Welcome to the tenth anniversary celebration of the Mannes Institute. That’s right — a decade of this. Actually, this is the eleventh Institute, celebrating the ten before it. Hundreds of scholars from around the world have participated in this special event. If you’re here today, it’s because you’re the cream of the crop. This is the combined faculty of the Mannes Institute over the past ten years. Each one of you created, organized, and conducted a workshop of your own. Each of you knows just how challenging it was, and how rewarding it was.

I’m going to begin by calling off the first names of all the people here in chronological order of the particular Institute you worked on and ask that you please stand up briefly. Remain standing while your entire group is being announced, and then sit down for the next group. Where there’s more than one person with the same first name — there’re a couple of Bills, Bobs, Davids, Johns, and Henrys — I’ll leave it up to you to know what you did and not take credit for someone else. Let’s hold our collective applause till the end.

History of Theory: Thomas, Joel, Sarah, and Cristle;
Schenkerian Analysis: Bill, Frank, Matthew, and Nick;
Transformation: Joe, Rick, Ed, Henry, Bob, and John;
Form: Bill, Janet, Jonathan, Scott, and Bob;
Rhythm: Justin, Harald, Kofi, and Chris;
Chromaticism: Pat, Dan, David, Richard, Charles, and Deborah;
Schoenberg: Andy, Severine, and Michael; Ethan will be here tomorrow;
Jazz and Pop: Henry, John, and Cynthia;
Cognition: Larry, Betsy, and Bob;
Aesthetics: Berthold, Alex, Steve, Fred, and Susan.

Now let’s give all your colleagues a round of applause.

Over these past ten years, I’ve had the privilege of working closely with every single one of you individually, getting to know you better, learn from you, and share my vision of something different with each of you. I’ve lived at the hub of an astonishing network of collegiality and creativity. I know of no one in our field who has had such an incredible
opportunity. I’ve become friends with virtually everyone in our field. Collectively we’ve set the standard for collaborative learning, critical discourse, and collegial participation. We’ve probed each other’s minds and challenged our own. We’ve puzzled and pushed, prodded and persevered. And together we created something that didn’t exist before. We created a community and a new way of interacting.

The Institute’s a time and a place where we give each other permission to think out loud, pose questions, postulate answers, and above all, trust each other with our own imaginations. We’ve forged a mode of noncompetitive exchange based upon shared vulnerability and mutual affirmation. We’ve allowed ourselves to be students again, by teaching each other and making what we do more personal. Beyond any musical knowledge we’ve acquired along the way — and that we’ve certainly done — it’s the process of the Institute itself that for me is our greatest achievement and the legacy of this enterprise as we celebrate ten years together. Together we’ve carved out an oasis, a communal watering hole within the increasingly arid institutionalization of our academic lives. We’re here to authenticate, validate, rejuvenate, and resuscitate. Our goal is to judge our thoughts, but affirm each other. We respond to ideas critically, but to one another positively. We seek above all to humanize our work and our community, and thereby reconnect with ourselves.

Over the past decade, our topics have covered the musical waterfront, with seven home games here at Mannes, and three on the road at Yale, Eastman, and Chicago. This year, however, is different by design. Our agenda over the next two days cuts across the borders and boundaries of the separate topics you each represent. We know from the outset that what we’ll do here lacks the time and concentration to be truly satisfactory in any scholarly sense. This time we’ll deliberately meditate too much and analyze too little. We’ll forfeit the depth and intensity of our prior efforts, and leave too much to the imagination to connect the dots. We’ll spread ourselves lightly in the ether of speculation, so our focus blurs and loses itself in the breeze. If we accomplish anything at all, we’ll do a greater service through unfettered rumination more than any actual achievement of its own.

But in the course of this process, I believe we’ll fulfill a larger purpose. These very deficiencies in clarity and precision will yield a truer representation of the state of our discipline, and of music itself. If our view of music always comes in tidy packages and logical arrangements, aren’t we drawing a veil over the inherent disorder of art and of all human affairs? What value is a theory of music that imagines its hills must be higher and its scenery sharper than they are in the rest of our lives, masking the unruliness of the world itself?

For these few next days in the decades of our work, let’s pause like hummingbirds in mid air, suspending our endless discrimination of detail, our constant categorization and calibration, and our relentless quest for technique. For these 30 hours or so, let hard facts become soft in our hands, like clay at the potter’s wheel. Let’s release ourselves from the desire to delve deeper, and for a moment gaze wider and farther instead. Let’s render our fluctuating states of mind with broader strokes, without trying to particularize their features or the precise way we might experience them. If no detail is accurately drawn, a sense of the whole may begin to emerge.

Let a series of images, disjointed and incomplete, float by like a congregation of clouds, gently joining, and slowly dispersing as reflections of our transient thoughts. Let’s wander into
precincts that are more difficult to approach and more amorphous to grasp, because they are less defined and less travelled. Let’s set aside our analytic picks and pails, and resist our temptation to dig deeper holes. We’ve explored so many musical mineshafts together over the past ten years, can’t we just breathe the warm air on top this time?

For once let’s enjoy the luxury not to be exact. Let’s dismiss the need to drive home some winning point, thrust the tip of some scholarly sword, or parade the glitter of an academic triumph. Let’s divulge our doubts and dimmest instincts, passing from one comment to another like food at a picnic, without unloading our cargo in perfect order. Let’s speak more from curiosity than certainty, and not insist we’re always right. Let’s grant each other the license to loiter and to browse without always having to buy. Let’s ply the aesthetics of the unfinished. All of these shifting scenes and memories over the next few days will compose nothing less than our own collective autobiography, a communal sketchpad of who we are, what we do, and what we might become, without trying to force or shape it.

Now you might ask, what then will we learn about music? About musical facts, scarcely anything at all. We may only tell ourselves what we already know, chosen perhaps for the sake of some adventitious quality — like it fits into a conversation here, or might be the right piece there — and not necessarily for any intrinsic value or significance of its own. But by letting go rather than grasping more, there will grow upon us a greater sense of intimacy with our work, and with each other. Any inadequacies we may feel along the way are merely our own, a frustration with our own fragmentation, and our inability to explain what we feel, or know what we want to know most. But these aren’t inadequacies, they’re virtues. Our sense of incompletion, this longing for more, is precisely what prods us to continue and keep looking. And that’s what drives music theory itself, and caused it to evolve through times of similar meditation set aside just like this by our predecessors since the days of old.

For all other times, when we disperse and re-enter the world, we can be more self-possessed, more composed, and better disciplined. We surely need that to do our work. But we don’t need it to reflect upon it. To sit close with our neighbor, cloistered in contemplation, hand to hand, jowl to jowl, is perhaps too intimate among colleagues, even of art. But draw a little apart, see people as people, adversaries as companions, rivals as friends, and they become valuable and full of interest. Then it’s not our words that matter, or the mental profit we may thereby glean, but rather the unspoken reverberations we make as we meet, and the resonance we feel inside as we move and think together.

These are more precious gifts we can give to each other. They’re often found far away, in rare moments and exotic places, buried and strangely transformed. Like sirens ashore, they sing to us a subliminal song, something to hold onto that tells us our lives, our work, and our connections with each other all count for something worthwhile. They sing a song of hope, and even courage. By listening quietly and carefully to these silent echoes inside, allowing them to modulate our customary modes of thought, slightly shifting the value and meaning of familiar things, we arrive at a truer nature of experience, of each other, and of ourselves.

And it’s this, this communal alchemy we can work upon each other together, that makes me wonder whether that unsettled sea into which we sail, is either so limited or unfathomable as its critics suggest. Those of us here, about to embark, might ask ourselves whether through these
dappled waves, shot between wind and water, we might not hear the distant voice of some fuller and finer truth than may otherwise be our aim, by choosing the rainbow over the granite, tacking into the breeze, and sailing like Ulysses, listening, lashed to the mast, into those shadowier regions of music, and the ebb tides of our own mind.

CITY ISLAND AND HART ISLAND

City Island is one of 70 islands in the New York Archipelago that includes Manhattan, Long Island, and Ellis Island. Lying just off the Bronx coast, it was first settled by the Dutch in 1614 and originally called Minifer's Island. It was renamed New City Island in 1761 with the idea of competing with New York City. When that didn't quite work out, people dropped the ambitious “New” and just went with City Island. Despite its proximity to the largest metropolis in the western hemisphere, City Island retains the ambience of a quaint fishing village. Unknown even to many New Yorkers, the contrast is stark. The most famous restaurant on the island is Sammy’s Fishbox, a veritable cornucopia of edible species of the sea available for human consumption in mass quantities, with the possible exception of plankton. It’s almost impossible to leave Sammy’s hungry, unless you’re a whale.

A stone's throw from City Island lies Hart Island, its even lesser known and more mysterious alter ego. Hart is the Middle English word for stag. According to Indian mythology, the island was occupied by a lone deer, shot by a hunter from a passing canoe, and remains haunted by its spirit. And haunted it is. Throughout its dark history, Hart Island has been home to an insane asylum for female lunatics, a macabre workhouse, a tuberculosis hospital, a Civil War prison for Confederate soldiers, an isolation camp for yellow fever victims, a reformatory for male delinquents, and a Nike missile base.

Above all, Hart Island is the site of New York’s infamous “Potter's Field,” the largest and densest public graveyard on the planet. This is a gruesome mass cemetery where unidentified and unclaimed bodies and body parts have been buried since the Civil War to the present. More than a million dead are buried there, half of them children. New York is the only major American city to maintain a separate public burial ground for the unwanted dead. Hart Island represents the ultimate melting pot, a place where individual lives are blended hopelessly beyond recognition. The name “Potter’s Field” comes from the Gospel of St. Matthew, designating a place for the burial of strangers, purchased by the priests with the bribe money recovered from Judas in his betrayal of Christ. If anything qualifies as Rachmaninoff’s Isle of the Dead, this is it. The place is just plain spooky. We’ll be able to see Hart Island offshore, but we won’t be going, let alone eating there — or anything from there.

ESSAY AWARD PRESENTATION

The Institute’s Musical Essay Award honors an outstanding personal essay on the topic of the Institute by one of its members. The winner receives a cash prize and presents the essay as a speech in a plenary session. This honor is given in memory of my nephew, Miles Alpern Levin, an extraordinary young man whose life was cut tragically short. The purpose of this award is to encourage music scholars to express themselves in a more literary and informal way than that of
conventional academic discourse. The essay may be poetic or philosophical, humorous or historical, but above all must engage listeners in a compelling and thoughtful way. This is a personal essay, not a professional one. The models are Montaigne and Woolf, Lamb not Lewin, Bacon not Babbitt.

Miles Levin died at the age of 19 from a rare form of pediatric cancer called Rhabdomyosarcoma, which kills only 350 kids a year. The chances of getting it are extremely remote. In the two years of his illness, Miles developed an astonishing level of wisdom and insight beyond his years, and became an inspirational public figure. He described his struggle with courage, humor, and imagination on an internet blog reaching tens of thousands of people around the globe. 15,000 people responded to his blog each month, from North and South America, Europe and Asia, including parents struggling with a child’s suffering, other young people facing death, and many healthy admirers. He gave strength to numerous patients in hospitals, helped others overcome addiction and depression, and even pulled some from the brink of suicide.

Miles was the recipient of several honor and awards, including the prestigious Sarcoma Foundation of America Leadership in Courage Award as its youngest recipient ever. His remarkable story was covered in print and on television. He was interviewed by Anderson Cooper on CNN and Bob Woodruff on ABC. Woodruff, who had suffered injuries in Iraq, became a close friend and admirer, attributing his own recovery in part to the inspiration he received from Miles. On the day of his death, CNN reported over a half million hits on his website. In two short years, this remarkable young man reached more readers than any scholar in our field during our entire careers — and most likely all of us put together.

Miles’ wisdom and charisma intensified as his illness progressed. He seized his fate as an opportunity to teach thousands how to live with courage, and how to die with grace. He evolved into a brilliant writer of considerable charm and insight. One of his pieces is a short essay titled “Manley the Digger.” It’s a poignant little tale about what Miles calls “the art of digging.” We’re going to read it today, not only because this award is in his honor, but because digging, the art of digging, has something to do with what we do too. We’re somehow not satisfied just listening to music. We’re driven to dig holes in it and see what we find buried underneath. We want to roll up our sleeves and rub our hands in the soil of music. It’s only when we get dirty with notes that we truly feel them, and feel we’ve come to know them. And we have faith that if we just keep digging deep enough, we’ll find something for sure.

Miles describes this love of digging in more poetic terms in his little yarn about Manley the Digger. As we’ll see with our own essay winner, he starts out with a tidbit of information on the surface — a single sentence from a small town newspaper the rest of us wouldn’t even notice — and digs up an entire world. It’s this uncanny ability to find creativity in the commonplace, insight in insignificance, that’s Miles’ link to our finest essayists like Lamb and Woolf, and our most astute analysts like Babbitt and Lewin. These are our best diggers, masters of the art of digging, who excavate the extraordinary beneath the ordinary, and in Miles’ case, find meaning in the face of death.
MANLEY THE DIGGER

by Miles Levin

Notice from the Ypsilanti Courier, April 18, 2006, Section B, page 9:

Manley Gilbert has purchased the former Lettie Bailey house and is drilling a well.

Manley Gilbert has purchased the former Lettie Bailey house and is drilling a well. Ever since childhood, he had a passion for digging. At age five, he made his first attempt to dig to China. By age nine he was digging holes that were deeper than he was tall.

Everybody tries to dig a hole to China at some point in their childhood, but most give up after twenty minutes when mom comes out with a cool glass of lemonade. Not Manley. He couldn’t explain why he liked to dig so much or what in his life he was trying to tunnel away from, but every time he felt upset or scared, he would go hide in one of his burrows. It gave him an inexplicable feeling of safety sitting there alone, surrounded only by dark, damp earth.

Where most would feel claustrophobic, Manley felt enveloped and protected. The dirt walls around him were thousands of miles thick; he was embedded in the planet’s crust, which formed a continuous barrier of earth-wall, spanning out in all directions until it reached the nearest bodies of water.

Years later in high school, when everyone else was saving money to buy their first car, Manley was saving up for a jackhammer. To no one’s surprise, he went on to become a construction worker, installing new sewage tunnels in areas of urban development. And now, at the age of 38, he was moving into the Lettie Bailey house with his wife, Tracy. She was a geologist.

They moved in on one of the first truly bitter days of winter. Tracy immediately rushed into the house, cold and excited to see their new home. But Manley stayed outside, surveying the front lawn. He was studying the landscape for the best digging spots. The ground was semi-frozen: abysmal digging conditions. He would have to wait until spring before he could break ground.

Tracy motioned from the front window for Manley to come in. He obliged. It was her birthday today. He had given her a birthday card that morning, and on the inside had written, “I dig you.” He wrote the same thing every year.

The new house was small and cramped, but Manley didn’t care. All that mattered to him was the underground stream that ran approximately fifty feet below their house. He wanted to dig until he reached water. Nothing inspired greater passion in Manley than digging, but water fascinated him as well. It was why he worked with sewage pipes, a professional fusion of his two favorite elements, earth and water.

Flowing water yields and conforms around solid objects, but over time even the strongest steel can be rusted away, the hardest stone carved out. A river created the Grand Canyon over
millions of years. This gave Manley great inspiration and taught him the patience required by the art of digging. He planned to dig (just him and his shovel, no power tools) until he reached that water fifty feet down. It would be the ultimate challenge of his digging career and what he would consider years later to be the best moments of his life.

*          *          *

This year’s winner of the Miles Levin Essay Award is Michael Cherlin, for his essay titled, “Think Lamb Not Lewin, Bacon Not Babbitt,” taken from the call for papers. Congratulations, Mike. Come on up and read us your wonderful essay.

CLOSING DIALOGUE

(with Susan McClary)

I.

S: All right, Wayne, so what can you tell us about the Institute after ten years?

W: What would you like to know?

S: Why did you create it?

W: I’m not exactly sure.

S: Well, take a guess.

W: The opportunity to do something different came along.

S: Why did you keep on doing it year after year?

W: It evidently filled a need, perhaps even a necessity among people I know.

S: Did you ever imagine the Institute would be this successful?

W: Morton Feldman once said you’re lucky if you have one good idea in your whole life. I guess this was mine.

S: The Institute has changed the way we interact.

W: That was the intention.
S: Your idea of a participatory, interactive workshop was a pedagogical breakthrough that’s been extensively copied.

W: I unfortunately couldn’t copyright it. If I had a nickel for every workshop music scholars conduct I’d be rich.

S: What inspired the Institute’s unique format?

W: Some past accumulation of law and theology, applied to music.

S: You’re a student of law and theology?

W: I studied law at Yale and Wall Street, and theology at Harvard and the lower East Side.

S: What’s their connection to the Institute?

W: I applied modes of jurisprudential and theological inquiry to music.

S: How so?

W: The law and the Talmud are both studied through an inquisitorial method predicated upon a fundamental act of contesting an initial assertion. They both involve intellectual sparring, haggling back and forth, requiring two or more people. It’s like chess; you can’t do it alone.

S: You mean arguing?

W: Yes. As soon as you say something, anything, I’ll automatically challenge it. In law it’s called the Socratic method; in Talmudic exegesis it used to be called pilpul, meaning spice or pepper, i.e. sharp, almost hairsplitting debate and analysis.

S: Music theorists are hair-splitters and note crunchers, aren’t we?

W: There’s a lot of similarity, but music scholars usually do it alone. That’s why our conferences are monologues. In law, every case by definition has two sides, where one says yea and the other says nay. Unlike music theorists, lawyers are trained to argue both sides. I once won a case based on the contested interpretation of a comma.

S: This why people don’t like lawyers.

W: Schenker studied law.

S: You’ve made my case.

W: To me that’s a virtue, perhaps a necessity.

S: And all this is based on what?

W: The desire to know, and the wisdom to doubt.
S: For what end?

W: *The value of inquiry itself.*

II.

S: What temperaments does the Institute represent?

W: *The humanistic, the artistic, and the scientific.*

S: How does it work?

W: *The Institute is an experiment in intellectual democracy. It’s a gathering of equals that oscillates between rambling and rigor.*

S: By what methodology?


S: So Montaigne’s your guiding spirit?

W: *He’s one of them.*

S: Who else?


S: No musicians?

W: *Bach — and maybe Schenker. I like his relentless sense of inquiry, though too often he provides his own answers.*

S: Anybody else?

W: *My father.*

S: What did he teach you?

W: *To question everything.*

S: Sounds unsettling.

W: *It is, he was, and I am. I’m as doubtful of myself as I am of everything else. Montaigne again. In that sense, the Institute’s autobiographical.*

S: That’s it?

W: *Well, also George Carlin.*
S: Carlin . . . the comedian?

W: Yeah. He said, “I think, therefore I am, I think.”

S: OK, Rene, I think we get the message. So what’s up with the different logos?

W: First it was a unicorn with the inscription, Loyalty to All. Then I changed it to Leonardo’s Vitruvian Man to capture the spirit of inquiry.

S: How about the M on the baseball cap?

W: It’s the symbol of the Kiev metro system. I’ve never been there. I hope the Ukrainians don’t mind.

S: Any other logos?

W: My latest is the hummingbird.

S: Why the hummingbird?

W: I like the idea of hovering in mid air, deliberately prolonging a state of indecision, ambiguity, and suspended judgment. That’s in Montaigne too by the way, but I got the idea from Morton Feldman. You can hear it in his music, where time is slowed down to the critical point of oscillation between two tiny sounds or motives. Feldman got it from Kierkegaard’s Either/Or, but adapted it via Samuel Beckett to get Neither.

S: How about your motto?

W: At the beginning it was Deliberate with Coolness, Analyze with Criticism, Reflect with Candor, and Evaluate with Conviction. The first three phrases come from an article published under the pseudonym Cato during the Constitutional debate of 1787. I added the last phrase to create the acronym DARE. I consider the Institute daring.

S: So what happened to that?

W: A few years later I saw a gigantic Apple billboard across from the Louvre that said “Think Different,” so I changed mine to “Think Together.” That’s catchier.

III.

S: To whom does the idea of the Institute appeal?

W: The seekers of truth.

S: Who does it offend?

W: The purveyors of truth.

S: Who does it not concern?
W: Everyone else.

S: What personal characteristic of yours, if any, does the Institute manifest?

W: A proclivity to acquire knowledge of all kinds, yet not enough of any single kind.

S: Anything else?

W: Some claim I possess a soul of opposition, a paradox-monger vexed with a skeptical spirit, arising perhaps from my breeding as a barrister more than any innate contentiousness of my own.

S: Do you agree?

W: At times I’m a zealot of my own dichotomous religion.

S: So do you simultaneously refute that now as well?

W: I recall the epitaph of William of Ockham: But now he’s dead, as plainly does appear, yet would deny it, were he living here.

S: How did your contrarian disposition influence the Institute?

W: I designed the enterprise as a courtroom for the adjudication of musical controversies through the trial of polarities, presentation of opposing evidence, and cross-examination of scholarly witnesses before an impartial jury of peers.

S: So the Institute’s about finding the truth?

W: By subjecting competing claims to adversarial interrogation, we may begin to approach something resembling a provisional truth. That’s the genius of Anglo-American law. It offered a two-edged sword that cuts on both sides, rather than a single blade wielded by one, blinded by his own opinion.

S: Is that why you’re doing this now as an interrogation rather than a speech, a Platonic dialogue instead of a soliloquy?

W: Not really. I got this idea from the Q & A near the end of Joyce’s Ulysses.

S: How’s that?

W: Recently a young colleague told me I perform a feminine function for our profession by offering a safe haven where more masculine academic warriors like yourselves can feel affirmed and rejuvenated for scholarly battle.

S: How’d that go down?

W: At first I was offended. I actually view the Institute in a more aggressive and radically political way, with me as an academic agitator and community organizer, a sort of
musical Ché Guevara advocating communal learning, intellectual socialism, and Marxist humanism in revolt against impersonal, atomistic, and capitalist driven scholarship. It grows out of my ideological experience during the sixties at Oberlin.

S: Intriguing. Tell us more.

W: The Institute’s defined by a negative dialectic, specifically its antipathy to the oppressive conventions of academia, and the alienation, apathy, and anomie they engender. Its vision is more intimate, its message more ethical, and its mission more political. The Institute rejects the institutionalization of pedagogy and the competitive individualization of knowledge that dampen our spirit, cloud our camaraderie, and mask true learning.

S: What have you been reading?

W: We disavow, with Baudrillard, the simulacra of academia and its simulation of scholarship. We denounce, with Foucault, the academy’s petty fussiness and bureaucratic overregulation as internalized means of discipline and control. We decry, with Marx, the encroaching capitalization of thought, and the mass production of credentials. We’re determined, with Nietzsche, to rattle the cages of outmoded customs and oppressive conventions. And we shake a clenched fist at the Palinization of educational standards and professional protocols.

S: Wow, that’s heady stuff. And to think I assumed we were just studying music.

W: We are studying music, but not just music. The medium is also the message.

IV.

W: May I continue?

S: There’s more?

W: I’d like to bring in Deleuze and geometry for a minute.

S: I guess they’re both chic these days, so be my guest.

W: In the language of Deleuze, the Institute unfolds a smooth space of discourse, where thoughts and voices are free to come and go, in contrast to the striated and partitioned grid of higher education. The round configuration of our workshops replaces the linear confrontation between teacher and students with the interactive geometry of the circle, demoting a centralized perspective, and subordinating the point to the vector. Just as any coordinate within a circle can connect with any other, so may any person within our sphere traverse the diagonal to converse with another. There’s no privileged place of position. In the curvature of our space we are always in the midst of ourselves. We don’t strive for the consistency of hierarchical order, but the rhizomatic equalization of a patchwork quilt, a decentered constellation, facilitating creative lines of flight between any of its constituents.

S: You sure toss around a lot of big words. Finished?
Almost. Just to bring this full circle: We here are a cadre of note-crunching nomads, intellectual warriors cultivating collective resistance to the musical microstate of institutionalized learning, by declaring and occupying a free scholarly plateau. That free zone, that small green patch we've cleared and claim together, is the Mannes Institute.

Aha! So there's a manifesto after all!

Not really. I'm just riffing here. I learned most of that gobblety-gook from Martin Scherzinger. He's off playing rugby somewhere in Scotland.

Whatever. So what's all that stuff got to do with Joyce's *Ulysses*?

Well, when I dropped my knee jerk macho reaction and reconsidered my colleague's idea about the more affirmative, feminine side of the Institute's radicalism, I began to feel like Molly (Penelope), offering a safe harbor for Bloom (Ulysses), the man of many twists and turns. I'm Molly to all of your Blooms, and my role here is to help you blossom. I wanted to recite Molly's incredible soliloquy at the end of the book (if anyone gets that far), lines like "What kind of flowers are those they invented like the stars," or "I wouldn't give a snap of my two fingers for all that learning," and climax of course, with "Yes I said, yes, I will, yes." But it all seemed a bit too intimate and personal for this crowd, and no one would probably get what I meant any more than they did Joyce. So I chucked it and went with the Q & A in the chapter before instead.

Well that explains that!

By the way, since we're going for full disclosure here, will you reveal who the anonymous donors are who've funded ten years of the Institute?

I figured you'd ask that.

Why, are you psychic?

No, I wrote the script.

I think it's too long.

I tried but I couldn't make it any shorter.

Never mind. Stop wasting time. So who paid for all this?

Me.

You're the anonymous donor?

I paid for it myself.

Out of your own pocket?
W: Well, I can’t patch my pantry or buy a burrito with this money, but I can spend it on you.

S: How much have you spent on us after ten years of the Institute?

W: Somewhere north of a third of a million dollars, give or take a few miles.

S: That’s unbelievable. Why did you keep this a secret for so long?

W: To protect myself.

S: From who?

W: You.

S: Against what?

W: From the misperception of me as someone I’m not. I was suspect as an outsider to begin with.

S: So then why have you just disclosed it?

W: Because I no longer want or need that protection. I want you to know. Maybe I should drop the pretense and call it the Alpern Institute?

S: But what about Mannes?

W: Mannes was the cradle for the Institute’s birth. For that I’m deeply grateful, but I’m the stork. Our relationship has been a complex one of mutual benefit, with ups and downs, but in general it’s rather remarkable that a conservatory rather than an academic university has spawned something this scholarly.

S: Your Institute has placed it smack in the center of the scholarly map. Mannes has become the Mecca of advanced musical scholarship.

W: Perhaps “restored” Mannes to the center of the scholarly map might be more accurate. Although Mannes is first and foremost a conservatory focused upon performance, it has a long and venerable history of scholarship of its own. Mannes’ uniqueness has always been its synthesis of theory with practice. A Zen monk once told me years ago that the key to music is a happy marriage of the head with the hand and the heart. I believe that — that we need all three — a musical ménage a trois.

S: So do I, Lois. So do I.

VI.

S: What aspect of the Institute do you enjoy most?
W: Its fluctuating incertitude. I like incongruities of judgment, and the give and take of opposing ideas. I’m often more interested in the shape of a statement than its substance, its manner more than its meaning, and its presentation over its point. I dwell upon cadence as much as content, and attend as closely to style as significance. I value rhetorical and spatial design. Oddities of speech intrigue me most.

S: What aspect of the Institute do you enjoy least?

W: Its simultaneous arousal of interest and indifference, conviction and disbelief. Without discipline, skepticism devolves into cynicism.

S: Anything else?

W: Virginia Woolf wrote in one of her essays that there are times when great art is too beautiful and universal to speak to the solitude of our own particular case. That’s an astonishing and even blasphemous idea. On occasion I feel that sense of isolation at the Institute. What’s all this got to do with me, anyway?

S: What issue, as much as any, if not more than any other, frequently engaged your mind?

W: The mode of interaction itself.

S: Meaning what?

W: The Institute’s a conversation, like this. There’s an old Chinese proverb that says tell me and I’ll forget; show me and I may remember; involve me and I’ll understand. There’s another that says a single conversation across the table with a wise person is worth a month’s study of books.

S: Explanation please, Confucius.

W: I see us as constant students engaged in a discourse of toleration, a debate of pluralities based upon mutual affirmation, where suppression of ideas is intolerable, and imagination reigns supreme.

S: What have you discovered after ten years of doing this?

W: I’ve learned that the most precious things in life are ephemeral, just like music.

S: How’s that?

W: Our encounters at the Institute are transient. That’s why they’re so precious: they live and die within a single moment. We experience a euphoric glimpse of ego evaporation and of actually thinking together, of contemplation as one. We sense a love-like union with others beyond our individual selves, a transcendence of our own isolation by merging into a larger body to which we belong. But we can’t hold on to this aura of intimacy. It’s a living experience in real time: here one moment, gone the next, just like music. The best things in life are like this:
you can’t really capture them without cutting off their head. The only way to keep a butterfly is to kill it. But then you don’t have a real butterfly. The only way to love someone is to keep loving them.

**S:** Is this what you actually think about during these workshops?

**W:** At times, yes. Camus said an intellectual is someone whose mind watches itself.

**S:** So by this standard was the decade of the Institute a success?

**W:** Yes and no. On a musical and scholarly level, yes. On a moral and political level, not really.

**S:** How yes?

**W:** We engaged in collaborative learning.

**S:** But what did we learn?

**W:** We learned how to think together about something we care about, and how many can become one. If you were receptive, you may have sensed our collective spirit, the sharing of something together in our mutual co-presence through the alchemy of union. This is the flower of the Institute, its epiphany and sweetest reward.

**S:** But we never settled anything.

**W:** I forget who said it’s better to debate a question without settling it, than to settle a question without debating it.

**S:** That’s debatable.

**W:** Well there you go.

**VII.**

**S:** So how did the Institute fail on moral and political grounds?

**W:** We were unable to really change our profession and how we treat each other beyond our discrete experience together. The event exists in a bubble or vacuum outside of ordinary time and space, like a sort of secular ritual. That’s what gives it its magic, and its heightened sense of significance. But its capacity to affect us more deeply, its efficacy in the world beyond its own unique dimension, is limited, and we fell short, as magic always does.

**S:** But haven’t you achieved something personally?

**W:** Melville said I try everything; I achieve what I can. And he wrote the great American novel. I just set up a few workshops and I didn’t even run those. I guided the ship, but you were the crew. I’m Captain Ahab, pacing the deck alone at night, chasing a whale.
S: But what about that SMT Lifetime Award, and all those glowing testimonials you exacted from us each year?

W: Memories and trophies. Echoes of past actions to sit on a shelf. If I’ve accomplished anything at all, I’ve enlarged the experience of others more than any actual achievement I myself am entitled to claim. The real work of the Institute was done by brains more inventive than my own. I’m obliged to each of you alone, and all of you together. My gratitude is the gold by which I discharge these debts.

S: So dare I ask your verdict on the state of the discipline?

W: Well, I guess I might be a little disappointed, but only because I’m so idealistic. Perhaps that’s what it takes to do something like this in the first place. We glimpsed the white whale, but we just couldn’t catch it. So maybe that’s the lesson of the Institute: go fish.

S: Have we let you down?

W: Put it this way: our horizon was big. If we faltered, the size of our attempt was largely to blame. We’re not going home empty handed, but it’s the whale that won.

VIII.

S: So what’s next for you?

W: Going back to Cali — I mean New Bedford.

S: Actually I think it was Nantucket.

W: They’re the same place.

S: Are you tired of the Institute after ten years?

W: Well, I find I keep getting to the office later. But I make up for it by leaving earlier. That’s Charles Lamb.

S: But don’t you enjoy being in the spotlight?

W: It’s getting to the point where I’m no fun anymore. Let’s all say 49 bye-byes and sail away on wooden ships.

S: Crosby, Stills, and Nash?


S: Simon and Garfunkel.

W: James Fenimore Cooper.

S: Meaning what?
**W:** I don’t know. Maybe someday I’ll set sail in a different direction, younger sailors, an uncharted sea, faster ship, slower fish. Perhaps a more hospitable port. For now I’m heading back to Ithaca. Penelope waits, the long day wanes. ‘Tis not to late to seek a newer world.

**S:** But what about us?

**W:** What about you?

**S:** Well, aren’t we your crew?

**W:** You are the souls that have toiled, and wrought and thought with me, far on the ringing plains of windy Troy. Tennyson, Ulysses.

**S:** Watch it, Quee Quay! I know my Tennyson and Iliad to boot. “Still there is the rolling wine dark sea!” “Though much is taken, much abides!” “To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield!” “The sirens sing!”

**W:** Then strap me to the mast of a ship with no name. We’ve drunk the delight of battle with our peers. We slew the noble Hector and swam in the wake of the great white shark. Sing, O Goddess, the rage of Ishmael. Truth hath no confines!

**S:** Hold on! This is getting seriously screwed up. Deleuze, LL Cool J, Feldman, Scherzinger, Tennyson . . . and now you call me Ishmael?

**W:** Cling to my coffin.

**S:** What? Remind me: what’s this white whale we’re supposed to be looking for? What’s that got to do with music? And who cares about all this anyway without you stomping around all peg-legged on the Pequod?

**W:** Well, it’s the . . .

**S:** By the way, is it really a whale, or just a big fish?

**W:** It’s the force that through the green fuse drives the flower and blasts the roots of trees.

**S:** So what’s that supposed to be now . . . Bob Dylan? You’ve lost me, Jonah! Is this a portrait of an artist or a young dog?

**W:** Well, it’s the force . . .

**S:** Never mind, Thomas, I can’t understand your Whalish accent anyways.

**W:** Then rage against the dying of the light, but don’t go gentle into that good night.

**S:** Stop. You’re drifting without an anchor. So what are you going to do if the Institute’s kaput? You ain’t got nothing else. You’re all washed up. You’re a one-trick pony, madam.
W: I’ll do exactly what I did before.

S: Yeah, what’s that, Rodin?

W: Think alone.

S: Alone? Great! So what happens to think together?

W: I stumbled on a corollary in the Talmud. Pirke Avot says study together, but reflect alone.

S: Pirke what?

W: The Sayings of the Fathers.

S: Whose fathers?

W: All true scholarship is ultimately the production of an individual mind, owing nothing to our colleagues but the contagion of diligence. Samuel Johnson. Maybe I’ll engage in what he called the invisible occupation of authorship just like the rest of you.

S: Hey, wait a minute! Dr. Johnson lived in the 18th century for God’s sake! That makes him irrelevant. And didn’t he have gout or something awful like that? This doesn’t sound too Institutish after ten years of your togetherness drill.

W: What kind of flowers are those?

S: What? You’re a quitter! A pied piper! Heretic! Shabbtai Tzvi!

W: What kind of flowers are those we’ve invented like the stars?

S: What stars?

W: I wouldn’t give a snap of my two fingers for all that learning.

S: All what learning?

W: Yes I said . . .

S: What are you blubbering about, Ayrab?

W: Yes . . . I will . . . yes.

S: Huh?

[silence]

S: Hello?
[silence]

S: Earth to Wayne’s World . . . come in, please . . . .

[silence]

S: Molly?

[silence]

S: Ché?

[longer silence]

S: What the hell?

[silence]

Diploma Ceremony

2001 History of Theory
Co-Chairs: Thomas Christensen and Joel Lester
Faculty: Sarah Fuller, Cristle Judd
In Absentia: Ian Bent, Thomas Mathiesen
Special Guest: Bob Kerrey

2002 Schenkerian Analysis
Co-Chairs: Bill Rothstein and Frank Samarotto
Faculty: Matthew Brown, Nick Cook
In Absentia: Charles Burkhart, Robert Snarrenberg
Special Guest: Carl Schachter

2003 Transformation Theory
Co-Chairs: Rick Cohn and Joe Straus
Faculty: Ed Gollin, Henry Klumpenhouwer, Bob Morris, John Roeder
Special Guest: Milton Babbitt

2004 Musical Form
Co-Chairs: Bill Caplin and Janet Schmalfeldt
Faculty: Jonathan Bernard, Scott Burnham, Bob Morgan
Special Guest: Charles Rosen

2005 Rhythm and Temporality
Co-Chairs: Harald Krebs and Justin London
Faculty: Kofi Agawu, Chris Hasty
In Absentia: David Cohen, Pieter van den Toorn
Special Guest: Steve Reich
2006 CHROMATICISM
Co-Chairs: Pat McCreless and Dan Harrison
Faculty: David Kopp, Richard Kramer, Charles Smith, Deborah Stein
Special Guest: Gregory Proctor

2007 SCHOENBERG AND HIS LEGACY
Co-Chairs: Andy Mead and Severine Neff
Faculty: Michael Cherlin, Ethan Haimo
In Absentia: Brian Alegant, Walter Frisch
Special Guest: Allen Forte

2008 JAZZ MEETS POP
Co-Chairs: Henry Martin and Walt Everett (in Absentia)
Faculty: John Covach, Cynthia Folio
Also in Absentia: Lori Burns, Steve Larson
Special Guests: Lewis Porter and Albin Zak

2009 COGNITION AND PERCEPTION
Co-Chairs: Larry Zbikowski and David Huron (in Absentia)
Faculty: Bob Gjerdingen, Betsy Marvin
Also in Absentia: Eric Clarke, Fred Lerdahl
Special Guest: Eugene Narmour

2010 MUSICAL AESTHETICS
Co-Chairs: Berthold Hoeckner and Alex Rehding
Faculty: Steve Rings, Fred Maus, Susan McClary
In Absentia: Daniel Chua, Martin Scherzinger
Special Guest: Lawrence Kramer

FINAL ROUND OF APPLAUSE FOR 2011 STATE OF DISCIPLINE
Faculty:
Kofi Agawu, Thomas Christensen, Henry Klumpenhouver
Pat McCreless, Janet Schmalfeldt, Joe Straus