

Roman Totenberg in conversation with Leon Botstein and audience at Kneisel Hall

Transcript of interview recorded in Kneisel Hall, Blue Hill, Maine (June, 2000).

From the Library of Congress, in Washington DC.

[silence]

[applause]

Leon Botstein [LB]:

We're going to organize ourselves here...we'd like to do is divide the evening in half. There will be no pause, no intermission. The first half, I will have a conversation with Roman Totenberg about his life and his [audience laughter]...about his life and his experiences as a violinist, growing up and studying, and his career. And the second half will be questions from you. Because we would like to give you an opportunity to ask someone who has had as varied, as distinguished and as remarkable a career as Roman Totenberg has had, questions which are on your mind. Particularly, those of you who are violinists, about violin playing, about violin playing past and present, and about the nature of the world of music. For those of you who are studying some ability, and those of you who are not studying, who have really wanted to find out about what Bronislaw Huberman really sounded like, here's the man to ask. So for those interested in the history of music and the history of performance and composition...First thing, when did you start playing the violin and how did you start playing the violin?

Roman Totenberg [RT]:

Well, I was six, and I started in Moscow. My parents and I went during the First World War to Moscow, and we lived very close to Kremlin, and during the revolution time, more or less. There was a concert master of Moscow Opera, Mr. Ermolov, who was a very elegant looking gentleman about, I would say, fifty sixty years old. I have a picture of his still at home, with "Best wishes for the future" and so on. And he took interest in me, in this little boy, and started teaching me violin, particularly when my parents, who both were working, would go out, he taught me how to play an instrument. He was my babysitter, so to say. That was very fortunate. And he found that I could play very fast, learn what he was teaching me, so that after about a year of studying with him - it was a time of famine

Library of Congress (Music Division)

in Moscow and we didn't have much food - and he had connections to different schools, to different...associations, and would go to play a few small pieces. And he wrote out second violin part for me, when I was about seven by this time. And he would take me along and I would fiddle along and he would play the fancy part and I would play the less fancy part. So that was really the deal, so to say.

LB:

And you brought home more food than your parents.

RT:

Yes. And actually, I would bring home white bread, butter, some sugar and things like that, which were really quite unusual to find in Moscow at that time. You have no idea of what kind of food we had. The bread was so that it was no...not edible practically. It was of something that they put together and called it bread. And I remember at some, at age of about six or so, when I saw first time bread and butter. The impression...and then I said, "Oh, this is bread. Is that butter?" And this stays with me still today. When I see white bread, I think, "Oh, this is bread and butter," you know! [laughter] But those things really stay with you forever.

LB:

But, even though you were very...obviously your parents, unlike Menuhin's parents, did not seek to exploit the talent.

RT:

No, not at all. Well, of course Menuhin was quite an extraordinary case, and I don't assume to be as extraordinarily gifted. But they were busy with their own things, and my father was an architect, and my mother was taking care of some kind of office in that regime. And anyhow, they were mostly interested that I should be educated. I taught myself to read at about age of four, I think, and so that was no problem. But the music I had learned from Mr. Ermolov.

LB:

But then in around 1920 you returned to Warsaw.

RT:

Yeah.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

LB:

You were Polish speaking, growing up Polish speaking, and you entered the conservatory there.

RT:

Yes, in 1921, yes. I was ten years old, yes. I actually entered conservatory in Saratov which is a town on the Volga. And they didn't accept children, so my father insisted that they should listen to me, and then I played audition, and then all the teachers came and said, "Do you want to study with me? He should study with me! And what a stupid man... what is he talking to you about!" [laughter] So I found a teacher, who was by the way quite a crazy man. He would have me...in Saratov he would...I would come to a lesson at, say, at five o' clock, I would listen to what everybody else was playing, and then I played maybe at seven o'clock. I came home about ten o' clock at night. And we really worked on everything possible. It was crazy but somewhat unusually helpful for me probably.

LB:

When's the first time you began to play publicly?

RT:

Well, when I was about that age, about eight, and my most terrible impression was for... that stayed with me forever...that was already time of the communism, and they had big meetings in tremendous halls of about a thousand people. And I was...they introduced everybody who was going to sing or play or whatever, and they would say, "Comrade Totenberg is now going to play this and that." And I would come out and everybody would laugh. Because I was very little comrade, you know. [laughter] So I thought it was a terribly offensive act. And for quite a while, I think, each time I would come on the stage I would think, "People are not laughing. That's good." [laughter]

LB:

And then in Warsaw you went both to a regular school and to conservatory.

RT:

Yes. My parents were very interested that I should really go to regular school with the other boys of my age and so on. And the conservatory was a building quite in a certain part of Warsaw that had most...the biggest villas and houses of very rich people. And then

Library of Congress (Music Division)

there was a conservatory, which had a big field in the back, and we all played soccer like mad there. I was supposed to be home, say in a couple of hours, instead I was five hours later still kicking a ball somewhere. And my father would suddenly appear, "What are you doing?" But at the same time it was a very good school, very good primary teacher in violin playing, and the usual harmony, counterpoint and solfege that you know...

LB:

[Karol] Szymanowski was the director of the conservatory when you were there as a student?

RT:

No, he became later.

LB:

Did you meet him while you were a teenager in Warsaw, already?

RT:

Yeah. Yeah. I met him first in some competition that I participated in.

LB:

Which you won.

RT:

Yes. That's right.

LB:

Participating is one thing. Winning is another. [laughter] So you won this competition .

RT:

It's the same thing, but winning is better than participating [laughter]. Having many students who participate and many who won competitions, I'm in agreement with you And the teachers like it too.

LB:

And Szymanowski was one of the judges.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

RT:

Yes. He was then already director of the conservatory, which was a very short time, about two years. Because he was probably miserable as a director, and only because of the name and his value as an artist that they nominated him as director of the conservatory.

LB:

So you won the national prize, the national prize of Poland at seventeen. And there was this exchange with other...

RT:

Other countries, neighboring countries. With Czechoslovakia and Latvia and Russia too. And the prominent people who got prizes in those countries would come to Warsaw, and we would go to their countries. I would give a recital in Prague and Riga and Moscow, so that was all. And the people from there, as you know, Rudolf Firkusny, the wonderful pianist who was Czech, just graduated, was also...we were exactly the same age. He came to Warsaw and gave a recital. And as a matter of fact, very few people know but he could improvise also, extremely well. And at the end of the recital he would give... ask people for a theme and then he would improvise. And interestingly enough, all those people, actually all pianists, followed me or I followed them, I don't know who followed who, but we found ourselves eventually in Berlin at the Academy of Music, the Hochschule.

LB:

What made you decide to study with [Carl] Flesch? In other words, having finished now with the conservatory in Warsaw...had you heard him play?

RT:

Yes, I heard him play. There was a choice. Either to go to Berlin to study with Flesch, or going to Paris and study with [Jacques] Thibaud or somebody like that. And general feeling was that Flesch was somebody very exceptional as teacher. And he came to Warsaw, he played the Bach concerti, I think with the...philharmonic. And I happened to have an aunt who was a musicologist. And she knew all those people. She was a friend of [Ferruccio] Busoni. And she introduced me to Flesch and I played for him and he said "Oh, come along. I will get you a scholarship in Berlin."

Library of Congress (Music Division)

LB:

So you went to Berlin. You had said the Szymon Goldberg was already in Berlin.

RT:

That's right.

LB:

And, say a little how the Flesch class was organized. What did you play for him when you first arrived.

RT:

Well, at the time I was playing Brahms' concerto. So that was what I played first. But the classes were also organized that we...He was teaching two days a week, Monday and Thursday, between 9 and 1. And everybody had to be there. And one of us would play. They were of course scheduled, that, let's say, I would be on Monday the third one to play. And you played the whole piece. Invariably. And Carl Flesch was sitting with his score, he had also the pianist there, and would make markings in the score. And then afterwards he would tell you...We used to say that he would say, "Oh, that was a pretty good performance. Only technically, not very good and musically, you don't know what to do with it." [laughter] This way that he kind of got you going, you know. And then cons... got out of his notes of this bar and that bar, that was out of tune, that was...that was not right and then he would say the whole thing...tell you a little bit about composition. He being also educated in Paris with his other violinist friends, he knew very much about French music too, so he would present you with some ideas. Whether it was classical or Russian music or Hungarian music, where he studied at some point, also. And he was prepared actually very often that he would just say, "Why don't you sit down, I'm going to play the whole piece for you" and would play with a pianist whatever it was. So that was usually the procedure...

LB:

You also played in the orchestra, the conservatory orchestra under [Franz] Schreker.

RT:

Yes.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

LB:

Can you say a little bit about Schreker as a conductor?

RT:

Schreker was a composer and very good conductor at the same time. What we, of course, had - like in our country here, now - a big academy of music has a very fine orchestra and we had a regular conductor who was...regular conductor, and not very inspiring. And Schreker being an outstanding composer and musician, would come conduct, it was something very special. You felt right away the difference, that there was tension and interest and so on. It was really quite...

LB:

Say a little about the way Flesch integrated you into performance, especially when you were in Baden-Baden in the summer. You played chamber music with him. Who else was in the quartet, or the chamber music group?

RT:

Well, chamber music actually. Flesch would come to Baden-Baden every summer. And being in Berlin I heard that he had students in Baden-Baden, so I thought I would like to go and see what's happening. How do I do that? So I wrote him a letter and asked him, "Is it possible I could come and have some lessons?" and how much it would cost me, knowing very well that I couldn't afford anything. And he wrote me a very nice letter saying, "The place is nice. We can find you a place to stay, and you can come. My fee is 100 marks a lesson or nothing. In your case, it's nothing. [laughter] So it was very nice. And so then I went there and he had a regular series of chamber music concerts. Gregor Piatigorski was always there. And a man by the name of Carl Friedberg, who was a famous pianist at the time, would come. And sometimes Artur Schnabel would come. And so that's where I learned the Dvorak quintet, as you know because i had my class here on that. And some others, other music. We all played quite a lot. You can hear...really had a bunch of wonderful performers. And so that we participated...I played second violin, Flesch played first violin, and one of my Italian colleagues, Arrigo Pelliccia, had to learn viola right away and was the violist there. Who, by the way, became a quite known violinist and violist in Italy. He played with the Quartetto Italiano and several other places like that.

LB:

Library of Congress (Music Division)

When you were a student from, let's say, '28 in Berlin to '32, concerts or violinists that really made an impression upon you, whose sound or playing impressed you.

RT:

Well, there was...there were wonderful performances. You have to remember that Berlin was really the eye of Europe at the moment, artistically. And you had wonderful...three opera houses performing steadily, Furtwangler the conductor, Van Cliburn, conductor, Klemperer, Bruno Walter, each one gave a series of concerts and all the soloists would come. Well, the violinists of my time...the man that you [LB] mentioned and probably noone of you [the audience] know, Bronislaw Huberman was a student of [Joseph] Joachim as a child prodigy, and was the performer in eastern Europe for many years. Eventually he created the Israeli Philharmonic, and got everybody to contribute money and all the refugee musicians to come there. But he was a very inspired playing...player. And sometimes he played so that you were just...thought it was...godly performance. Other times he played terribly. He was very, very, very uneven. And you can...I remember when he came to Berlin he played a terrible concert. I said, well he's finished. And next time, a few weeks later he played Mendelssohn and Brahms concerti together and it was just heavenly. One of those incredible, very nervous, men and very highly impressive in person. And at the time, also Erica Morini who was a wonderful woman violinist who recorded quite a few things with George Szell, and was a great virtuoso. She was, I think, as good as Heifetz in certain ways, and tremendously full of life and temperament. She played with the Berlin Philharmonic. I remember still the Tchaikovsky concerto performance when we went wild applauding and so on. And somebody told...sat next to me and said, "Oh it's a clique. It's paid people applauding." But she was really remarkably good. And actually, Adolf Busch was in his prime and played very beautifully. He also performed, I remember, a concerto by Busoni that we don't know here, which is a very, very fine piece. And as a soloist he played a lot. And eventually he played sonatas with a unknown young pianist by the name Serkin. And I remember first reviews was that "he had this young pianist who seems to be doing pretty well. We wish him best," or something like that. That was the beginning of Serkin's career. Busch really picked him up and made his career in Europe at that time.

LB:

You had a great success in Berlin and you also won another prize in Berlin.

RT:

Library of Congress (Music Division)

Well I won the Mendelssohn Prize which was a prize that all the people, performers in Germany would compete for. And the prize included a recital in Berlin.

LB:

What did you play for the competition? What did you play for...do you remember what you played for the...

RT:

I think I played some Bach, and some...I think the Devil's Trill Sonata of [Giuseppi] Tartini and a movement of Brahms' concerto. And I remember that I was very excited about this and kind of closed my eyes and just played the hell out of it, so to say, and made really great success with it. Because we did have some very fine violinists who performed, like Ricardo Odnoposoff who became concert master of the Vienna Philharmonic. And Boris...a man by the name Boris who became concert master of the Berlin Philharmonic, and so on. They all competed at the same time. And that gave me the chance to give a recital in Berlin. And what you don't know...the day of my recital, which was about at 8 o' clock at night, I was very much in contact with my Polish embassy there, and they had some very important "do," so to say, in the afternoon at 5 o'clock. And they asked me, would you come and play? So I came and played there first and then played my first recital. And the next day I got a telephone call from Carl Flesch saying, "I want to speak to you." [laughter] So I went, we made a date, and he took me for coffee. Well, by that time the reviews appeared and they were absolutely fabulous, so he couldn't say much. [laughing] He said, "You're lucky," he said. "Don't do it ever again!" [laughter] He was a very serious person but at the same time had a lot of human qualities. He took me later, when he lived in London, I came and I played some concerts there and he took me out for tea to...at...Lipton's had a store where you could...they served tea and coffee and...mostly tea. And he said to me, "You know you should buy some stock in this. It's a good business here." [laughter]

LB:

You...you had already in Berlin had contact with young composers. And you did...already played some contemporary music as well.

RT:

A lot of it, yes. I always was interested in live music of the present, so to say. So that I did some performances of Hindemith and Toch, first performance, Ernest Toch. And there

Library of Congress (Music Division)

were also local people like a man by the name, Bondke, who wrote a terribly difficult solo sonata which I had to learn and perform. And of course we were listening very much what was going in France. And I heard about the Debussy sonata which nobody played at the time. And I started thinking how to learn it.

LB:

What brought you to Paris? In '32 you went to Paris. Why did you...what led you to go to Paris?

RT:

Well, I wanted all the time to see Paris and see what the French musicians do. At the same time, I felt that the life in Germany was not the same and it's going to be worse and worse. So I packed up and went to Paris. I got letters of introduction from Flesch to all his friends. And also I was by that time quite known in Berlin and Berlin society. I knew all the ambassadors of different countries. And the French ambassador gave me letters to all his important people in Paris also. You have to know that Carl Flesch studied together with Kreisler, Thibaud and Enescu. They were all at the same time at Paris Conservatory. So they were close friends. And so when I went to Paris, I gave my first recital there, by the way playing also first performances of Hindemith Sonata. And with the local French pianist and Jacques Thibaud came to the concert, because Flesch asked him to. And he was really very nice to me. After the concert, it happened that he didn't like [Joseph] Szigeti, and Szigeti just gave a concert and played [Max] Bruch's sonata, which is a very long work some of you may know - and not an exactly exciting work. And those people that are being...being very much on a upswing into modern music, and so on, they didn't like it very much. So he told me "Oh, your recital was so much amusing, interesting and good for me than the one I heard the other day, this Bloch sonata!" That was...

LB:

What did you think of Szigeti, whom you certainly knew...?

RT:

Yes, I knew Szigeti very well, and I heard some most wonderful performances of Szigeti, but...very much befriended. And I have letters where he would write to me first of all started writing to me and say, "Don't call Mr. Szigeti, call me Joska." And then he would send me a stack of records, because he wasn't sure whether they were good or not.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

What...that he played with George Szell, mainly unknown Mozart sonatas and things like that.

LB:

When...you then decided to study with [George] Enescu. What was...

RT:

Yeah. Well that I pretty much wanted right away when I got there. And Enescu had a group of musicians that he formed an Institut Instrumental - Instrumental Institute - where you could study and talk about music. And he himself was teaching and Pierre Monteux was teaching chamber music. Of course at first I played for Enescu in his home. And when I came, he said, "Oh, you are Polish. you must know Szymanowski. What do you play of Szymanowski?" "Well, I play the Mythes" "OK, let's play it." He was good a pianist as a violinist. He'd sit at the piano, and he didn't need any music. He remembered it very well. He played the whole piece with me. [Unintelligible] That...he bought me right away, forever, you know. But he was a really wonderful musician and inspiring person. Absolute modesty too.

LB:

What kind of...well you heard him in play as well...

RT:

Yes I heard him...

LB:

How would you describe the playing.

RT:

It was very expressive and marvelous rhythm. Absolute impeccable rhythm. He played some Bach, and it was right after a recital of [Nathan] Milstein, which was very brilliant violinist, as you know, but played as fast as he could, everything, and was impressive to the audience, and great success. But a couple of days later, Enescu gave a recital, and he played the same Bach and it was just like heaven and earth. It was so much better, more interesting. So that's something one could really learn from him...

LB:

Library of Congress (Music Division)

While you were in Paris you began concertizing with Szymanowski. Describe that. You traveled with him and concertized?

RT:

Yes. Well, we knew each other. Or actually I would say I knew him very well. To some and...he and I we would play together at home. And one day he suggested, "Why don't we give a concert in Paris together?" and so I played al his composition with piano. And so we gave concert there and then got engagements to England and Scandinavia, so we traveled two to three years together. He was the most erudite person I knew. He was always with a book or was reading and was very elegant. And a wonderful composer as you know. At the same time, I was impressed very often with the wonderful knowledge of the literature, musical literature. I asked him something about Brahms' sonatas and was surprised that he knew every note, what was done and why and how constructed and so on. So that was a real pleasure.

LB:

Describe his page turner, [RT laughs] the advice he gave his page turner.

RT:

well, he usually...he was not a great pianist, of course played very well. But when we played together and there was a page turn, he would say "Don't pay attention. That's a composer's edition that I'm playing." [laughter]. He skipped many notes, you know.

LB:

The...you also traveled, before coming to your travel to America, you also made a tour with [Artur] Rubinstein.

RT:

Yeah.

LB; You met him in Paris or already in Poland?

RT:

No, I knew him in Poland, and I knew him for many years. And I was very well acquainted with his wife's family too. The father of his wife was a Polish conductor and violinist and composer, Mlnarski. He was the conductor of the opera in Warsaw. And so I knew them, and to some degree Artur Rubinstein. But I learned to know him much better in Paris. And

Library of Congress (Music Division)

we became very friendly and one day, he said, "Well, next summer I'm going to South America. You want to come with me?" Of course I said no, I wouldn't [laughs], but I did. And so we went everywhere: to Brazil and to Uruguay, Argentina and Chile and played numbers of concerts. Those...in South America you played...you came to town and played a recital. If you had a reasonably good success, you repeated...played another recital. And that went up to ten recitals. I played ten recitals actually in Buenos Aires. And of course my pride in that was...I should tell you this new secret, was that I played ten recitals with one white shirt, and there never was...[laughter]

LB:

In Paris...Paris was different from Berlin and you met a lot of musicians.

RT:

Yes, sure.

LB:

And [Darius] Milhaud, [Nadia] Boulanger, painters and so forth. What was different about Paris from Berlin?

RT:

Paris was much more scintillating, so to say - can you say that? - than Berlin. Musicians, painters, and all kinds of artists, ballet dancers, we were all intermingled. And, for instance, Szymanowski had his opera and his ballet performed, and Serge Lifar was the famous ballet-master at the Opera. So we learned to know him very much. And there's a book actually published by the name Misia, M-I-S-I-A. Misia was a patroness of many painters and her house was like a museum of painting, and she played piano very well. So I would very often play sonatas with her, all Beethoven sonatas. And people would come gather of all kinds of works of art, so that you rubbed shoulders with really everybody. And it was most inspiring too, because painting and theater, we were completely interwoven with music. Also I must say that in Paris, the music was much more progressive. Strangely enough, the twelve-tone music which was started in Austria, as we know in Vienna, and was not terribly much done in Berlin. This was something in Paris, much more alive, and so on.

LB:

Library of Congress (Music Division)

You had already begun to teach when Flesch came to Paris, fleeing Germany. You were his assistant in Paris?

RT:

That's right.

LB:

And what led you to start to teach? How did you decide...

RT:

Well, I slowly started teaching. I...already in Berlin, Flesch would give me some students to help out and teach them. And in Baden-Baden we had Henryk Szeryng and Ida Haendel and people like that that I, to some degree, was teaching too, preparing them for the lessons and so on. So that became gradually part of my interest. And in Paris, I had developed a class, and...so that I didn't teach formally but I had private students and then traveled abroad to play concerts.

LB:

How did you get started in the United States? What made you decide to emigrate to the United States? You had emigrated before you had to.

RT:

Well, actually I was very friendly with the people of the Spanish government. When the Spanish war started, the civil war, we were all on tenterhooks, what will happen? And the terrible things that happened there, and obvious attacks of the German Luftwaffe which came to help Franco gave us a feeling that this is really just a dress rehearsal for world war. In 1938, I felt that sooner or later things were going to be bad. And I started coming to America in 1935 already with...just on tours. I was engaged by some managers and I became very friendly with the members of family of Roosevelt, who were at the time visiting Europe. A family by the name Dows, who were one of the Hudson families, you know. And they encouraged me to come to America, and help me very greatly to do that. And Mrs. Dows was a very good friend of Nicholas Longworth, the Speaker of the House at the time, and when he dies - he was an amateur violinist - he left a violin which was supposed to be a Strad. And one day I got a telephone call from the American Embassy in Paris saying "there's a violin for you sent from the States" and that was the Strad that they sent me, so, when I...

Library of Congress (Music Division)

LB:

It was really a Strad?

RT:

Yeah.

LB:

Oh, it was. You said it was supposed to be a Strad, so I got suspicious.

RT:

Well, there was some question of whether...but it was sold as a Strad.

LB:

But then you...you then...

RT:

So that I came several times. And then in 1938 I said, that's it. I'm going to stay there.

LB:

You played in the White House. Tell us about this.

RT:

Well I played the Quirinale in Italy, in Rome, for the king of Italy. And was very impressed with the rigamarole that was...you know, these guards that were practically seven feet tall, all dressed up and standing there. And then you couldn't turn left, right. You had to, also, when you spoke to the royal family you couldn't turn your back. You had to back out and so on. As a matter of fact I...it was so formal that I had to have a high hat besides full dress and cape. And when I came I had to borrow a cape and a high hat from ambassador of Poland, who was very nice about it, but his hat didn't quite fit me, it was too small for me. I had a swollen head already then. [laughter] And so when I was leaving after playing with great success and so on, it was very nice, I had to back out and so on. I went to the... to pick up my high hat and cape and there were about thirty other high hats and capes. And I didn't know which one was mine. I had no idea. They didn't fit me anyhow. So I had to stay there until everybody left, and there was one left for me. [laughter] So that was... I thought it was very auspicious in some ways but very confining. And when I came to

Library of Congress (Music Division)

America, of the recitals I was invited to play at the White House. And it was a president's... vice-president's dinner. And Jack Garner was there. Jack Warner was a very, what we call "naturka" character, you know. So he took off his shoes and everybody was very much at ease. And Roosevelt turned to Jack Garner and said, "Well, you know he's playing the violin of old Nick. I hope he plays better than old Nick." [laughter] So that was the beginning, and then there were three people of us, Lily Pons, myself and Cornelia Otis Skinner who recited some poetry. And after that we were invited upstairs to the private rooms of Mrs. Roosevelt, who served us dinner, sitting on her knees and moving around in a nice American way. And the whole place was otherwise pretty messy because the elevator didn't work and this and that. And you could see that this was very easy life there. And that's the time I said, well this is really the country for me. I going to go stay here. [laughter].

LB:

In the United States you had a solo career. You had the Alma Trio. You ran the first chamber music for WQXR. You were concert master even for an orchestra the Stokowski conducted, and gave the first performance of the Barber concerto. How did you find America different? How did you get all these things? How did you make these decisions to get these things started? How did the career develop in the United States.

RT:

Well, the answer should be really Work, Work, Work. Being with all those students, you have to say that [laughs]. But, no it was all natural progress, you know. You play solo then you get involved in...I already did a lot of chamber music in Germany and actually in Paris, too. We had a association of musicians that we would play regular chamber music. Some of the most famous French musicians today were participating. But so...

LB:

How did the Alma trio get started?

RT:

That was...I became very friendly with Yehudi Menuhin. And we went to...he had an estate in California, a place called Alma. And the mountain...was magnificent place with swimming pool and so on. We would spend all the time there. And my colleague Adolph Baller who was his accompanist and pianist, who was a wonderful Viennese pianist, was there. And Gabor Rejto was a Hungarian cellist. And we played for everybody the trios. At

Library of Congress (Music Division)

first we read and we got interested more and more, and everybody liked it so much that they organized concerts for us. And before we knew, we really played practically all over United States, the three of us. But that's how it worked.

LB:

You were one of the faculty members at Aspen, and were there for over a decade. And how...you were in the very beginning. How did you get involved in that?

RT:

Well, I was actually involved in Santa Barbara in the beginning of the Santa Barbara Academy of the West. It all started because we were in San Francisco and there was kind of a crazy woman manager who said, "Santa Barbara is perfect place. We should have a music school and music festival there. You want all to come there?" So she invited Darius Milhaud and myself and Soulima Stravinsky, the son of [Igor] Stravinsky. And Lotte Lehmann was there. So we all went there and for several summers were there...

LB:

You gave the first performance of the Schoenberg Fantasy there.

RT:

Yes, that's where... 'cause Schoenberg would come and stay the summer and give lectures. And one day he came with this new composition he wrote. And the only performance before that was private performance by a Mr. Koklarski, who was in... was one of the musicians in Los Angeles. And so I learned it with Soulima Stravinsky together and we did the first performance of that. Of course, as you can imagine, Stravinsky was interested in contemporary music very much, so we did a lot of contemporary music together. But back to your question, the man who started Aspen, Mr. Paepcke came and offered us, actually myself to come to Aspen with Mack Harrell, the wonderful singer, who participated in both places. And... so that I spent actually eleven years... eleven summers in Aspen. In the beginning it was very small, Aspen. I'm sure that I wouldn't recognize it if I go there today. It was just one main street and a few dusty other streets and little huts and old miner's houses. So that when we had a house at some point where every room had a number on it and there were about fifteen rooms. That was obviously a house where they would tell the guests "Go to room 15." [laughter]

LB:

Library of Congress (Music Division)

You also had a...you met Bernstein as a young man.

RT:

Yes, very young.

LB:

Those of you who may not know who Oscar Levant was, but for those of you who do, you...how did you...because also you were involved in the creation of the Bernstein Serenade.

RT:

Yeah. Well I met Bernstein first time...Oscar Levant was...became very famous person because he was on a program "Information, Please" in New York. And those of you who don't know who he was, he was a pupil of Schoenberg and an excellent pianist and Broadway composer, and friend of Gershwin. He told me often that when he traveled with Gershwin sometimes, Gershwin usually got the lower berth and he was in the upper berth. And Gershwin would say, "You see that's the difference between talent and genius." [laughter]

LB:

He also wrote a notorious autobiography. He was really a character.

RT:

Yes, well I must say, very often I turn the television and there is an old picture of Sinatra with Oscar Levant as an actor, and it brings, really, a shock to me, because we spent quite a lot of time together. So that at some point he wrote a composition for me and we played it at Town Hall in our my recital, together. And then he was invited to go to Curtis Institute to speak to the students, and he invited me to come along and we played his piece. On the way back, we were on the train from Philadelphia to New York and then there was this character who...young man who wouldn't let go of us. Would come over and ask Oscar Levant, "So how did you do this?" and "Why did you do that?" and "How do you play piano?" and so on. That was Lenny Bernstein [laughter] who was a student at Curtis still. And so I knew him from that time. And then we knew each other, of course, in Tanglewood when he was a conductor and student of [Serge] Koussevitzky, and became quite well acquainted. And then I heard that he was kind of...nothing to do, in between after the Koussevitzky school and so on. I wrote him a letter and said, "How about writing

Library of Congress (Music Division)

me a concerto?" And he was...wrote me back that he would be delighted to do it. And then he made a contract and he was supposed to write a concerto. And he started writing it and wrote two movements in which I was very much concerned. We worked together quite a bit. And then he said, one day he said, "I'm not going to continue this," and "I have another commission much better than that." That was the West Side Story. So he just dropped it like a hotcake. And I never heard about it until some years later when he finished it, and I think Isaac Stern performed it. And of course, I was pretty mad about it. And Lenny came to give some lectures at Harvard, and he called me and I came to one of the lectures and he apologized profoundly, that he really owes me something, and so...But not that he did anything about it. We know very...I'm sure that Seymour [Lipkin] knows pretty well what kind of a character Lenny was. So that's how it...

LB:

Before we come to the present, you then moved from Aspen to Tanglewood, and then finally to BU [Boston University] after teaching. And then...

RT:

Yeah. That was actually the same time. As soon as I got to BU actually I started a program in Tanglewood for young people. I said, as long as we don't have young people here at the University why don't we do something in Tanglewood, where they had a program there of other things. And...so that we started a program for young people.

LB:

[indicating audience] I want to turn to you because there are many students here. And rather than move to the subject of...from the biographical, you have a sense of the breadth of the career. And many of you may not know a lot about the history of 20th Century music or violin playing, but you know a lot about playing the violin and playing chamber music. And so really, we would like to hear from you questions of Mr. Totenberg about music making, his career, what he thinks about violin playing today, about concert life today, how it was different then and now.

Off-Camera Female Voice: Before we start, Leon, tell him that he could talk a little about his thirty years at Kneisel. 'Cause he's been here a very long time, probably longer than anybody else in this room...

RT:

What? What?

Library of Congress (Music Division)

LB:

Your experiences here at Kneisel Hall and in Blue Hill.

RT:

I thought I was in Paris again...
[break in recording]

LB:

...as he plays for you.

RT:

That's right. That's right. And [unintelligible] too. Schnabel and also Carl Flesch recommended him to Yehudi Menuhin and has played with Menuhin for several years. But actually I invited Arthur [Balsam] to come to Tanglewood and played all the Beethoven sonatas together there. And had lectures about it. And then he invited me to come here and play the Brahms sonatas together. And that was my first visit to Kneisel Hall. It was very, very pleasant, many friends that were teaching here. And ever since I was keeping some contact. When Leslie Parnas became director here, he asked me every year, "Come. How about coming to Kneisel Hall?" "Well, I have still this and I have still that. And finally one day I said, "Well maybe I will come." And I never left, so to say. So that's how it really happened. And when Leslie left, somebody had to take the slack for a little while so I was the director, pro tempore, so to say. And held that until we found a wonderful person; a conductor, a pianist, a marvelous director who is sitting right there [laughs]. And I remember that I asked Seymour to come and we both played for Ann [?] Stern, who was then our bed-giver, so to say. And so the deal was done, and I never left. So I hope this place will remember me as somebody that they enjoyed having around.

LB:

Questions.

RT:

They are very shy people here.

LB:

Shy. Don't be shy. Laurie...

Library of Congress (Music Division)

Off-Camera Female Voice: I thought you were asking some really good questions that you wanted us to ask. Like, what do you think of violin playing and concertizing now? I know you still judge a lot of competitions, and what do you feel like you're hearing, and are you optimistic about the future of violin playing?

RT:

I'm very optimistic always about those things but it has changed very much. It's no question about it. Literature has changed. Also the way careers are built nowadays. In olden times you were very good, and the only way you could show yourself would be give a recital in a big town like New York or Berlin or Paris, which I did. And then if you got very good reviews, you went to the manager and they would give you a few concerts and more and more, and that's...it was a natural development. I think the recording business and the whole television business changed it completely because there's such a tremendous amount of publicity that is necessary. And although, and particularly in America I think, it's very strong. I know that there are many of the...not many but quite a few of the famous musicians who started career in this country with the financial backing of very substantial individuals. Isaac Stern who had a fund made for him so that he could give concerts and so on. And I even..Horowitz, I'm told at the time, there was \$70,000 put to he...to build his career here. So that picture has changed very much because of that and so the careers are built differently, I think, today. I really don't know exactly how it happens that somebody is famous. As you know, many of performing artists now won prizes. But many won prizes and didn't make anything of these prizes. I think Emanuel Ax I think twice had won competitions, and...first time nothing happens so he went again and played another competition. But basically, it's much more a question of who you know, how you do it and...than it was.

LB:

About the actual standards and quality of violin playing. Let's compare say when you were a conservatory student to now.

RT:

Well, I think those things have changed too. Nowadays in violin playing, we are pretty much uniform. The techniques are..we kind of know what it is, how to do the things. From [Otakar] Sevcik to Carl Flesch and then [Ivan] Galamian, taking up the French school in a way. But, so that today, people play with more velocity and more ability to play all the Paganini Caprices, let's say. In my time we studied them, but hardly anybody performed

Library of Congress (Music Division)

them. As you know, [Jascha] Heifetz was the image of success as a technician never played any Paganini, really.

LB:

Did the Czech, the Czech virtuoso, did he...?

RT:

Yeah. Vasa Prihoda. He...practically nothing but Paganini, and so on. There are some recordings of his still available that are completely fabulous. And also, I don't want to say that there were not tremendous violinists at the time. And I heard Yehudi Menuhin play Paganini Concerto with a way that your hair would stand up. It was absolutely without worrying about the technical part, but it was such a panache and such a drive and wonderful sound. I was in Paris couple of weeks ago and bought...found a recording of that performance taken off the air. Pierre Monteux conducting, by the way. And simply just fabulous. You just say, "that's marvelous." I find today it's a little bit too standardized, the playing. And we know all the recordings so everybody chooses this and that and copies it. And then with my students, most of them come with a lesson. They know the recording of this and pretty much try to copy it. This is not necessarily a good development. The development which I find also...which has improved our playing is the tape recorder. When you think that when we started we never could hear ourselves. So that's why when you hear some of the old records of [Mischa] Elman or somebody like that, when you hear some funny slides and funny things, because they couldn't know that it wasn't right, you know. There's a famous recording of Hubermann about whom I talked to you about before, where he plays the Kreutzer Sonata, the beginning and...[sings melody] [laughter] That slide takes half an hour 'til he gets to the note...[laughter] And that was his feeling of expression, you know, and it was quite noble for that time. We hear ourselves today and we say, "Oh did I do that. That's terrible!" You know? Very often I think all of us feel the same. And so that..I know that when I fir...the concert where I played the Chaconne of Bach, I played it a few times for the tape recorder and invariably I play it too slow. I listen to myself, "Well come on boy, get going." You know? [laughter] This is really something that is tremendously helpful to us. Those are the different...

LB:

So you think there's some loss in the variation of the sound that is made on the violin, in relation to style, is that...?

Library of Congress (Music Division)

RT:

In...to some degree, I think it's true. Today being that we play, in the last, big halls. And the teaching became so that everything is for the big sound and fast playing. We lose the shading. The scale of sound has diminished very much, I think. I think that artists of the past could much more play half-voice or doing completely...kind of a...in a sound that was intimate. From that sound up to the loudest sound was a great scale of difference. And it's different...difficult to make your students or colleagues play a different qualities and so on. And I think in all the excellent teaching of Galamian, the inspiration quality was lacking. And once you play well the instrument, the people like Enescu or Thibaud or even Flesch would give you that very [?] inspiration of quiet and very important. And I feel in my lessons I try to impress the young people, "What does it mean, this passage to you?" or "What does it mean to you, this page to the whole composition?" And this is something that in older times we discussed much more. And the young people would fight about it. "You, how could you want it this way? Or that way?" And it is standardized much more, and it is not necessarily good.

LB:

Questions, please. Yes?

Off-Camera Male Voice: You mentioned that you premiered the Samuel Barber concerto? Could you maybe talk about what his intentions for that piece were and any kind of discussions you had?

RT:

[to LB] Can you explain?

LB:

About the Barber, the performance of the Barber concerto.

RT:

Well I heard the Barber concerto was being written for somebody in Philadelphia, that it was commissioned and it was not performed. And at the time I was the concert master with Stokowski. And I was to play concerto and...so, and I knew Samuel Barber so I invited him and talked to him a little bit. He'd just got out of the Army and he said he would be delighted if I would perform it. And so we rehearsed quite a few times together. He was still in his Army uniform and I have some pictures of that time. And that's how it was

Library of Congress (Music Division)

performed firstly[?], Stokowski conducting, and was immediately a success. Really it's a very successful work, and quite unique in the simplicity, at the same time really says something. At the time I always was on the lookout for new pieces. That's why I contacted Bernstein and Martinu - who was also in New York - and...

LB:

William Schuman.

RT:

...William Schuman. William Schuman I knew and actually he came to me because he had written Violin Concerto which was not a success. And he wanted to change it, work it out and so on. So he would come to me quite regularly and we made all kinds of changes in it. And then I performed it in Aspen and it was very great success there, really, and from then on. Unfortunately I don't think it's played very much but it's an excellent work. It's very long. So I think this is one reason it's not played more. I think the first movement could be what you call, Konzertstück, you know, and forget the other two. But he wouldn't agree to that.

LB:

Yeah.

Off-Camera Female Voice: Yes, I was wondering. You were talking about how when you were in Paris there was a lot of interaction between other artists, other than musicians. And I was wondering if you could talk about whether there seems to be big deviation now, like we don't intermingle because we're so focused.

RT:

Not enough

OCFV: Like how much do you think that that actually has to do with making the lack of expression, like feeling...

RT:

I would agree with you. The feeling when you combine your artistry with other people that do something else, like the painters or actors or dancers. Your whole feeling of art broadens very much. And when I came to Boston University we organized kind of a club where we would meet regularly with...because they...the School for the Arts is also theater and painting and so on. So it was for a few years we had very nice relationship...

Library of Congress (Music Division)

Now, all three school became so big that you really don't do it anymore. But I think in Paris, somehow the intermingling is very natural. Because the city itself demands it. When the museums, the ballet, the theater, and the opera, before you know you are in a vault[?]. You meet friends who are in other artistic endeavors. And I think...for me it was always great source of inspiration, really. And even now when I go to any town, particularly Paris, you run into all the museums like crazy because there are such wonderful paintings and you have the inspiration for that. But...we are trying to do our best but it's not easy anymore. And for young people, particularly. You don't live together with other arts so much anymore.

LB:

[pointing to audience member] Yeah.

Off-Camera Male Voice: I think my colleague before me was alluding to the fact that a lot of individuality in violin playing, in classical music making, has been kind of lost and has become much more uniform. I was wondering in terms of the actual musical education itself, outside of violin playing. When you're in the conservatory, nowadays many of the musicians in conservatory learn about music, to put it lightly, I would think. They don't... the study of form and harmony and composition, piano playing is not as emphasized as it used to be in favor of basically continuing to develop motor skills. And I wondered how that differed from the education that you received as a young person.

RT:

Well, I think that possibly that nowadays you're, as everything else, you are more specialized. You want to be so good in playing, your technical approach to it, that people are not so concerned about musical content. But I think it is a little bit, in some ways, our American fault. I think you'll find that...more interest in what to do with music, what to do with art, in some of the European countries. In England, I think, in Germany...and the problem with France is always that it was in every direction, so that you couldn't be specialized too much, you know. So it was good, at the same time difficult for the artists. But I think generally, we are so impressed with the technical ability that sooner or later people get mostly involved with that. And I think, of course, that depends very much on the ambiance that live in and maybe your teachers, so. And you have to think of it that people like Sevcik, who was a mostly technical teacher, and all his school, was somewhat like Galamian, where it was...that was the prime interest - to really produce very successful product of somebody who can play extremely loud, extremely well, and so on.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

LB:

But there's also the separation composition and performance. Even [Jeno] Hubay, who had a whole school of playing in Budapest, was a composer. It was trashy music, but he wrote it. And so that...which leads to the question of whether...when you were... whether you ever...how many of your classmates really tried their hand at composition, for example, even popular music? And whether there was more of a connection than you see now.

RT:

Well, it was easier. As you know from great music, that practically every great composer - not only Dvorak but Beethoven and Mozart - used the popular songs and the popular music as part of their daily life. And in some ways, even Hindemith did the same thing and the Italian composers did the same thing. And I think we came a little bit away from that, which is some times very difficult. Certainly the twelve-tone music created chasm of... between that and what was there. I must say that when I was in Paris we were completely seeped in progressive music, twelve-tone and...did all kinds of what you would say crazy music, together. And when I came to America and first heard the First Symphony of Shostakovich, I thought "Now that's terrible. How can we go back to this kind of music again," you know. And it took me some years that I understood that this is also very nice, you know. Really, this its the problem with all our artists, I think. Whether it's music or visual art or even poetry, to see both sides of the medal, let's say. And how...that one and the other have great advantages for us.

LB:

[Pointing to audience member] Yeah.

Off-Camera Male Voice: There were a couple of violinists who had big, splashy beginnings, winning competitions, then did...whose names I won't mention, but who did... their debut programs were all bonbons, all encores. Is that kind of a metaphor for the sort of technical thinking, with no depth, not building a program, with...

LB:

We're curious whose these are, who these people you won't...never mind. [laughter]

RT:

I won't mention the unmentionable.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

OCMV: Their careers went nowhere after a big beginning...

RT:

I find this is a real art to be able to build a nice program that is...has some balance. And I think that our director Seymour [Lipkin] spends a lot of time thinking about it. And when I have a recital, I know that it's like childbirth. You think about it, you do this and that. Maybe this better and that there. I know my colleagues feel the same way, I'm sure. And some of us are more successful than others. And of course, everybody who performs has some more understanding of that kind of or other music. And it takes ti...years, possibly for you to realize that you do better this than that, you know and put it together. So building a program I think is really tremendously important and not an easy task for everybody.

LB:

Partly the bonbon tradition has declined as amateur playing has declined. It used to be that the recital was a way of displaying, like a professional sports person, to the amateur, how well the professional could do it. So the technical skills or playing things that were familiar very well...but now the technical pyrotechnics you want to show, but you don't have and audience...You have an audience of CD buyers. You don't have an audience of amateur players. you know, seeing look how terrific the real first-class professional does it.

RT:

But I must tell you that of course the programs have changed completely from the time when I was in Berlin still. Kreisler would come out to the recital that he would play maybe a couple movements of Bach, and concerto, maybe Mozart concerto with piano, and then ten of his compositions after that, you know. That's what everybody was waiting [for] anyhow, you know. And that was rea...the difference with playing today is that we all at the time played not Brahms, Beethoven, those concerti with piano, but Mozart and older virtuoso concerti like Paganini and so on, in the recitals. [Alexander] Glazunov even, too. And that's not done, it's not good manners nowadays, so we don't do...

LB:

[Alfred] Quidant [?] and [Isabel] Aretz [?], those as well?

RT:

Yeah. Oh yes. Absolutely. Everything.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

LB:

[Pointing to audience member] Yeah.

Off-Camera Male Voice: Here in the...well you've pretty much seen the whole change of chamber music in terms of, particularly, string quartet playing. From that time on, probably like from the Pro Arte type quartet, to the Hungarian Quartet, you know, giving lineage the the Busch Quartet, then even coming to Guarneri and even on 'til, like we saw, the St. Lawrence Quartet last year. You've seen a whole, almost a century of string quartet playing. But, I don't know, but either way if you've ever thought about playing in a string quartet yourself throughout your life, and if you had a chance, what were your reasons you didn't decide to make yourself do a group, a permanent group.

RT:

Well, it really...the quartet playing today is quite different, in that respect. Instrumentally, the famous quartets except for Budapest, the others were not as well schooled instrumentalists, but mainly played for the artistic value and...which was...

LB:

You were in the Galimir Quartet early, too.

RT:

Yeah. Galimir Quartet came to Baden-Baden to Flesch to take some lessons and they acquainted us then with the Alban Berg quartet. And a sister of Felix [Galimir] was studying with me [?] then. And they played...he played with three sisters, and they were not very good instrumentalists but they played extremely well together. It was really... particularly the new music, so to say. Now the style was quite different. The Pro Arte Quartet, which was a French Quartet, had quite a different style than Budapest. I was quite friendly with both...members of both quartets. But then you could hear the difference. The Pro Arte played French music and Schubert extremely well. Exciting and so on. Budapest was much more smooth and played Beethoven quartets exceedingly well. It was quite a different culture of approach to it. In France there were some excellent quartets. [Lucien] Capet had a famous quartet, so that Pierre Monteux was a member of Capet Quartet on the viola at the time. But in quartet you can really discern the difference of the approach of the group, very much. I am sorry to say, very often some of our best quartets really are too smooth, too fast, too...They don't get the real gist of the music very often. I think the

Library of Congress (Music Division)

Tokyo Quartet which plays very, extremely well, I haven't heard a performance that would be exciting to me as a music making.

LB:

Why didn't you yourself, the questioner asked why you didn't yourself go into the quartet.

RT:

Oh, I think it's more a personal question. I had a string quartet being at WQXR for several years and did a lot of...I think I was always more interested in diversified chamber music and that's why from the very beginning I played the quintet or trio or quartet or whatever. I probably didn't want to get involved in living in a marriage of four people, you know, which is very difficult problem, of course. And we know that many quartets change constantly the members.

LB:

A revolving divorce of four people. [laughter]

RT:

Yeah. It's very terrible. Somebody right now is having a court case because they dissolved quartet.

LB:

[pointing] Yeah, in the back.

Off-Camera Female Voice: You spoke a bit about musicians and their interactions with other kinds of artists. What about the relationship between musicians and people who are not necessarily artists - people in the rest of society. What do you think is the role of music?

RT:

I didn't quite get what's the relationship...

LB:

I didn't quite understand myself. I mean, you're really asking...I mean because you obviously can tell every musician in the subway from a non-musician. [laughter] The question is...you said it in a very charming way is what is the relationship of the musician

Library of Congress (Music Division)

to everybody else in the world is. Oh. But you really want to know what is...the question of how musicians interact with people who are not musicians. Is that...

OCFV: Mm hm.

[silence]

[laughter]

LB:

It's a good one, yeah. I don't talk to anybody who isn't a musician so I wouldn't know. [laughter] I avoid them strenuously.

RT:

And the other people...

LB:

And the rest of the people, yeah right.

RT:

Are there other people besides musicians? [laughter]

LB:

No, we're not making fun of you. I apologize. But there...

OCFV: No, I guess I'm trying to talk about the role of musicians in society and maybe how it's changed over time.

LB:

Ah, that's...I see. Its a very good question. What is the role...when you were growing up, the musician seemed to be an important person in society.

RT:

That's true.

LB:

Even in Berlin in the 20s, Schnabel had political views, was very outspoken, Flesch too. They were important people in society. And what do you compare now, the role of the musician in society. A very good question.

Library of Congress (Music Division)

RT:

Well, I think the role of musicians is always the same, of educating the society and bringing the best of your knowledge to...and your inspiration to society, which should bring not only happiness but excitement to the people, and satisfaction. On the other hand, we are intellectually awake people, and we don't want to play music just for pleasure of hearing sounds. And involvement of music as our expression of our understanding and our feeling towards people, to our daily life and all that. You can't divorce it. It's all part of our human...of us as human beings. I think that only maybe superficially musicians perform just for performance's sake. And as we know, many musicians get involved in the political and social life. And I think particularly if you are a teacher, you immediately are thrown into the social life of young people and what to do, how to help them to achieve what they want to. And if you look at the general aspect of life, too, some of the best musicians were highly principled people. It's quite unusual that composers of a certain type like Wagner were very one-sided as political thinkers. I...most of European musicians went through different stages of...in every country. And some have survived, some didn't but we all had very strong social and political feelings about it. And I think today too. And I think particularly teachers, or those people who are involved in teaching feel obligated to give back what we have received from our society or our teachers for our colleagues and so on down to younger generation. I think that's really part of our thinking, practically every day.

LB:

Couple of more questions. Couple more questions. Last round. Yes.

Off-Camera Female Voice: You just had re-released on CD all your recordings of Bach solo sonatas and partitas. And I was very curious, that when you listen to them - you hadn't heard them for a lot of years - you said you played them so differently now. Why is that?

RT:

Well, I think that every one of us artists grows and changes with time, and changes also with the taste of the...of his generation. I recorded Bach sonatas in 1970, about. All in, I must say, two days - all six of them. And ever since, I performed them very often. And influenced...more and more got influenced by the discovery of Baroque-time musicians. One of our great problems of string players is to adopt this wonderful music of Baroque time to our instrument and our way of playing. And we have to be able to use some of the knowledge and some of the sound that we know that Baroque music was produced

Library of Congress (Music Division)

with to our instrument. I don't like people who go overboard and play, let's say a Bach first movement of any sonatas with exaggerated rhythms and so on that some people advocate. On our instrument, it really doesn't fit it. And it's a question of finding sound and tempo that is right for the particular...solo sonatas particularly. I think that many of the movements that I have done since 1970 were approached in a rather heroic type of music making. A kind of, you know, make big...make it very big and wonderfully sounding and... build a real church, you know. And I went away from that today. I still think that it has to have a grandeur to some time, but I'm much more modest about it and try to speak the language more than produce overall effect. And that has changed. 1970 to today is thirty years You feel differently about those things. And of course, I...anyhow I'm quite different, and I think...than, lets say Mr. Heifetz who never changed anything. He played always the same, things with the same fingering, the same bowing brought to perfection, and so on. And I think myself and many artists that I have known have changed and elaborated and things every few years. Carl Flesch used to have...every two years or so he would have all...buy all the famous parts of music and rework them. And quite a bit changed. And I, without imitating him, I must say that I have to do that all the time. Every year or two I find some other things, and so on. I'm playing for the Brahms sonata in a couple of weeks. And I found some new ways, new things that I think I like better than what I did before. And you may like it, may not. We'll find out. [laughter] But I can't see myself to do exactly the same things.

LB:

A final question. If not, I want to say you have many friends here from many years. I remember being your student, what, for seven or eight years. And everything you say about being a teacher and a musician I am the beneficiary of.

RT:

Thank you.

LB:

I think we all are, for all your many years of playing and teaching and being a complete human being not only a great virtuoso.

RT:

Thank you. Well, we do what we can. [laughter]
[Applause]

Library of Congress (Music Division)

RT:

Lovely to be not only with colleagues and students, but to be with friends. And you are all my friends. Thank you very much for coming.

[Applause]

This has been a presentation of the Library of Congress. Visit us at www.loc.gov