

INCITE PROJECT  
The Reminiscences of  
Robert Sherman

Columbia Center for Oral History  
Columbia University  
2019

## PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Robert Sherman conducted by Gerry Albarelli on June 27, 2019. This interview is part of the INCITE Oral History Project.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that s/he is reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

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Session #1 (video)

Interviewee: Robert Sherman

Location: Ossining (village), NY

Interviewer: Gerry Albarelli

Date: June 27, 2019

Albarelli: Start by telling me, just so we have this as an introduction, where and when—your name, please say your name and then where and when you were born and a little bit about our early life.

Sherman: [00:00:17] Well, I'm Robert or Bob Sherman. I use Bob basically for my broadcasts, and I use Robert when I have to sign checks or do other useful things and when the IRS [Internal Revenue Service] calls. Born July 23, 1932 and grew up in a highly musical family. My mother was Nadia Reisenberg, the pianist. My aunt, Clara Rockmore, still today considered the preeminent virtuoso of the theremin, which was the first electronic instrument. So, I grew up around music and with music, played the piano sort of. I had a certain talent for it and lacked the discipline to do anything. Mother always told me, for heaven's sakes, don't tell anybody you study with me because you're not typical of my class. I mean, at that time I didn't like Bach. I didn't want to play Bach. And if I were a real student mother would have made me play Bach, but I could say no.

Anyway, I developed a proficiency at the piano, so I accompanied my glee club at college.

Actually, in high school, I made a decision early on. I did not go to [The High School of] Music and Art. I did not go to Performing Arts High School because I knew that if I did that I would be the worst. I would be the absolute bottom of the barrel among real musicians or music students.

So I went to Stuyvesant High School where I was not only the best pianist in the school I think I was the only pianist in the school. When I was a senior the orchestral conductor asked me to do a concerto movement. I remember running to mother. I said, “What’s the easiest concerto there is?” She told me Haydn’s in D major, so I learned the first movement. Great effort and played it, so I mean, I had performing experience. When I was in the NYU Glee Club I started playing little solo groups in between the choral segments, and I did stuff like that.

And I was—in 1953, actually the year before I went to Teacher’s College [Columbia University], and I don’t know if you should say this or not, I should say this in public, but I went there because it was the only place where I could get a master’s degree in one year without having to write a thesis. So, I did it. And at that point also there was a system the Army had. Now, this was just after the Korean War. Draft was still in effect. And I decided I’d rather spend—I had skipped several grades. I was quite young. I decided I’d rather spend three years playing in the band than two years being in the infantry or whatever horrible thing they were going to make me do. So, there was a system where you could audition for an Army band. So, I went to the Army band in Brooklyn, and he needed a pianist to play at the officer’s club.

I didn’t tell him I couldn’t play popular music. I wound up playing *Green Sleeves* and at the officer’s club, but that’s another story. But he said, this is a little marching band. I can’t. There’s no MO [military occupation] for a pianist. That’s just—I forget what MO stands for, but military designation or something. There was no place as a pianist. So I said, “Okay, what do you need?” He said, “Well, I always need clarinetists and drummers.” So I was at Teacher’s College. I took clarinet lessons. I took drum lessons. And I came back to him and got into the band on clarinet

even though I couldn't really play the clarinet. I remember his audition because he wanted a pianist, remember. The audition, he gave me the method book, page one it said C D E, E D C. I could do that. Next page: C D E, E D C with staccato marks. I could more or less do that. Pass. So, after I got out of TC [Teacher's College] in the August of '53 I went into the Army.

Had to go through basic training which was, I guess everybody had to no matter what, and then I was assigned to the Army band in Brooklyn, and we played troop ships going in and out. That was largely my Army career except they had a talent contest one day. All Army talent contest was a big deal. So, I'm on a little base. I figured, listen, if I can enter the contest that's a day I don't have to do whatever I'm supposed to do in the military, so decided to enter the contest. Well, it was one other guy that entered the contest also. We came there, and he looked at me, and he said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I'm playing the piano." I said, "What do you do?" He said, "I'm an accordionist." He says, "Okay, pianist," he said, "you're winner in the instrumental division. And you," to the accordion, "you're winner in the novelty division".

So we both were winners, no bother, and we went back. Then came First Army, which was the whole eastern part of the country here, and was, I think, at Fort Dix maybe, where I had had my basic training, actually, but if it wasn't Fort Dix it was—I think it was Fort Dix. Anyway, I came back, and it turned out that I was the pianist and there were six other competitors, all of them playing the accordion, as it happened. Well, they were incredible accordion players. I remember they were imitating birds and train whistles and I don't know what the heck they were doing. And here I'm sitting with my Khachaturian in Toccata, which is a piece that sounds very difficult but really isn't. Beautifully laid out for the keyboard. So I won, so now we go to all Army.

People are flown in from Japan, from everywhere. I remember one of those was a real honest-to-god pianist who studied with Jose Iturbi, and here I am, you know, not knowing what I'm doing, but anyway.

We went, and I practiced like crazy, and the other guys who were in New York for the first time went bananas, went to bars all night, didn't touch the the piano. And also, there was one guy who instead of in the novelty category was in the instrumental category. Incredible drummer who had this huge act. I remember the American flag would shoot up at the end of it, and he'd drum and all kinds of stuff, but there was a rule. If you exceeded four minutes you get demerits. And he was so excited he went up for about five and a half. And I cut the Khachaturian to make sure because we were at about four minutes and ten seconds. I wasn't going to take any chances. I cut one of the repeats or something. I was three and a half. Lo and behold I'm a third place winner.

First place was a Dixieland harpist, and the second place was -- no, jazz harpist, that's right, and a Dixieland clarinetist was second whose main achievement was being able to bend over backwards so the clarinet was touching the floor behind him while he's playing *Tiger Rag*. That was a big audience favorite. And I'm here with my Khachaturian. So, we all won. And what followed next was kind of really strange because at that time Ed Sullivan decided he was going to put all the winners of this contest on the air. I think it was the second annual, and he had done it the year before. And so, I remember Monday I came to the studio and talked to the producer. And I played my Khachaturian Toccata for him, and he decided that wasn't right. I don't know whether he didn't like modern music or he felt the Khachaturian was too Soviet and he didn't want to mess with that. I don't know.

But he said to me, “Well, can you play *The Fire Dance*?” “No.” “Can you play the Chopin *Polonaise*?” “No.” I avoided, ritually, any piece that anybody else had heard of because I didn’t want them to realize that I couldn’t do it very well. And he thought I was putting him on. I’m a winner of All Army Talent and I can’t play anything that he’s ever heard of. So he finally, grudgingly allowed me to play a little Tchaikovsky piece that I couldn’t really play very well. At least he let it go, so somewhere in the files of The Museum of TV there’s me playing a minute and a half of Tchaikovsky on the Ed Sullivan Show. But there [were] further ramifications because after that there was designed an All Army Show that was going to tour army bases of the Far East. And I remember the—I can’t think of her name but the woman who produced, choreographed it had done the same thing for Roxy and the Radio City Music Hall Shows, and real professional.

It was called *Rolling Along*, and they had some very good people on it. They had a circus act that was Santini Brothers I think or somebody. They had a trampoline act. There were all kinds of things because it was variety, and this time I was mostly playing a Chopin’s Military Polonaise, and I also couldn’t do very well, but the guy, the colonel who was in charge also didn’t like the Khachaturian in Toccata, which is the only piece I could really do well. Anyway, for, I think it was six months or something, we were on tour. We went to Alaska then to [the] Far East. We went to Taiwan. We went to Okinawa and Korea. And this was just after the Korean War, and I remember thinking that was the most awful place I had ever seen. There was nothing green. Couple of houses had little pots of flowers out. That was the only color you saw. Hills were bare and shot completely. Oh, it was just incredibly—it’s like *M\*A\*S\*H*

If you look at *M\*A\*S\*H* and you see those mountains, those bare mountains, that's what the whole country looked like to me. And I do remember on the other hand Okinawa being the most lush, green, glorious place I had seen, and my boss at [W]QXR, who was some years older than I am, had been in the assault on Okinawa, and he said Okinawa to him looked just like how I was describing Korea, so the difference in those ten years or whatever it is had turned this barren, this desolate place into this green paradise, and I guess the same thing has happened in Korea, at least South Korea.

Anyway, that's the sad story of my performing life. I mean, it continued every so often. I would come out of retirement and play something with somebody for fun. But basically, I had decided while I was still in college I didn't really know what I wanted to do, but I knew that music somehow would be there. I also knew that I wasn't going to be a performer for reasons already discussed, but I wanted to do something. And of course I grew up listening to WQXR. Mother frequently played there, gave recitals there, and I just decided, wouldn't radio be a great thing? I love playing music for my friends. I love saying, "Listen to this piece I just found." And everybody said, "Well, you can't get into New York radio. That's impossible. You got to go out to the Hinterlands somewhere, get a job at some little backwater station and learn the trade and then maybe you can get back to New York."

So that's actually what I planned to do. And lo and behold, just before I was ready to get out of the Army, Abram Chasins, who was then music director and a friend of the family and colleague of mother's, wonderful pianist, told her that there's a job opening as a typist at QXR. So I applied for it from the Army. And I guess probably because of knowing mother I got the job. So first thing out of the army I go to my job at QXR, and it was the most exciting thing you could



imagine. I was a typist now, and I walked in the first day, and I was introduced to the director of recorded music, Lawrence, Harold Lawrence. That same day he's going on vacation. He stayed to tell me what he wanted me to do—listen to these records, make out the cards. We had printed typed cards at that point with the composer and the name and the timings and all those things. And he gave me this enormous stack of records, LPs, of course, to listen to, and then he went on vacation.

Well, I was so excited about this thing. I finished that whole pile of stuff and a batch more so when he came back he was impressed. "Look at you", he said. [He] looked at all this that I had done very well. But he also said that he's leaving. He's leaving QXR in weeks or a month, whatever it was, to go to head up Mercury Records, which was one of the big companies at the time. And he therefore had to program ahead because he was the chief programmer. He had to do not only the next month the way we usually had but the next two months, maybe even three, I don't remember. And it turns out that he had had battles with almost everybody else in the department there, and so he asked me, who at least he hadn't had any fights with, to help him.

Now I didn't do anything really except look up see when's the last time we played Beethoven's Fifth or whatever and helped him, made a few suggestions along the way or I would look up, we need a six minutes piece. What do you think we could do? That kind of stuff, and I did it, and again, serendipity, just at that point one of the people in the department left. And he, that is, Lawrence, liked my work helping him and recommended that I be put into her position, which of course got everybody else in the department very pissed off because, you know, I'm fresh out of school here and I'm just coming in and I get jumped ahead of many of the others. But, whatever

it is that they realized eventually it wasn't my fault. I couldn't have orchestrated it if I tried, but anyway, that started me at QXR.

And I moved up after Harold Lawrence. Martin Bookspan came in as the director, and when he decided to leave and do freelance and other things I was named director of recorded music, and when Chasins left, I was moved up to music director. And eventually I was program director, and it was somewhere in that period, 1969 actually, I had started almost immediately when I came to the station. I started a program called Folk Music of the World because I loved folk music and we didn't have any on the station. We had a lot of other—well, I shouldn't say any. Pru Devon did Nights in Latin America, which was authentic music from Latin America. But we didn't have a real folk music program, Russian gypsy songs and ballads and whatever. And I started it. I wasn't allowed to do it on the air because we had a strict union divisions there. So I programmed it, wrote the script, gave it to the head of continuity who typed it up and gave it to the announcer who did it on the air.

And that continued. I say I was, at that point, program director '69, and this was the height of the folk music revival. And I suggested a program of contemporary folk music. It's all a long story how that [unclear], and I won't bore you with.

Albarelli: It sounds interesting.

Sherman: [00:18:36] Well, if you insist. Stop me if your tape runs out or just falling asleep, but I was sent out. The station then, as forever, was looking for younger listeners, QXR classical station. We appealed to the better educated, higher level, whatever you want, part of the population, but not youngsters, people nineteen and early twenties, even early thirties. They were

not our main constituency, and those are the ones that advertisers are often looking for. So, I was sent out to talk to various college groups and see what they're looking for, what they could tune in for—so I did. I did just that, and I went and made a number of recommendations to the station.

I went at one time to the Hunter College High School. I don't know if you know about that. Part of Hunter College, but it is a high school for exceptional, bright kids and really the elite within the public school system. And I talked to them about our Folk Music of the World program. And I said, "So we play pieces by Burl Ives." [grumbles] And I said, "And Pete Seeger." "Yay!" And I said, "Well, yeah, we do a lot of Pete Seeger." I said, "Of course, we stay away from the controversial. I wouldn't play *Waste Deep in the Big Muddy*." And I remember a girl got up and wagged her finger at me and said, "That's the trouble with you. You're wishy-washy." So, I slunk away, feeling like Charlie Brown and came back, and I began thinking. I said, you know, she's right. What's wrong with playing a song like that? It's what young people are looking for.

So, I came back, and among the recommendations was let's do a contemporary folk show, not Russian gypsies and not Burl Ives or *Blue Tail Fly* but new stuff that is really appealing to younger listeners. And this was approved. Now, who's going to host it? I went around to everybody I could think of and talked to Peter Seeger, talked to various others—this was the year and the time of *Hootenanny* TV show, of the big revival. Everybody was running around doing folk songs. Nobody wanted to waste time doing a silly little radio show on a classical station yet, which was obviously going to bomb. So, we couldn't find anybody who really wanted to do it. Oscar Brand, of course, had his WNYC program going.

So eventually my boss, in desperation, said, "All right, you do it." I had wanted to do things on the air by then. I'd given them several audition tapes, but I don't have a QXR type voice which is

the booming baritone. If you remember Duncan Pirnie and people like that. Well, I didn't have that kind of a voice at all, and they said, well, how much damage can it do for folk music? Anyway, I went on the air and with Pete Seeger as a first guest by the way, and to everybody's surprise, including mine, the show was an enormous and immediate hit. Not that we ever attracted any younger listeners, but the regular QXR listeners, sixty-year-olds somehow had had this in their background, and they loved it, and there were all kinds of letters that came in and praise and this and all kinds of excitement. And the show was definitely a huge success.

And that's why a year later when the same situation happened with a classical opening, that's another long story that I won't bore you with, but I started doing The Listening Room, which was a basically classical program. I would later insert show music and a little jazz here and there and other things, theater, but basically it was a classical program which morphed into an interview program largely because as I started doing this program, people, not so much listeners but artist managers and sometimes artists realized what a wonderful opportunity to promote concerts, to promote engagements, whatever it is, and very important people and groups volunteered to come. So, I didn't solicit them, but they came. One of the very first was The Guarneri String Quartet and I doubt that they personally did, but the manager said that this is a good opportunity for you. Very early on [Leopold A.] Stokowski called the station, and he wanted to promote his young associate conductor, and I have blocked out his name. He later took over The Golden Band, Cox, Ainslee Cox, that was his name.

At any rate, he wanted to, and he said, "If you'll interview Ainslee Cox I'll come too." Offer you can't refuse, right, so Stokowski was one of my first guests that very first year. And so it went, and it expanded, and the more guests I had the more guests wanted to come on, and that's really

how the program evolved over many years, and it lasted from '70 when it began. I think the last program when it ended was '91, something like that. But by then I realized that broadcasting, on-the-air work is really—first of all, I seemed to have some kind of a talent for it. I didn't know what I was doing exactly, but I was able to do it comfortably, and I did apparently well, and I realized that was much more meaningful to me than the administrative side of things, so I quit as program director and just stayed on. I think they gave me a title of Director of Special Projects or some made up stuff like that.

But whatever it is, I was involved with most of the live music programs. When we had a chamber festival, monthly program, I hosted it. When there was an American music series I hosted it and so forth. So that really launched me and my career, which has continued to this day, as a broadcaster. There have been ancillary things. I've done – like concert narrations, because it's kind of nice to see an audience instead of on the air and maybe somebody's listening and maybe they're not. We don't know. And if you tell a joke you don't know if it fell flat or people thought it was funny. Much better when I can see them and hear them. So I've done that. I've written books, gone into other areas of that, always within music.

And after thirty years QXR decided to narrow its focus. We used to do all kinds of things. I think I already mentioned Nights in Latin America. But John Wilson did a jazz program. Now, this was classic station, but we had a jazz program, a dance program. We had news analysis programs, all kinds of things. But by then this narrow casting became the thing. Either you were a news station or you weren't. Now, we had news every hour from the New York Times, but we were a music station. We were a classical station. And the concept, which I don't think is entirely wrong, is that if you go to a station and it doesn't give you what you're expecting to get, you

could say, well, the hell with this. I'll go somewhere else. Like now, if you want news you go to WINS Radio Station you go to WCBS, in New York I'm talking, of course, and you don't expect to hear Sinatra. You don't expect to hear Mozart.

On the other hand, on QXR you don't expect to hear Pete Seeger. So they decided to drop all non-classical programs. I shouldn't tell you this, but at one point I was told at QXR, I wanted to bring in a group to do a whole hour of Stephen Sondheim songs. They said no, not on QXR. We can't do that. So the point remains that *Woody's Children* was off the air, and it was picked up by Fordham [University] public station WFUV. So, thirty years at QXR, twenty more so far, twenty and a half by now, at FUV, and this past January we had our fiftieth anniversary, which actually was recorded in December with every folk personality. I shouldn't say that. With many of the really top folk personalities, Tom Paxton and Tom Chapin and Josh White Junior and David Amram and John McCutcheon. Holly Near, Dar Williams. I can't even think of them all.

So, it was a three-hour concert at Symphony Space that we boiled down, and I've just been listening to it because I'm going to repeat the programs in August. So anyway, that kind of brings us up to now, and now that I've wasted a half hour of your time, what else can I tell you [crosstalk]?

Albarelli: What a great half hour. Just tell me, now let's go back and talk about Avery Fisher and when you first—

Sherman: [00:28:58] Yes, well, early on, and I can't really pinpoint the first time, but I recall that Avery Fisher was very much a listener to the program because as I mentioned, these interviews, artists coming through New York wanted to promote their concerts. So this was a logical place

for them to be. I pretty soon started having live performances, so even if the artists didn't have recordings they could come and play, or if there was a composer who wanted to show off his new piece he could come and perform it or whatever it is. It was a launching pad for young artists, which I always included, and some of the great names in music, Pavarotti and all the rest. It was a kind of a center point for people interested in music. You kind of listen to that, you had a better idea of what concerts are coming, what's going on on in New York, who's here, what's going on.

So that, for the first point, and I'm hazy on the dates here, which is why I'm saying I don't really know when I first actually met Avery, but I know, for instance, at one point they took *The Listening Room* off FM and they put it on the AM side only. And Avery wrote a letter to the station saying this is terrible. You can't take it off. You mustn't. When the Avery Fisher Career Grants were set up he asked me to host the event. So I was there. Avery, of course, announced the winners that year. It was Heidi Lehwalder, the harpist and Paul Schenly the pianist, one of the Kavafians [Ani Kafavian, violinist], I think, possibly, was on that list. I don't remember the fourth one [Ursula Oppens, pianist]. But anyway, I hosted it, and of course it turned into, maybe even it was live, I don't know, but we broadcast it on WQXR. And for the next thirty years I continued to host these programs, mostly up at Lincoln Center.

And that's essentially how I got to know Avery, and in the early years, while he was still there he personally announced them, and we talked of course, and we met ahead of each event and talked about it, and he was my guest on the air. Every time we had a special program on, I think the tenth anniversary of *The Listening Room*, he was one of the guests because he became part of the

family in a sense. So, that's really my connection with Avery, and we met him at various social events and dinners ahead of the or following the career grants, all that kind of thing.

Albarelli: So tell me an anecdote or two, you know, something that happened at a social event or some stories about Avery, some of your experiences and memories.

Sherman: [00:32:22] Well, you know, it's so distant now to come up with specifics like that. I remember his recipe for a happy marriage. It can be summed up, he said, in two words: Yes, Dear. And that was, I think, one of his standard jokes, but he was just warm and gracious and gentlemanly. I don't know if that's a word even, but he had this kind of old-world charm. I associated that kind of—with Europeans more than Americans, actually. George Jellinek was my colleague for many years, from Hungary originally. That kind of person really, I don't know. I'm out of adjectives, but warm, friendly, accommodating, humane, very interested in a wide variety of subjects. Very anxious to help other people. This was Avery's focus. He used to have chamber concerts in his home, and he realized from talking to all these young performers how difficult and intensely competitive it is to establish a career.

If you don't have a million dollars to back you and say, all right, we present you at Carnegie Hall, it's very, very difficult to establish yourself, to maintain early stages of a career, and that was his purpose in setting up this whole project: The Avery Fisher Career Grants and eventually the Avery Fisher Prize and so on. All of these were part, and I think rubbed off on me a lot because it was 1978 that we—when I say we I mean basically *I* helped start the Young Artist Showcase. Now that was sponsored by McGraw Hill, and without Harold McGraw Junior, who was the chairman, it wouldn't have happened, but he also was very much into education, very



much into excellence in all areas. And he understood the same thing as Avery, that it's so difficult for young people to get a start.

So we established this program, and of course subsequently everybody who won the Avery Fisher Career Grant was on the Showcase. Conversely, I remember seven or eight years ago, four of the five winners or recipients of Avery Fisher Career Grants had been on the Showcase earlier on. So we started not only following him but preceding him. We were the feeding outfit into the areas that he was working with. I'm on the board of the, whatever it is, the nominee recommendation board. And I'm told that some of my guys got through. Actually, one of the nominees, I was told, I was the only person who had suggested him, and yet good enough. They followed through. He received the grant.

So, I'm now taking you way past Avery himself, but what he accomplished. What his real legacy is that from running a successful business and producing his hi-fi equipment, he became one of the supreme patrons of the arts that this country has ever had. His endowment allowed, well, by now over 100 wonderful artists to gain significant help in their careers and not only because of the cash award, which helps, some of them bought pianos with or whatever, but because of the imprimatur. It was the Good Housekeeping seal of approval. Remember that? But it was that for artists, for music. The only lapse is that I don't think he cared for singers too much, and therefore it was limited to instrumentalists. That cut the possibilities in half, but there are certainly extraordinary artists that he has helped and his foundation has helped, and it's just when you can put in your bio, 'Recipient of an Avery Fisher Award', you're already among the elite.

Because how many—well, 100 people in thirty-some-five years now have won this award.

That's [a] pretty rarified group of artists, and it's a major, major development. It's a major mark

of credit in their career. And the one other thing that I think was very pivotal in his decision to do this, he did not like competitions. He felt that competitions were unreal, unfair. You cannot judge musicians the way you judge athletes. It's not a matter of who can play this faster. It's not a matter of who can play it louder. It's a matter of what kind of artistry is in there. And that's a very important distinction. I have been involved with competitions, and that's a whole other can of worms. But the point remains that there are certain artists, for instance, who do not do well at competitions. They just don't. I think Martha Argerich was one of those who got bounced out of one of the Chopin competitions, I think. Several people resigned because they were so upset.

Well, I'm sure it's not that she didn't play well – she did, but it's a matter that there are all kinds of intrigues within competitions and nationalistic votes and the way that things are tabulated, and all sorts of things can go beyond the pure search for talent. So anyway, from all of this came down the fact that Avery stood as a giant in this absolutely honest approach. He didn't want to decide anything. He didn't want to say I want this person because I like them. That wasn't his point. He wanted this board of recommenders or advisors—they call them recommendation boards. They were all around the country. Probably fifty people on it who are involved in all different phases of music, conductors and presenters and like me, broadcasters, whatever, writers, critics. So all of these people from different fields put forth who they think are among the most promising young people.

And then they have a board within it, which I'm not even sure that Avery participated there. I think he wanted to be apart from it. He didn't want to have a hand. He didn't want anybody saying to him, well you liked him so he—didn't want any of that which so often colors competition wins. Well, he won that because this judge was [mimics mumbling]. He didn't want

any of that, and that's what he didn't like about competitions also. But he wanted to help these people, and he wanted not to feel any sense of favoritism involved. He wanted this to be as fair minded as it could possibly be. So, I think he himself did not participate in any of the voting or any of the decisions, but he made it possible.

So, I don't know what else I can tell you beyond that.

Albarelli: Tell me about some of your experiences of doing those broadcasts, you know, with the recipients. I mean, just some memorable—

Sherman: [00:41:14] Well, there's so many because these are, obviously, superb musicians. The difficulties for me were that some of them speak better than others. There are certain artists, and I really don't want to mention names, who are terrific players but not very comfortable in front of a microphone. They don't speak well, or they don't have a great deal to say musically. I interviewed, I guess I can say this because he's long gone, Shura Cherkassky, one of the great historic golden era pianists. And I was astonished that he couldn't really answer questions properly. "How do you learn a piece?" "Well, I don't know. I just sit down and it comes out." "Do you plan this?" He says, "No, it just is there." And that was his way. He had a natural gift. He didn't think about anything. He didn't plan it. He didn't say, well, I want to phrase it this way. He just did what came naturally, and there it was.

So as an interviewee, pretty nothing. As a pianist, top of the line. So, there were artists of this sort who are very voluble, but there are some that are very shy and very unable, really, to convey—especially youngsters. Now, remember when you've been doing this in the field for 20 years, you've had dozens of interviews, you build up a certain ability, a certain ease in front of

the microphone. Young people, not the same thing. It can be very, very threatening, and I never understood it because for an artist to go out and perform on the stage alone in Carnegie Hall, eh, no problem. I'll do that next Tuesday. To sit in front of a microphone and talk, oh, can't do it. I'm frightened I'm going to say something wrong.

Remember, first time I interviewed pianist/conductor, Philippe Entremont. He was talking away before we started, and telling stories and all of this. And we're about to go on the air. These were all live programs. We were about to go on the air, and his press agent, who was in the room, now, he made some kind of a joke. He added, "Oh, I just hope people can understand my terrible French accent." And she said, "Well, if you speak very slowly and carefully everybody will understand." So I asked him a question and instead of ba-da-da-da-da out comes [speaking slowly] "I was born in—" And it took a while to listen enough and get him to be himself.

So there are artists and especially, as I say, young artists, when it's very hard. They're not used to this. So there are some that were wonderful and some that [are] not so. But performing, they were all wonderful because there were hardly—it's the highest level. If you've received an Avery Fisher Grant you really are an artist with something special to say. You can't go wrong. That's why some of the organizations that help young artists, Young Concert Artists for one, Concert Artists' Guild is another here in New York and Astral in Philadelphia. When they chose an artist and they help guide them; they advise them on what to wear and what to say, all this, you don't have to look any further. If they've won the Young Concert Artists auditions, I trust them. When a press agent says something, well, not so sure, you know. He's the greatest artist of his time. Well, maybe yes, maybe no. But when you have that imprimatur, and it applies totally to an Avery Fisher Career Grant, there you are. You don't have to look further. You don't have

to think what's his background and where did he study and what kind of repertoire? Doesn't matter. It's there.

Albarelli: I'm supposed to interview some of the recipients of the career grants [unclear]: Yo-Yo Ma, for instance, and—

Sherman: [00:45:48] Well, be aware of the difference between the prize and the Career Grant. The prize is a bigger deal, and it's offered much less often, and it goes primarily to artists who have already made a major, what, a major gift to the musical world. They are really—like Garrick Ohlsson who is already a major artist, and this is a nice salute, an awareness of all that he has accomplished. But the grant is very different because these are young and, in many cases, unknown artists so that it's a very different situation. And if you can talk to some of those artists, I mentioned the Kavafians, Ida and Ani. I think they won at different years. One of them, I believe, was also given the prize later, but they were wonderful young people. And who knew them back in 1970-whatever? But they were helped enormously by the grants.

Albarelli: No, I feel it's important to talk to some of those people just to get a sense of how it helped, you know, what difference it made, and then the people who won the prize. So do you remember having Yo-Yo Ma on or Emmanuel Ax or?

Sherman: [00:47:21] Yes, absolutely, oh sure. I mean, Manny Ax has been on many times. Matter of fact Yo-Yo Ma in the early years as well. Maybe I shouldn't.

Albarelli: Say it and we can always—you'll get a copy of the transcript.

Sherman: [00:47:40] Well, it's not a matter of transcript. It's a matter of I don't know that I should tell tales out of school, so to say. But first time I met Yo-Yo Ma was not something that I was doing personally but there was a thing, a series at Carnegie Hall. I think it was called Three by Three. And there were three short recitals, forty-five minutes recitals, and by three different artists. And I think they were recorded and sent out to various stations. And they asked me to interview some of the performers, and Yo-Yo Ma was one of them. It happens that I gave Yo-Yo Ma his very first review, which was when I started writing for *The New York Times*. This is a whole other side of my life I didn't get into. But one of the first things they sent me to was a concert by kids at L'école Française, which is a private school in New York, and Yo-Yo Ma was one of the—age eight or something, and I said something about what an incredible talent this kid was.

But anyway, he was now seventeen, eighteen, and he came to the studio, and our engineer at the time, Maurice Dicker was from France. And Yo-Yo Ma lived in France, spoke French fluently, and he was talking away with the engineer while we're getting ready, yammering back and forth a mile a minute. We start the program and I asked Yo-Yo whatever I asked and it was, "Uh, uh, uh, uh, well, uh, I, I, uh," that kind of thing. I believe that we could not even edit it usably. We had to discard it. We just couldn't use the thing. And later on it turned out that this was the first time he had ever done an interview, in English at least, but I think any time, and so he'd stopped at the bar on the corner before coming into the studio and had a couple of scotches, and so he was not quite with it—and of course he was undoubtedly nervous about making an impression. So that's what I mean. Carnegie Hall, fine. Microphone, oh my gosh. So that's the kind of thing that frequently happens. I taught a class at Julliard called the Business of Music, another side to

my life that I haven't gone into, but one of the things I did regularly was to have mock interviews just for our class purposes, and make the kids interview each other so they could see how you have to deal with certain things. They practice. They get coaching. They know their music sideways and backwards and upside down. But talking, nobody tells them anything about that, and so they don't know how to deal with it, and either they're putting in 'you know 's all the time, the things that become very annoying or they're full of erms and ums or eh, eh, eh, and that also becomes detracting from what they're trying to say, and they have no idea how to deal with a stupid question. [When] somebody asks them something foolish, they have to know how to get out of it. They have to know [how to] ignore.

I kept telling them listen to the political guys. Why is education such a—well, I don't even know how to put it. I was thinking of yesterday's debate. Several times they were asked a specific question. They answered it with a prepared statement regardless of what the question was. So that is what I was trying to tell them. You get a stupid question, don't try to answer it. Answer the way you say, well, that's very interesting, but the reason I want to play this [Sergei] Prokofiev is—and you tell them what you want to tell them, not what necessarily he asked. So that kind of preparation was very rarely done in conservatories at that point. So most of these young kids did not really know how to handle themselves. If they won YCA [Young Concert Artists] they were coached then, but if they had just emerged and they were found elsewhere, in most cases Fisher got there first, they didn't have that experience, and they wouldn't necessarily be able to handle themselves well. So that was that.

I have so far gotten off the track that I have no idea what you asked and what I answered and why, when, where we are, but that's kind of the things that I do remember, that it was a joy to

constantly meet these people and get this sense of intensity to sense the determination that they had, occasionally the sense of outreach that was already built into their thinking at an early point. It's very rare. Not many artists can separate themselves from the difficulties of building a career and ask what you can do with that musical gift you have beyond giving concerts. So, I think there are a lot of ways that the Fisher Grants have kind of changed the face of music in America.

Albarelli: When did you first become a recommender, and can you tell me about some of your experiences in that?

Sherman: [00:53:55] Well, they're not experiences really. I think I was on the very first list and they've never thrown me off. So, I have been, well, I can't really remember artists that I recommended whom they chose. I know one that I don't want to mention the names now, but basically, I encountered a lot of young talent myself. So I was able to add recommendations that not necessarily other people knew. So I'm not convinced that many of my early, especially earlier on, recommendations came through because I might have met somebody who was studying at the, I don't know, Performing Arts High School, but the rest of the presenters throughout the country, they never heard of that person. If I'm the only voice then probably they've got ten other guys selecting the same artist. They're more likely to go with the ten. But that's really beside the point. I would never have thought about anything else other than who, amongst these talents, should be helped most? Who do I know that really is very special and would benefit from a grant?

So that was my focus, and if I found someone that I thought was really artistically valid, whatever it is, that is the person I would recommend. And I, without fail, recommended two or three each year since then. So that's always been a very difficult choice for me in a way because



I usually have a lot more than can possibly be said. I mean, I can't send them ten recommendations. So, I send them two or three of those that I really feel are special or deserving or in some other way—I remember telling them one time, you've never had—and what the instrument is I'm not sure, but I think maybe saxophone, not sure, but whatever I said, then, "You've never had one. I think you ought to consider it, and this is an outstanding person on that instrument." So, I think it's been a challenge every year for me to make that decision, narrow down, but because of the Young Artist Showcase, because I'm constantly hearing young artists I'm able to make some, I think, valid suggestions.

Albarelli: What are some of your later memories of Avery toward the end of his life?

Sherman: [00:57:07] Well, I really can't say. I didn't know him in a social way beyond the broadcast. So, I never found that there was any lessening of his thoughts, lessening of his ability, lessening of any element in his life. He did not seem to have regress physically particularly and mentally not at all. So I don't recall when the last time that he was actually on those broadcasts before he sort of yielded it to his kids or whether they first started after he passed. I don't know. But I have no recollection at all of any decline, as such. I think the Avery Fisher in the last year [was] pretty much the same as the Avery Fisher in the early years, remembering that my knowledge of his started long into his life. He was probably sixty by the time I met him in the first place. So, there wasn't that much change. I never knew him as a young person. I never knew him as a businessman.

I never had any connection with his kids until they began appearing on the program. That's really pretty much all I can tell you. I mean, it's a peripheral connection, more a connection once removed. So I can tell you about the artist that won his award or received his grant, but that's not

him personally. So most likely the artists themselves who really—first of all, he admired them so much, and he spoke to them and invited them to his home to play. So there was a much closer relationship there. I think we were involved in some kind of a project together, but I'm not really sure what it was. But there was just a sense of dignity to him that was always there from the very first day I knew him until the very last time I saw him. And there's a gracious quality. I mean, I showed you those notes that he made. It was just typical of him, of his willingness to go out of his way. And this was very late in his life. I don't know that there's a date there, although you can—

Albarelli: Can you read that, that note? [unclear]

Sherman: [01:00:15] I don't know that it's dated. I doubt it. Can't even see. What is that date here? That ninety-nine?

Albarelli: Eighty-eight?

Sherman: [01:00:32] Eighty-eight.

Albarelli: I think.

Sherman: [01:00:36] This one is later, I think. This is—

Albarelli: Ninety-two.

Sherman: [01:00:40] Ninety-two. See but look, he looks the same, right?

Albarelli: Right.

Sherman: [01:00:46] No change. I mean, he's exactly the same, maybe a little bit older there. I look older too, but there really was not, in my awareness, a young Fisher and an old Fisher.

Albarelli: Would you be able to read this, the note?

Sherman: [01:01:11] I think it was the InterSchool Orchestras of New York because he was on their board also, and you could probably look it up, see when they—boy, this is embarrassing, I think. “I have often said that the gift of life is a gift of time. What one does with that time” better maybe, oh, “determines,” it's over two lines. “What one does with that time determines when one has lived a useful life.” Boy does that apply to him. “If I were asked to give an example of a useful life helping others I would mention up front the life of Bob Sherman. A musician's life is among the most—”

Albarelli: Difficult?

Sherman: Dependent?

Albarelli: Difficult?

Sherman: [01:03:09] Yes, probably difficult. “A musician's life is among the most difficult for survival, and,” that may be a crossing out. “And,” I'm not sure here. “I know Bob has extended a hand on his programs to countless talented performers who needed that exposure to get—to get,” looks like handed, but I don't know what it is. “Or to advance an already pursuing—or to advance an already pursuing career. What beautiful—what a beautiful life,” looks like it's live.

Albarelli: Lived maybe.

Sherman: [01:04:36] His live? I don't know, "helping others. Bob, your audience and friends will never forget what you have done with your life. I can only say bravo, what a performance of humanity and generosity." A few words I can't read. He was just scrawling these notes, which must have been typed up afterwards. And, you know, I'm sort of very amateur, very minimally knowledgeable graphologist. But I'm fascinated by it, and I can see here elements of kind of breakdown, certain words just don't take proper shape. But there's still an upswing. When you see a line going up it shows enthusiasm. Anyway.

Albarelli: It's a great note, and it could easily describe him.

Sherman: [01:05:59] Exactly, that's what I found so incredibly touching, that this is—he was ascribing to me what I consider his points. The joy that he took in his life was not that he made good audio equipment but that he was able to help all these young musicians that he loved so much and that he admired so much. So that's why I felt, when I told you that story originally about Meyerbeer because yes, I should have been saying this about him not he about me. But this absolutely is a perfect self-analysis of what he was and what he still stands for today.

Albarelli: Great. That's a perfect way to stop.

[END OF INTERVIEW]