



A Few Minutes
with
John and Harriet Robb

This booklet was compiled by
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UNM Libraries

Having served as a longtime member of the John Donald Robb Musical Trust at the University of New Mexico and also as Head of Special Collections at the CSWR, I began to delve into the boxes and in the Robb Archive. Dean Robb's papers include correspondence, lectures, scores of his compositions, interviews, photographs, recordings, and many more documents. The more that I read and listened, the more I became impressed with this enchanting man and his lovely wife and life partner, Harriet. I began interviewing family and friends. As I researched the Archives, I decided to read brief excerpts from his papers at the monthly John Donald Robb Musical Trust meeting held at UNM. The excerpts became part of a regular agenda item: "The Robb Minute." Trust members and guests were entertained and inspired by the readings, giving everyone a "first person" feeling for these two wonderful people and thoughts from family and friends. Many of the minutes are taken from the Dean and Harriet's travel notes made during their trip around the world in 1957-1958. Here are a few "minutes" that reflect Dean Robb's life, his love of music, his love of family, his humor, his inspirations, his philosophy, even a bit of his politics. Excerpts from their unpublished diary *It's Not So Far*, a daily journal of their travels around the world. The excerpts in this travel diary were written by both the Dean and Harriet and give the reader a good sense of the Dean's wife and constant companion throughout their married life together.

~ Marilyn Fletcher

Photos from the archives of the UNM Center for Southwest Research and Special Collections

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Notes are presented as written

A Few Minutes with John and Harriet Robb

Selected from interviews, correspondence, diaries, and
other papers in the UNM CSWR John Donald Robb
Papers, Manuscript collection 497.

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WHY AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY?

My Twelve Lives

The question arises, why should I have written this autobiography? Biographies customarily are written about world famous people, and I am not in that category. I might justify this manuscript on the basis of the fact that I have participated in important events. I have done some things that most people never succeed in doing in that I have not been made a slave by any of my occupations, but have insisted on living the good life and enjoying the fine things in which a person interested may find in life. I might add that others share something of the same feeling that I have expressed about the importance of the things that happen to plain people. When I was a young man, I read some essays by Chesterton, the brilliant British essayist. In one he said in effect, "The things that happen to all of us, like birth, death, and children are much more important than the doings or careers of even the great men. It is humanity itself that counts." As a non-conformist, I am deeply suspicious of the tendency of adulation which comes when one man succeeds in using power, regardless of how he got it. The fact that I have been interested in folk music is one facet of this approach. I am interested in what is happening to these poor, simple people in the villages. I am interested in their religion, their recreation, their work, the incidents of their lives as described in their ballads. I think that this is important. If it weren't for that, I would have long ago given up collecting folk music and preparing a book about it. This may not be an adequate apology but, at any rate, it expresses the way I feel.

The draft table of contents lists these "lives." The working title was "Twelve Lives."

1. Biology Teacher in China
2. Artillery Officer in France in WWI
3. Bond Salesman
4. Lawyer
5. Yachtsman
6. World Traveler
7. Avocations—Raising Sheep—Hunting—Skiing
8. College Professor
9. Author and Victim
10. Candidate for Congress
11. Musician
12. [Husband and Father]*

**Robb did not list his no. 12 in the draft, but I feel that he certainly would have included "Husband and Father" in his list of lives.*

Robb's wife and children were undeniably such an important part of his life that it would have even been considered number one.

From Twelve Lives, draft of an autobiography that was never completed nor published.

Twelve Lives—An Introduction

I think it all goes back to the fact that I have thought—ever since the days when I began to think—that one life was not enough. I wanted to rescue each from oblivion. That is why I am writing this book. I wanted to try many things, and in this I have been successful. I was for a time a cowhand in North Dakota on my brother's ranch. I practiced law for twenty years in New York City. I was a professor of music, head of the department, and dean in a western university for a period of sixteen years. I resided for a year in Central China, teaching biology. I made a three-hundred-mile trip (in the midst of a revolution) through bandit-infested country. I was a combat commander of field artillery in France in 1918. I have run for Congress and been beaten. I have sailed my own yacht in long distance ocean races. I have composed three symphonies, three operas, several concertos, and about one hundred other works. I have conducted, as regular or guest conductor, the national orchestras of three foreign countries and a number of symphony orchestras in the United States of my own compositions and those of others. I have collected in remote places and recorded on tape over two thousand folk music melodies, transcribing the words and music of hundreds of these, and translating many of the texts into English. I have written one book and a number of articles on musical and legal subjects. During the depression, I have experimented with subsistence farming, raised sheep, and learned how to wash, spin, card, and weave wool, and make my own homespun clothes.

My loyal and beautiful wife has been a participant in almost all of these various activities. Without her enthusiastic cooperation, the rather wide distribution of my activities would certainly have encountered considerable opposition.

I have, after great struggles, achieved peace of mind in the thought that I have gone as far as talents God gave me would permit me to go. It has been my good fortune to have been a member of a large and loving family and later the patriarch of my own happy family which numbers fifteen including three children, two sons-in-law, and a daughter-in-law, six grandsons, and three granddaughters. I am ready to balance and close my books at the end of any business day from now on.

From Twelve Lives, draft autobiography.

EARLY YEARS

Paternal Family History

Well, my father was born in McConnelsville, Ohio in 1845, as I remember. I can verify these dates, but I'm pretty sure it was 1845, and he was a member of a fairly large family that had moved from Washington County, Pennsylvania, where they had been residents for some time. My American ancestry on the Robb side is well enough filled out that I have ancestors dating back 1740. One John Robb—I think his name was—came from County Down, Ireland, peculiarly enough, and we've always thought of our ancestors as Scotch-Irish, but I guess that's what the Scotch-Irish were.

From Interviews with Charlemaud Curtis.

Beginning My Diary

At the age of fourteen, I started to keep a diary and kept one for many years thereafter. It records some memorable moments. The earliest diary I can find is for 1906, and as I look at it, I am rather amazed to have a rather complete record of what I was doing at fourteen years of age. I made a notation at the top about the weather, largely because there was a place for it entitled "Weather and Thermometer." I didn't record the temperature but only because I didn't have a thermometer handy. But I did indicate that January 1, 1906 was "fine." My diary reads as follows: "Up at 9 a.m., went over to rink back of flats. Didn't skate. Ford, Offie, Pilk and Flabby were there." These were my bosom companions in those days and they had the usual picturesque names of boyhood.... The diary continues, "Had ride in auto." My father had one of the first automobiles in Minneapolis. It was an Oldsmobile which steered with a tiller. It had one cylinder and was cranked at the side.... "After dinner. Unique with Ed Izdal." The Unique was a little silent moving picture complete with piano. One of its features was throwing the words of a popular song on the screen and the whole audience (though sometimes sheepishly and reluctantly) would join in singing. "Bed 10:30."

From Twelve Lives, draft autobiography.

Looking Back on My Childhood

In looking back on my childhood and reading my diary, I am struck with two things: In one sense I am a different person. I am ashamed of the mediocrity of my thinking as evidenced in my diary, and the very matter of fact way in which I took everything. My handwriting was abominable: I was incapable of getting interested in theoretical things.

I was more interested in the weather, in fist fights, playing with boys, and things of that sort. One redeeming feature was that I was a great reader. I remember particularly the historical novels of G.A. Henry and Edward L. Tomlinson and the Horatio Alger stories.

From Twelve Lives, draft autobiography.

Sunday Afternoon Reading

One of the things I notice when reading this diary is that for a boy of 14 (and I am sure from pictures that I have preserved that I was a large boy at this age and looked almost like a man) my writing and my interests were immature. The two most frequent entries in my diary have to do with going to church where I went not only to Sunday School, but to also play basketball at the gym, and to Sunday School socials, and I remember our church with great pleasure as a very warm, friendly community of people who influenced my life. And the other thing that I recall, is that I apparently read a great deal; one of the entries for a Sunday, for instance, was "Read all afternoon." The books that I read were sometimes mentioned. No author was ever mentioned [in the early diaries]. The only three that were specifically mentioned were *Wilderness Voyager*, *The Vagabond*, *The Amateur Cracksman*. I think that this last one was one of the Raffles stories about a very sophisticated burglar.

From Twelve Lives, draft autobiography.

My First Musical Inspiration

I can't remember the very first, of course, but I do remember the first that really gave me a great impetus. That was a visit which my older sister, Lottie, who was quite musical, escorted me to when I was about 12 years of age I would guess. And that was to hear a performance by the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra. In its early years, it was then under the conductorship of Emil Oberhoffer, who conducted a program which included an aria from *The Trumpeter of Sackingen* by Lortzing. I thought it was beautiful, I was very moved by it.

I had a very strange, fragmentary musical experience. I took six lessons on the cello, from a very excellent instructor, Carlo Fisher, who was then first cellist of the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra. And then I took a year-long series of lessons on the pipe organ at our church, which was then occupied by a charming French woman. I was, like most of classmates at that time, more interested in physical sports—baseball and football. I'm afraid I didn't get much real disciplined musical experience until years later, when I got into Yale University, and took all the music that was possible in those days.

From Interviews with Charlemaud Curtis, Cassette 4.

My Inspiration

... You were responsible, I feel almost certain, for the event which, as it turned out, was decisive in my life. I refer to the first concert of the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra which I, as a callow grade school or high school student, attended. I believe that you took me. On that day I felt that if I could ever write music which could exalt people as that concert did me, my life would have been worthwhile. Yet it seemed an arrogant presumption to think that I could ever do so. It took me about 40 years to work up the pressure and to acquire the confidence to make an all out effort, but what a joy it has been.

From a letter May 30, 1952, to his sister, Lottie (Mrs. A.S. McLaughlin).

Early Music Lessons

I did play the tuba in the high school band, but I could only play in one key. I don't know how I got by with it, but at any rate, I had a uniform and a big tuba.

Well, I would say probably [formal music education began] when I got to Yale. I had studied a little bit. I had dabbled a little in composition because I always wanted to be a composer for some reason. I used to sit at the piano a little bit, but I certainly considered myself the least talented of my family, of the musical ones. I always loved music somehow. We had a lot of music in our family. In those days it was the custom for the married children to come back for Sunday dinner and spend the afternoon and discuss politics. We always had a lot of music. Mother had been raised in a somewhat Puritan atmosphere; she said her father would not even let her swing in the swing on Sunday. They [my parents] were both musical in a way. They loved music. Dad could sing a lot of Civil War stories, and my brother Jim was so marvelous, he could play anything at sight in any key. I still remember—we had a big house in Minneapolis with three big rooms separated by sliding hardwood doors. It was a marvelous house, and he would march from one end around the dining room table singing the “Mulligan’s Guards,” or “St. Patrick’s Day Parade,” or the songs they used to sing in the Civil War. And Mother had a very sweet singing voice and had some musical education. She used to sing, but she sang these sad songs, and all of us were sentimental and we would weep, so she stopped singing. My sister Lottie could also play well by ear and knew music, but it was my brother Jim, who didn’t know music, who could play anything.

From Interviews with Charlemaud Curtis.

City Versus Country Life

When I compare the subject matter of my diaries of the months when I was in the cities with those when I was out in the country, I feel that in the latter I came into much closer touch with reality and the adventure of living. In the city we were skiing, bobbing, playing like children. In the country we were already men. We were useful in haying, in the milking of cows, and this was really much more fun than just playing. This is one thing that gives the country boy a deeper contact with the reality of living and he becomes a man much sooner, it seems to me. I suppose that later in life if he does migrate to the city, he finds himself lacking in some of the educational advantages. But for me, a boy who lived in the city, to have the opportunity to spend three summers on my brother's ranch was heaven. We lived close to nature. Life on the ranch was a very primitive kind of living. There were few modern improvements—everything had to be done by hand or horsepower.

See also **Cowboying with Brother Ned**

From Twelve Lives, draft autobiography.

Cowboying With Brother Ned

[While a young man, Robb visited with his brother on Ned's claim of 160 acres in Oliver County, North Dakota.]

I became fascinated with the folk music of New Mexico because in my youth I had gone to my brother's ranch in North Dakota. My brother Ned, he was glad to have us because we were big enough to stretch wire fences and to work on the road. I lost a fingernail which has never come back to its normal size because I was loading rocks for him and didn't get my hand out in time. The rock went down on it and the fingernail turned bloody and came off.

This is all a prelude to the fact that this was an exceedingly lonely life out there on the prairie and when we would have a party, it was a party! On the 4th of July there was always what they called the "Old Settlers' Reunion." They erected a platform in front of the old town hall on which they danced and they'd have a little orchestra out there. You would drive with a team of horses, a buggy, for 50 miles. It was quite a long trip. They would dance. There I began to hear folk music that I can still remember. These young goddesses were dancing with these slim-waisted cowboys. And gee, I was so thrilled with it and so was my brother Ned, who was quite musical and could remember all those tunes.

The fascinating folk tunes they played were so distinctive and beautiful that when I went to New Mexico and found that the same sort of thing was going on I started going out, and my wife and I spent many weekends,

lovely weekends, unearthing the sources of these folk songs. Altogether, I made a collection of about 3,000 which are available in my collection at the University of New Mexico

As a matter of fact, I incorporated one or two of them in my opera, *Little Jo*. Calla Hay, who reviewed the performance, spotted it right away among the Spanish melodies. There is a difference. I don't know what it was but I was startled that she should spot it. At any rate, I loved those things. Then I came here and had occasion to meet Arthur Campa and Helen Chandler Ryan. I forget just how I came in contact with them. They took me up one evening to hear Prospero Baca. Out of that first 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 songs that he sang—and you know 12 or 15 are in my collection—that was an extraordinary group of songs that man sang.

From Interviews with Charlemaud Curtis, Cassette 4.

My First Trip to Europe

In 1911, when I graduated from high school, was another memorable year for me because my sister Lottie, who was always ambitious for me, had proposed that I take a trip to Europe, which none of our family had ever done before. In expectation of this, I had gone to work two summers before, selling books in order to raise the necessary money. One item which I sold was an encyclopedia of several volumes called *The Book of Knowledge*. In this way I earned \$250. While I do think this was a good book, I also remember selling a set to a very humble woman who washed clothes for a living. It was touching that she would be willing to make such sacrifices so that her son would be able to enjoy a better life than she had enjoyed. I sincerely hope that it was worth the money to her.

On May 15th of that year, I started for Europe with my friend, Frank Carlton, who had been on the track team with me at Minneapolis Central High School... It was very exciting for the two of us, having just completed high school and having absorbed some of the traditions of western civilization to be visiting Europe...

Source TBD.

Literary Influences

J.D.R.: Oh, here's a letter that I ... thought you might be interested in. He asked me to tell him what three books made the greatest impact on my life. I could think of three that had an influence. One of them is *My Musical Life* by Rimsky-Korsakov, telling how, under the encouragement of Balakirev and others, he found the courage and desire to abandon his career as a naval officer and adopt that of a teacher and composer of music. Two, *Les Miserables* by Victor Hugo. Why? Because Thornton

Wilder, in a speech at an Alpha Delta Phi fraternity banquet, expatiated on the theme that literature was the orchestration of platitudes and this book was a good example of the platitude, "Courage is Contagious," which has been in my mind ever since. And third, my own book, [laughter] *Hispanic Folk Music of New Mexico and the Southwest: a self-portrait of a people*. Why? Because it epitomizes years of joyous collecting and study by me and my inseparable companion, my wife, of the hinterland folk cultures which so enhance the total picture of our country's culture. By way of addendum, I have been a P.G. Wodehouse addict. I might select, as one of his, *Leave it to Psmith*. Why? Because I found it evokes that joyous gift of explosive laughter.

From Interviews with Charlemaud Curtis, Cassette 6.

On Melancholia

Another facet of my life that I am not very proud of is that for a period of years from my teens until late in my 40s I was prone to melancholia. I remember that this probably came to one peak when I was in China in 1919. It took me a good many years to overcome it. It was a foreshadowing of something which was to plague me for many years. In 1927, when something I was working on in Rome went sour, and I felt that my future as a lawyer was threatened if not ruined, I had come very close to a nervous breakdown and for a year or more I consulted [a psychoanalyst in New York]. For a number of years I had slight phobias. Thank God, that shadow passed away from my life and since then I have probably enjoyed as sound and balanced a life as most people have. I think that one thing that contributed to this was that my life was split between my interest in music and my interest in law, and when I decided to unify it by renouncing law and going in for music I think that did a great deal to give me new unity and since then I think my "nerves" have been very much under control. I do have some reluctance in going up on high places—on the edge of a cliff or on top of a high building. I am very unhappy. I don't like to go up on the chairlift up in the Sandia Mountains where it goes over one very deep canyon. The thought of being stalled there in space is rather appalling. However, my first aversion to going up in the air has pretty well evaporated now, and I have flown all over the world and on some very long over-water flights.

I have achieved a real feeling of optimism and serenity in my later years which is also accompanied by a mellowing of my character.

From Twelve Lives, draft autobiography.

COLLEGE YEARS

A Memoir of Yale, 1911-1915

I went to Yale somewhat accidentally because my elder sister, Lottie, thought ... I had great promise and ought to go to a distinguished university. So, they sent me off in the fall of 1911, and I, having made no plans, had to take all 16 entrance examinations at once. The entrance committee felt that, owing to such a sporting gesture as taking all 16 exams, I deserved a bit of justice tempered with mercy and admitted me [in spite of flunking four subjects].

I worked like a badger and then spent three and a half years of the most happy years I ever spent. I fell in love with Yale, and a lot of us felt that way.

I rented a room in a boarding house at 7 Library Street which is now the great Harkness Quadrangle. The proprietors were a couple named de Ladson. The husband was a little fellow named Cap and his wife was a huge and formidable woman whom we called "Desdemona," and she ran a tight ship. [As to my plans for Yale], I knew that I was interested in debating and probably in law and politics.

I remember one night, to torment Desdemona, who was like a dark cloud downstairs, we all came galloping down the front stairs making a defining racket. When she came with a big, stout cane in her hand, breathing fire, we were all sitting calmly in the parlor. "Who did that?" she said. And we looked with horror because we saw that she had the heel of somebody's shoe, and there was somebody in the room who had a heel missing. She went around until she found the culprit, and she said, "I'm certainly going to see that this is reported to the authorities." Well, that was fun.

I also tried out for Freshman Glee Club for which the principal requirement was a dress suit, and I had one and was allowed to join. I made it all the way through the Senior Glee Club in my senior year and got to go on that fabulous Christmas trip. Cole Porter was at Yale then and he was writing delightful songs for the Yale Dramatic Association. Cole was a small dapper fellow and wrote very witty songs.

Published in Yale Alumni Magazine, November, 1975.

A Teaching Appointment at "Yale in China"

Toward the close of my senior year at Yale, I was offered a chance to go to China to teach for a year at "Yale in China." This institution had been founded as a mission by a group of graduates at Yale. It had been in existence for quite a number of years and had already developed a middle school and a hospital, and there were plans to establish a medical school.

The Rockefeller Foundation, which was at the time financing the Peking Union Medical College in Peking, got interested and as one form of aid established two teaching scholarships, one in biology and one in

chemistry. I was awarded the one in biology. My qualifications for the job were that I had taken biology as my science, and I had at least two years of biology and received high grades in the courses. Furthermore, they wanted somebody of good Christian character and the fact that I had been one of class deacons and had a reputation of being that kind of person militated in my favor. I was not sure about taking this appointment and I went home to talk it over with my family. My father advised me not to go, stating that I ought to stay at home and start on whatever I intended to do with my life. I think that beneath the views that my father expressed was a feeling of loneliness. He wanted me to go either into the law or the bond business and said that he would support me while I went through law school if I wished to do this. I had a great deal of trouble making up my mind. I finally wrote to New Haven that I would accept the appointment. On July 10 I got a letter telling of my appointment to the staff in China for one year at a salary of \$800 and traveling expenses.

It was a sad parting for I loved my family and I had been at Yale for four years and had been with them only during the summers. On the other hand, I was off on a great adventure.

Source TBD.

Teaching in Changsa, China

We taught, not only our courses in biology but also we were impressed into service in teaching Shakespeare and other English courses. Our students were all young men. They would come in, sit down, open up their fans, and fan themselves during the course of the class. Most of the boys were married although they were quite a bit younger than I was, and they could not understand why a big strapping fellow of 23 wasn't already married. I was studying Chinese from the time I got there. I had an hour-long lesson every day; so I started to throw in Chinese words in my classes, but the students always laughed when I did so. However, at the end of the year, I had a vocabulary of about 800 characters and I could write a good many of them although not as beautifully as a Chinese calligrapher. Calligraphy in China is done with a brush and is a fine art. The Chinese writer had to be something of an artist with the brush as well as a scholar. Chinese characters are, of course, ideographs; the words are put together in such a way as to bear some relation to the meaning. I can remember only one; the famous character for trouble, with a roof on top and two women underneath. The Chinese have a sly sense of humor.

That year in China brought forth many exciting adventures including a rather long trip that I made on foot and sedan chair at the Chinese New Year through the heart of Hunan province. Another trip was to the Holy Mountain of Nan Yo. Finally, at the end of the year, I took a three-hundred-mile trip, mostly on foot and by sedan chair, but partly on river boats from Changsa down over the mountains into Kwantung province and thence into Canton.

From Robb Papers, Folder 99.

WORLD WAR I

Serving in World War I

As one who has been drawn and is going willingly to fight, because he believes that we must resist to the death the attempt of Germany to conquer and dictate to the world. I shall fight myself and support conscription in war time until Germany is willing to talk peace.

At present the powers that be in Berlin have given no satisfactory proof of good faith.

The people of Germany must assert their power and compel a democratic peace, as we are trying to do.

Enclosed find one dollar. I love my country not only enough to fight others on its behalf if they attack it, but also will fight those who would rob it of its democratic heritage.

A letter to People's Council for Peace and Democracy, New York City, July 31, 1917.

John Donald Robb was commissioned into the United States Army on September 13, 1917. He was honorably discharged on July 3, 1919.

Letter of Commendation

Headquarters of the Field Artillery, August 4, 1919

To Whom It May Concern:

Captain Robb served under me for about six months with the 11th Field Artillery. During that time I knew him intimately. He was an excellent officer and an efficient man. I had such confidence in his judgment and ability that during the Argonne battle I selected him for the command of a battalion. This command was one of great responsibility and above his regular rank.

Captain Robb is loyal, faithful and trustworthy. He is a man of the highest personal character.

W.G. Pearce
Colonel, 11th Artillery



MY MOST FASCINATING PERSONALITY – HARRIET

Harriet, My Most Fascinating Personality

The most fascinating personality I have ever encountered is my wife, Harriet. Her mind works at a rapid clip with the result that often in her communication with me she will omit the intervening steps and expects me to start right off with her in the middle. A characteristic way for her to start a conversation is "Barbara is coming here to dinner Monday night." I thereupon have to go through a roster of all the Barbara's I know: Barbara Yell, Barbara Crocker, Barbara Gilstrap—who is it? But it isn't they. "Oh, it's Barbara Neilson," and that is the way we often arrive at the final result. She has such a strong sense of the association of ideas that she thinks that I should be able to follow her train of thought, but, my brain being too limited in telepathic aptitudes, my reason reels.

Another, not dissimilar, incident, occurred this morning, April 18, 1965, [this is the only indication of the time period in which much of this autobiographical draft was written] when I started walking to church for the Easter service. When I was almost at church, she came along in her little Volkswagen and suggested that I get in with her so we could arrive at the same time and sit together, which I did [Imagine Robb folding himself into a small VW beetle!]. After we got out of the car she handed me one white glove which I dutifully held until we got to the church. I didn't know what to do with it. I looked around and there she had the other one on her hand. Why she handed me just the one I will never know, but somehow it shook me up because I have an innate sense of order, and it seemed to me that she could have either handed me two gloves or none.

From Twelve Lives, draft autobiography.

A Marriage Proposal (as remembered by a family friend)

The most precious story that he told was how he and Harriet met and how they decided to get married. He was a young officer and was stationed before the First World War in some training area in the Midwest. He saw her at a dance and he said that she was the most incredibly beautiful person that he had ever met. And so they danced, and he fell in love. Apparently there was some talk of engagement, or marriage, or something of the sort, and then for some reason, it fell apart. And they didn't communicate with one another. He was an officer, a lieutenant I think, in the military in World War I. He was walking along the streets of New York with his brother, and he was to disembark within the next 48 hours. And there he saw Harriet coming across the street. He said "Hello and how are you?" It was just amazing. After saying the niceties, he and his brother walked on and his brother said to him, "You're crazy! You let that gorgeous person go? What's wrong with you?" He started thinking about it and sent her a telegram as he had asked where she was living in New York. The telegram said "I've been such a fool! Is there any possibility that we might get together? I'm being sent out tonight on a train and going to Europe. If you could come down to Grand Central Station, we are leaving at 9 o'clock on a train to New Jersey where we will disembark." He waited around at the train that evening—nothing. He got on the train and off it went. A little way out the Commanding Officer called out for Don* Robb, saying there was a message for him. It was from Harriet and she said she would be waiting for him at the next stop. He asked permission to get off the train to sit with her in a taxicab. He proposed; she accepted. He got on the train and went on to New Jersey and sailed off to Europe. Isn't that the most enchanting story ever heard?

*Names for John Donald Robb include Don and Dean.

From an Interview with Dr. Richard Lueker.

In the Meantime, Harriet ...

... Harriet is a very unusual person... She didn't find anything inconsistent about having dates with other people and I know there was one rival of mine that her brother and his wife seemed to like. His name was Phil ... and she wrote me that she was going on an automobile trip with her brother and sister and would be going up through Massachusetts and New England. I hit the ceiling and wrote her a letter and broke off the engagement.

And then I decided to quit the bond business and go back to law school. About a year later, I was in New York with my brother Jim, who had invited me to come down from the Harvard Law School to the Biltmore Hotel

and spend the weekend. We ran into Harriet on Fifth Avenue and we stopped and chatted for a while, and then went on our way. Jim said, "Is that the girl you were engaged to?" I said yes and he said, "If you let her slip through your hands you're a bigger fool than I ever thought you were, Don." Well, I was not particularly anxious to get married at that time. I knew a lot of young men that don't feel like getting married. But I did it anyway. I went back and re-proposed and the miracle was that she accepted me.

I was fortunate during my younger years when I was still able to play the cello to have a string quartet that met at my house once a week in Pelham. We would read through the literature instead of trying to perfect it for a performance, just for our own pleasure. So we read many of the Beethoven quartets. It enlarged our comprehension on the scope of these men's activities.

Debbie MacVeety was one of them [the string quartet]. John Ward used to play with me. And Phillip Wesson—he played the viola and he used to bring in interesting things by English composers.

From Interviews with Charlemaud Curtis, Cassette 3.

A Kiss for Harriet

... We [friends of ours] used to get together in New York. They had an apartment up on Madison Avenue. One afternoon we were invited, after leaving the office, to come by for a cocktail. As I came to the front door, the maid opened the door and saw me and handed me a slip of paper and then she slammed the door in my face. I read the paper and it said, "Don, when you come in kiss all the girls except Harriet. Money is no object. Evelyn." [Laughter] Well, it seems that during the afternoon, they had been talking about their husbands and the girls all said, "My husband would never kiss me in public, never show any sign of affection in public." Harriet said, "I can count on Don. He always kisses me when he greets me." So when I came in I said, "Hello Sally" and I kissed Sally, I kissed Evelyn, I kissed all the other girls. Then I said, "Oh, hello Hattie" and walked on, you know. And I could see her face drop, the poor little thing! God bless her!

From Interviews with Charlemaud Curtis, Cassette 7.

A Few of Harriet's Classic Remarks

Harriet keeps uttering classic remarks and this morning John jotted down a couple. As he was trying to hurry her to breakfast, she turned to him and said, "Listen, I have to do my face." A man "washes" his face, a woman "does" hers. At breakfast the subject turned to space travel and Harriet remarked, "I doubt if I'll ever see Mars." Don had been predicting that one of these days old ladies will buy a ticket for Mars, take a comfortable seat in an outbound rocket, take out their knitting, fasten their seat belts, and knit all the way to Mars.

From It's Not So Far, October 27, 1957.

MY CHILDREN

Alone With My Children

Harriet reminded me that that was the year in which she circumnavigated the world and left me for six months with the three children.

She left me with the children. This was quite a sudden thing. It was a very exciting thing to us, because Mrs. Walker, the wife of the President of the Sacony Vacuum Company, was, I think, the international marketing agency for the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey. She and her husband had been living in the Far East for many years as head of the—well, he had last been made President of the Sacony Vacuum Company which may have brought him back. Harriet said they went around the world deluxe! Of course they went by boat in those days, by liners, and given all the treatment as if they were almost royalty. Edith Walker was coming back from there so Harriet went on around the rest of the way. I know that she wrote some witty and pleasant letters. I remember going off from the Pacific Coast on a Canadian Pacific steamer—there were a lot of Englishmen aboard and she said “They say England rules the waves, but not out here! They’re all seasick!” You know she’s a great mixer and makes friends. I was left with my three children to take care of and my mother who came all the way from Minneapolis.

I was living in Pelham. I took care of the children there. I became much closer to my children, being both father and mother, than I ever had before. I remember one day, I think it might have been during this period, at any rate while we lived in Pelham. I was working one weekend in a little sort of sunroom that we had at the end of the house. It was very warm weather at the time and the windows were open when I suddenly realized that my children were silently gazing at me as I worked. Finally, Priscilla said, “What are you doing, Daddy?” And you know the impatient parent has to give some sort of answer, so I thought up this formula, “I’m making money.” She said, “Where is the money?” [Laughter]

From Interviews with Charlemaud Curtis, Cassette 9.

Music for My Children

... “Through the Musical Telescope” [Opus 33]. I was at Shelter Island one summer and I thought I would write just a little, small piano piece for my grandchildren to play, and I did that. Instead of using the usual titles, you know, that are supposed to appeal to children—“Flowers in the Breeze” or something of this sort, I tried to give them technical terms that had something to do with modern music and would give the children a chance to listen very quietly to some rather modern ideas, for instance, one like parallel triads. The melody, instead of being a single line, was a

series of chords, a series of triads. Then I had some of the various oriental scales, Japanese pentatonic, Chinese pentatonic, Indonesian which all are variations of five-tone scales. The Chinese is the black note scale and the Japanese (sings the scale) is a little more subtle, but it's still a five-tone scale. And the Indonesian uses the 7th degree of the scale. It leaps up to the 7th. It's slightly different. But each of the melodies delineated and the kids could [play them], and they were very simple, most of them. And it was reviewed very favorably.

From Interviews with Charlemaud Curtis, Cassette 9.

SHELTER ISLAND, NEW YORK

Discovering Shelter Island

Shelter Island is an island in between Orient and Montauk Point. It's shaped like an alligator—that part of Long Island—and the alligator's mouth is open to Orient and Montauk Point. You have to take a ferry to get there from the North Shore or the South Shore. There is no bridge. It's very family-oriented. It's lovely—I can't say unspoiled, because lots of people have come in, people from East Hampton who have built these monstrous houses. It's sort of changed some parts of Long Island. The tenor or the island is a little different now, and Daddy wouldn't recognize some parts of it.

From an interview with Priscilla Robb McDonnell.

He bought the property in 1933 during the depression while we were living in Pelham, New York. My grandmother had an opportunity to go on a cruise around the world. She left my grandfather and three small children at home to go; my grandfather encouraged her to take this trip. While she was gone, he had an opportunity to buy this 26-acre property and he bought it.

This was during the depression and I don't know how much he paid for it but it's a beautiful home. The house itself had stayed in the same family since pre-revolutionary times until my grandfather bought it.

From an interview with Robbin MacVittie.

Memories of Shelter Island

[We went out to Shelter Island] every summer, I think every summer since I was seven years old. And every morning we would wake up to the strains of Daddy composing out at what had been the chicken coop. And he made it into a—first of all, he had a... Daddy was an interesting man. He wanted us to see how the pioneers had lived. And so, he had sheep which he himself sheared, and carded the wool after washing it, and even dyed it with his own vegetable dyes, and then wove suits of clothes for all of us—we still have the old barn loom. He could wear the jacket he made back in the '30s that he could wear at the time just before he died. It had moth holes in it, but he was so proud of that jacket. But that was then the chicken coop that was made first into a shed. We even had little plays in that makeshift chicken coop, but then they really made a nice studio for Daddy. And he had his piano there and his library, and it became a really nice, big room, but it was a separate from the house. But it had been the old chicken coop. So he wrote compositions, and one of them was called "Chicken House Tunes."

From an interview with Priscilla Robb McDonnell.

Strolling Down to the Beach at Shelter Island, Long Island, New York

My mother has a picture—it's a picture that a friend of mine took of my grandparents as they were walking at Kemah (Shelter Island). The house was within walking distance of the beach. They would walk down to the beach together and then back after swimming. The picture of them is from behind, he in his bathrobe, she in her swim suit, walking arm in arm. Taken from the back, here is this tall, imposing gentleman in his bathrobe and my grandmother in her old fashioned swim suit, just walking together for their almost daily swimming ritual. "Gapoo" was what we grandchildren called him and "Hattie" for my grandmother, Robbin MacVittie.

"Chicken Coop Tunes" were composed at Shelter Island in a old chicken coop that was renovated with his old office furniture and wood paneling. It was a beautiful, self-standing study. I remember from the window in the house that faced in the direction of the study, the "chicken coop." Often I would wake in the morning to the sound of his music—working on the piano, composing out there.

From an interview with Robbin MacVittie (Priscilla's daughter).

INTERNATIONAL LAW AND EXPERIENCES ABROAD

Rome on Horseback

[In Rome] we were fortunate enough to find a lovely apartment on the very top floor of a small hotel. It looked right down on the gardens of Prince Bon Compagne, one of the great villas of Rome. We never saw much social life down there, but we could see the gold fish swimming in the pond. It was all surrounded by a very high wall. It was a square block and we were near to the Borghese gardens where there is a marvelous restaurant called the Casina Valadier. You can sit and have lunch outdoors, and look out over the panorama of Rome with the dome of St. Peter's rising up and these other great buildings in sight. It's a very romantic place. There's also a riding circuit there, and Harriet and I used to rent horses and go for a ride. One day, we rode around the "galloperie" as they called it and three or four horsemen were approaching us. I said to Harriet, "Look at that gorgeous Arabian horse that man is riding!" And she said, "Look who is riding it!" I looked and it was Mussolini. As he came along, I gave him the Fascist salute sort of with a grin on my face and he returned it to me and he grinned, too. He knew I was an American.

From Interviews with Charlemaud Curtis.

My First German Cello and The Hill Cello

... I had been in Europe for a year and a half in 1926 and 1927 when I was working on legal issues. Six months in Berlin, and while there, the cellist of the orchestra in the Hotel Esplanade played beautiful cello, and I was so excited that I asked him if he would give me lessons and he said that he would. I took lessons and sometimes practiced at the lunch hour in my room. There was a whole galaxy of American bankers and lawyers over there at the time and living at the same hotel. The wife of one of them, Evelyn Terrell, told me she could hear me sawing away on the cello up there at lunch time.

I was transferred down to Italy where we lived for a year and there I got big ideas because in Rome there was a conservatory called the Santa Cecilia. Forino was the cello teacher and agreed to take me for private lessons. I had bought this cheap German cello in Berlin and he said to get rid of that "German junk." I told him that I could not afford to go to great expense for a better cello. He then said that some of the best symphony orchestra players in Rome were playing on instruments made by Pedrazzini, a luthier who was operating in Milan. I was commuting back and forth from Rome to Milan on legal business in those days so I took the occasion to visit Pedrazzini, and he was a native of Cremona where Stradivarius lived. His studio was right over the fish market in Milan. He had a great collection of old beams

of old houses from Cremona for the epoch of Stradivarius lying around in his big studio and was making violins and cellos out of them. He pointed out one that he thought sounded marvelous, so I bought a cello there that was pretty good. But when this offer later came from Willem Derieux, here was a cello with a tag inside saying, "At the sign of the harp and the flute in the Haymarket, London, 1883." With it were letters from the Hill company saying that the instrument had been sold some years ago. It had enough to identify it, and the number is on the end of the finger board where they had stamped it. Mr. Robertson, of the violin shop in Albuquerque, verified that it was indeed a Hill cello. At any rate, I bought the Hill cello for \$1,000 back in the '20s. It was a sad story for it was being sold by a man who was a professional cellist but was so disillusioned by the competition and the unfair treatment of musicians in the big metropolis that he was going to sell it and buy a butcher shop. I hope he had fun butchering animals, because he gave up something very beautiful for it.

I have a bad feeling that it's been lying here unused for several years and I have no right to keep this beautiful instrument boxed up. When I was in New Haven on this last trip to the Yale Alumni Association, I had lunch with Mrs. Hibben's daughter, Norrie, one day. They are an extremely musical family. They play those ancient instruments and it was the most exciting luncheon discussion you could have. And when I mentioned that I had a Hill cello one of the girls said, "A Hill cello? Why that is worth \$50,000." The highest price that I had run across up to that time was at Sotheby's in London. Robertson Violin Shop here told me there was a cello there (Sotheby's) that sold at auction for \$13,500.

From Interviews with Charlemaud Curtis, Cassette 3.

A LIFESTYLE CHANGE OF PLACE AND PROFESSION

On Giving Up the Practice of Law

At the age of 49, in the year 1941, I made a great break with my past. I left a prosperous functioning law firm of which I was the senior partner and came out to New Mexico at a fraction of what I had been earning there and took up my new life as Professor of Music and Head of the Music Department. Many people have expressed to me their admiration of my courage and their envy that I was able to get out of the rut. Actually, I was not in a rut. I was enjoying the practice of law, so that is one thing that is wrong about their understanding. Secondly, it didn't take much courage because I wasn't running away from something I didn't like but instead I was going to have a fling in something I was very much interested in. I feel that after 20 years I had done about everything interesting that a lawyer can do and I was going to repeat myself from then on. Thirdly, I had found that while the experiences at the Harvard Law School were one of the highlights of my life, the practice of law did not fulfill for me the promise of law school days, as far as intellectual excitement was concerned.

Source TBD.

Westward Bound

I believe I must have told you the story of my visit with Dunbar when he came to my office in New York. I was the senior partner of my law firm which was then called Robb, Clark, and Bennet. And we had really quite a sensational success in New York. Dunbar interviewed me at my office [Dunbar later identified as William MacLeish Dunbar, then Dean of the UNM College of Fine Arts]. I had the corner office and it was pretty impressive. We had a whole floor of the Kenlow Building, our library of books and files, and law clerks working for us. He talked to me for about an hour and as I told you this office was fitted with early American furniture. It was a beautiful office. At the end he said, "I've made up my mind if you have" and I said "Well, I've made up my mind." He said, "There is only one thing I'd like to verify. I'd like to meet your wife, is it possible?" I said "Well, I'll call Harriet." Harriet, who is a very decisive woman, took a look her watch. She said, "I've got 20 minutes to catch the 12:25." I said, "Meet us at the Yale Club," which is right across the street from Grand Central Station. We went up there from Williams Street where I was located, 52 Williams. After he met Harriet and succumbed to her charm, it was in the bag. He then and there offered me the job and I accepted. So that was that.

It did change my life. It was one of the changes that was certainly for the better. Not that I didn't enjoy the law, I did enjoy it. It was exciting. I had

gone into it, however I had always wanted to be a composer but I didn't have nerve enough. I didn't have enough self confidence to believe I had any right to consider myself a composer. Then I got that encouragement from Nadia and began to read about amateurs who had started and had become professionals like Rimsky-Korsakov. So I was encouraged to do it.

From Interviews with Charlemaud Curtis, Cassette 10.

Harriet "On Moving to New Mexico"

I loved Westchester; it's a perfectly beautiful place. The schools are excellent and I thought we were just going to live and die in Westchester. They had wonderful cotillions for the young people. Then Don had a call to teach at the University of New Mexico. I had seen the handwriting on the wall. Instead of reading books about prominent lawyers, great judges, Don was beginning to bring home books of the life of Beethoven and Mozart and so forth. So, I could feel that interest creeping in. When he finally decided to go to New Mexico, my friends were all horrified. "Why, how can you leave New York?" We had season tickets for the opera, season tickets for the symphony, we even had season tickets for quartet music—we had one series where they played all the Beethoven quartets—they played three every night. Someone said that it was something to play three quartets in one evening. It's also something to listen to three quartets, in one evening! We wouldn't have the ocean; we had a place right on the water, Shelter Island. I think where your husband is happy, you are happy. The only qualm I had, really and truly, was when Don had already gone, I had emptied the house, and we had this station wagon piled to the ceiling. We got up early that morning to leave and as I drove out of Pelham onto the freeway there, for a moment I had a qualm. I don't know how long it lasted, 30 seconds—maybe three minutes, and then it was all over. That was it. I started west and "Here we come!" And afterward I thought, well I am not ashamed of that. I would be more ashamed if I had lived in a place for close to 20 years and my children grew up during those years, that I could leave it easily. That I could just tear those heartstrings—goodbye, Pelham! It was nice, but we're through! I could understand that terrific feeling and I never had it again.

From Interviews with Charlemaud Curtis, Cassette 14.

Grand Canyon and Monument Valley Utah Experiences

In Arizona, we were entranced with the Grand Canyon, of course. From there we went to Monument Valley where we stayed at Harry Goulding's Trading Post. Remember we had the whole family with us.

Harry Goulding's Trading Post was on the slope of one of those beautiful monuments that stick up out of the desert and a young man who was there told us that there was going to be a "square dance" about – oh, not too many miles away on the reservation and that we could go. It lasted all night. It was a healing ceremony. They had created a pavillon for this elderly, sick person and they were feeding everybody who came got lamb stew and, I was told by—Morris Knee was the man's name—a very knowledgeable young man that the man who was sick—his family had to feed everybody who came. That was one reason why the Indians never get rich because, when they would have to give a party sooner or later, they had to feed everybody and they ate voraciously.

An amusing thing happened. Here was this beautiful, great big fire that they had kindled with what looked like cedar logs. It was flaming! Here was this chorus of young men singing in that high, shrill falsetto that is unique among the Indians. It was a thrilling thing. Then of course all the guests were welcomed. If you danced with a squaw, you had to pay her. At the Trading Post that afternoon, Morris Knee said, "You know you're not immune. You may feel a tug on your coat and you look back and there is a squaw has picked you out and you have to dance with her." So Johnny [our John Robb] and I kept joking about it, you know, and the first thing I knew, doggone it, I felt a little tug and here was a little girl about 13 years old and so we danced around and she was chewing gum all the time. When I got tired of it, I slipped her a 10 cent piece and walked away. I was a real cheapskate because Nancy got in on the act and she got hold of the blanket of this Indian who was an elderly man and so he danced around with her and he paid her a quarter. I felt like a cheapskate after that. Then Johnny, when he saw that I had been hooked, he was in histrionics, you know, guffawing at me. Pretty soon I looked over and some squaw had grabbed him, so he was out there dancing. So there was a little rivalry between me and my son on that occasion.

From Interviews with Charlemaud Curtis, Cassette 9.

Christmas Sing-Alongs at the Robbs

I remember them very distinctly. This was such a popular event that the house was filled to overflowing. The children would be there and my grandmother would have a special wassail that she prepared and my grandfather would make fudge. He would direct everything; he would have different people doing special music things and then everyone would sing-along. It was a long time ago but I do have some precious memories of those events. He and Harriet were a great host and hostess. My grandmother always told me that there were a couple of things that would make any social event a success—flowers and candles.

From an interview with Robbin MacVittie.

On the High Seas

While in New Mexico, I'd gone down [to South America] originally with the United States Navy on an aircraft carrier. In those days I was Dean of the College of Fine Arts and they had a public relations program with the U.S. Navy in which they would invite administrative officers of the various universities which had naval training units to go on cruises to see what it was like. And it was done, I think, very honestly because we had to pay for our meals. We ate at the officers' mess, but we paid just like everybody else and, as far as billeting was concerned, we were just put in a small room with two bunks, one on top of the other. We had a 20-day cruise.

It was like a wartime task force. There were about 25 ships including a submarine and about 20 destroyers, and there was an oil tanker that came out and refueled some of the ships.

I have a story about the last day out at sea. The executive officer asked if I'd like to take a high-line transfer to a destroyer, which means they shoot a rope over to the other ship, then they pull you over in a boatswain's chair and you're dancing above the waves, and every once in a while they dropped somebody. They dropped one man the first day out of New York. But there's always a destroyer coming along behind and they pick 'em up. They said, "don't worry about it," but when I got out on the back deck ready to be transferred—incidentally, my roommate was a Jesuit priest from Holy Cross University. And I, in order not to be bored on this trip, had taken a little phonograph and was transcribing folk songs in my cabin when there was nothing too exciting going on, and he was writing a book on cosmology. He turned out to be a good scout and we were the only two to accept the challenge to go over on the destroyer. The boatswain's mate was swearing at the crew and said about us, "These damn fools have never done this before, they don't know what they are doing." Just before I got into the boatswain's chair, you know, to be hauled over—but when they started here it was just like the Blue Danube [sings a phrase]. Down there was the blue Atlantic Ocean. On the other side, the loving arms grabbed me and brought me in. Life on the destroyer was so different, so informal—the captain, the officers, and everybody.

From Interviews with Charlemaud Curtis, Cassette 7.

LISTMAKER EXTRAORDINAIRE

I Am ...

1. I am a successful composer of beautiful music.
2. I am a considerate husband.
3. I am a loving father and grandfather.
4. I am completing my piece for the Chamber Orchestra.
5. My compositions are not being published—some are on the way to publishers now.

From Robb Papers.



Things to Do One Day

1. Write letters
2. Paper for article on "Songs of Western Sheep Camps"
3. Tickets to Globetrotters
4. Passports
Take guns to store room
5. Repair phonograph
6. Close with city
7. Close with R. Savage
8. Re-register
9. European itinerary
10. Get quit claim deed
11. Architect for garage, placing pool
12. Pick up stuff at A... 's
13. Thank Anderson and Montoya
14. Shave cream to Lefos, Warsaw, Poland
15. Clean drawers and closets
16. Pack
For Europe
For Shelter Island

From Robb Papers, Reminiscences, and Twelve Lives, draft autobiography.

POLITICS AND POLITICIANS

My Venture Into Politics

Well, that was a very meaningful year (1960) in a way. The reason that I ran for office was that ever since I had lived in New Mexico, the entire congressional delegation was controlled by the Democratic Party and I had been a lifelong Republican, and I inherited my politics, I suppose, from my father. I respected my father greatly and so I became convinced that the Maynard Keynes direction that a little inflation is a good thing was a very dangerous thing.... We were being led into an incredible national debt; our failure to pay for what we wanted as we went along was just nonsensical. And so I thought, by golly, I'm going to run. Maybe I've got enough of a reputation to make it. I chose to run for Congress, but I didn't care who I ran against. There were two candidates at the time. One was Joe Montoya, who was later elected to Congress, then later to the U.S. Senate. The other was Tom Morris, a very nice man from Tucumcari, who had formerly been a student at UNM.

The outstanding impression for us [for the Dean and Harriet, his constant supporter and campaign companion] was how many people we met that we never in our ordinary life would have met. All over the state, in so many towns and, as is the American custom, they all immediately began calling me "John." I belonged to those I met because I was a candidate for office. Some of them would put point blank questions to you which you had to answer right on the spot. It might be something you didn't know much about.

Well, it was a rather disillusioning experience. Nobody asked me to run. I had to ask myself to run. In the first place, that seems a little bit, kind of egotistical to think you should. But I don't think so when you think of the fact that many people do it because they really want to do something. They feel that something should be done and that their point of view is worthwhile.

Interviewed by Charlemaud Curtis, March 3, 1981.

On The Campaign Trail

On one occasion I went into a little town called Arroyo Hondo up near Taos, and there I had the name of the Republican precinct chairman, and I inquired for him, and a young man said, "Well, yes he's over at the ranch but my uncle's running the bar in here, why don't you come in here? There are always lots of people in here." So I went into the bar and I did something that I thought afterward I was a little ashamed of. I bought them all a beer. Oh, there was about eight or ten men in there, all Spanish-Americans—and

they were exceedingly cordial and friendly but there was a man running on the Democratic ticket for Corporation Commissioner or some such office and he was a very tall man by the name of Pickett. He went by the name of "Seven Foot" Pickett. When I left this bar in Arroyo Hondo surrounded by good will and enthusiasm, the spokesman said. "We're very happy when you big shots from Santa Fe come to see us." I wondered because I came from Albuquerque. Then he went on and said, "We're sure glad you came, Mr. Pickett." So my electioneering efforts went in vain.

Then on another occasion, my wife who gallantly campaigned with me, side by side—I'd taken a few days off to go up to a ranch and we were riding – she was the last one as we were returning to the ranch and the man had said that this mare she was riding had a colt and would be anxious to get back so don't let her get loose. Harriet had to close the big heavy gate and not knowing how else to handle the gate with both hands and handle the horse, she tied the reins and put them around her waist. She got the horse through the gate and the horse reared back and pulled that gate against her and she broke several ribs.

She was very, very ill. I mean she couldn't sleep in a bed. She had to sit up in an easy chair that Les Briggs brought over for her, God bless him. Well, there were some people going by the road which was just nearby in a car and they rushed up to see. They said, "Is there anything we can do?" And she reached in her pocketbook and pulled out an election card and said, "Vote for my husband!"

From Interviews with Charlemaud Curtis, Cassette 14.

Correspondence from Politicians

Well, this is the pile of autographs of famous people.

From United States Senator Sam J. Ervin,

"Your interest in the Watergate investigations is most important for the work of this committee and it is good to hear from you."

From Dwight D. Eisenhower.

"Thanks very much for your note of May 27 and clipping enclosed concerning your support of my effort in connection with the U2 incident. It goes without saying that I am grateful for your confidence. It is now more important than ever before...understanding among all people should demonstrate convincingly the peaceful purposes that bind together all Americans. I hope that in your campaign you will find it possible to stress this point over and over again. With renewed gratitude and good luck." I was running for Congress.

From Dean Acheson.

“Dear Don, You are very good to write me such a warm note of commiseration on my absence from the reunion [of our class at Yale]. How I wish I could have been with you! I had a rather bad time while my brethren were celebrating but I am a great deal better now and trying out how to spend my summer loafing. Sandy Spring is a good place to do it, and so far I am enjoying it. Many thanks for your note and warmest regards. Dean”

From John F. Kennedy.

“I want to thank you for the very friendly letter you sent me after my election to the Presidency. I am most heartened by the many expressions of good will which I have received. I am sure they reflect a broad unity of purpose in our nation. I hope that my record in the next four years will sustain your generous confidence. I am ... Sincerely yours, John F. Kennedy.”

From Nixon.

“Just a short note to thank you for your kind note about my address to the nation on October 7. The cooperation and assistance of every citizen will be needed in our continuing flight against inflation. My fellow citizens...cross the threshold into a great new area of challenge.” I’ve always regarded the Watergate as a kind of trivial incident. And yet it was—a wrong thing.

From Interviews with Charlemaud Curtis.



UNM MUSIC DEPARTMENT CHAIR AND DEAN OF FINE ARTS

My Philosophy of Teaching Music

I don't know that I ever particularly emphasized this with them. I had some pupils who developed quite substantially and the most successful of all of them, I suppose, was John Lewis, a colored boy who lived in Albuquerque. He studied composition with me. In our composition class, I told them that there were no rules that I was going to enforce against them, that they had a right to go where they wanted to go. I would give them advice as a friendly older brother, from an unprejudiced point of view. That would be a very rare opportunity because people are very reticent about composing, about criticizing a composer to his face. Musical critics are excluded from that because they are supposed to say something honest and frank and, if necessary, unfavorable. I found some students would accept none of my ideas, some of them accepted a great many of them. This attitude of encouraging a person to be himself was rather rare. The best composition teacher I ever had was Nadia Boulanger because she was not a composer and I say that perhaps unfairly, but I always felt that studying with Paul Hindemith and Darius Milhaud—that they were composers and they were holding back a little. They would tell me things, but they weren't giving me their innermost secrets. Whereas, Nadia she had so many earthy bits of advice. I was telling your wife this afternoon that she said to me "When you are discouraged and don't seem to be getting anywhere you must

remember that creation and criticism are incompatible. When you are composing, your duty is to [create] something and to kill the [critical] faculty until you get it done. The critical faculty will bring you to a stalemate." I've seen that happen with my students when they would come back after a week's work and have one page all marked up and erased and a mess, and I could see the agony that they had gone through because they would not take that idea that they started with and force it through. You may say this is terrible, this trashy stuff. But at least when you get through, it's something you can look at it and criticize, then turn loose all your intelligence on it, then throw it away [perhaps], although I find it very difficult to throw anything away. Each one is like a new baby or something, with lots of potentiality and that's probably one of my faults because I have an enormous library of discarded texts that I have never finished with.

From Interviews with Charlemaud Curtis.

Expressionism in Art and Music

Non-objective or expressionistic art in which supposedly subjective ideas are portrayed turns out only too often to be a kind of craftsmanship in which forms and colors and lines are put together in a pattern dictated by the whim or fancy, or the originality of the artist. Some of these are interesting and even thrilling. They do at times indicate imagination and daring and the best of them have their place. But for a whole generation to deliver itself over to this cult of non-objective, meaningless art to the virtual neglect of representational art seems to me to neglect something that is of permanent value. I think there are permanent values in music and in art values of form and content. I believe that great music or art must have content, that it must convey something idealistic and ennobling to the listener or the viewer. If this is a non-conformist view, I can only say this: that my ear tells me that certain works of art [and music] have been written in this century. Some of them have been written under the influence of very radical canons or beliefs, including some of the songs and choral works and even other works of Anton Weber, who has been, posthumously, the idol of a whole generation of serialist composers. The greatness, I believe, resides primarily in their content, not their use of the new technique.

But also, I find many works which have gradually had to fight their way against the vogue of the avant-garde and the charge of undue conservatism. For instance, ever since I hear the Fourth Symphony of Gustav Mahler in 1926, I have felt that it is one of the great works of the twentieth century. Yet he was derided as a neo-romantic.

... Music is not an art that has the power to portray specific ideas.

Source TBD.

A Riot on University Hill

We had that famous concert over at the Student Union Building. Students broke it up with stink bombs and ... Well, it was very hard to get a decent place to perform and so I had reserved it a year or so ahead of time. The students wanted to have it for a dance—one of these, I don't know—one of these UNM bands, I think, was coming. We tried to get this for so long I didn't see how we could give it up. So, at a certain point in the concert, the lights all went out, an alarm clock went off, and a stink bomb was released. And so I made a sort of humorous remark. I said that you can expect these things in time of war. It was during the Second World War and then—the people had left who did the damage—finished the concert, threw the stink bomb out. [Laughter] Then I wrote a retaliatory poem for the *Lobo*, in which I unkindly referred to the "Hitler youth." [Laughter]

From Interviews with Charlemaud Curtis, Cassette 6.

A copy of the poem follows.

Riot on University Hill

Listen my children and you shall hear
A tale that will blanch your cheeks with fear.
'Twas the second month, the night seventeen,
Fateful as rarely a night has been.
When a concert was slated to be played.
A band of students unafraid
And smarting with a fancied wrong
Swore that vengeance to them should belong.

So they with cunning laid a trap
Which at the crucial time should snap,
And empty from the concert hall
The audience and players all
In dread confusion and stampede
So that in future Profs should heed
The dreadful threat of hoodlum ire
Enforced with stink-bomb, noise, and fire.

And so their plans they laid with care;
With H₂S perfumed the air..
Aping the Nazi's famed technique
(Alas the mixture was too weak);
Put firecrackers down the flue,
To go off when the switch they throw;
Set an alarm clock to go off

And interrupt the wicked prof.
Into this dire, infernal den
The audience assembled then
Sniffed tentatively the fragrant air
Then filled 'most every vacant chair.
The alarm clock failed in its timing;
Before the concert came its chiming.
But "Fear not—worse is yet to come.
"We'll git that great big lousy bum."

So those these sworn storm-troopers bold
"The story has not yet been told,
Our vengeance soon will be complete;
We'll make that audience retreat.
And when the firemen rush in
And add their shouting to the din
Our false alarm will play its part To
terrorize each trembling heart."

The concert scarcely had begun
When of a sudden came the fun.
The lights went out; the music stopped;
The firecrackers popped and popped.
Those brave storm-troopers rushed the door.
Impatiently they left the floor.
Though scorning thoughts of a retreat,
They felt it best to be discreet.

The audience midst the wild furor
Sat in their seats and asked for more.
Alas, the Hitler youth had fled;
The firecrackers all were dead;
The firemen arrived too late.
The lights went on, and I must state
The concert duly was completed,
And not a note had been deleted.



HISPANIC FOLK MUSIC

My Interest in Folk Music

Well, I suppose this has some remote sources in my childhood because we had a lot of music in my family. My Dad was a veteran of the Civil War. Imagine that! He was born in 1847 and I'm still alive here in 1981! He fought at the battles of Shiloh, Vicksburg. Dad used to sing wonderful songs that I think are probably folk songs in the Saint Patrick's Day Parade and Civil War songs. He used to like to stride around from one room to another and my brother or sister would play the accompaniments. He used to sing a song called "Eloise, the Belle of the Mohawk Vale." It was a very lovely plangent melody that I loved. That surely was a folk song. Then my brother Ned became adventurous and when the government decided, under the Homestead Act, to give any citizen who would go out into North Dakota and settle on land that had never been cultivated before, they would give the 160 acres free, provided they would plow 40 acres and live there for five years, I believe. Well, my brother Ned did that. He picked out a place among those big rolling hills, without a tree, which give rise to some of the most beautiful sunsets I have ever seen. I went out there as a teen-aged boy, but big enough to work. In fact as I told you earlier today, I sacrificed a fingernail when I was working off his road tax by working on the road. I was loading rocks on this big truck and just didn't get one finger away fast enough. And a rock came down on it and it's been a corrugated fingernail ever since. It was a very lonely life. There were no fences even. Yet, one of our jobs was to fence in the part of the pasture because he had

a herd of 24 cows which we milked. I never forgot that—it was hard to do at the beginning. I wrote home to my mother the first summer that I was out there that I was getting right along. I milked 1 ½ cows everyday.

I used to say “Move over, Bessie,” push them over a little when they were crowded. We sat on a little stool and milked in the old-fashioned way. We would have parties, but the big one was on the 4th of July when they had what they called the Old Settlers’ Reunion. This claim, by the way, was in Oliver County, North Dakota, which was, you might say, the apex of a triangle of two towns on the Northern Pacific Railroad, one of which was called New Salem and the other one was called Mandant and both of them somehow have a romantic tinge, at least they add a romantic tinge to my memories, because in the hotel in Mandant, which looked like a big metropolis to us, although it was only a lot of shacks you know, there was a hotel! I think they called it the “Interocean.” A funny name for a hotel way out there in the middle of North Dakota and in the corner was a huge bison’s head. All over the prairie in those days you could pick up some bison skulls. We used to take glass and polish them. They would come out shiny and black. Of course, they had been weathered by age. At any rate, on the 4th of July, the settlers out there, who were a diverse lot, used to assemble for what we would now call a rodeo. There were horse-bucking contests and lots of good eats and everybody had to drive in buggies as there were no cars or anything of that sort. They would erect a sort of cottonwood floor in the front of the town hall and try to decorate it a little bit and then they would have a dance in the evening and they would play these lovely North Dakota tunes. I’ll hum one for you. It went like this. [Hums]. My brother played in the [hesitates]

C.C.: What was the name of that one?

J.D.R.: I have no idea. All I know is that it is a nice melody. In fact, I’ve interpolated it in *Little Jo* at one point. Also, I used a lot of New Mexico songs in that opera as thematic material and Calla Hay, who wrote the first performance up for the *Santa Fe New Mexican* spotted this tune as not being Spanish in origin which I thought was amazing that she could tell the difference. At any rate, to me a teen-aged boy, and as I told you those cowboys, I particularly admired one of them, Ted Albers. He had a very slim waist and big shoulders and he was very daring. He was the best bronco rider in the county. These beautiful men would dance with these young goddesses from the ranches as they looked to me. Beautiful girls and the beautiful music, I was hooked! Then I forgot all about it. Then when I came out here in 1941 I had the good fortune to meet Mrs. Helen Chandler Ryan who was active in the WPA music project. You have her book—on children’s games, isn’t it? And other books too.

My First Hispanic Folk Music Recording

I would be glad to start off telling you about my first visit. It just happened that Prospero Baca—the first song that he sang to me—is the first song in my collection. “Que largas las horas son—How Long the Hours Are.” And I didn’t realize what I was getting! All I knew was that it was very interesting. He was an elderly man. I was with Dr. Arthur Campa who at that time was on the faculty at the University, and Helen Chandler Ryan, who had been working with the WPA (Works Progress Administration). You may not remember about that, it was a federal, subsidized program to encourage artists, and it extended into the field of folklore. Campa had made some collections; he was not a musician, he was a Spanish professor but he did have a friend name of Armandariz, whose name you will probably run across. And they made many recordings, some of them I suppose are over at the University. He always said he was going to leave a lot of things there but whether he did or not, I don’t know. Diverging for a moment from the subject, another one who left some things there, but I don’t know whether they are very well cataloged, was Ruben Cobos.

From Interviews with Charlemaud Curtis, Cassette 13.

First Field Recordings of Hispanic Folk Music

It is a nice melody. In fact I’ve interpolated it in *Little Jo* at one point. Also, I used a lot of New Mexico songs in that opera as thematic material and Calla Hay, who wrote the first performance up for the Santa Fe New Mexican spotted this tune as not being Spanish in origin which I thought was amazing that she could tell the difference. At any rate, to me a teen-aged boy, and as I told you those cowboys, I particularly admired one of them, Ted Albers. He had a very slim waist and big shoulders and he was very daring. He was the best bronco rider in the county. These beautiful men would dance with these young goddesses from the ranches as they looked to me. Beautiful girls and the beautiful music, I was hooked! Then I forgot all about it.

Then when I came out here in 1941 I had the good fortune to meet Mrs. Helen Chandler Ryan who was active in the WPA music project. At any rate, they were kind enough to take me up to Bernalillo. In Bernalillo, I heard one of the great troubadours sing that night, that very night, without accompaniment, just his simple voice. Hold the line a minute while I get...I want to get a copy of the index of my collection of folksongs to refresh my recollection, as we lawyers used to say. On the first group that are now numbered nos. 1–10 of my collection.

That was the first recording that I have, that I recollect although somewhere I had an indication that I made some kind of collection in 1942. Yes, apparently I had been up there once before, in 1942. The thing that impressed me was that among these songs that he sang were songs

which I have later come to realize represented various forms, among them were at least two Spanish romances, one was "La Zagala," I think that's a thing of Spanish origins. Then there was a lovely hymn called "Bendito sea Dios—Blessed be God," a country hymn, a lovely country hymn. Then there was one called "A los soldados." I'm reading now from 1942, maybe that's when I went up there with Dr. Campa. Then in 1944 when I went up again and he sang a *decima*, with ten-line stanzas, which we've come to recognize as a separate form—"Delgadina," which is also a romance, even a *cuando*, a very short lovely one to the "Our Lady of Guadalupe." It has a thing that has always stuck in my memory. At the very end of one of the verses it adds a meter-a-foot, a metrical. Every verse ends with the word "*cuando—when.*" There may be other *cuandos* in the Index but when will there be another Guadalupe? Well, that's how I got started.

I had been enterprising enough to take along a Presto disc recorder and I had to have a converter so that I could operate it from the battery of my car. I can't remember whether they had electricity in Bernalillo at that time. They probably did in Bernalillo. But at other places at that time, I did have the problem of using the battery of car as a source and using a converter which I managed to get a hold of. Well, at any rate, that's how I got started. It's possible because that was the form in which I recorded them originally. But that only lasted for a very short time, because the wire had one fatal defect. If you once got it snarled, it was gone. Anyway, the wire recorder had that fatal defect. The story of how I switched to tape is a long one.

From Interviews with Charlemaud Curtis.

Matachines Dance

VA: In some of your research you have discovered dances that are still current in New Mexico that were thought to have died out in Europe a long time ago.

JDR: One of them is—there are many of course, not only those of the Spanish people but also of the Indians that have a tremendous rhythmic and melodic variety and the cowboy music, of course, which Lomax has collected. These are all included (and some very small, but impressive Negro music from Albuquerque and also from Florida). I recorded also in South America, Central America, and some places as far away as Nepal. [Pause. Voice of America interviewer asks about recording equipment apparently.] Well, in the first instance I had nothing to do this with except the Presto disc recorder.

This had to be operated from the battery of my car. I had to have a converter to convert the current. It would run for about 20 minutes then I'd have to crank up the car ,or give up, or go to a town where

there was electricity. Very few rural areas had rural electrification back when I started in the '40s. My head was running with these very interesting melodies and I went to see the Matachines dance one time (I recorded Matachines dance in a dozen different towns in New Mexico). I discovered that the Matachines dance was a European dance which was danced in the 15th century, I believe in Spain and Italy and is even related to the Morris dance in England. That has emerged all over New Mexico as a type of dance that the Spanish villages dance. Also, an amusing sidelight of that was the fact that the Jemez Pueblo, an Indian pueblo, they do the Matachines dance on their Feast Day of their patron saint. They do it in two versions, they do it in the original, sort of Spanish version, in a costume with a miter like a bishop wears encrusted with turquoise jewelry or little pictures or anything that they have and long ribbons of bright colors, they call them "mille colores." It's a symbolic dance, I think, of the struggle between good and evil in the world because the Matachines dancers represent good. There are six of them in two rows and a leader called a "monarcha," and a little girl in a white communion dress represents purity and good and she's being pursued by an evil element called the "toro," the bull. The dances are arranged so that just when the *toro* is about to capture the little girl, one of the Matachines dancers interposes himself between them. One of the dancers is called "La Escondida," the hidden girl. She dances in and out along this line...

So, the Indians were apparently taught this dance by the *padres*, the friars, who felt that they were incorrigible and would continue their pagan dances unless something was done about it, and they even made it a penal offense for them to dance the Indian dances. They figured they had to teach them a good Christian dance so they taught them the Matachines dance. That's the story! This is folklore and not history, so don't hold me accountable for its accuracy. I wrote an article about this in *Western Folklore* published by the University of California. I wrote to Willie Apel, a noted musicologist about this. He brought out the big *Harvard Dictionary of Music* and he thought there was no doubt that I had proved the origin of the Matachines dances of New Mexico...

From Voice of America Interview, Cassette 4.



MUSICAL COMPOSITION

The Hill Cello

When I came back from Europe with this Pedrazzini cello, I had bought a miserably cheap case for it and there were apparently some nuts that stuck out and scarred the front of the cello. It was a fine instrument with a big tone. I finally sold it to Mr. Karl Burg. He was a lovely old gentleman who was the first cellist of the Albuquerque Symphony Orchestra and a very kindly man. He was teaching part time at the University and he finally bought it from me. In the meantime, I had acquired this Hill cello which I loved and which is still in beautiful condition. Robertson worked it over years ago and improved it tremendously. We added new tuning pegs which were very long to account for my long legs. I noticed that Joanna de Keyser used a very long steel peg at the end of her cello last night.

I have a dilemma. Rather than making a gift to Yale University, though I have great respect for Mr. Richard Reppann who is the director and plays harpsichord beautifully and had lovely instruments there, I don't like the idea of the cello being consigned to a museum. I'd rather have it in the hands of somebody that loves it.

I once read a book called *The Amenities of Book Collecting*. The author tells about the joys of book buying and owning, and he makes the point that

rather than making gifts to museums he would rather dispose of his books that he loved to people that would love them and prove that love by paying the current price. I don't know whether that philosophy is quite clear, it's sort of tintured with a commercialistic attitude. Yet, on the other hand, I don't feel like giving away any. I naturally, like all other human beings, have certain specific wishes that I would like to fulfill before I shuffle off this mortal coil. And I'll be in a better position to do it if I have the wherewithal.

From Interviews with Charlemaud Curtis, Cassette 5.

My Teachers—

Nadia Boulanger, Paul Hindemith, Darius Milhaud

... The best composition teacher I ever had was Nadia Boulanger because she was not a composer and I say that perhaps unfairly, but I always felt that studying with Paul Hindemith and Darius Milhaud—that they were composers and they were holding back a little. They would tell me things, but they weren't giving me their innermost secrets. Whereas, Nadia she had so many earthy bits of advice. ... [Once] she said to me "When you are discouraged and don't seem to be getting anywhere you must remember that creation and criticism are incompatible. When you are composing, your duty is to [create] something and to kill the [critical] faculty until you get it done. The critical faculty will bring you to a stalemate." I've seen that happen with my students when they would come back after a week's work and have one page all marked up and erased and a mess, and I could see the agony that they had gone through because they would not take that idea that they started with and force it through. You may say this is terrible, this trashy stuff. But at least when you get through, it's something you can look at it and criticize, then turn loose all your intelligence on it, then throw it away [perhaps], although I find it very difficult to throw anything away. Each one is like a new baby or something, with lots of potentiality and that's probably one of my faults because I have an enormous library of discarded texts that I have never finished with.

From Interviews with Charlemaud Curtis, Cassette 6.

Hindemith and a Bottle of Rhine Wine

I studied with Paul Hindemith in New Haven where I took private lessons with him. Hindemith, when I approached him one winter day with a bottle of imported Rhine wine in my overcoat pocket, I said, "I would like to ask you to take me as a student in composition?" He looked at me kind of brusquely and said, "I can't teach composition! Nobody can teach composition! There is nothing to teach but repetition, variation and

contrast, either you can do it or you can't! But I can teach you theory." The minute he [Hindemith] saw that bottle of wine, the game was decided in my favor because we met thereafter in his little modest home on 2nd floor in New Haven.

So he put me to work doing harmony exercises and I told him that I had taken courses in harmony. He said this would be different, "we will go through it and you ought to be able to master the subject of harmony in about six weeks. I want you to learn so that you can write it just the way you'd write a letter without thinking about chord structure. You know how to write "cat", you don't think about c-a-t, you just write it. I want you to write with a stopwatch." Well, I did that and it was a surprising thing that within a few weeks I was writing within a fourth of the time that it had been necessary for me to write one of these exercises that he had prepared. After we got through with this, he sent me a copy of a book (he had been sending me these mimeographed sheets with the problems on them that I was to do). Here was this whole series of things incorporated in a book called *Traditional Harmony*, published by Schirmer. He wrote a note, an inscription in the fly-leaf "To one of my musical guinea pigs, Paul Hindemith."

Source TBD.

LIFE AS A COMPOSER

Insomnia

There are other times when I frequently wake up out of a sound sleep with a tune running through my head that I think is nice and come to the piano. Harriet's very understanding, she says it never disturbs her when I come in here at 3 a.m. Then I jot down what I've heard. Then I usually try to whip it up into a form with a little accompaniment to remind me. Then I'll find a place for it later on perhaps. Sometimes there are aesthetic problems that arise. For instance, I had what I thought was a very nice theme but I thought perhaps it was too gay to be part of a requiem mass. Then I thought afterward well why should there not be happiness if a person chooses to have faith and believe that there is a good God and that there is an afterlife. These things are happy thoughts. Maybe it would not be inappropriate. So I did finally write out a prologue, just recently, on the basis of the thoughts that I had at the time. I think it's a little bit happy rather than sad. In some reviews of my music, they have said my music is happy. Well, I've had on the whole a very happy life and a very fortunate life. Perhaps my music is—they say it lacks profundity—but that probably means I don't use dissonance and I have always had a great loyalty for the beautiful kind of, well, the art of harmony has always fascinated me—beautiful, subtle, rich harmonies that I grew up hearing as a young lad. Maybe my actual musical preferences were formed at quite an early age and now I'm an old man. Therefore my preferences are of a much more conservative nature.

From Interviews with Charlemaud Curtis, Cassette 12.

An Early Review

That first piano sonata has rarely been played but I still like it. I think there is validity in these things although they are all written in a very conservative style. I find that [conservative style] my real person. I've been thinking about it lately. There was a review of my record album that was brought out by *Hi-Fidelity*. At the end he said, he ascribed, a lot of allusions that I certainly had not thought of and I don't accept all of them as being valid, but nevertheless, he heard something that was derivative from this and another composer. Then he finally said, "but in spite of the allusions, etc., Robb writes so tenderly and beautifully that I can't imagine anybody objecting to the fact that they sound more like music written in mid-nineteenth century than in the twentieth century." My position is that a composer has the right to write in any style that he damn [well] pleases and I said what I thought was a good argument—"Abraham Lincoln didn't have to invent a new language in order to say some profound

things in plain language in the Gettysburg address.” And I commented on the bad influence that I thought Arnold Schoenberg had had on a whole generation of young composers. I said that he did have the good grace at one time to—although he tried to play God by calling the tonal system dead and inventing a new system in music and making every composer think he had to develop a new art of music or he wasn’t a modern composer. Even Nadia used to say you have to write in the style of your times. I think my musical tastes were formed—I’m an old man and they were formed when I was a very young man. I was so thrilled when Debussy came along. He sounded very modern to me and so did the early works of Stravinsky, the “Firebird.” But I think he put me too far back. He might have put me in 1915 or so, when I was young. The things that you really love—that go to your heart—are what I’m talking about and I have a great predilection for, as I have said at times in other interviews.

From Interviews with Charlemaud Curtis, Cassette 7.

Snow Song

Now we come to Opus 7, “Wedding Music for Violin and Pipe Organ.” This was written in an abbreviated version, for our wedding—my wedding with Harriet—and I later enlarged it, and in that form it has been played at the weddings of all my three children. One thing particularly impressed my son John and his wife Peggy when they were married down at the First Methodist Church downtown in the old building there; they were married in the winter sometime and among one of the things they played the wedding music. Also, I think—I don’t know whether it was Priscilla or not—sang my “Snow Song” which I had written in collaboration with my brother, Jim. Jim and I used to—he used to sit down at the piano and play. He didn’t know anything about music, but he was composing. He had a beautiful ear. This man had an incredible ear for harmony. Other people can play things and you know I’m shocked with the harmony. They don’t have that sense of harmony, but Jim, without any knowledge of music, had this. One day, we were playing and he did this thing—he was doing something very attractive and I sat down at the piano and played something up above. I played a melody that would go along with it—counterpoint. Out of that came the piece called “Snow Song.” Well, this was sung at the wedding as we came out, and it says [sings] “As I walked through the drifted snow, slowly back from my wandering, I think that the snowflakes find peace in the snow as I find peace in you.” And as we walked out, big beautiful snowdrops were falling down out of the sky. Johnny and Peggy were so impressed!

From Interviews with Charlemaud Curtis, Cassette 7.

Little Jo

... Then comes my opera, *Little Jo* [Opus 17]. I had a sabbatical leave coming up, '47-'48 I guess. I came here in '41, that means '48, doesn't it? So I took the sabbatical leave. I had gone out during the summer before. I had a gallstone operation. I had fallen in love with this story called *Life and Death of Little Jo*, written by Robert Bright, who I think is one of the most talented writers we have ever had in New Mexico. Lena Clauve told me about it, what a wonderful book it was! He was living in poverty among the natives in a Spanish village near Ranchos de Taos called Talpa. He became very familiar with the people. He was working in the field by hand with them and he lived there.

He wrote this beautiful sympathetic story which I think goes much deeper than Willa Cather's *Death Comes to the Archbishop*. He was more familiar with the people and more real, really! Through his prestige and other reasons, it became a best seller. At any rate, I lightly wrote the libretto myself while I was still in my hospital bed. I had a yellow pad and I made a very quick recovery. Afterward I thought I should have a professional who knew how to build up suspense better. But still I put my heart and soul into it. And when I went up to work on it with Darius Milhaud (who was then at Mills College); and he was going to Paris on a sabbatical leave, so I followed him over and worked with him. And I also, through a strange accident, when I got to Paris intending to work with him, I found that he was down at Aix-en-Provence where he came from, stricken with bad arthritis which he had for the rest of his life, poor man. He wasn't in Paris at all, so I went back to Nadia Boulanger. I had a hint that she didn't care much for Milhaud; they didn't see eye-to-eye. I don't know whether that was true or not. At any rate, I went to her and I never told her I was also seeing Milhaud. Then he came back to Paris so I was hooked up with both of them. I was seeing Nadia on Wednesdays and Milhaud on Fridays and going... I don't think I ever told Nadia, I didn't want to stir anything up there. At any rate I had expert commentaries on this. I don't know that I got quite so much out of either of them on this particular project as I had on previous occasions. Although I remember one thing—it wasn't in connection with this—but one of the things that happened when I was studying with Nadia. I had showed her my string quartet and I had made a misprint. I had written the notes in another key for one passage which was unrelated, and I said, "Oh, that's a mistake!" And she said "No! It's better that way!" It was such a shocking effect. She had such a feel, such an unerring instinct for beauty.

Well, at any rate, the opera proceeded and I came back [to UNM]. Kathryn Kennedy O'Connor at the Albuquerque Little Theatre came up and listened

to it. Then she said, "We'll do it." So we got some musicians from the symphony and Kurt Frederick conducted. George Robert played the piano. We had only room for 13 in that crowded orchestra pit. Eddy Ancona played the bassoon, and I still loved it because there was an outpouring of letters from Ernest Blumenschein and, what was the famous poet from Santa Fe that wrote lovely letters to me and it was well reviewed? I thought, "Oh, gosh, this is wonderful, if only I had another year I could make another Carmen out of it." I felt, you know, so in the groove by that time, but I didn't have the other year. I once made an unguarded remark to Erna Fergusson. She said, "Well, what would your criticism be?" I said, "Well, perhaps it lacks dramatic buildup and intensity because I wrote the libretto and didn't have expert advice." And she went and included that in her review. I thought that kind of unnecessary. And then Kathryn Kennedy O'Connor, to my consternation, when she wrote a book on opera in the cow country, she spoke so disparagingly of this and yet we had four days of sold-out houses and we wanted another [night] but they had it booked. That meant 2000 people [saw it] and it was oversold. One of the disappointments of my life has been that there have been only two performances since then. I may have mentioned this a previous session that we had here. One of them was at the colorfully named Corn Stock Theatre in Peoria, Illinois. Here again the question of personal influence came in. Harriet's niece, Harriet Parkhurst, was an active member of the Corn Stock Theatre, and she talked the theatre into putting it on, and they did it in the round. Actually, their performances were in a tent in Bradley Park. It had to be done with piano. They put on a very nice performance. This stage in the round permitted us to do a very nice thing. I had the chorus divided. There weren't enough of them to cover all sides so I had them in four groups behind the audience, you know, facing the center. The final chorus had a beautiful stereo effect.

Then last year, to my great surprise, Dean Willoughby, a fine man who was head of the Art Department at Eastern New Mexico, called me. They put on a two-day festival of my music. The last day they put on a student performance of Little Jo, thank God! I tried so hard to sell it. I sent it to Wollford Bain, who was head of the music department at Indiana. They never did it anywhere else though.

I showed this to John Crosby and he listened to it in my presence, but never took to it. Then I showed it to John Reardon. John Reardon said, "Well, they have a Santa Fe Fiesta. Why don't you—it belongs more in the Santa Fe Fiesta." I guess it didn't mean an unfriendly thing on his part, but at any rate, it was kind of a slap in the face. So my opera experiences have not been riotously successful.

From Interviews with Charlemaud Curtis, Cassette 8.

Dontaro

... Then comes *Dontaro* [Opus 32], my chamber opera from the Japanese. This was one of the comic interludes of the Noh plays of Japan. *Dontaro* is a Japanese warrior who has been away at war with his feudal chiefs—Samurai, I guess they were called. He had left two ladies behind him in Edo. Nothing is said about his having been married to either of them. One was “My Lady Uptown” and the other “My Lady Downtown,” and he comes back after being away at the wars. He expects to be greeted warmly. He goes to “My Lady Downtown,” he crosses the bridge in Edo—and you know the very marvelous frank, oriental stylish as I am, Mr. Dontaro. He introduces himself to the audience and then he goes ahead and says, “I have My Lady Uptown and My Lady Downtown. I think I’ll go and see My Lady Downtown first.” She turns him away because she’s kind of mad because he hasn’t written. He says, “I don’t know how to write. I can’t write a letter. Well, alright, if that’s the way you feel about it, you didn’t know this, but I have a Lady Uptown.” She knew it alright. So then, after he has left, she says, “I had my chance and let it go. What was I thinking of?” So he goes to the Lady Uptown and has the same experience there. And this is the crowning rebuff—each of them says she’s married a policeman or a wrestler. Then the Lady Downtown goes to the Lady Uptown and says, “Please let me see Mr. Dontaro. I sent him away.” She says, “Oh, terrible, what are we going to do?” The Lady Uptown says, “I heard a rumor that he was so mad that he was going to seek revenge by becoming a monk and going into the monastery. Oh, this is terrible. We’ve got to stop him.” He was walking by the river and saying his prayers “Amidha Buddha, Amidha Buddha.” And they say, “Please, Mr. Dontaro, come back to us. We’ll do anything you say.” “Anything I say?” “Yes,” they say. “Alright then, I’ll spend one day of each month with you and the other with you.” “Oh, that isn’t fair.” “Just as I thought, what are these wicked women trying to do, stopping a monk from going into the monastery.” So they finally agree and compromise a little bit and he says, “You’ll do anything I say?” “Yes,” they say. “Alright, pick me up. With your hands, make a chariot and carry me home saying that this is the carriage of Mr. Dontaro.” “No, let’s say this is the chariot of our lord, Sir Dontaro.” They start singing and staggering off the stage with him and at the last words he says, “Can’t you sing a little louder?”

That has been done. We staged a concert performance with costume in Carnegie Hall and I have the program of that somewhere. Under the Composers’ Guild, who did quite a number of works of mine in New York in Carnegie Recital Hall, and in this performance there was a tenor by the name of Calvin Harris, a New York tenor that I got. He had quite a lovely lyric tenor voice and the girl that sang the part of the Uptown Lady, I think it was—oh, I can’t remember her name for the moment. But the contralto part was played by my daughter, Priscilla. It was done with piano

and only the very minimum scenery—we had two gates representing the houses Uptown and Downtown, just a little framework. Everything is just suggestive in the oriental theatre, in Chinese theater particularly. That was kind of a fun performance. We did it here without costumes at my house at one meeting of the Albuquerque music clubs.

From Interviews with Charlemaud Curtis, Cassette 9.

The Leprechauns

Stage Directions for The Leprechauns (for violin and piano) Box 39, Folder 10, Robb MSS497BC

Suggested by an etching by Robert Lawson.

The narrative is presumably read (perhaps sung) during the performance.

A distant trumpet wakes the echoes of the dawn calling the Leprechauns for the march to the forest. They begin to appear from every creek and cranny jabbering excitedly.

More Leprechauns join the procession in their little peaked hats.

They swing into step across the fields—LEFT—RIGHT—LEFT—RIGHT. They pause at a marble altar and pour an oblation.

On they march, the torrent of little men ever swelling. They enter the forest. A trumpet blows merrily.

Oh! They are in fine spirits this fresh, dewy morning. The drums beat out a vigorous tattoo.

Their heavy tread resounds through the silent woods.

They approach a sylvan glade and the leader gives the signal to halt. What is that sound?

It is a shepherd piping.

Suddenly, soft voices are heard singing. Lovely forms in white are dancing in a circle. The Leprechauns listen in silent wonder.

The dance ceases.

The shepherd's flute is heard again.

But little men must march to their sweet destination. The procession

moves on. They halt again. Now the woodbirds are singing.

Before a rocky grotto they sit on the grass.

A white-robed priest appears. It is so quiet here in the forest. A hush falls over them.

The priest intones a pagan prayer. They bow their heads reverently.

"Forward!" cries the chief. Onward, ever onward they go.

It is gay to meet and march thus.

Where are they marching? Over hill, over dale.

No man knows why, but once a year the Leprechauns do march. The trumpeter plays when he has breath.

They pass a little cascade.

Beat, drummer, beat.

And so they march, deeper and deeper into the forest. But we have followed them far enough, let us turn back. Music drifts back from the procession as it moves away.

The sound of marching footsteps dies away in the distance. END

Written for program notes from Robb's papers:

The Leprechauns are mythical brownies of Irish folklore who wear little peaked hats and run around in the night with mischievous intent. One can read about them in the rare book, Keightley's *Fairy Mythology*. The famous American artist, Robert Lawson, who made the drawings for "Ferdinand the Bull," has done many etchings of these little people. It was one of these etchings that suggested the piece to the composer.

The Leprechauns tells a story about these little men from the time they are awakened early in the morning by a fairy trumpet call for their annual pilgrimage to the forest until they finally disappear in its messy glades.

The composer, Donald Robb, a native of Minnesota, is now a lawyer practicing his profession in New York City. His avocation, however, is composition, and among his compositions which number over one hundred are two string quartets, a piano sonata, a violin sonata, and a symphony.

Written for program notes by Robb.

Composing Music at 88

New Mexico's dean of Music is stumped. John Donald Robb is frowning and wondering why it is that writing a major mass [the Dean's *Requiem*] should seem such a feat. Beethoven completed symphonies in the twilight of his life. Robb is writing a mass. "A composer is one of the truly free souls in the world," he says.

Few however, are given the lease on life that Robb can claim. Beethoven composed his ninth and final symphony when he was 53. Robb is writing his first mass in the morning light of his library. He is 88.

"Maxwell Anderson once said that a successful play should result in the affirmation of good," says Robb in the living room of his sprawling Southeast Heights home. "I would like the same from my music, and from music the world over."

His bushy white mustache and eyebrows curl up as he smiles. "Here I am, an old man, and still getting joy out of life," he says. "And much of it is because of music."

From Albuquerque Tribune, November 21, 1980.

SUCCESS IN MEXICO AND SOUTH AMERICA

Taxco

... During one of my summer vacations when I was the last Dean at the University that had a nine-month contract—and that was one of the chief inducements that persuaded me to come here—that I would have time for composing, you see. And we went down. I had a letter from Hubert Herring, head of the Committee on Cultural Relations with Latin America (or something like that), to a man who was their factotum in Mexico. I think his name was Chavez, but I'm not sure. At any rate, when we looked him up in Mexico City, he said "Oh, you're going to be down here through the summer? Why don't you go down and stay in our house at Taxco?" That sounded wonderful to me. He said, "All you have to do is pay the salary of the two servants"—Vicenta, who was the cook, and Benito, who was the Clark Gable of Taxco. This was a house—Taxco is built on a steep mountainside and looks way out—and if you're high enough up as we were, we could see all the mountains of Chilpancingo. There were three levels. On the lowest level was the street entrance. This led up to a sort of reception room. Then there was a diagonal staircase which led up to the dining room and kitchen. Then another sloping stairway that led up to the bedrooms. The only disadvantage about that was that if we went into the bathroom to take a shower, there were little scorpions around your feet. We learned to avoid them. This was an utterly charming place. I moved heaven and earth to get a piano up there. I had to hire eleven men eventually and pay them, and they brought it up the steep, narrow, winding roads, and installed it in my—I think in the reception room in one night.

There was a woman who lived there, an American woman of an advanced age. She had a beautiful home. We were invited over there one night coming home from Doña Berto's cantina where we had had a few libations. I saw a crowd of four or five men (all men, no women) and I could hear this music for violin and guitar coming from around one of those beautiful fountains in one of the little squares. I stopped and asked them who they were and whether they would come up and play those songs for me and they did! I didn't have a piano at that time. I sat across the table from them and copied down something like 30 melodies which, as it turned out, were melodies that were used at the Fiesta of the Holy Cross in Taxco and that they had peculiarly interesting names like "Danza de las tres potencias"—"Dance of the Three Powers" and that's a well known Mexican tradition. The three powers are what? Imagination—well, they're three intellectual aspects of life—the dance of the tigers, the dance of the bull, the dance of the little weavers, you know? "De los tecomates," they call them, the little weavers.

When I came back, and you know as a composer I've always been fascinated with the innate hidden beauties of these things. They were just played with ordinary 1-3-5 guitar accompaniment. I made arrangements of these for two pianos.

From Interviews with Charlemaud Curtis, Cassette 8.

Concert in Rio de Janeiro, 1965 Letters to Harriet and Priscilla

July 14 to Harriet:

Yara Ferra, the soloist, is a brilliant young girl—charming and modest and a terrific pianist. I attended the rehearsal, spotted a few wrong notes and made suggestions—then lunch with the Souza Lima's [conductor], Yara, and the Lima's son. At five, there was a press conference with two photographers and two reporters. All in all, quite a day! There is a party at the Souza Lima's after the concert—everyone musical will be there. I wish you could be here, sharing these experiences. I love you and hate not to share every part of my life with you. Your devoted Hubby.

July 15 to Harriet:

Dearest Girl, Here is one of the stories in this morning's paper. I am certainly news around here and the concert is going fine. The dress rehearsal was this a.m. The [second] concert Sunday is to be televised internationally and they have urged me to stay, so it is clear that I should. Yaweee!!! It's great fun—and I do wish you could be here my beloved partner.

July 15 to Harriet at 1:30 a.m. after the concert:

The concert was marvelous!! Yara Ferraz played it with great mastery. It was thrilling. My work had by far the best applause and four or five curtain calls. Two or three hundred people crowded backstage and half at least asked for my autograph. I felt like a real celebrity. Geomias Novais was there and praised the concerto highly. She was also at the Souza Lima party afterwards and especially asked about you and Nancy whom she called "a breath of Spring." Yara was fascinated with my cowboy hat and kept trying it on before a mirror, so last night at the party I gave it to her.

July 17 to Priscilla:

I have just talked to Giomar Novaes and am walking on air. She said the concert was a triumph! That my music must be heard in Rio and all over the world.

July 21 to Harriet:

Darling Girl, *mi querida esposa*—that is to say. It is impossible to pass the room which we occupied in this same hotel twelve years ago (remember, with a grand piano and all) without a feeling of sadness that you are not here this time to enjoy it, too. I have just come from a swim. The water is divinely cool but quite a bit warmer than at Shelter Island. I had forgotten the velvety smoothness of the sand. Rio de Janeiro is not only all that I remember but a better all.

Yesterday I took off at 7:30 a.m. for Brasilia. It was a magnificent city but no place for a human being to live. Sao Paulo and Rio by contrast are enchanting. Built by men (not by an organization) they have all the faults and all the virtues of human diversity.

But Rio, I have fallen in love with Rio all over again. The only thing wrong with Rio is that you are not here and that makes it incomplete. Rio with you was perfection. Without you, it still has charm but it lacks that “quelque chose!” *Con todo mi amor*, Johannes Donaealdem Robb (anyway that’s the way it’s written on my Yale diploma!).

From letters to Harriet and Priscilla written July 14, 15, 17, and 23, 1965 on various stationery from Hotel Jaragua in Sao Paulo and Hotel Excelsior Copacabana in Rio de Janeiro. He and Harriet had visited Rio before, as he lovingly recalls, and he greatly misses her presence with him as his concert was performed and he was showered with praise.



Rio de Janeiro Concert

July 14, 1965

Here is one of the stories in this morning’s paper. I am certainly news around here and the concert is going fine. The concert Sunday is to be televised internationally and they have urged me to stay, so it is clear that I should. The press conference last night was something reporters and photographers and flash bulbs going off like mad. At dress rehearsals the TV cameramen were all over the place photographing Yara, the soloist, Souza Lima, and myself. Yoweee!! It’s great fun—and I do wish you could be here my beloved friend. As always, your slave, JDR.

The concert was marvelous—all American—Copland *Outdoor Overture*, Samuel Barber *Overture to School for Scandal*, and my *Concerto*. I wish you could have been there to share it all. All in all a very great day in the life of JDR. Good night, my love, Don.

From Letters to Harriet, July 14, 1965.

High Altitude in South America

Now for our plane trip from Santa Cruz to La Paz, Bolivia. Leaving Santa Cruz in a Panagra DC3 we left the jungle climbing up over the barren foothills of the Andes—awe inspiring in their gigantic forms. Higher and higher we went—up to 12,000 feet—still the earth was close beneath us and we could see the stone houses, the llama pens, the cultivated areas, cocaine terraces and quite plainly a little railroad track and a road that wound their way sinuously upward. We sucked on oxygen tubes on the last leg of our flight. Soon we saw the overpowering grandeur of the Andean cordillera show clad and dominated by the 22,000 foot peak of Illimani. At La Paz, we landed at the 13,000 foot airport—light-headed despite the oxygen and drove to the hotel. I had not imagined that the altitude would affect us so. We were both light-headed and Mother developed a splitting headache, relieved by aspirin. No wonder the Indians of the Altiplano and mountains chew the cocoa leaf like a curd of tobacco. They say it makes your mouth insensitive to feeling but it also takes away the feeling of cold, hunger, and fatigue. Mother and I were tempted to try it, but decided against the experiment. Those who use it look dwarfed and pale and strange. It eventually impairs the brain, but Bolivians said that used in moderation it was alright.

Letter to Priscilla, August 31, 1953 from Hotel Crillon, Lima, Peru.

Across the Andes

The next day we hired a car and guide for a trip to Chulumani (75 miles away). If I had known that the entire! road was along steep! mountainsides, sometimes many hundreds or thousands of feet above the gorges, I would never have gone. My nerves were taught as a violin string and I had moments when panic almost overcame me. At one place, a large rock hurtled down the slope and across the road just ahead of us. Somehow, I held myself together through those frightening 4 ½ hours until we finally reached Chulumani. Through all this, Mother maintained her usual aplomb. She was astonished that I should have been frightened. Arriving in the security of the Hotel Hamburg, I seriously considered spending the rest of my life there in preference to facing again those harrowing miles in the course of which we had crossed the great Andean *cordillera*.

That night—the tail end of a fiesta—we went into the charming village and watched the Indians dance in the street to the music of an atrocious grass band of about six players. There was weird resemblance to jazz improvisation, but the Indians stood out, nevertheless, through this “jam session.”

Alas, the only really native instrument I heard was the Bolivian pan pipe

made of two rows of bamboo reeds. A young Indian was strolling along the road playing it. We stopped. He was shy but finally played a little for us—quite skillfully.

We started to visit the Seventh Day Adventist missionaries who live beyond the village, but our driver warned us not to go. He said there was a band of armed Indians assembled beyond and he could not advise us to go farther. To Mother, this was merely alarmism and she was all for going, on the theory that they would not harm such obvious tourists. I overruled her.

We started back [to La Paz]. After a night's sleep I was more relaxed. At the really precipitous places I simply shut my eyes and relied on our superb driver. At Santa Rosa, we stopped and did some photographing and so on over the high pass in the fog back to La Paz.

I have written a book! If it bores you, skip it. I'll write about the rest of the trip later.

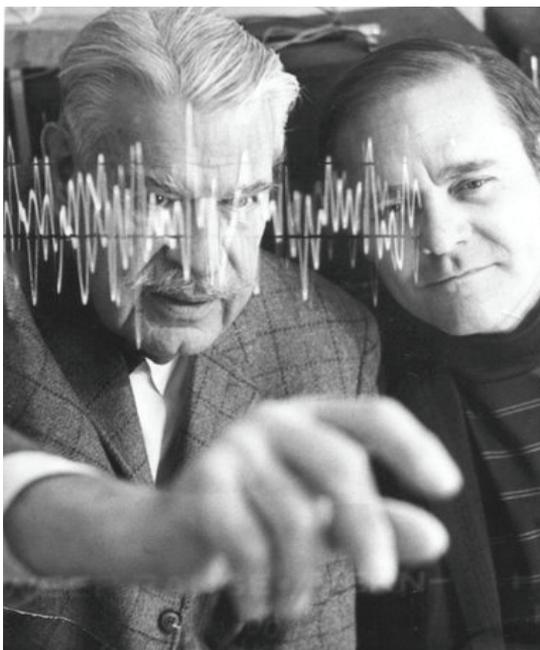
From a letter to Priscilla.

Hector Villa Lobos

A preliminary note about Rio de Janeiro: The Fazenda is in a beautiful valley between Teresopolis and Novo Friburgo. It is called Franja de la Campaña and is a little bit of orderly Germany transplanted to Brazil. The principal crop is trees, i.e. lumber. The trees are planted in rows like corn. Each forest consists of one kind of tree. The eucalyptus groves are light and sunny. The groves of Parana pine are dark as night. As we strolled through the latter, Bill [our host] said this bowery darkness is what gave its name to the Black Forest in Germany. Bill's comments on life in Brazil were amusing. "If you invite a Brazilian for dinner, he will be two hours late, or he will not arrive at all, or he will bring six friends with him." This is fairly accurate.

Another highlight was my visit with Hector Villa Lobos on our last day in Rio. Though just returned from Europe and very busy, he made time for a visit with me. I took Harriet along, and, in Brazilian style, a young American friend. He spoke no English but we conversed in French. He listened to the recordings of my piano concerto.

Source TBD.



ELECTRONIC MUSIC

The Evolution of Electronic Music

The law of diminishing returns had caught up with composers in the 1940s. The radical innovations of the 1920s began to appear as the breaking down of an established tradition rather than the creation of a new one. Into this vacuum came two new ideas.

The composer, Anton Webern, was a man in love with music, so much so that he marked virtually every note of his compositions with special marks of expression. To him every note was beautiful and should not be cluttered up with big masses of sound. And so there developed a new kind of listening concentrated not so much on the architecture or grammar of a piece, as on the sensuous effect of each note. Each note is a “happening.”

John Cage, and others, have reintroduced the idea of chance, in rebellion against the expected. The rules of harmony had so conditioned composers ... that one could hear what was coming, even in a new piece. Chance or aleatory music then provided a new element of the unexpected or of surprise.

Both of these ideas are reflected in most electronic music compositions, especially those composed in real time as it is called as opposed to planned time. So, in electronic music you will often hear a single note with an envelope (that is, a *crescendo* or *decrescendo*) held for a long time

for its own sheer interest or beauty. And likewise you will encounter many surprises, so that you cannot take for granted what is coming next.

Electronic music had its start with the coming into use (about 1945) of the tape recorder. It has already had three historic phases of development but I must emphasize that none of these has rendered obsolete the music of any earlier phase any more than it has supplanted, or was intended to supplant the music of the still-earlier historic past.

Presented to the Guitar Society, Albuquerque, New Mexico, September 26, 1967.

The Three Phases of Electronic Music

The three phases of electronic music [are] as follows:

- (1) The phase in which musical or natural sounds were recorded through a microphone and then processed to create new, beautiful and meaningful musical compositions. The French were inspired by the opportunity for the first time actively to capture, preserve for posterity and shape into works of art the fascinating sounds of nature and life. This phase was pioneered by a group of composers in Paris (the best known of whom is probably Pierre Schaeffer). Consequently, it was given a French name, Musique concrète. ... The word *concrète* in French means the opposite of abstract. Taking a comparison from the world of art, the word abstract in one of its meanings and perhaps—its earliest, meant a composition in forms, colors, lines, etc. that were not copied or derived from nature but were created by the artist's untrammelled imagination. The opposite (or concrete) therefore to a Frenchman would represent images copied basically from nature although rearranged, perhaps, in color, shape, line relationships, etc. Oddly enough, in English, this sort of thing is sometimes referred to by the term abstract which to a Frenchman represents almost its opposite.
- (2) At almost the same time as the origins of the Paris group, at the North West German Radio Station in Cologne, there originated a fortunate collaboration between composers and electrical engineers. They took a different approach from the French as might be expected. They scorned the use of microphones or natural sounds and maintained that electronic music, to be worthy of the term, must rely entirely upon electronic instruments designed to reflect basic mathematical and scientific truths for the sources of its sounds. This approach was greatly assisted by the engineers who taught the composers to use electronic instruments already developed for other purposes but capable of producing an infinite variety of musical sounds.

- (3) The third phase is what is coming to be known as computer music. Two types can be distinguished. The first is digital, as pioneered by Bell Telephone Laboratory, modified and improved at the Argonne National Laboratory. These programs were devised for the earlier model computers of which there are relatively few in existence in the entire world. Since the advent of the new generation of IBM 360 computers and developing a number of independent music programs for this magnificent new generation of computers.

Presented at the Guitar Society, Albuquerque, New Mexico, September 26, 1967.

First Contact

A composer's first contacts with computer music are sometimes discouraging. I remember well how a teletype machine on which I was writing a program suddenly printed out before my eyes "What? You've been here three days and you're still making mistakes." Still the composer does have a contribution to make to this difficult inter-disciplinary science, as does the engineer, the mathematician, the programmer, and others.

For the composer, it initially boils down to the problem of how to communicate with the computer. There is really no merit in doing something the hard way when there is an easier way, and there are some fine minds at work on this problem. The composer should learn all that he can about the related fields but there are some tasks beyond his capacities. Fortunately, there are others competent to take over these tasks.

Remarks at the International Festival of Contemporary Music, Venice, Italy, September 8, 1970.

Music and Computers

I present the following remarks with some reluctance because I am no expert in mathematics or physics or the science of computers. However, as a composer, I have in recent years become increasingly involved in the study and composing of electronic music and this has led to some excursions into the domain of physics and mathematics. These have finally brought me face to face with the surprising realization of the fantastic unity of scientific and mathematical thought throughout the world and the almost unbelievable capacity of mathematics to express even intangible things like music in numbers. However, since the attempt to express the nuances of music frequently involves computations far beyond what a human being has time for, this leads one naturally into the field of computer science.

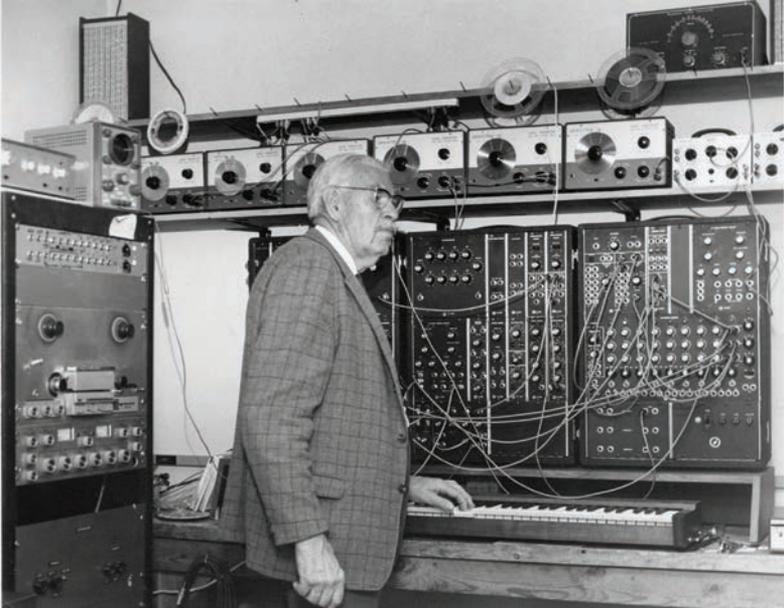
Presented to the Association for Computing Machinery, Albuquerque, New Mexico, October 5, 1967.

The Future of Electronic Music

All musical sounds are simply aggregations of simple sine waves, a basic tone called the fundamental and its overtones which are so soft that one is hardly aware of them. This was the discovery of a French scientist named Fourier who devised a method of analyzing complex musical sounds by eliminating one by one the constituent sine waves. This is known as filtering and it changes the sound.

Electronic music is here to stay for it is simply the application by composers and technicians to music of the fascinating discoveries of the physicist and scientists the art of music. Some of them are excellent musicians. Albert Einstein, that giant thinker, was a violinist and my guess is that a man with that good a think-tank probably played the violin well.

Remarks to Friends of Music, Shelter Island, New York, August 20, 1978.



IT'S NOT SO FAR

Foreword

Harriet and Don were having lunch with Hoshu Ota, a young sculptor at Hiun Restaurant in Kyoto. We were seated Japanese style, cross-legged on soft grass mats before a low table, having left our shoes at the door. We were in a small room opening onto a tiny Japanese garden and apart from a flower arrangement, the only decoration of the room was a scroll by the painter Bochu lettered in Chinese calligraphy. We asked Ota to translate it for us and he reported that it said simply: "It's not so far." "Is that all?" Don asked. When Ota assured him that it was, Don inquired what it meant. Ota hesitated and then said that perhaps it meant that it is not so far from one human heart to another. Or, Don suggested, thinking of young Ota, from ambition to fulfillment. Or, said Harriet, from anger to love. We had been searching for a title for this book about our journey and it suddenly occurred to us that we had found it.

When Don was retired at the age of 65 from duties at the University of New Mexico, we decided to celebrate by taking a trip around the world. We had formulated our purpose as follows: to make friends if possible for our country; and to find out by personal observation whether or not it was true, as is so often said, that Americans were disliked throughout most of the rest of the world. In addition, it had been Don's purpose, being a musician, to learn what he could about the state of music in the countries which we visited.

We can now look back on that journey and could not have formulated our own conclusions as succinctly as this oriental poet had done. It is not so far from the heart of a Japanese, or an Indian, or an Indonesian, to the heart of an American. It is not so far from America to the Orient. And in Don's own field it is not so far from the heart of Oriental music to that of the Occident.

From the Foreword to It's Not So Far, being an account of a trip around the world in 1957-1958. Compiled from the diaries of Harriet B. Robb and John Donald Robb. The foreword appears to have been written by Harriet.

Our Round-the-World Trip Begins

August 3, 1957

We were awakened by the porter this morning when we arrived in Quebec to begin our journey. We dressed and took a taxi to the beautiful old Chateau Frontenac which rises from a great bluff overlooking the St. Lawrence. Jim [Dean Robb's brother] had already arrived from Beauceville, Quebec, where he has mining interests.

In the evening we had a pleasant surprise. We had anticipated that sailing

from Quebec, where we knew no one, we might miss the gaiety of the usual embarkation parties in New York, but good old Jim had seen to that and had a dinner party for us complete with filet mignon, sparkling burgundy, and all the trimmings.

The *Homeric*, on which we were sailing, is a beautiful ship, only two years old and handsome in every way. The decor is beige, brown, and gold. Scenes from Homer's poems are depicted in wood carving and etched in glass all over the ship. Our cabin in tourist class is larger and more luxurious than most of the first class cabins which we have occupied in the past. In a way the *Homeric* is sort of a mystery ship for it flies the Panamanian flag, and has an Italian crew (a happy-go-lucky lot), and we are told that the ownership is Greek.

From It's Not So Far.

Stage Fright at a London Concert

We went on to the "Prom" Concert at Albert Hall (London). The program included the second piano concerto of Tchaikovsky played by a pianist named Leonard Cassini, perhaps in his thirties. Don thought he looked nervous as he came onto the stage and a dreadful thing happened. During the midst of the performance he had a lapse of memory and sat with his hands fluttering over the keyboard for possibly ten seconds (it seemed like an age), while the conductor desperately kept the orchestra together playing the accompaniment. Those hands hovering helplessly over the keyboard without daring to make a sound were a frightening sight—a concert pianist's nightmare. Thank God, he "came to" and finished in good shape. But Don was shaken, as we are sure most of the audience must have been, and the poor man must have undergone agonies. We wondered whether a young artist to whom this happens is through, all his years of study wasted, and whether a conductor would take a chance on repeating such a fiasco before thousands of people? Still, such things happen to all artists.

From It's Not So Far, August 14, 1957.

On Richmond Hill

As we passed Richmond Hill, Don thought of the words of the song which his brother Jim and he wrote called "Richmond Hill" and sang it to Harriet. It is based on a Robert Herrick poem:

On Richmond Hill there lived a maid
More fair than May Day mom, Whose
charms all other maids surpass A rose
without a thorn.

This lass so neat
With smile so sweet
Has won my right good will.
I'd crowns resign to call her mine,
Sweet lass of Richmond Hill.

From It's Not So Far, August 17, 1957.

A Briefing Before Our Visit to Russia

The authority for our visa to go to Russia has come through.....Don received a letter the other day from Paul Bunker whom we visited in Munich and who is Business Manager of the American Committee for Liberation from Bolshevism. Paul had suggested that if the Russian visa came through they would like to send one of their "top men" to brief Don on what to look for in Russia. Don wrote back that he was reluctant to go to the Soviet Union with any ulterior motive, that we were going at our own expense to try to make friends, to learn first hand as much as possible about conditions in Russia and to report honestly, without fear or bias, our own observations. Naturally it would be our desire to observe the musical world in Russia and if possible to meet Russian musicians for despite those who say that human opinion is helpless in Soviet Russia, we still believe that every friendly contact between the citizens of the United States and those of Russia will promote understanding and, we hope, help to lessen tensions which are so mortally serious for the world today. Therefore, while we could not refuse to talk to any friends of Paul's, we would prefer not to be "briefed" or go in with any other purpose than a friendly visit.

From It's Not So Far, September 23, 1957.

Sputnik II

The papers today carry the electrifying news that the Soviet Union has launched its second earth satellite, Sputnik II, that it is circling the earth at a distance of 900 miles, and that it weighs half a ton, and carries a live dog with it. This dog has been conditioned, by Pavlovian methods, to eat only when a bell is sounded, and radio signals are sending to earth its blood pressure and other physiological data. This makes Don realize how close we were to the center of advanced research in the Soviet Union when we went to the Pavlov Institute. Don is concerned with the apparent complacency with which the news of the satellites has been received in Washington, at least at first. Still deeper, however, than the realization that we are behind the Soviet Union in this branch of science, is the knowledge that, educationally, we are being outdistanced in the domain

of science at the least. And we will continue to be until our educational system is wrested from the hands of the "educationists" who through their pressure group, the National Education Association and affiliated groups, have perverted our educational system to their own purposes. They have destroyed the system of competition and hard work which alone can make for high class education, retaining incompetents in school, and permitted students to loaf through years of schooling instead of learning. The Soviets have not made this mistake. They eliminate those who cannot or will not pass the examinations, but they give free education to all who can and do. If we cannot and do not wrest our schools from the "educationists" and do this ourselves, we will never catch up with them.

From It's Not So Far, November 6, 1957.

Visiting the USSR during the Cold War

At noon, Don and I went with Lianne as interpreter and Mrs. James Reston, who is musical and quite interested, to the Union of Soviet Composers in Moscow. We were met by Yolodinsky, a musicologist, and Nicolay Peyko, a composer. We heard a recording of Peyko's First Symphony. Peyko, who is 41, explained that the work was written in 1946, had its first performance in 1947, and was printed in 1957 by the Union of Soviet Composers. He presented Don with a copy of the score which he followed during the playing of the piece.

Don found the symphony to be fine. There were passages where he felt the influence of Shostakovich was perceptible. The melodic writing was particularly fine and the symphony had a real tragic feeling in its conclusion. Peyko acted just as Don does when his music is played. He was obviously nervous, fidgeted and smoked cigarettes. When Don applauded and said that he admired it and that when one heard the actual music and it was good, one felt that perhaps arguments about social realism and formalism in music were rather meaningless. Peyko was obviously relieved and pleased. While Don did not say this to them, his own opinion is that, unlike literature, music is a cryptic language, which cannot be translated into words and therefore cannot be so easily censored.

From It's Not So Far, October 7, 1957.

Art in Moscow

The art that has thrilled us in Russia is mostly the art of the old Russia before the communists started to tell the artists what art is. The ancient icons (especially when they are seen in the churches, their natural setting) are incredibly splendid. The book bindings on which artists have lavished talents of the first order using gold and precious stones, the architecture of

the old churches and monasteries, the lacework of the wood decorations on the old houses; these are uniquely Russian art and art of the first order in design and imagination. It seems as if the communists, in losing God, had lost good taste and artistic imagination. Their new architecture and art is a product of sterile imitation.

From It's Not So Far, October 1957.

Lippizaner Stallions

We had breakfast in our room and then proceeded to the Reitschule (the so-called Spanish Riding School) which has been in continuous existence since the 16th century and consists of a group of superbly trained horses and riders who give demonstrations of classic riding. We were able to get fine seats in the beautiful riding hall. The tan bark was combed into parallel lines. The spectators in the two balconies leaned over the balustrades and made a pleasant picture against the gleaming white walls ornamented with gold leaf. This is a large oblong hall and from the ceiling hung three magnificent crystal chandeliers, which sparkled brilliantly as the lights were slowly turned on. Then, to music by Mozart (the G minor symphony) and others, the horses and riders appeared and went through the various school figures. It was like a classical ballet. The superb horses and riders with tall black boots, white trousers, brown coats with gilt buttons, and Napoleonic hats went through fascinating maneuvers and school figures. Afterward we went through the stables where the grooms were polishing the gilded bridles and rubbed the noses of the lovely, white horses.

From It's Not So Far, Vienna, September 8, 1957.

Shocking News From Home

It was sickening to pick up the Viennese paper yesterday morning and to see a large photograph of two national guardsmen barring a Negro girl from entering a high school. The Austrians are our friends but untold damage can be done and is being done by this sort of publicity. We try to impress our friends here that our Supreme Court has decided that segregation is unconstitutional, that our President is trying to abolish discrimination, and that our Congress has also acted, but that we are trying to solve the problem without civil war. Nevertheless, the Governor of Arkansas has done the United States of American a great disservice in these critical days by calling out the militia to prevent integration by force.

From It's Not So Far, Vienna, September 11, 1957.

Cowboy Songs on the Adriatic Sea

October 17, 1957

... but one of the best parts of our trip was the young people in the forecandle who started to sing and dance to the music of accordion and tambourine. They placed their hands on one another's shoulders and danced a ring dance. Don took some snapshots and jotted down a few tunes. After the dancing stopped there was singing and we learned that many of the young people are from Armenia on a trip. Harriet told someone that Don played the guitar and they demanded some "cowboy" songs. So he sat down surrounded by at least a hundred of them and sang "The streets of Laredo," "California Joe," "Suzanna," and when they needed more peppy tunes he "fudged" with "Ragtime Cowboy Joe." We also sang "Deep in the heart of Texas" and made them clap their hands at the right place. And we sang "El Tecolote," making them sing *cu cu cu* at the chorus. Harriet directed the chorus in the refrain. This went on until someone shouted "Dubrovnik" and sure enough we were entering the harbor. Before we went ashore, an Englishman on board said, "You certainly make a good pair of ambassadors."

From It's Not So Far.

Swimming in Heraclion, Crete

We took the morning plane for Heraclion on the island of Crete. We chose this instead of Rhodes because, while the latter has the beautiful Hotel des Roses, Crete has the Minoan ruins of Knossos, the oldest Greek civilization. Heraclion is a fascinating town. A guide from the hotel took us in tow and we started for the funeral of the poet, Nikos Kazantzakis. The pall bearers wore gorgeous blue Cretan costumes, with white boots and daggers in their sashes. We had luncheon on the square and had a rack of lamb with some yogurt. The lamb was delicious, cooked with tomatoes.

After lunch, we went out to see the partially restored Palace of the Minoan kings at Knossos. The Minoan civilization dates from about 3500 B.C., although the palace itself was first built about 2000 B.C. The two symbols of the Minoan civilization were the bull and the two-headed ax, the Taurus and labrys. In the wall paintings which have been preserved, men and women are costumed exactly alike, but the skin of the men is indicated with red paint and that of the women in white paint. Animals were portrayed with blue paint. On the way home we went for a swim at the deserted bathing beach of Heraclion. The water was comfortably warm and the air not cold, for Greece is still warm at this time of year.

From It's Not So Far, November 5, 1957.

Feluccas on the Nile

From our balcony each morning [in Cairo] it is a fascinating sight to see the feluccas going upstream under the bridges of the Nile without any motive power except their sails. They leave these hoisted until the last possible moment before passing under the bridge when they then quickly lower the mast and all. These masts and the tremendously long boom come down in a matter of seconds while the fellucas coasts upstream in an eddy for long enough for the boatsmen to hoist the mast and sails again by means of a windlass. On the big boats this takes six men. In the process, they never get the sail wet, and we tip our hats in admiration.

From It's Not So Far, November 26, 1957.

Bethlehem's Shining Star

As our stay here is short, Tony drove us over to Bethlehem to see the birthplace of the Savior, the Church of the Nativity, having been built in the cave in which, according to our guide, Christ was born. How authentic this is we do not know but at any rate, we were in the village where the great event took place, and we prayed very reverently in the tiny cave. Just before going to bed, we went out on our balcony and saw a star (it was obviously a planet), brighter than any we have ever seen before. It was startling—so big and so bright and we could not help thinking of the star of Bethlehem. Unfortunately, we could not identify the planet without a star book, though we surmised that it was Venus, the evening star.

From It's Not So Far, November 15, 1957.

Elephants and Monkeys, Oh My!

[Harriet's hilarious diary entry of a visit to the Zoo in Ceylon, Sri Lanka.]

In the afternoon, we visited the government music school and saw some Ceylonese dancing by fifth-year students. The music and dancing does not compare with the best Indian music and dancing but was interesting. Don always enjoys visiting a music school and the utter lack of acoustical insulation made us realize that in our worst buildings at the University of New Mexico we were not so badly off.

We then went to the Zoo where Major Weiman, the curator, arranged for us to be picked up by an elephant with his trunk. We later were told that the picture of Don in the elephant's trunk was published in the paper here. The first time he picked up Don by the waist and he hung there—

legs up and head down. We suppose this is the picture they published. The elephant then picked Harriet up but kept her head up. Afterward Major Weiman said he thought he would not do this anymore for he did not want any accidents! When we asked him what he meant, he said the elephant, if angered, could crush a person with his trunk. Don asked whether the elephant that had held him was strong enough to do this. He said that he had seen an elephant crush a coconut with his trunk, which was much harder than crushing a human being.

Don has never cared for monkeys and after this afternoon his motto is "I hate monkeys." He was feeding one of the small capuchin monkeys some nuts when suddenly the monkey got hold of Don's right index finger and gave him a savage bite which drew blood. The Major was quite upset but assured us that there was no danger of hydrophobia. Don's finger was treated in the infirmary.

From It's Not So Far, February 27, 1958.

India—a Cosmic Dance

We went to Agra and saw the Taj Mahal, and to Jaipur, the pink city. Of course, we were entranced with the camels and the oriental picturesqueness of everything. Monkeys are everywhere, peacocks strolling around, fabulous ruins such as there are in Delhi, and people everywhere. Well, we bought a statuette which was a hermaphroditic statue, I believe. It portrayed this dancing figure and later on when I was doing electronic music, I used that statue with the piano by pressing the sustaining pedal. I could rotate it around and make a sort of spiraling sound, and I would tape it with a pencil, and you would get tapping of various parts of his body; you'd get different sounds, different timbres. I called this piece, "The Cosmic Dance of Shiva." That's on one of the recordings that Folkways brought out. All of the sounds were made by either plucking the strings or tapping the strings. I had a pencil with lead on the end of it, and that made a dull sound when I'd tap it through the hole in the sounding board. That was a kind of fascinating thing because in those days of electronic music we were experimenting.

The dance in India embodies a lot more than bodily movement. They say that just the movement of the eyes is something that the actors will practice for hours at a time; the expression of the eyes, to express anger, love, yearning, surprise, etc. One of these actors got up and did that, and also the same thing with the use of the hands. They gave us demonstrations of things of that sort, which were foreign to us. There are various schools of dance. We took photographs of some of these both in south India and in north India. In north India they have Hindustani music which is somewhat different. I won't try to go into the differences

but I did, in the latter part of our trip, meet a man who was a professor of music at the University of Madras. I bought his books on South India music and he said something in the introduction that is very beautiful to me. These are the volumes that I bought from him. But the thing that I read was, "There are many pathways to God, but of these the pleasantest is [San git margal]." That's a Sanskrit word meaning the pathway of music. And that appealed to me very much. It's one of the many byways that I could have been led down for years, you know. There are so many things you could throw your life into, and that certainly would have been one because they say that the theory of Hindu music has been in existence for something like a thousand years in literature. I mean, there has been writing about it, and furthermore they have borrowed a lot of their knowledge of the past from the sculptures which are so omnipresent in India. There is one temple south of Calcutta where there are hundreds and hundreds of sculptures of musicians and dancers showing the instruments, showing the poses of the dancer. They say that the great dancers go there and study the sculptures to see the way these dances were danced a thousand years ago. There are people in India who are quite anxious not to let western music blot out the knowledge of their own music. To some extent, that is taking place, because they have what they call "film music."

From Interviews with Charlemaud Curtis, Cassette 11.

My Hong Kong Suit

I bought some clothing in Hong Kong because it was supposed to be the cheapest place in the world to buy nice clothes, but the trouble was, I really was trying to go too cheap I think. I bought a mohair suit which was very good looking and black. I started off for New York in this suit one day. I took the plane that stops at Oklahoma City, you know? We had 45 minutes or something like that, and I went into the airport and walked around, and I sat down, and suddenly I felt a ripping. The whole seat of my pants had ripped out!

From Interviews with Charlemaud Curtis, Cassette 11.

The End Of Our Journey

Don woke up at 3:30 a.m. and went to the bridge. We were just entering under the Golden Gate Bridge and the lights of the bridge, the dark bulk of the land, the tiny fishing boats going out for crabs, and the lights of the city and Berkeley across the way were so beautifully mysterious that Don wakened Harriet and we watched it together.

A day or so ago, we had passed for many hours through a stretch of the ocean covered with jellyfish. The crew said that they were Portuguese man o' war. At places they were so thick that the surface was covered with huge patches of them. We were reminded of Rachel Carson's wonderful book, *The Sea Around Us* and her description of spring on the ocean when the plankton, jellyfish, and fish blossom forth like plants ashore in prodigious quantities to feed the living beings beneath the sea's surface.

From It's Not So Far, May 20, 1958.

It is surprising and disappointing to realize how quickly the vivid experiences of travel fade into oblivion. Already the Orient seems far away in the past.

And here the story of our journey ends. A few days later, we arrived at home in Albuquerque, by train. Our daughter Nancy was the only person whom we had written the time of our arrival and Don had warned Harriet not to be unhappy if no one should meet us. The letter might have gone astray.

Instead, we found a veritable delegation of family and friends at the station. Although our diary covers only the portion of the trip from New York eastward to San Francisco, we had in fact circled the earth and had been away four days less than one year. In truth, it's not so far.

From It's Not So Far, May 22, 1958.





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