taken mechanical drawing—I liked that—at a school outside Philadelphia, and I did a kind of mechanical drawing sort of abstraction. Now I realize it was—had certain elements of Kandinsky, you know, if you've got to compare it to something. And it was in a piece that visually I was depicting a jazz piece by Woody Herman called "Apple—" Applehine? No. Yeah. And my mother showed it to an acquaintance who was a good friend of a friend of ours named Robert Motherwell, who I understand—I never knew he was at Black Mountain until I read these books. But according to her comment, she showed him this and told him what it is, and she said he said, "That boy should stick to music!" [LAUGHS] I don't know whether that's a compliment. No, I didn't take any art classes. And as I say, I never realized, nobody even mentioned him, as far as I knew, as far as I remember. What, fifty years later I read in the book that Robert Motherwell was there. So, there you go. But anyway, I knew—He and Max Ernst used to, three or four times a week, would come for cocktails

at this gentleman's house, and the gentleman's son and I hung around, so it was sort of in and out but never part of the thing.

MEH: So that first year, you have a study?

JW: Yeah. And slept in the—I think that was the last year the lodges were open. I'm not sure about that but I think so.

MEH: The lodges were open for maybe three more years.

JW: Were they?

MEH: Yeah. But you had—Where was your study in the Studies Building? Do you remember?

JW: You come down the stairs, one, I think the one on the right, the one with the window facing towards the hall. The one with glass in the hall. I was right across from a very large study which I think had been probably a faculty room or something. And that was first occupied by a—I mention this because there's something happened there. I don't remember his name, but he was very unpopular with people—a student. And then Rauschenberg had that study afterwards. It was a big one. Mine was just a regular room with no one. But I mention this guy had it because maybe four or—Oh, Eini Sihvonen had the study next to me, and we were very chummy for a while. And then we used to have little parties in my study, and we'd had one night and—I don't know what happened, but I went home. I'd had enough. And it went on in my study. Well, the next day there was hell to pay because it seemed—I think the guy's name was Ronald Something. And the students had gone up to the

farm—the other people that were there—and gotten a cow and somehow got it down these metal steps and put it in the study. And there was very great repercussions. And there was a student-faculty meeting, where there was talk—they were going to throw the people out, and I was held responsible for it. And I didn't know a thing about it until the morning when I got there. And Albers was sitting there looking very dour, and he could look very dour. And being very German. And so were several of the others. And you would have—I mean, it was a stupid student prank, but if it had happened two years after that it would have been forgotten with the breakfast coffee, you know. But that made me quite a—They got rather threatening over that.

MEH: I've heard about the cow situation before. I can't remember who did it or why.

JW: Well, I can tell you who was at the party. They didn't like this guy. That was the only reason they did it.

MEH: But you don't remember who that person was.

JW: His name was Ronald, I think Ronald Something-or-other. He was, I think he was studying math or something like that. No, I didn't have—Nothing. I mean the party was—Well, Bert would have been there. Tim LaFarge would have been there. I don't think it was them, and I don't remember who else was there, so I don't know. But I was held accountable for it. But I truly had nothing to do with it. Not [LAUGHS]—I'm not saying that because I'm afraid they're going to

throw me out of Black Mountain College. Come to think of it, I did know at the time and I really forget.

MEH: That particular study that had the sort of milky glass panels, I always assumed that was used as an office, but it was used as a study?

JW: [OVERTALK] It was used as study.

MEH: I think it was designed as an office, but when you were there it was used as a study.

JW: [OVERTALK] I thought it just had that kind of glass because it let light into the hall. It was no larger. As a matter of fact, it was probably smaller than a number of them. It had a built-in desk but so did a lot of them. The one next to it—the first one to the right after the steps—was a faculty office. That was later. I don't know whose it was that year, but later it was Flola Shepard's office.

MEH: So, that first year you were there, Bimbus had the apartment on the lower level.

JW: [AFFIRMATIVE] I can't remember who had the apartment on the upper level, the one that I later had. But it was definitely faculty.

MEH: What do you think, as a student, having your own little space ==

JW: You mean the studies

MEH: – what was the impact of that?

JW: [OVERTALK] Oh, it was essential. It was essential. You needed something—you needed privacy, desperately. And even the first year when there were still a number of students there, after not very long you

got so you knew who was walking by from the steps in the hall. There was a lot of outdoors, but particularly in colder weather, some people are indoors—There was enough togetherness. People—Oh, and also it was—one of the few things that was totally law, and respected, was the Do Not Disturb sign on the door. And some people put them on and never took them off. But—There was a—Yeah, if they were over there—You would know about this. If the college was there before the Studies Building was built—and obviously it was because they were building it—I can't imagine the place without out. Just can't.

MEH: But this was a novel concept. I mean, normally you'd be in a dorm and you'd share a room with somebody and—

JW: Yeah, yeah, I realize that. As it was, we were, you know, nine people were sleeping in one room and—But you had this private—And a lot of people put, I did, put some kind of mattress so you could nap or some people slept there overnight. Not many.

MEH: That first year you were there was the year of the—Every year seemed to have its crisis, but [OVERTALK] that first year was the year that Albers and Dreier left.

JW: That was the crisis, yeah.

MEH: Were you at all involved in that?

JW: I didn't—No, of course not. That was the first year I was—No, I would have considered that—I would have then and still would consider it way beyond my, anything I have any power over. No, it became obvious that

it was—The way it was presented to us, at least my understanding of it at the time was. That it's going to be—Is this going to be an arts school or is it going to be—are we going and try to be all things to all people school. And to be honest about it, I mean, Albers was not the kind of person you were going to be crazy with unless you study with him and adore him. And some people studied with him and didn't adore him, so—I see now, from reading this lo many, many years later, that Albers had a lot more to him than I thought. But I didn't think about it, and I wasn't, you know, I wasn't—He was the Rector, or whatever ever they called it then, and that's good enough for me. [LAUGHS] And I certainly—You know, I had just gotten out of the Army and I was a PFC. I wasn't about to say, "I want a different general." [LAUGHS]

MEH: That first year of other students, Ruth Asawa was still there.

JW: I don't remember at all.

MEH: You don't remember Ruth at all? That's interesting. Who were other students? Nick was there.

JW: Yeah, Nick and I sh—Oh we first shared a room down in—They had like an army barracks type thing. We first shared a room. A nice experience with Nick. When we first arrived there we were roommates, the two of us, and they had an evening—after-dinner, it was still light. It was September. Meet the Faculty get-together in the Round House, which was a lovely building. And obviously not everybody showed up because even with that many people you couldn't get them all in there.

Or it was just for the new people, I guess. Yeah, new people to meet the faculty. And they would—It's totally subjective, but it seemed to me and it seemed to Nick too—we both agreed on this and from then on we—we had a lot of differences but I think we were close. That evening was magical. Absolutely—the air was magical. The temperature had just the right amount of coolness and leftover warmth from the day, and the breezes had just that scent of pine, and the faculty made sense. And it was just—We felt like we had died and gone to heaven, both of us. Nick did it with “ohhhhh” his surroundings. But I had this English upbringing so I didn't do that, but we agreed on that.

MEH: So you were, you and Nick were new students at the same time.

JW: Yeah, we were—We were new at the same time.

MEH: What did you do on the Work Program?

JW: I drove the truck, which was nice, you know, on one hand. On the other hand, I could never walk into my study without six notes being there, and I found out that I was driving the truck and that was all I was doing for a while.

MEH: So this truck was the like army surplus truck?

JW: Yeah, it was one of the—what did they call them? It wasn't one of the big ones. I had driven them all in the Army. I think it—They couldn't have called it a “Four by—” Something like that. Weapons carrier, the army called it. You know what it would look like—if you took the top off a

Hummer [LAUGHS] and cut the price by about sixty thousand dollars, it'd be just like that.

MEH: What did you do with the truck?

JW: Well, I had to take slops up to the farm twice a day. Any furniture that had to be moved, and people were moving a lot of furniture around. If you—Oh, pick up supplies from town. That was it. I mean that was the school's transportation. I mean—Well that was—I mean, basically, I mean anything that people couldn't carry and it had to be moved, that's where the truck came in. So—And they didn't—And then I forget what the ones were but a couple of experiences, it wasn't go out and have a beer or anything. A couple of—Oh yeahhh. There was another—there was a big deal that year about we are not going to buy coal from scabs. I was. I would have bought—I couldn't tell the difference between the heat comes out—I was shunned. Shunned. Because I was the only that voted to buy scab coal. I'd been cold. I didn't know anything—The other idiots hadn't—You know, it's all very well to say that unless, you know, when it's still warm out. "No, we're not gonna—" So there was a—Somewhere between the college and Black Mountain there was some kind of railroad siding there, and they put this—they had bought this full railroad car full of coal, and the students first "Oh yes, we don't want scab coal. We'll use this coal and we'll unload it ourselves." Well, they would for about seven minutes. [LAUGHS] And they found that it's hard work, and it's dirty work because it's big lump coal. But I had to

drive—Somebody had to drive it there and back and forth. So I would go there with this merry band and load it up in the back of the thing and then students would climb up there and then I said they'd be appreciably less merry after a half an hour. But that kind of thing. Oh and then after that—after that ran out which is probably two nights or something, they were out chopping wood and that had to be hauled around to all the various furnaces. So—I'd forgotten all that stuff.

[LAUGHS]

MEH: Did you work on the farm?

JW: No. No, you weren't going to get me to work on—I mean, I would deliver the garbage. No, no way. My friend Bert ended up professionally, I mean, you know—He did, he was a farmer and loved it. But no. I had four—My mother, after she'd left my father, I was living in Philadelphia. Terrible. You don't leave a kid to sweat in Philadelphia, they thought. They sent me to a nice farm. They sent me to this—in South Jersey or somewhere and back way away from the water. For two summers they sent me to live with this—It was like the end of the earth at that time. It was like the face of the moon at this truck farm in New Jersey. I was there for the whole summer, and I never wanted to see a farm again, and I still don't want to see a farm. So now I'd have enough of farms. [LAUGHS] But there was a certain similarity between—I guess it's young people. If they haven't experienced anything—between the students at Black Mountain then and young people who have grown up

on East 71st Street, who come out of their building dressed in overalls and talk about how wonderful it is that they're saving the wolves.

[LAUGHS] People [UNINTEL WORD] in countries where there's wolves don't think it's wonderful to save the wolves. But there was this kind of do-good naivete about them there too which—god bless 'em, you know. I mean I certainly don't want to be with the Bush crowd, but I did want—I didn't care if union or not-union coal. I wanted to—But anyway, it was very—it was an all-consuming job because when you get down to it there were a hundred people, each of them with needs and they all need trucking it. Which leaves me with one thing I tried to tell you—I guess I had to—There was an A&P, I think it was, in Black Mountain at the time. It wasn't very big. None of them were. And it's the only supermarket I ever saw that sold sugar in 100-pound bags. They made moonshine out of. [LAUGHS] And since then I've never seen it in 100-pound bags. But they wouldn't do that anymore in Black Mountain. They're artsy-craftsy now. Well, maybe the idea of making your own booze is a good idea. Anyway, [UNINTEL]

MEH: So that first year you were there, Rauschenberg was there as a student.

JW: Yeah, see, this is what I can't quite figure out. Because this guy must have left, and Rauschenberg came late in the year. Are you sure it was the first year I was there? I remember him being in that study, that same study that this happened in.

- MEH:** He was there that first year and then he was gone and then he came back before you left, with Twombly.
- JW:** Then maybe I knew him—I probably knew him better the second year. That's funny.
- MEH:** He was there that first year with Sue Weil?
- JW:** Yeah. [AFFIRMATIVE] And then there was a threesome, Cy Twombly and him and Sue.
- MEH:** Yeah, that's when he came back.
- JW:** But that—Maybe it was the next year that he had that study. To tell you the truth, I don't know. I went there two years, and then I went away for a year, and then I came back for a summer session, a year, and then the next summer session, and then I left.
- MEH:** So at the end of that first year, you did not stay for the summer, what did you do?
- JW:** The first year what did I do? I know what I did the end of the second year. Oh—Right now I don't know. I know the other years. [LAUGHS] I wasn't into staying drunk all summer then, so—I worked summers. Maybe I was down here. But my impression is that—I know I worked here the year—One of the years, but I think it was the year after that, after my—No. No. Yes, I do know. I went back to my grandparents in Philadelphia and worked at—My grandfather had a—worked for a milk company and got me a job in the loading dock. And it was rough, it was very rough. And Philadelphia in the summertime is not a pleasant place,

but that was—I don't know why I was doing that, to tell you the truth. I needed money. As simple as that. But it was a—And all you did was pick up milk from a conveyor belt, put I don't know how many of them, twenty-four? into a box and take the box across the room and stack them seven high and it continued all day. [LAUGHS] And I didn't end up looking like Charles Atlas either. I know I did that one summer.

MEH: Another question of that first year I was going to ask you. Did you take any classes with Johanna Jalowetz?

JW: Yeah. Bookbinding. She was—I thought I mentioned that. I took bookbinding because she was such a likeable lady and—Yeah. So anyway I was very, I thought this was wonderful in your book because I'd never heard this before and I would have been, I would have shrugged it off before but now I think—After this famous Happening, whatever we called it I don't know, you said she said something like “Here comes barbarism again” or something.

MEH: Return to the Dark Ages, something like that. Yeah. What was she like?

JW: I think she was right. [LAUGHS]

MEH: What was she like?

JW: “Oooh, she was—” Her husband had been a very well-known avant garde musician and they were real biggies, I mean biggies in the sense—we're not talking Black Mountain Biggies, we're talking—And I think she was a product of her time, and I know she taught singing, but I think she was definitely in his shadow. I don't know how long he'd been

d—He hadn't been dead all that long I don't think. But I think she was sort of coming into her own and she—she enjoyed, she enjoyed people paying attention to her. She was a very sweet, you know, just very pleasant to be around, very sweet, amusing. And I was just becoming aware that there was another civilization on the other side of the pond and it wasn't all—everybody from Germany wasn't, well, didn't start World War Two and that kind of thing. So it wasn't them (?) But I think she was there the second year I was there too. And by that time I had gotten this idea I was going to go to—lucky it didn't work out that way—I was going to go to the State Academy, Staats Academie für Musik und Darstellung der Kunst im Wien. I was going to go to Vienna which, I've since learned, at that time was probably the most miserable dreary place on the planet. But—So I took German and languages and I never had talent for a it. I had to take German tutorials with Flola and I talked to Johanna. She would sort of giggle every time I'd try and speak German to her. But I did take bookbinding and discovered I had some no talent for that either.

MEH: What did you do in bookbinding?

JW: I bound books.

MEH: Like library books?

JW: No. I bound—I had to give my mother some Christmas present, so I bought of all things for her, I bought a collection of Heine's poems translated into English and bound it in buckram, and it looked very nice.

And she was absolutely thrilled [LAUGHS]. And if you gave me Heine's poems now, I'd say wonderful, you know. I'm thrilled with them. As a matter of fact, somebody just gave me Dante and, you know, I know it's terrific but I'm not about to—And I understand that she took it from the bookcase and showed it to somebody and the whole inside dropped out. I didn't—Oh I was interested in—Was that this year? I guess it was towards the end of the year. Or maybe it was the second year, I was supposedly engaged to, enraptured by, [SOUND LIKE thetcherly] hooked on [SAYS NAME OF STUDENT, DELIBERATELY MUDDLING NAME: Errisinola Lombard Ginesi]. And from [UNINTELLI PLACE NAME] Switzerland. Gosh, when I think of it. And she did that. She would do a lot of things that she knew were going to lead to nothing. Started nowhere and were going to lead to nothing. So I think I was probably [UNINTEL WORD] because she took it.

[END OF RECORDING CASSETTE 1. CASSETTE 2 BEGINS.]

Wednesday, 19 January 2005.

MEH: Okay, Jay. I have a question, is Jay your given name?

JW: [AFFIRMATIVE]

MEH: Do you have a middle name?

JW: [NEGATIVE] [LAUGHS]

MEH: I think you do, and I think it's in your college records. Does it start with "G"?

JW: Oh, my heavens. Yeah.

MEH: [LAUGHS] I can't remember—

JW: When's the last time you looked at my college record?

MEH: Thirty years ago.

JW: Was it after Christmas?

MEH: [NEGATIVE]

JW: Okay.

MEH: Okay. Jay, after your first year you came back to Black Mountain having worked for the summer lifting things, and when you came back the college would have changed. The Alberses were gone and the Dreiers and Bimbus and Bodky—it was a whole different crew. Was it that first year that Lou Harrison? No, somebody, Vollmer Hetherington was there that year.

JW: That was the second year.

MEH: That was—Lou came the next year. [OVERTALK]

JW: I don't know who was there. Maybe Vollmer stayed there another year. The year after that I—I thought I was going to Vienna and I didn't—

MEH: Oh, right. So when you—Lou was there when you came back from that summer.

JW: [AFFIRMATIVE]

MEH: And you studied with him? Lou Harrison?

JW: Oh absolutely, yeah.

MEH: What did you study?

JW: Oh, I was ready by then. But that's—what about Vollmer? What poor little Vollmer?

MEH: Yeah, what about him?

JW: Well, that's a whole thing. Well, I continued with piano under—Louise? Was that her name? Hetherington. The wife.

MEH: Yeah [AFFIRMATIVE]

JW: And Vollmer didn't really have that much to do. He wasn't, he wasn't a composer. He wasn't equipped. But here's what he did—At one point—I forget, I was studying something with him in music, of course, but I don't know, I don't really know what. But at one point, I walked out of the Studies Building one afternoon and I walked over to the—there was a little building next to the Studies Building where they used to use it for—it looked like an old farmhouse or something, or bungalow. And it had a rattletrap piano in the corner there, and I sat down and wrote my first really successful piece, which is on the—It's the one that's called "The Dying Turtle"—a quasi-neo-Ravel sort of thing. But it was a good piece. And Vollmer—As I say, I don't know what direction or what was going on with the lessons up to that point, but he saw that piece and he said "Great." He said "Now I want you to write something really big." He said, "I want you to write a piano trio," meaning for violin, cello, and piano. Well, that's not my favorite combination and it still wouldn't be, but it was a test. And at this time—God, was I young! [LAUGHS] I was madly in love with Gustav Mahler's work, and I had been writing little pieces sort of in imitation. That got a—If you're going to imitate somebody, Ravel's better. But—I mean if nobody seems to notice and I'm speaking of experienced musicians, nobody seems to notice that that's what that piece is, but that's what it is. However, I—Oh, and here's where Mrs. Jalowetz comes in because she's from Vienna and I decided I

wanted to go to the State Academy there, and I sent away for information. And in the meantime I had started working on this trio, which took up pretty—it was really feeling my way. It was a big—I have the score here still. It's a student work but it's a big student work. So I spent a lot of time changing it, writing it, and stuff like that. And in the meantime they had sent me back—"We'd welcome you with open arms. We welcome—" It didn't say "We'd welcome American dollars" but I think that was—They sent me what the requirements were to enter—not to graduate. To enter. And they were staggering. They would stagger anybody. If you showed them to anybody in America now, they would doubly stagger them. One of the things I remember was—[UNINTEL] remember—that no matter whether you play the piano or not, you are supposed to look at any, whatever they chose to give you—Beethoven, Schubert, Mendelssohn, or Brahms—they would throw a symphonic work at you and you were supposed to reduce it to play it off on the piano. That was one thing. I'd had a tough time with Diller-Quaile in that. So I thought "Oh well, my dream is at an end but I'll just try" and I said, "Will you take—Would you consider looking at a composition?" and they said "Yes." So, so—So I spent a great deal of that year working on that. Now Vollmer was—he was a very practical sort of man, and he, he knew—I knew nothing about strings. I mean, whatever experience I'd had—and I don't hear them, I don't hear them as well as I hear other instruments, and they're more complicated to write for or at least I knew where the crossovers are on reed instruments and things like that, so I knew what to avoid, I knew brass instruments. So he—he was invaluable

as far as the technicalities, and he kept me going is mainly what he did. And so I finished that, sent it in. I had to copy it twice because I had just finished copying the whole thing in one of those notebooks, filled the whole notebook. I know where the other study was. It was across the way. It was a slightly bigger study facing the—it was next to where those stairs go down to the ground on the bottom floor. I'd had my window open and I had left the score on a table right next to the window, which is where I worked, with a big bottle of ink above it. And while we were having dinner, clouds came from that way, they came from that way right over the lake. They met over the lake and hail came down this size, crashed through the window and poured the ink all over. You know, one chance in a trillion—I had to do that one all over again. So that—that took up a good part of the year. Now the other thing was by then I was writing for dancers, and I was writing for Marriage on the Eiffel Tower. I only did a little one there—and playing in it. And I began doing more, being more involved in what was going on there then, and that was, as far as I'm concerned that was probably the best thing I did. Oh, now what was the question you asked me about Lou?

MEH: We started with Vollmer, and you were talking about this piece you were working on and your application to go to Vienna.

JW: Oh yeah. Well, that, yeah, then the thing—The answer came back “Yeah, you can come and, as a matter of fact, we”—They didn't say “We loved the piece” but “it shows sufficient something-or-other so that you won't have to pay tuition.” So they weren't after—it was very low anyway, but I thought that was

pretty nice. So I was set to go there with [LAUGHS] [LIST OF NAMES: with [ONCE AGAIN DELIBERATELY MUDDLES THE COMPLICATED NAME OF GINESI], and the rest of them mob. [LAUGHS]. So that was like the full names of the Andrews Sisters. Anyway! [LAUGHS] That's pretty good. She, much to my horror and everything, she took up with somebody else named Jack Boyd at the end of the—and I'm still—[LAUGHS]. And anyway so I didn't know where I was going to go—Oh yeah, I was still going to go. So I went up to—This time my mother was running the Provincetown Wharf Theatre or whatever the name of it was. So I went up there for the summer and met another gal and got married, and I was all set to go to—I did get married then. And we were still set to go and then all of a sudden, I think it was in August or something like that—whenever—the Korean War broke out. Now that wouldn't seem to affect me one jot (?) but the international situation was very, very tense, and Vienna was a Four Power city. The Russians were there too, and they were expecting all hell to break loose at any time—the State Department. So they not only closed off, nobody's going to Vienna but all civilians had to evacuate then. So I stayed in New York that year and worked and did a little writing on the—a little more writing and made an ass out of myself as far as relationships go. And by the end of the year, then I was ready to go that summer session. I don't think Lou was there in the summer although maybe he was. But he certainly, he was—To me he was more than supportive. He was a great help. He wrote a lot of letters to people. He, he was going to arrange to have a piece published in New Music magazine, which was a very

high prestige thing then. Now what happened with that, I mean it was always going to be another one. It was going to be and never was. I don't know. I don't know, you know. But—So that year I did a lot—I wrote an awful lot. I wrote for everything that was around and wrote pieces besides. And for instance I wrote a piece for percussion and player piano, most of which is lost. I think I have only two pages, the two beginning pages. But it was successful. It didn't sound like anything anybody—And Lou had always said that he wrote a lot of percussion music. Well, he had quite a different—His idea of percussion music was this very lyrical kind of almost like a string orchestra sort of thing, which is odd. But I had a background as a drummer, as a jazz drummer, so mine was a bit different. And he was a big help there because he all of a sudden—You know, they used to have an Arts Festival at Greensboro. I don't know whether they still do. But apparently with the powers that had always been at Black Mountain, there must have been some kind of friction between what was going on and—I don't think they wanted to recognize that there was anything going on in Greensboro, but Lou insisted that we load—I had this big old Lincoln and we'd load up all these gongs and things like the beginning of a British movie and all this stuff. So we loaded it all up, and we went down there and we performed that totally off. And we weren't invited to it but we did it anyway. And he was great in that sense. And he certainly opened up my—Well, the man was an encyclopedia of knowledge, not only about music. He was really good on his—He knew more about history than—He had more of a background and more of a catholic fund of knowledge than anybody else in the place. And he

was bizarre. There's no question about that. But he was bright, very, very bright and—And he—So he was—A lot of it was saying—By then you're not talking about "Use that chord there" or "Use that note there" or "Do not do this." It was more things like "Well, you know, in this instance, think Messiaen or think Honegger" or something like that. They had a pretty good collection of scores there. They must have come from Jalowetz. The Round House was filled with music scores. [OVERTALK] They must have come from Heinrich Jalowetz?

MEH: No, they were actually left to the college by someone who had been in New England—Thomas Whitney Surette.

JW: Well, there was a lot of Charles Ives's own manuscripts there and—not his autography, but private editions that he published leather-bound himself and things like that. That was another thing. Lou got me a job. Lou knew Ives's wife. Melody, her name was. Isn't that a wonderful name for a wife? And apparently she let him into the Sacred Barn that had all of his stuff. And he was responsible for putting some of these pieces in order so that they could be published, and a lot of them—and he got me in on the job, and I forget what—it was an overture. I forget which one, but he would do things—Ives, I mean—Ives, he would do things like quickly scribble six or seven notes in one of the string parts and he'd have—and he'd have arrows going every way and then he'd say, "continue with such for 112 bars" and things like that, you know. [LAUGHS] That was his own shorthand and stuff. And Lou had me doing stuff like that, for which I was paid. Not much, but I was paid.

MEH: Were you doing that while you were at Black Mountain?

JW: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. When I left I think—No, I don't know where Lou went. I know he was in New York for a while. He'd kind of pop up and pop out again. Oh he, he—I think—I know, he'd won a Guggenheim and went somewhere mostly to write but would come back to New York every now and then. So he wasn't there. I think Wolpe was there the last—I guess Cage was there the first summer, Lou through the year, and then Wolpe at the end. And I had one lesson with Wolpe and that was enough. [UNINTEL]

MEH: Okay, let's go back a little bit and then focus on various people and events. When you came back that first year, you were there for '48-'49 and then you left—

JW: I was there '49-'50 too.

MEH: Okay, and then you were there '49-'50.

JW: And then I was gone for . . .

MEH: No, no—'49-'50. Pete Jennerjahn and Betty were doing the Light/Sound/Movement Workshop? Do you remember that? Were you part of that?

JW: The what!?

MEH: They called it the Light Sound Music Workshop.

JW: No, I know nothing about it. It must have been a different—Maybe it was during the summer when I wasn't there or something?

MEH: Okay. They just did a lot of things like experimenting with—Nick was very involved—with, you know, music and sound and dance.

JW: No, it was a time when I wasn't there. I [UNINTEL] but I have no—I would have known about it. I would probably would have had something—Pete was the leading player and arranger for our little jazz band that we had.

MEH: So tell me about the jazz band.

JW: Well, Pete had had a lot more experience. See, I'd had experience as a drummer but not as a—I think that started the first, yeah the first year I was there. Yeah the first two years. We had Pete—he played clarinet and alto. I played trombone. Oh, Dan Rice's brother—

MEH: Jack.

JW: Jack, right—played the drums. He wasn't very good but what the hell, you know, I have to be frank [LAUGHS] [UNINTEL] and we had a guy who—I can't remember his name but he did very well on piano, and that was an important part. And we played standards and played for dancing and people liked it. And we had a repertoire of maybe—oh, I don't know, we could do more—We actually had arrangements that Pete did and I did a few of them, but I wasn't that interested in doing them at that time. It doesn't make sense but—I guess I wasn't. I think Pete was giving us arrangements that he'd done before or something. There was something very, very familiar. I think he took riffs that he'd heard on recordings or something like that and put them down, which is okay, and so we had about twenty or thirty pieces that we'd really worked out and then we could sort of fake it with the rest of them. But—Yeah, it was a nice thing. I wouldn't say it was ready for the jazz clubs, but it was perfectly adequate. It was fun. It was [UNINTEL] fun for me. I enjoyed it. I enjoyed that

because I hate dancing. I mean I love babbling and making out with girls but I don't—I don't love dancing and I was always an awkward dancer. So, so I loved playing half the time and babbling the other half of the time [LAUGHS]. Although, I mean, the idea of making out with a girl, you knew them all so damn well, you know. It was as if you shared the same rooms from the time you were that high [GESTURES CHILD'S HEIGHT]. So—but anyway—The idea was it was a party, right? And I always thought—either I loved parties a lot or else I was what? But—

MEH: Do you remember any particular parties at Black Mountain?

JW: I remember the one that I wrote the music for.

MEH: Which one?

JW: This was the last year I was there. There were very few women there. Very few. And I was—had been fooling around, and I came up with a song and wrote some lyrics “You have flabbergasted me with your beauty.” This appeared in Duberman’s book. [He gets it wrong. (?)]The song wasn’t called “flabbergasted.” But—So I decided one way or another I was going to make a little musical. So I wrote a little introductory piece for this thing—something about a chorus line coming in singing “Here we are, the life of the party” et cetera, kicking up their heels. And then I had Joe—By this time, the weather’d [UNINTEL WORD ; guy?]. It must have been like February or something. It’s miserable, dreary. And he—all of a sudden these flashy signs that said “Girls. Girls are coming.” All over. On the walk and, you know, in odd places. And we built that up for a while, and I got the stuff together. I guess I worked on it for

about two weeks, and in the meantime we started—So I did a quite a long arrangement of “You have flabbergasted me with your beauty.” Then I guess it was late February or March, probably March, but I had written a little song cycle with Mary Fitton Fiore about Saint Valentinus. So we put that in. We included that in it too. We’d done it for Valentine’s Day. So we put that in too. So I had basically “Here we are, the life of the party” and then “Flabbergasted” and then this little song cycle, and then we did “Flabbergasted” again in a big way. And this was my idea. We got Tim LaFarge, who took voice lessons, and he [LAUGHS] he has all the animation of these stick figures that you draw from—I mean—But he’s big and he’s good-looking, so I think we took his shirt off and probably his pants too and had him dress in a Roman toga, in short Roman toga and had him singing “You are flabbergast—” And he’s so serious. It’s wonderful. And then the girls were the same girls that everybody—but they were made up. I think Nick had to do this. They were garish. And seeing somebody like—who the dickens was that? There was a gal that came from a missionary family. She later went to St. John’s? Anyway, she was the most repressed Protestant figure you’ve ever seen, [LAUGHS] and they made her up looking like the Witch of Endor, and they were all just—Viola would look wonderful. Viola had great bosoms anyway, but these things were—And Nick painted his body gold and posed as a statue on top of a table, which they turned with streamers so you could—Actually, he was like Corrogio [PH] in one of his more far out moments. Anyway, that was a resounding success. And the words were “You’ve flabbergasted me with your beauty. You’ve annihilated me

with your charm. Don't you know that your kiss is divine, more than melons from off of the vine." That kind of thing, you know. Oh, and at the end the girls are all singing "Flap, flappety flap, flappety flap and desta [sic] flap, flappety." And Tim [SINGS IN DEEP BASS VOICE] "You have flap, flappety flap flappety flap with your doo-do-do-do-dooda-de—" [LAUGHS] That was a party I remember. [UNINTEL WORD] They liked that.

MEH: And that was like the focal point of the party—the theme?

JW: Oh yeah. It was the excuse to have a party. And supposedly everybody was coming down to see a show, but I mean one guy in two weeks can't produce a, you know, so—I was doing other stuff at the same time. So it was an excuse for—I liked the song so it was my excuse to get it done, but I—They did a wonderful job, but I never thought it was—You know, it's one of these things that sort of snowballed, and everybody got enthusiastic about it. Yeah, probably, because, as a matter of fact, I think Duberman in his book says "Things weren't totally dead that winter, not with people like that around. There was the musical 'Flabbergasted'." Actually, the musical never had a name. The song had a name but—

MEH: You say a musical. Was this one piece or a series of pieces?

JW: No. Well, it was an entry piece where these girls came in. Short. And then we did "Flabbergasted" in one sort of way. And then we did this song cycle. And then we did Flabbergasted again. So the whole thing was probably 25 minutes maybe, if we stretched it out. But that's enough.

MEH: Do you remember a medieval party?

JW: Medieval party. No, I would have remembered that. It must have been some other time.

MEH: So you, you were telling me—and then we'll come back, but I don't want to forget it—you were telling me about driving back and forth to New York on Rauschenberg's station wagon?

JW: Yeah, yeah. Oh yeah. Well it was—Actually it was Sue Weil's station wagon. It was—What year are we talking about? Are we talking about 1949, something like that? And the weather was cold. This was a—one of those real wooden sided things from about—I think it was about a 1937 station wagon. It was in terrible shape. It had no heater and it had no—I mean it was frightening now that I think of it. And it was in terrible shape and everybody was freezing but they could all cover themselves—they could lie all over each other and cover themselves and they did. And I think I had two people in the—No, one of them was another music student—there was Stanley? I think it was name was. He ended up—I can't remember his last name.

MEH: VanDerBeek?

JW: No, no, no.

MEH: You worked with him.

JW: No. This was a guy . .

MEH: Cook? No, he was earlier.

JW: Gee that name sounds familiar but I don't think he was a music—Well, anyway, but this guy, by the time we got to Philadelphia, it was snowing hard and there were no windshield wipers. and we had to get on. I mean, it was

move or die, like the French Foreign Legion. So he had this—There was a running board and he had to stand on it from Philadelphia to New York.

MEH: Who is “he”?

JW: This poor nameless student.

MEH: Stanley.

JW: My mind is filled with poor nameless creatures. [LAUGHS]

MEH: So he stood on the running board and—

JW: Well, he—This is rather—He I guess he’d rather stand on the running board and—Well, we’re moving than stand by the side—Somebody had to do it. It was this big damp wet snow that went splat. the size of your fist and we could not have moved if—[LAUGHS] Well that’s the time I got home. By the time I got to New York, I thought I myself was ready for—I was very cold. I was very tired. The trip probably took—It took more than 24 hours because I remember I arrived—My mother and her new husband were living on—in one of those little tiny apartments on Cornelia Street, on the third-floor front, or something like that. It had taken more than 24 hours with this wretched car and whatever. I’m frozen. I’m in the worst—so I call up to this floor. I’d never seen this apartment before. They were both up at Yale but they’d gotten this apartment for the Christmas holiday. I knock on the door and I hear this moaning and groaning from inside and [LAUGHS] and it takes a while and I’m knocking again and [MAKES COLD SOUNDS] and the door opens and there’s my mother on the floor and [LAUGHS] my stepfather had had a heart attack. She got so excited she broke her ankle and they had—and just then I arrived at the end of my

tether. [LAUGHS]. I'm sorry. I mean, they were all right. It wasn't the end of all our lives, but that was—I didn't care about it.

MEH: Well it was 24 hours to remember, definitely. And your stepfather was okay?

JW: Yeah. As I remember, yeah. I don't know how soon—Maybe four days before Christmas. I remember going out Christmas Eve with him and buying a Christmas tree, and she's hobbling around on her crutches and [LAUGHS]. Yeah, as a matter of fact, we had one of our best Christmases, but it was rather a shock to everybody. I mean once—Then the medics arrive, and they're both taken away, and I sit down with a nice bottle of liquor. And I think I had one drink and slept for twenty hours. And the next thing I knew they were coming home so –

MEH: So getting back . .

JW: The whole thing sounds mythical, you know that. I guess I had fun somewhere along the line.

MEH: Sounds like it.

JW: Now let's see—it was rather— Oh every time we had like a—If it was a serious concert, for instance there was one—Lou got a very fine pianist to come down and play Ives's "First Sonata." Now that—I think we probably did then, but for most concerts that didn't automatically signify a party afterwards. But this other kind of stuff like a play or—a student work—would generally precipitate a party.

MEH: And when you say "a party," what do you [OVERTALK]

JW: I mean they made up the Dining Hall in sort of a festive fashion, and people got dressed up to some extent, and there was music and a band, and there was liquor, and there was—or whatever people wanted. And snacks. And it was—And you asked, “May I have this dance please?” That’s what’s called a party. You can call it “dance” if you want. But—

MEH: While you were at the college, Cage came down—John Cage. I think he visited and then he was there the summer you were there.

JW: He was there—Yeah, the summer. I don’t remember whether it was—I don’t know whether—He and Wolpe weren’t there at the same time. He had sort of appeared a couple of times I think but he, I think he—The first summer I came back, before Lou, you know—I could be wrong about some of this but—I mean the sequence of events. But he was definitely a teacher at one point and—I tell you, I have one good story about John. Somebody, I guess Wes Huss, although I didn’t know him very well. Somebody got the idea to do this play based on Kafka’s The Trial. And it needed, you know, it’s a spooky sort of story and it needed spooky sort of stuff to it. And so I had written—That’s right, David was there because David Tudor—I had broken my right hand, which kind of slowed up the writing and playing of any kind. So I came up with something. I wanted an overture or they—maybe they asked for an overture. And it had to be kind of spooky. Well, they had two grand pianos in there, so I wrote an overture that lasted about six minutes long and it was for the insides only for these two grand pianos. And they plucked—that’s been done before. But a lot of stuff that hadn’t been done before. I used—They would press the

key down silently and go over the strings with scrubbing brushes to get one particular sound. Another sound in which you press the keys down—you have to stand up while you play this because you're reaching inside, plucking them one thing or another. And another thing was I got these silk screen squeegees—they were just the right size—hard rubber. You put handles on them and they'd bang them and get these various—The whole thing gave off an unearthly sound, and then for the most unearthly sound they gave up, because nobody—Now this is stuff that nobody—People have written for the insides of pianos before, but they never have gotten this kind of thing. And the fact was that I was writing for two of them, so it gave one pianist time to set up his—I mean, most of these things they have to press the keys down silently so it gave the pianist—That takes preparation. You can't just bang your hand on it. So for every move you make, you kind of have to set it up. That's the reason for two grand pianos, basically, so you don't have these enforced pauses—although there were a lot of pauses in it. And one of them was you take the silkscreen squeegee along those bottom coiled strings of the piano and you rub it like this and it gives a sound like you've never—Anyway, this was sensational. Then at one point in the play, the female says to the male protagonist "Oh yes, I've always loved that lullaby. Would you sing it to me?" Well, at this time I was writing very dissonant music, but you can't do that—so I had to write a lullaby. Well that appeared later. That's, you know—and it was very pretty and very tuneful and perfect for it. And then there was one other piece that was in there just as a piece of mood music to prepare for an action

so there I could write whatever I wanted. You know, I [UNINTEL]. I had a broken hand. So I went—I got a [UNINTEL] free in that main classroom in the Studies Building and Francine du Plessix Gray—although she didn't understand a word, she didn't understand anything about music—I would write it out real big on the blackboard and she would put the dots in the right places and things like that. And this was a kind of—I didn't have to play it myself. I knew I couldn't play it—you know, so I could write pretty much what I wanted to, and I thought it was a pretty good piece. And then I had like my first, I guess it was my first lesson with John and his first question was “What composers do you admire?” which is, you know, it sound like a—But there's a good reason for that, you know. You sort of know where the person's coming from. And I said “Anton Webern”—I don't know if you're—And—which to me was and still is minimalism. Not what they—you know, minimal amount of notes to get the maximum effect sort of thing. And he said “Wonderful, because I admire him too,” which—And then he said “Why don't you show me a piece that's”—and he took a look at the piece and he panned it, panned it, panned it. He says “This, this is dull as far as timbre is concerned, as far as rhythm is concerned, as far as this is concerned, as far as that is concerned. There's nothing right about the piece.” So I think there might have been a preview of that particular piece before the—Anyway, sooner or later it was heard. David played it. He came up to me afterwards and he said, “I was totally, totally wrong.” Now this is your teacher, and he had some reputation, and that takes something for a teacher to say, “I was totally wrong.” I wish, I

kind of wish I had that piece still. I don't. The only thing left from that thing is the lullaby which got thrown into the Six Pieces for Children, which are kind of a grab-bag for anything, little pieces I didn't know anything else to do with, that were melodic. But I thought that was terrific that he did that. But he was—he was just I think really beginning his aleatory Zen business. I think he was—Here's a way of putting it: he was creating himself. I think he was creating himself more than he was creating the music that he wrote. And my opinion, for what it's worth, is that his artistic achievement is himself. Now he did several important things formally with music, but he abandoned them, and as far as I know they're rarely, rarely used. But he had a, what do you call it? Oh, a sort of wheels within wheels arithmetical rhythmic form that's reflective. There's words for it but sometimes the words aren't there anymore. But it was a—There hadn't been a form even remotely like it before and that's quite a—it's an achievement to come up with a new form. And the aleatory, of course, one could say one's abandoning form altogether but—You could say but you don't necessarily have to. But I think philosophically there was just too great—We were and remained friends for a while, quite a while, and—But musically I think we were just too far separated.

MEH: Did you feel that you identified musically with Lou Harrison?

JW: Yeah. Yeah, much more so. Yeah, Lou—Lou was not afraid of a beautiful melody. He embraced it and loved it to death.

MEH: What was Lou like?

JW: What was he like? Bizarre. He's bizarre. He's not quite—Brilliant! Capable of writing some of the loveliest music that's ever been written. And also capable in my estimation of running away with himself more than usual. Had one thing in common with Olson. The two of them would get enthusiastic over an idea and—or a procedure or any-, anything, and would tend to, tend to love it to death. Lou had—He had—he could at times be totally original, and I think he sort of somewhere along the line later in his life, as a matter of fact, while he was still at Black Mountain—People were changing then. The faculty was changing. Everybody—What they would have believed in unto the death in September was not necessarily what they felt come June. And his style was changing. He became to my way of thinking turgid, and he had a—he'd had a clarity. He'd had a clarity in his work that I think disappeared. Oh, who was the best musician? Charlotte Schlesinger was? Probably Lou had the most talent, although I can't be sure about that. John, I think—John created a myth. He created a—And a famous one, you know. As far as—I mean, if you said to me “Well, I'll tell you what, we're going to sit down and you can have all the nice wine and cigarettes you want, and we'll listen to an entire evening of John Cage only,” I think I'd rather go stand out in the cold. [LAUGHS] I mean some things I would but anything after a certain date I wouldn't. Not really.

MEH: How do you remember David Tudor?

JW: Oh, he was frightening, David. He—Well when you talk about talent. I could never figure out why—why he was like second piano to John, you know. I don't know. He never—We all knew that he composed. None of us had any idea

what it was or what it was like. I still don't. I'll tell you one thing. For instance, this piece that John panned? It was a short piece. And this is the way it had to be. The way it had to be. But it would have been anyway. But he learned that the way he—The way he would work, you'd give him the piece. He'd never seen it before, and it could be a sonata by Griffiths, a big, long, heavy romantic thing, or it could be short and modern. He would look at a page for about two minutes, and then turn the page and continue that as long as it took to get through to the end. Then he would put his head down and start playing it [LAUGHS]. And it was not only—He had not just remembered the notes and what they looked like on the page. He had a—he had a conception of what he was going to do with that. I'm not saying this piece was pedestrian, but I do remember if you'd ask me to write it again, I couldn't do it. I have no idea what it was. I know it sounded terrific when he played it, but I also know that when I was doing this, I sort of—I stuck in like doubling things in octaves, which I never do, or running just to fill in and give some excitement to that section—which is a perfectly legitimate procedure up until the end of the nineteenth century. But it's not—and certainly not for somebody who fancies himself revolutionary. But I knew it was going to sound good, right? But somehow he incorporated that in there so it sounded like brand new and—It was a piece that just swelled and grew and grew and then did all this neat stuff that music's supposed to do when it really grabs you. David to me was wonderful.

MEH: It must have made a big difference to have somebody as frightening with his talent as Tudor take you seriously.

JW: Yeah. Not only that. He was, he welcomed the idea of playing this piece on the inside of the—He never said a word about any of it but he was always more than cooperative. Let's put it that way. And as far as I know he never played any—I don't think he played any of the other students. There weren't that many anyway, but—

MEH: So you composed music also for Marriage on the Eiffel Tower and The Scapegoat?

JW: The Scapegoat—that's the name of the play, yeah. Marriage on the Eiffel Tower I just did the funeral march for. That's all. I think I was wrapped—I was wrapped up in the trio, and I think I might have been writing another piece at the same time. Or maybe I got scared. I don't know. [LAUGHS]

MEH: Now what about Scapegoat?

JW: That was the one I told you about. That was the—That's a play based on the Kafka.

MEH: Okay. Okay.

JW: The one—in fact the two pianos, this piece and—Yeah, there were three pieces in that. Not a lot, but—But they all in their own way were really—Oh, one nice thing, I was walking up towards—This is the nicest compliment you can get—I was walking up towards the Studies Building one day and I was behind I don't know who. They hadn't seen me, and they were whistling

“[HUMS SONG]” you know, that’s nice. They’d only heard it two or three times. They couldn’t have heard it more than that. That was good.

MEH: You and Viola were good friends.

JW: We were lovers for a while.

MEH: You were lovers.

JW: And good friends too.

JW: Yeah.

MEH: And so she also was—She came to Black Mountain, I think, with an interest in music.

JW: Well, she, she came from a family that used to for entertainment play four hands through scores and things like that. Yeah, she was an excellent pianist. She played most of the things. And she—There were very few girls there that year. Excuse the word “girl,” but that’s what they were. And she was mainly interested in the dance, but she was a good pianist, and she was very bright in many ways. She also had a well—she had a, more or less a European education. She knew what the Renaissance was, for instance [LAUGHS]. You know, real arcane stuff like that. But she told me later that—She was there for one week and I’d sort of—I hadn’t exactly been sitting across the table making goo-goo eyes at her but I thought “Well if I’m going to get a girl, this is the only one here, and besides that she plays the piano.” Like the old joke about the—Oh, never mind the old joke. [LAUGHS]. But anyway, somewhere along the line very early in the thing she’d written a letter to her mother saying “This is—What the hell’s going on in this crazy place! You’ve got painters that can’t

paint a picture of anybody and composers that can't play anything." That's referring to me. [LAUGHS]. So—And later I got along fine with her family and yeah, she was—We had a very good time. And during the holidays she would come up sometimes and stay with me in New York, and she loved that, and my mother adored—They adored each other and got along great. Yeah, but it was very pleasant all around, very nice all around. And very—It was a symbiotic relationship but it wasn't on both sides. I mean I did some—wrote some nice things for her dances too. And it's just that Black Mountain was Black Mountain, and the bloody real world's out there, and what worked at Black Mountain does not work in the bloody world. Yeah. That's the—if I have one screaming—if I'm going to scream about its defects, it was—it was the worst preparation for the world afterwards that could possibly be. Which is I'm sure why so many people stayed on hanging on the edge of the cliff, the precipice, till the bitter end. I didn't care. That seemed grimmer than anything to me, but the—You know, the real world. Yeah, I'd reached a point where "Gee whiz, it's going to be so much more exciting out there than it is at Black Mountain." But, I mean, if somebody sat me down and said, "You know, it really doesn't pay to alienate everybody." If they told me that, for instance, I might have done a little better. [LAUGHS] That's not too much to ask from a college, is it? Somebody'd tell you something like that? Give you a —? I'm joking.

MEH: So did you, did you take courses other than music after the first year? Math?

JW: Not really. I don't think there were that many. I took—Oh yeah, I took a Paul Leser course in anthropology. Just one. Yeah, every now and then, but I don't really remember what they were.

MEH: Did you know Max Dehn?

JW: No. He was—he died early on while I was—He was math and I wasn't—I mean just to nod to. And he was about the only person in the school that you called “Doctor” Dehn. No, I didn't.

MEH: How, how—At what—I think you already—Okay, let's just stay with Black Mountain first. You were there for two years and then you came back to New York for a year, and then that would have been, I think, '51-'52. You were there '49-'50, '50-'51.

JW: Yeah. So—okay, yes.

MEH: And then you went back for a summer session?

JW: I went for a summer session, the year through, and then ended up with another summer session.

MEH: Okay, so you were there '52 and then '52-'53 and summer of '53. The '52 summer session was when Kline was there—Franz Kline?

JW: Yes, yes. [OVERTALK] Who everybody adored.

MEH: Okay, [UNINTEL] Okay.

JW: I mean you know that. Everybody knows that. Yeah, he had a coach (?). Yeah, yeah.

MEH: [OVERTALK] Imagine I didn't know it. Tell me why everybody adored him.

JW: Hm. Well he was a hail-fellow-well-met and—whatever that means. Sounds nice. If you like to laugh and drink—and it wasn't—I remember when he was a painter, so he didn't talk baseball. It was a very—I think it was really quite—it was masculine bonding, but without the football and the baseball and the—And he was an amusing man and he was a generous man, and—Beyond that, you know, I mean, if you're drinking beer with somebody two, three nights a week, how much do you really learn about them. Not that much.

MEH: Speaking—

JW: Most—I sort of like—I think my relationships with males are—That's the level they were on at the time, sort of like that. I don't know what—I'd just rather not go into that, but—I mean I didn't trust them, by and large. And I didn't have all that much reason to trust them, so—

MEH: You're talking about Kline?

JW: Oh, no, I'm talking about males in general. So, it was a superficial relationship that he was invariably good, pleasant company, and that's as far as it went.

MEH: Speaking of drinking, did, did you go to Peeks? Ma Peek's. Do you remember?

JW: Oh, Peek's Tavern. Yeah, I had the car. [LAUGHS] That's how [UNINTEL, LAUGHS]. Yeah, what about it?

MEH: You tell me about it.

JW: Well, dingy roadhouse. About all to see [UNINTEL] like the rest of the] roadhouses. It was just—I mean you couldn't get a real drink anywhere so they served beer till what? Eleven o'clock or something? It wasn't very late.

They had a lot of restrictions in North Carolina. And it was the only place around. They served—I'll tell you something about them: they served hamburgers with lettuce and tomato mayonnaise so—Is that enough? You didn't go for the fine cuisine. They had a jukebox. It was a place that—It was out of the college. It was the only place—I don't know of any other place where you can get beer, where you can get a drink around there, unless you'd drive into Asheville and pick up liquor from the State store. And I don't know where else you could get beer. So I mean it was the only—Also, it was close by. It was not far. You couldn't walk it, but it was close. Be there in ten minutes in a car. So every now and then just the simple human urge—"You know what This place is bugging me. I wanna get out of here or something." Just for the night, you know. That's where you went. There was no other choice. It turned out there were, but you had to drive a long way and they weren't—Essentially they weren't all that much different. I—There was some, but not overwhelming, friction, hostility between the townies and the Black Mountain people but there was—And it was—it was just as much the fault of the Black Mountain—BMC people as it was the town people. They weren't [LAUGHS]—I mean the town and the college were not made for each other. No. Maybe we've done enough for a while?

MEH: I was going to say—[IRRELEVANT REMARKS NOT TRANSCRIBED]

[END OF CASSETTE 2. BEGINNING OF CASSETTE 3.]

January 20, 2005

MEH: Jay, you went back. You were there for two summer sessions. The first was when Kline and Tworkov were there. How would you compare the summer sessions to the regular winter. Just in terms of the activity.

JW: I would say, by and large it was a different experience. Theoretically, I think in the beginning the summer session was generally set up to be focused on—was set up to be focused on one aspect especially on the arts—and they got [UNINTEL WORD] and got whoever they could. There were new faces all over the place. They generally were not all that connected to Black Mountain. Yeah, if I'd say the focus was different, it tended to be more on the arts, if possible than it was during the year. We didn't have the—I don't know what the proportion was but I'd say it was twenty-five percent of the students during the year were doing math or something like that and there were virtually none of those people around. There tended to be a more festive atmosphere. And during the wintertime—during the winter year, the fall and the winter, there could be the doldrums. And it was much more concentrated than in that sense. There was more activity. And there was probably a bigger bang for the buck, really.

MEH: Did you study dance with any of the dance teachers, with Katy Litz

JW: Did I study—?

MEH: Dance.

JW: No. No I didn't. [LAUGHS] It's like I've always had a yen to study fencing, and I took one lesson with a friend, who gave me a foil which I still have hanging up here somewhere, only she decided she was going to put an end to this and

taught me in the Italian tradition, which is squat down low and stay low. And she made it a very long lesson, and I couldn't walk for two weeks and that was my last fencing lesson. But I saw the contortions that the dancers were putting themselves through, and I had no desire to go through that. Also I just—Aesthetically, I didn't connect with it.

MEH: What was Katy Litz like?

JW: She was a young curmudgeon, in a sense. She had a sense of humor. You've got to remember this is coming from an outsider who wasn't in her class. Now they—And that was the be-all and end-all of Katy Litz. Dancers are the most singularly focused people in the world, in general. A few exceptions, but—And if you're not, if you don't share that focus, it's almost as if you're a different species. But Katy and I had some experiences because we travelled—we had to travel together just she and I in a rather broken-down car to Louisiana, which was quite a trip in those days. So we got to know each other and she did, she definitely had a sense of humor. She was not—she was not a Renaissance person by any manner of means, but I don't think there is a single dancer in the world who—

MEH: So in the summer sessions the—You—In the summer session there were musicians there. T the first summer—Both summers, Cage was there. And then there were Irma Wolpe and other musicians came. Stefan Wolpe was there. Did you—First, did you identify at all with Stefan? Did you study with him?

JW: I took one lesson and that was the only one.

MEH: Why?

JW: He was—Because [LAUGHS] he was “Let us now worship at the feet of Stefan Wolpe.” He was—The lesson consisted of a primer (première?) and summation of his greatness. And I could have gone and read it all in a paragraph. I mean I really—I really was pretty turned off by the guy.

MEH: What about the musicians that came that last summer you were there? There were a lot of concerts—

JW: Well, the only one I can think of is David. I’m trying to think—I don’t know what other musicians were there. I don’t know whether it was the last summer, but Katy had a friend, an Indian friend, named Vashi who was a charming man. And he was an expert Indian drummer, from India, but that didn’t really have much relevance to whatever I was doing. And for me the summer sessions were a different kettle of fish anyway. I would focus on doing one concert’s towards—writing for a complete concert of my own stuff towards the end of the session, and I was sort of—I felt unhindered by faculty or lessons or anything else like that. The other people there were wonderful to chat with, but it wasn’t—I didn’t think of it as being, like So-and-So is the teacher. I’m the student. And I always had my own agenda for the summer sessions, what I was going to do. As far as I was concerned, the time didn’t work that well that way. You were free to make your own decision. Yeah, we were free to make our own decisions and that kind of thing. Now I had a number of chats with John but I—whether you want to call them lessons or not, I don’t know. But I think we went into some of that before.

MEH: What about—What do you remember about dishwashing?

JW: Most people didn't know how to use the machine and I did. And then it probably broke down pretty soon. But—Oh, the first year there was still a very formal thing and it had traits of Army KP—whoever was experienced became a—the master sergeant and we privates all had to leap and follow his commands. But I don't think that lasted terribly long. But what can I say? Nobody died from ptomaine poisoning and [LAUGHS] that was our major triumph, I guess.

MEH: Do you have particular memories of events or anecdotes—things we haven't covered that you remember about the college? People?

JW: Oh, I wish I had been prepared for that one. I—Probably the times when I'm alone years later now—If I think of something, it's probably, it's almost definitely not, not what we've covered. I mean I don't spend any time thinking of what the relationship was with specific faculty members or—But I can't dredge up anything unannounced.

MEH: What about the landscape?

JW: Oh well that—particularly one night, looking out of the Studies Building over the lake, and it had snowed that day, and the bones of the trees and the wonderful whiteness against the blackness of the mountains, and they truly were black mountains then, at night, and the sky was this magnificent clarity. It was one of the most stunning things I've ever seen. As a matter of fact, my young person's boyhood dream was to have an apartment in New York, a home in Cornwall, England, because I'd seen a movie about it and got carried

away, where the waves would be incessantly beating at the rocks below. I don't know what I would have done if I had got tired of that. And to have a home in that area—to get away from New York and the [UNINTEL WORD: SOUNDS LIKE bam waves] [LAUGHS].

MEH: What about—?

JW: It was miserable in the summer. Not miserable, but the awful kudzu is growing all over the place. And it was hot. I'm kind of used to hot, but it was—Well, and the fall was unreal. The fall with the—Naturally, just stunning. [UNINTEL] stunning.

MEH: Why did you leave Black Mountain?

JW: It was time, in every way. And oh, just plain my GI Bill had run out. Well it had run out before, but nobody seemed to notice or care. But it was time. I'd gotten older, definitely not wiser. I don't think anybody left that place wiser, really—more experienced, perhaps, but not wiser. Oh that sounds silly saying that. That's [INAUDIBLE]. There's got to be a time in everything where—maybe not move on but move out of, anyway. If that's all you can do, that's what to do. I even walked away and left my car there. I imagine it ended up as mulch, or something. The car stopped working. That's a good reason to leave.

MEH: Do you remember the first time you went to Black Mountain, how you traveled there?

JW: Yes, I went by train. Had a—I was in a—I think, I think it was an overnight trip, and—Yeah, I used to take this kind of thing for granted when I was a kid. And

then had a lovely breakfast in the dining car, and I was fascinated to talk to the locals there because they were sort of beyond my experience. And I just, just, I don't know whether they met me or I grabbed a cab up to the college, but I traveled nicely.

MEH: Did you go into the surrounding area at all—into Black Mountain or Asheville?

JW: You mean on that first visit?

MEH: On any—While you were at the college.

JW: Oh sure. Yeah, I used to like to—There was really nothing available. Any—Oh, as far as I remember, there was a pretty good bookstore in Asheville. That's where we—That was like “a lovely Saturday I'll get all these books” sort of thing. It was not a town to—that I felt terribly comfortable in. It was very much the Deep South then, and quite often Delores would be with me, and she was black, and it just—I never felt threatened but I felt uncom-, I was made to feel uncomfortable by being in the company of a black person. The liquor store was there. I mean I wasn't buying it by the tub, but if you had to go—if you wanted anything that's where you had to buy it. It was way later there was an excellent, first-class restaurant that served drinks. They were on the top of that ridge that you went through the tunnel to get into Asheville. I think it had something to do with the Vanderbilts. I'm not sure. But it was—they had a gorgeous terrace overlooking the city, and it was the only place any-, anywhere in the area] where you could get cocktails. It was probably hideously expensive. Anyway, we only went there once but—Oh, but as far as, “let's see,

wouldn't it be nice to go into Asheville and have dinner or have lunch"? No. It wouldn't have been nice. [LAUGHS] It was pretty bad food.

MEH: What about the movies?

JW: Ah, that we did. That we did, yeah. We'd get a group—Black Mountain itself had a tradition—they had one movie theatre there. And they showed nothing but Westerns on the weekends. That's all—And they probably packed the place. Well I never want to see another Western in my life, although we went into Asheville—I remember we saw High Noon there, a group of us, a whole—I could put about eight people in my car. And maybe we went with two cars to see this ridiculous monstrosity called Quo Vadis, and we were all sitting together, a bunch of—It was very, very similar to New Haven when the Yalies go to a local movie. They hoot anything off the screen, and we were a group of maybe fourteen people, and this rather pompous movie starts out: it says, "The Overture," and you've got about eight minutes of Hollywood schlock, and there were howls of laughter and hissing and nasty looks from all around. But yeah, we used to like to get a group together and behave like brats is what we did and we loved it. And [UNINTEL] [LAUGHS].

MEH: When you left Black Mountain, you came to New York?

JW: Yes.

MEH: What did you do? What were your expectations then?

JW: They were rather high because I knew John, who would invite me—I met a lot of people like Pierre Boulez—Well, I mean, meeting Pierre Boulez is like meeting the Rock of Gibraltar sort of. And I don't speak any French and he

didn't speak much English and he wasn't interested in what I had to say and I wasn't that—to tell you the truth, I wasn't that terribly interested in him either. But I mean there were introductions there. I took a cold water flat on East Sixth Street, and I needed a job. I needed money so I took some wretched job. I think being a bookkeeper for a publisher. And I wanted to work twenty-two weeks and collect unemployment, which is what I—Twenty-two. You had to work twenty, and I wanted to make it look good so I worked twenty-two weeks. I'd say that—That turned out to be not necessarily—It didn't take any planning on my part because the head—the controller, head bookkeeper—it turns out was fiddling the books and he hires me to be his assistant because he knew, he knew I didn't know how, didn't know a damn thing about it except how to add and subtract. And when the top blew off it, was unnecessary for me to turn in my resig—I wasn't blamed for it, but it was a convenient time to leave. Let's put it that way. So I didn't have to worry, I didn't have to plan that. That worked itself out. And after a while, Nick and Remy had found themselves homeless, and so they moved in with me in this—Oh, this was a—God, that was—You know, you can put up with the most extraordinary things when you're young. Absolutely wretched behavior on everybody's part twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and you're living right on top of each other. I mean, it's extraordinary we didn't kill each other. But then we—They went and got this unbelievably smashed-up, destroyed loft on Suffolk Street which was in the bowels of the Lower East Side, and it was a shambles. There were seventeen windows and none of them had glass in them. And the—If they did have glass,

the window itself didn't meet the frame and it had a floor—Oh, it also had a tin ceiling, which they thought was—that's got to come down. And every time a part of it came down, oh, a hundred years of good old New York City soot would come down on your head. It was 115 feet long, I think, and about 30 feet wide, and we had to clean up this—Anyway, we got, we got it done and we lived there. And then the cold set in and there was no heat. So we, for a while, lived in a tent inside this giant open space and then I, I got a new girlfriend and a new apartment—or a new old apartment.

MEH: So—Now another question I had is you met Stan VanDerBeek at Black Mountain.

JW: [AFFIRMATIVE]

MEH: And you continued to know him in New York?

JW: [AFFIRMATIVE]. I think there was a period of I don't know how long but a period where we didn't have much—I don't remember Stan that well from Black Mountain itself. I don't, right now I don't remember him. I guess we must have been casual friends. I can go into a big thing about the nature of relationships at Black Mountain from my point of view anyway.

MEH: Go ahead.

JW: Well, I always wanted some space around me. I did not grow up in a home with brothers and sisters, and I think I mentioned somewhere before, every year the population was thinning down, which meant you saw more of less people. And either—what I mentioned was that you got so you knew them, who it was, from the footsteps thirty yards away. But with very few exceptions,

I didn't—I didn't want—I didn't seek closeness with people—particularly men, and most definitely men. For what it's worth, that's what happened. That's where I was. But—So a lot of the men that you've mentioned, I have memories of them but not, you know, nothing that really sticks out because I just—I mean we'd go out and we'd have beers together. I'm not saying I shunned them, but I didn't, I didn't do—popular thing, “male bonding” right and left—only with one person, really, Bert probably. So that my—my memories of most men are pretty dim and by and large the same thing applied to women. So—sorry, we're—Anyway, then I don't remember being very much in touch with him in New York till several years later, and I think probably that's about the time he started—The Brussels World's Fair I think was 1958, right? So I think—I—We didn't get together and start working together till late '56 or '57. As a matter of fact, we were working against deadline so it must have been—it could even have been in '58.

MEH: What was the deadline?

JW: They had a—He—They had a contest for short animated films, short films, and you had to have the film ready by whatever date it—it had to be in Brussels at that time.

MEH: And what did you do for the film?

JW: Well, his films—I did this for a number of his films. As far as I knew, his films remain—They never had any dialogue, and they didn't necessarily tell a story but they had a—they had a sort of a link. You could follow the gist of it but it wasn't a story in the old-fashioned sense. But the narrative, as such, had to be

supplied by the music and so I—I always thought—now most people didn't, but that's the way most people are [LAUGHS]—that the music was truly fifty percent of the film. I mean it could, you could highlight what people see on the screen or you could virtually erase it, and most people, you know, they're not aware of that. But the music to any film, whether it's Bette Davis in Now, Voyager and the spring is coming up and the whole thing, without that, they're seeing a totally different film. They don't even know it. So I liked the idea of working with that—on something like that. Power it gives you. Now, we were working with about fourteen cents worth of equipment, but anyway that's another story connected with the film. But oh yeah, there was another thing. At one point, they used to have, they used to have me to dinner quite often and I don't think—I'm not sure whether they had any children by then or not but Joanna I always got along very well with and she was always very nice to me. So we'd see each other—I think they lived on Grand Street, around there, around that area. I knew a couple of other people that lived in that same area. Oh, and I had a - yeah I'd had a fire and they arranged for me to stay with another composer who I think—I'm not sure. I think he had something to do—Another composer who was the boyfriend of a gal who was at Black Mountain. I remember his name. His name was John Duffy. What her name was I don't know. But yeah, they were—This is what my memory says. I'd had a fire, probably had virtually no money, or—Wait a minute. I had a job so I had money, but I had no place to live, and they put me up for a while at their place and then arranged for me to stay with this other guy around the corner. And

they were doing things like that. And once I broke my arm and they arrived with a big box of groceries because I couldn't schlep groceries back from the market. So it was always a pretty good relationship there.

MEH: So tell me about the music that you composed for those with thirteen cents of equipment.

JW: For that film? That was—It was called *Woo Woo How* and I think—he says it won at the World's Fair. I guess I should take his word for it. It was his first film. It was kind of—For number one, it was done with very little money. And this was his idea. It's used all the time now, but as far as I know he was the first to do it. He would take cut-outs from Life magazine and move them around, instead of drawings. And they might be the front of a big Buick with a tremendous grille that opens and closes like a threatening mouth and that kind of stuff. Oh, what later became—what they later used consistently and constantly on the Monty Python Show, it's comstop (?) animation or something like that with cutouts. Well they were—That's, that was what he worked with. And it was, for him it was very convenient to film and probably very—he didn't need fancy equipment. He could just lay a picture down, take one thing and move it slightly and take another one, like that. But it ended up to be a very choppy film with a lot of this kind of jerky movement and some very quick stuff. Now [LAUGHS] I'd seen a lot of Hollywood movies and I'd seen—I was in love with Tom and Jerry cartoons. And the way they work is: they, when they want you, they sink everything to the instant. Well, they have four hundred thousand dollars worth of equipment—at that time four hundred thousand—and they

have experience and technicians who would know and they could—they can slow up a piece. Well, I was working from—He gave me the rough cut, which was a very rough cut indeed, and I had this little movieola where you turn the dial and look at it. Well that's not controlling, see, so the only way I could get an absolute at timing was—What do they move at, twenty-eight frames a second? Something like that. I counted and counted and counter [LAUGHS] and ended up with I at least had the sense to roll it up as I counted. I didn't have it all over the room. But that was the first thing to get a—Second, my second—So I charted all that. It took forever to write this bloody four and half minutes and I wrote it for a brass trio, which is nice not to hear the repercussion (?) in it. Trumpet, French horn, and trombone. And, and I was working at ASCAM at that time, working at night, and living in Paradise Valley, which is a little courtyard at the back of 9th or 10th Street, I think, and Avenue A. And I didn't ever go—I worked till midnight. I got home and finished the last I don't know page, two pages, and drew the double bar at about 5:30 a.m. and went to sleep in a virtuous—And the light comes up, I'm still sleeping, I hear these dogs barking and people carrying on and there's smoke all over the place. And this thing is sitting on the table between two windows and the fire escape. And I'm kind of curious and I look around and it looks like there's real—something going on. So I kind of plod down in my—I don't know, skivvies, I guess I threw on a pair of pants and a T-shirt and go down to look and the building's about to blow up [LAUGHS]. And the firemen are starting to get all excited and rushing in with their axes. And the only thing I could think of

was that damn score that I'd worked so hard on. And I'm not particularly athletic, but they had this kind of a fire escape where between the second floor and the first floor a ladder sort of halfway hangs down. It's about, ends up to be about seven feet off the ground. Well I—I knew the firemen wouldn't let me in that way so I leapt [LAUGHS] all the way, I was pretty thin at the time, but I didn't do this sort of thing and I got up there. What was—I was on the third floor, yes. So I come up, the big thing was climbing up that far. These firemen. They're standing like this. They were too amazed to—you know, and then firemen shouting. Well, all I had to do was reach in and get the thing and I waved [LAUGHS] "I got it." That was a big—that was a big drama connected but I was not—I mean after all this counting frames per second and then figuring out each sixteenth and all that stuff. And then of course—oh, it all was ashambles because there was no way that we had the technical know-how and the equipment to start sinking this. And even if we had, it was put on tape and the tape stretches so—And then Stan didn't have the money to put it on a soundtrack beside it, so that when it was shown for ages—it finally was done and I don't think I ever saw a—but whatever, whatever happened there between this supposed sinking (?), I'm sure it's a totally different concept than what I had to begin with. [LAUGHS] Anyway, the movie—The movie was very successful. Well, after that I did, I don't know, at least three—maybe five—more movies, and they were things that I made up on the spot [LAUGHS]. They took a day, if that. I wasn't going to go through—I mean this literally stretched out for months. That's a good story.

MEH: [INTERRUPTION?] Okay, we had been talking about your working with Stan VanDerBeek. And you said you also stayed in touch with Francine du Plessix Gray when you were in New York?

JW: Oh, we saw each other socially.

MEH: What was she like at Black Mountain?

JW: Flamboyant. How's that?

MEH: That's good.

JW: [LAUGHS] She, she got along with everybody, I think. She, she wanted to be kind and good and she was. She enjoyed—I think she was—I think a lot of the things she saw were quite new to her—just people's attitudes and their way of looking at things and the kind of humor that there was around. I got the feeling that she was not that much in touch with the average American and that she—I think she was kind of enchanted by the whole thing, so—I don't think she was enchanted enough to stay for the whole year but—She was enjoying herself, totally.

MEH: Yeah, I had the sense from people that, you know, with everybody else bumming around in jeans and worn out T-shirts and suddenly she appears [OVERTALK]

JW: [AFFIRMATIVE] Not everybody, but yeah, she was—she was a tonic [LAUGHS]. She zipped up the boys. [LAUGHS] I believe the expression is “put some lead in their pencils.” They—Some of the boys were very grateful that she was there. [LAUGHS] She's a nice memory.

MEH: Who else—of the Black Mountain people in the 50s, when you came back to New York—you were working with Stan VanDerBeek. You were in touch somewhat with Remy and Nick.

JW: Yeah, well we shared a loft. We shared a small apartment and then a loft together for a while.

MEH: Did you move with them to the loft in the Lower East Side?

JW: Yeah, well they—I, I had an apartment on East 6th Street, and then that was too tiny, and they went and found this loft and asked me to move along with them, so I did. And we spent about six months trying to get it in shape so you could even just exist in it, let alone live. It was very—It was totally medieval. It was—But they—they were young and in love. I was young and I was in love, but not with them. [LAUGHS] Oh, and for a while—Oh, one person we never mentioned from Black Mountain who was sweetness personified was a guy named Harvey. I don't remember his last name. Do you know a—

MEH: Harvey Harmon?

JW: Harvey Harmon. And he I guess found himself homeless or something for a while, and he stayed with us for a while. And my memory is he was like—I guess it was wintertime, and I think he slept like twenty-two hours a day. He was not a go-getter, under any circumstances, but I think he hibernated. But he was always very sweet and very nice to be around [LAUGHS] when he wasn't comatose. But I mean it was a huge place. You could have put the Second Armored Division in there with their tanks and still had room to maneuver. But I, I took up with somebody else and found an apartment way

down in the Wall Street area at a time when it was—before it was a twenty-four a day operation. So it was noisy, busy, busy jammed until 5:30 p.m. and then it was like a tomb.

MEH: Did you stay in touch with other people or work with other people in New York during those early years?

JW: From Black Mountain? No, not that I really rem—Oh, I went to the Cedar quite often and—Yeah, people would show up, but I didn't visit too many people in their homes or—They didn't have the resources and then they didn't have the money and they didn't have the inclination to be, you know, to give dinner parties or that kind of thing. So if we saw each other, it was generally in the Cedar Bar. And during most of that time, I was one of the few that had a full-time job.

MEH: What were you doing?

JW: What was I doing? I don't know. I would take a job and work at it for X number of months, and then I would take another job and work—I mean I worked as a book—I did office work of one kind or another, generally with numbers because they came easy to me. I had a lot of them. I mean, I think I mentioned to you I worked as a bookkeeper and a few others, but I don't—blessedly—remember them, what they were. The jobs were easy. You could pick up a job easy. They couldn't look up your entire history on the Internet, and you had to have a minimum number of papers and you had—if you were reasonably clean and decently spoken you could get some kind of a wretched job.

MEH: Did you—Where did you learn calligraphy?

JW: Ah. Okay. Well, Lou did it. And I admired it, and he told me a bit about it. I never took calligraphy with him. However, I began to develop a pretty decent musical hand, and when Lou—Lou had calligraphy fountain pens, which means that instead of having a straight point it's a chisel point, shaped like a chisel, and you hold it—Now with music you hold it straight up and down, and then from Lou I learned that calligraphy's done by holding it at a 45-degree angle. I just would take a look at his—because music, it generally contains some words, faster, slower—and began—and I always took pride in what—Actually, the time I was sharing with Remy and Nick, I began to take a pride in what my scores looked like and that's probably when I first—And I first began to use that kind of a pen, because the older scores were very like little, truly like fly specks. Oh, and I got a couple of copying jobs, for which I was paid. So it necessitated a change of the hand, and then whatever was written started glaring back at me in comparison with the score. So I just, I think I got a book or two and I practiced a little bit and then—I can date this because about the time I was doing the first score for Stanley I would do some writing. I had a—I worked at a drawing table, the right sort of angle, to write scores. But that's very cerebral work and also just the process of writing down is a little small and very cramped. And then to relax I would get a nice big pen and start just practicing calligraphy afterwards. It was—because it was the same thing but it wasn't. You know, you could actually sweep your hand, and gee, you know, just by holding the pen right the letters came out so beautiful. Well

I—And then I got some more books and some decent pens and somewhere later in the—I think maybe two years? No, a year and a half—I got a job working at the library at NYU and worked in their—headed the reserve reading room, as a matter of fact, when everybody else was away and everybody else was always away. Paid practically nothing but I could walk to work. And they had one of the name calligraphers there that gave evening courses, and I could take them for free. So I signed up for them, but by that time I was already so far ahead of the rest of the class—And it just developed on my own over the years. And it's something I like to do. And it's something I got a—I got a real aesthetic pleasure out of being a really good hand. It's a—Yeah, I was always, I think I mentioned a long time ago, I think, in high school I'd taken mechanical drawing. Well, that's not, certainly not art but there was to me a satisfaction in this fine, precise work. Calligraphy's not necessarily precise, but—Well, it is precise, except for the flourishes and even they have to be—Because if it's not—If one line goes the wrong way on a page, it'll glare out at me. So it was just a natural affinity for the work. And later, when my main income was professionally working as a copyist and sometimes arranging—this was for Broadway shows—I would get an occasional calligraphy job and copying became a real onerous chore. It takes a long time to do a page and a lot of—I mean [LAUGHS] it can take a long time. Some of them are easy but, you know—And it's very precise and you have to, you have to remember what the hell you're doing, and I never like to remember what the hell I'm doing [LAUGHS]. That's not quite true but—It's detail, detail, detail.

And I thought that even being badly paid as the calligrapher, I was enjoying the work more and it paid better. And there was never—With music copying, it was always—I don't care if it came from the most reputable publisher in the world that has all the time in the world, and they've got people that plan out production processes and all this stuff—they always had to be done yesterday. They always—They always meant staying up all night, practically. It would come down to that, even if it wasn't that at the beginning. And even if it wasn't that way, I would put it off because I hated the work so I had to do that, you know. And calligraphy—some jobs were like that but most of them weren't.

MEH: I don't want a long—because we're short on tape and time—but sort of with your adult life, did you continue to compose? What did you do?

JW: Did I continue to compose? Off and on, but I—Sometimes it became impossible. But I never—I didn't compose unless I was specifically commissioned to do it. Not all the time was I—yes, I guess I was—Sometimes I may not have been paid very well. Probably I never was. But that—I no longer saw a purpose in writing—in writing for eventually the dumpster or something. I no longer got satisfaction out of writing music that's for the sake of writing music.

MEH: Right. So looking back on Black Mountain, what do you feel really—What do you think, as a school, was the importance of Black Mountain? And what do you think was the importance of Black Mountain—

JW: The importance?

MEH: As a school. Why did it matter?

JW: In the cosmic view of things?

MEH: Yeah. Both individually and in the cosmic scheme.

JW: I'm not—I wish you'd phrased that question differently.

MEH: Okay. How should I phrase it?

JW: [LAUGHS] What is the ultimate meaning of Black Mountain? That's even worse. It's really—I'm going to have to say—you're not going to like this but you're going to have to take it. That's not the kind of question I can deal with. It's too bloody abstract for me. And it also—[OVERTALK] Also, I mean when you get to "what is the ultimate meaning of something?" that's a—

MEH: Well, let's get more specific. What about Black Mountain do you think worked as a school?

JW: The freedom. The encouragement. The encouragement was wonderful. And the—There was no "You can't do that," when it came to work. "Oh no, you can't make that modulation. Those keys aren't related" or there was—I mean, aside from the very beginning strict courses, which I'm all in favor of. Have a background. In other words, if you're going to draw, if you're going to be an Abstract Expressionist artist, I think it's great if you know how to draw a human figure before you do that, you know. And I thought it was very necessary to have the fundamental background. But, yeah, you're encouraged—encouragement to take chances and to try something new. That's what—that's one of the reasons why I—It's a dual-edged sword later when I decided that I was only going to write for commissions, for a specific purpose. Because I was no longer at Black Mountain. Then you, you—It would

have been death to do something new and different every time, even if you were capable of it. But while I was still at Black Mountain—I don't know how, really, but—I came up with an actually revolutionary idea with almost every piece, in one way or another. Sometimes it was technically how to write the thing, how to get these certain effects. But I always—Every piece became a new challenge and what are we going—you know, I'm doing to present myself a challenge, and as far as I know it's never been tackled before and let's see how we're going to deal with this. And that to me was—That was the excitement, whether people liked it—And I gen-, I actually felt at the time it didn't make any difference whether people like it or not, you know. Now, when you ran into a situation like in a play where somebody says, "Oh sing me my favorite lullaby," you're not going to, obviously you're not going to [LAUGHS]—I think later on I became crazy enough to do, you know, something where you attach a grand piano to the fourteenth story and drop it [LAUGHS] and record the sound. No, I didn't actually do that. And call that "My Favorite Lullaby," but—Am I clear at all on this?

MEH: Right.

JW: The excitement, the excitement was in the encouragement to—Well, number one, I suppose, and this isn't, this is a dual-edged thing too—to go your own, do your own thing they would call it now. Yeah, and I think that has a good and a bad side.

MEH: What about—My next question was "What do you think did not work about Black Mountain?"

JW: The same thing. The same thing that worked is what didn't work. The do your own thing attitude. Because it can lead—It depends on who's doing it and what they're doing. Truly. You know. I mean, you don't—with all the blather I've given you, that's really what it boils down to as far as I can see. It's a pretty simple equation. Either it works or it doesn't work, and it can go disastrously wrong, if you've got the wrong—I mean, I don't know why I got off on that da-da-da-da-da-da on a stand on a pulpit, "That's what's wrong. Everybody's doing their own thing." But it can be, can lead to craziness.

[INTERRUPTION IN TAPING. MOVE TO THE PIANO.]

MEH: Maybe—Okay, this first score that you have here [OVERTALK]

JW: Oh, this is—It's for two pianos and four hands. This was written during vacation up at Missy's place. Her aunt was a piano teacher. It was written for her aunt. Basically it's a student work that they can play together and there aren't too many of those. [OVERTALK] Rather (?) dissonant.

MEH: [OVERTALK] Do you have a date on it?

JW: Yeah. June 1950.

MEH: And Missy is Missy Ginesi?

JW: Yeah.

MEH: Okay. Okay. Then let me just—Okay. And this score?

JW: It's my—It's for piano, August 1952. It was written at Black Mountain College. This is a—This is when I started taking into consideration the silences and integrating them into the composition as part of the composition rather than a rest at the end of the phrase, that type of thing. It's about six, seven minutes

long. It was recorded in New York many years later, and I don't know whatever happened to any of that stuff. The other—

MEH: Who recorded it?

JW: I don't remember. A friend of the composer, Gerald (?) Duffy's, I think. Pianist he got. Now this is *Four Short Pieces*. This was written—this is for prepared piano in case you can see that. This page contains all the instructions of where and how exactly to prepare the piano, which is—means, in this case, it's screws and dimes and a wooden peg, more screws, and it gives the dimensions of the screws and where they go, and the dimes and bolts and things like that. It gives changes in the pitch, it changes the sound, it changes the timbre—it changes everything. This piece was specifically written, since I'm—to put it mildly—not much of a pianist, for me to play. At times it can sound like you're playing the piano but—And this, I, I would play myself. I did—undoubtedly did it at Black Mountain, but I don't remember when or—But I went on tour with Katherine Litz, I guess it was, and performed this special little concert at the University of Louisiana, a demonstration piece before the dance concert. The piece probably lasts eight minutes. Doesn't look like it with that number of pages but—Kind of effective. That one would work.

MEH: And this is—You did a—This is not the piece that David played at Black Mountain?

JW: That one's lost.

MEH: That was lost, okay. This is a different piece.

JW: I had some thought there. That's not going to turn up. That's been lost for—That was probably the box that my landlady got rid of when I was in the hospital [LAUGHS]. [WATT PLAYS THE PIANO. MOOD MUSIC.]

[END OF CASSETTE 3. BEGINNING OF CASSETTE 4.]

[PIANO PLAYING CONTINUES]

MEH: Okay, Jay tell me about this cover.

JW: It's a cover that was done by Gerda Slavson—is that what her name was? I didn't know her very well but I'd written a score on paper like this because it was just ordinary paper that you draw staves and lines on. And it was an unruly pile and I asked her to do me a cover for it. And the piece was for the insides of two grand pianos and you had to play it standing up. You put your foot on the right-hand pedal and you stood up because you were bending over the insides of Steinway Model B, because of the way the bracing of the piano. Anyway, the strings were plucked, they were strummed, they were rubbed with scrubbing brushes, and they were hit with silkscreen squeegees. Now people would press whatever—well, it was C major, and they'd press it silently and that leaves those strings exposed so if you should thump it, with your hand let's say, those notes will come out, the rest of them won't. It took preparation because you have to, in most cases you'd have to press whatever you wanted to get a chord and—So it took time. It was written for two so they could kind of dovetail each other in the playing of it. That piece right now is totally [UNINTEL]. Anyway, it was written as the prelude to a play, The Scapegoat, which is based on Kafka's The Trial, and it had to be spooky and it was very

spooky. It was very eerie. And the eeriest effect was—The lower strings on a grand piano are coiled wire, like the old-fashioned springs they used to use on doors and much tauter, and by taking this hard rubber squeegee and rubbing it that way it gave an eerie long-lasting sound, which is like no other in the world. I mean it set up—By the time the play started, everybody was creeped out already. So that was kind of neat. I hope that score turns up later. Anyway, it was a very—Lou Harrison certainly thought this was the greatest thing since white bread. Nothing like it had been heard before and I've heard a few pieces, you know other pieces, I'm not the only one to write for the insides of pianos, but I've never heard anything approaching it in the effect. Now, as I said, that was done on this kind of paper. Well this is a different, this is what remains of maybe a twenty-piece, twenty-page score for I think four percussion players with a prepared piano. It was played by people at Black Mountain. It was called "Incident Number One." There was going to be more, but there aren't. I hope some of the rest of this turns up. It's—It made a lot of noise. It starts off with a—starts off with a big bang and then gets very quiet and then sort of picks up later. It—This also was done for, let's see, metal rattle, two lead pipes, muted. I don't know what the "muted" is, really. Two tortoise shells, which are like temple blocks (?). Very low side drum. A suspended lead pipe, which gives off a tubular bell sound. Break drums, which are very rich sounding. These were Lou's collection of oddments (?). Oh, a thunder sheet. That's used in sound effects that sound like thunder. A tam-tam and claves and then there's glockenspiel, at the bottom, and the prepared piano which can sound like all

these things put together and more if it has to. We'll see if that piece turns up. I keep it in here because she made this—I don't know how this survived, but I think it's a neat cover and it protects these sheets here. That was done a number of time and it was done down at the—as an unscheduled appearance at the Women's College of North Carolina in Greensboro. Sometime there's more to say about that, but we'll do that for another time.

MEH: That was when you went down for the arts festival?

JW: Yeah.

MEH: Well, go ahead. While you've mentioned it—what about the arts festival?

JW: Well that year they featured mainly puppeteers, which wasn't, you know, our thing but it turns out that Manuel de Falla, who wrote some very popular pieces, but he also could be quite, quite daring, has written a wonderful opera called [UNINTELL TITLE] for big puppets operating little puppets. And the little puppets are doing Don Quixote and the big puppets are cursing at each other and carrying on in the background, and it's a wonderful little chamber opera that de Falla wrote. But that has nothing to do with me or anything else. It's a great score. But it was pretty—We were the, we were certainly—we added the spice to a rather bland diet of artistic expression. Let's put it that way—this piece did, anyway. I like that. [LAUGHS]

[END OF CASSETTE 3, BEGINNING OF CASSETTE 4]

WATT SITTING AT PIANO.

JW: Every now and then I like to turn a metaphor.

MEH: Who went with you to Greensboro?

JW: Well, Lou. He was the instigator of all the trouble. And Joe and Mary Fiore—they played two of the instruments. Viola Farber played the prepared piano. Dan Rice played the glockenspiel. And one other person. it might have been me, for all I know. At Black Mountain when we did it, I conducted it, but I may have played the—Oh, there's one interesting thing about this particular score, just the technique involved of writing it. All percussion players were free at any given time to play any instruments, and they were laid out on tables, and I think, I see here, it's not written that way [REFERRING TO SCORE] but there was—I think they were originally written, the parts were coded in color so that everybody had to know where all the instruments were and it was very important to play—Claves are tiny things. It's very important that you lay them down where you picked them up because people are wandering around. So within the piece everybody plays every one of the instruments. That's so I can get any combination I want at any time. That's totally foreign to the way most—to the way percussion music is usually written. A person has their instruments in front of them and they play them, but the kind of funda—With a choreographed little ballet going on there, people running from there to there to there to there and saying, "Excuse me." [LAUGHS] No they didn't. In rehearsal they did a lot, but they—they all could read music very well and they did very well with it. It was a fun piece to do.

MEH: You said it was unscheduled at Greensboro. You arrived there, and you got it on the program?

JW: Lou made have called beforehand, but he decided he was sufficiently well-known to get his way. He decided, I don't know, two days before they were going to go down there and do this. Now I'm sure that Greensboro a month ahead had written a very kind civilized letter saying "Do you have anything you want to submit? We'd like to know about it," but he didn't want to go that way. We arrived kind of late. The thing was already in progress, and they had a—every year—I only went the one time but I know this was the way they did it—every year they would have an imported celebrity, and this year it was a composer named Ross Lee Finney, who at the time—He had a name and he was rather a conservative composer. And he was giving a lecture. He was from the University of Michigan, probably head of the department there. He was a successful composer and, as I say, a bit conservative. But he was giving a talk in the main auditorium. I don't know if you know whether it's still there or whatever it is—but it was a fairly good-sized auditorium with a balcony. And you can imagine the young women are sitting there and they're taking in his conversation. Well we arrived late, so we went nicely enough. We went and sat in the balcony, and I think maybe we were the only people there. We certainly didn't look like the other people, but—They're taking care of their white gloves and all that. Finney's babbling on about the wonders and magic of music, and he made—I don't know what it was because I was shall we say [UNINTEL], he made a comment about Arnold Schoenberg. And Arnold Schoenberg to him represented everything that was wrong about music, because he wrote this unsingable dissonant jagged music. And he had done

some kind of an analysis of Schoenberg's music, and he wanted to share that with us and all of a sudden next to me I'm jolted awake by Lou—pops up from the back of the auditorium and says—quote—“Either you're wrong or Schoenberg lied to me,” and he sits down. [LAUGHS] This was totally gratuitous. Well, Finney stood standing there. I guess he must have—I was in a state of shock. And poor man said, “May I ask who made this latest contribution?” or whatever he said, and Lou said, “My name is Lou Harrison and I'm a composer who studied with and knew Arnold Schoenberg very well.” Now what happened after that, I don't remember because we were all—by this time we were all non-plussed and—but filled with laughter and so on. I don't—Things, I don't know what happened. I think I disappeared into a motel room and cried, or something. [LAUGHS] But later that afternoon or the next day, sure enough we're on the program and we did our thing and—to resounding silence. I mean, otherwise they were playing little, you know, nice little string quartets and stuff like that.

MEH: [INTERRUPTION] We're on.

JW: This is, this is music for a dance, based on St. Francis and then [UNINTEL: SOUNDS LIKE burny friends] that Nick Cernovich in a paroxysm of religious zeal got involved in. You know, I guess it was fun. I think it lasted probably about at least twelve minutes, maybe a little longer. The first—It was in three movements. The first movement is for two pianos, played straight on the keyboard, notes and all that, and it all has a kind of a, it has a very spacious leisurely quality, and it had a sort of dissonant medieval sound. The second

part I don't know what was going on in the dance, but it was kind of frantic and this was played by—this is again years later. This was a dissonant part but still melody that people could respond to, and percussive. This was kind of a riff. This is marked—Well, I'm totally wrong. Oh at this point it's marked Lento [UNINTEL]. After that then it is [UNINTEL]. Yeah. [INAUDIBLE—MUMBLING TO HIMSELF AS HE LOOKS THROUGH SCORE.] I'm mixed up, but I do remember the second, the second part is kind of dissonant. Well there's a lot of drum carrying on here with jagged rhythms. We're not beating out 4/4. Yeah, it had a—the second movement had a slow introduction and then a lot of noise and then the third is very spacious in sound and sort of a climactic, well acceptable quotas (?) (codas?). Surprise surprise. I remember this was a pretty successful piece and then I forgot about it and ran into this—I don't remember the name of it. I hadn't thought about it in a long time. I'd like to hear it though. This one—it's touchy whether they would work or not.

MEH: Okay.

JW: This is that—there's a *Trio for Violin, Cello, and Piano*. Boy, there is an ace (?) and copied many years later when I became a professional copyist. I didn't even know it at the time, but I remember that—I certainly wasn't writing a serial piece, but it turns out that the main theme of it is a twelve-tone row, which is just—it wasn't designed to be that way, but it is, which is kind of interesting. It's definitely a student work, but it's a well-knit one. It just doesn't have the punch that it should have but—I could hear this one. Oh, it was written—It took a lot of time. This was at the very beginning of what I was doing, and you see it's

quite a substantial work. It was written to gain entrance to the State Academy in Vienna where I had thoughts of going and [INAUDIBLE, PAGES TURNING] A substantial work. Yeah, about 230 measures so it's—and these measures are, they're not fast, so—Probably lasts about twelve minutes.

MEH: Was it performed?

JW: No. No. Never. We didn't have a violinist and a cellist down there, and I didn't have one in my [UNINTEL] [LAUGHS] It'd be easy enough to do and good people could read through it. Maybe they will someday. It's not the greatest work in the world but it's—It's not the worst either. These are nice. This is a collection of Ottomans (?): short, generally pretty pieces that—I think three of them were written for specific purposes. For instance, the “Lullaby” was written for that play The Scapegoat with the leading line “Sing that, that's my favorite lullaby,” so you're not going to write something crazy. There's a “Prelude,” “Lullaby”—The “Prelude” was written specifically for this group but I started [UNINTEL] an Estampé, which is maybe my best piece. I don't know. For what it is, that's professional. A very—This piece attracted a lot of attention. It's basically “Yankee Doodle” but it doesn't sound very much like “Yankee Doodle.” They liked that one. And the last one, which knocked—is a virtuoso piece. Oh no, “The Dying Turtle”—that's the first, first good piece that I wrote. Gee, I did things like write in the fives (?). I used keys, number one, I wrote it in five flat. It's a—Oh, you've heard it. It's a very acceptable piece. And the last one is “Virtuoso” and it only uses three notes—A, G, and E—and the trick is to—it's also probably the longest. The trick is to—this was an assignment from

Lou, his first assignment—and it worked—The trick is to—How are you going to write a piece with only three notes without driving people out of the house? So the point is they go all over the place, and the rhythm is constantly changing, and so the focus gets on the rhythm. And this has been performed a number of times. They've all been performed a number of times. And I've—Now this sounds improbable to me but I've yet to meet a person who said "Gee, that's only three notes." So that's the—Now this is the last piece I wrote at Black Mountain. It's a big one and it was a concerto for piano with what we had. I use the word percussion but this time a kinder gentler percussion, and a flute player, a fellow that came from Asheville. And it's a toughie. So far it doesn't look like that, but the piano part, as I look at it here, is, it's the kind of thing people don't see, you don't see ver-, you don't see at all anymore. It's a lot of tone clusters but sometimes they're not actually complete clusters. It's a—it's a killer. It really is. It's a rough piece. It's a slam bang make a lot of noise, damn the torpedoes sort of work. It's—Now we rehearsed and rehearsed and rehearsed it, and I know we performed it, and there's no record of it. I can't, I can't, I don't see anything about a—I see a program for the year's end concert, and I know for instance they got strings for another person's work. They had strings and horns and a chorus. And this was originally I guess supposed to be done then and it's not on the program but I do know it was performed, so what the circumstance—I was getting ready to leave—what the circumstances were then, I don't know. So—This one—the interesting—part of the copy is in Lou's hand. This is—You know, the flute

part's in Lou's hand. I'd be interested to hear this tried now, mainly to see whether it got totally out of hand or whether it didn't. [LAUGHS] I put a lot of work into this. Whether I was going over the edge or not, I don't—[UNINTEL], yeah. With a cigarette burn in it, that's nice. Yeah, it'd be kind of interesting to see whether it [UNINTEL] was ready to be committed or just sent to New York. I ended up in New York. At least that piece for the insides of two grand pianos, that's the one I'd like to find the most because it's in colors and all that and besides it's a very successful piece. Maybe it'll turn up but I don't know. And this stuff, I don't know what to say about it. I mean we—You're certainly not going to lug it home today but if you want this to go to the archives it's fine with me. I don't have that many copies of the Six Pieces for Children. I need to make another copy, so I don't want to give them to you right now but they will—if that's what you want, they'll eventually go down.

[END OF RECORDING, CASSETTE 4.]

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]