This is a transcription of Craig Reardon interviewing Jerome Moross in his apartment in New York on 4/16/79. The main focus of the interview was Moross' relationship with Bernard Herrmann for a planned book on Herrmann. Because Craig was so difficult to hear due to the placement of the microphones, his comments are usually edited or occasionally cut, in this transcription. As much as possible, an effort was made to keep a sense of the flow and tone of the conversation.

CR: Opens the interview asking about how Moross and Herrmann met. He had first read of Moross in Oscar Levant's book which describes Moross and Herrmann as two sassy young men.

JM: It happened in a German class in high school. By the way, Benny was about two and a half years older than me, but I actually graduated high school before Benny. I got out of High School when I was fifteen. We were in a German class, I was sitting in the back of the room so the teacher shouldn't disturb me while I was composing. I looked up and I see a boy sitting across the aisle, twirling his hair, studying the Mahler *Fifth Symphony* in an Eulenburg Miniature Score, and so he looked at me and he said, "You know Mahler?" I said "Mahler stinks," or something like that which I thought then. I'm stili not a Mahler devotee. He got quite angry and grabbed what I was writing, and looked at it and tossed it back at me and said, "Dishwater Tchaikovsky", and we started to argue because I felt he hadn't even looked at the thing. Suddenly the teacher was calling the two of us up - stand up, get out! She threw us out into the hall.

CR: What were your ages then?

JM: I was just 14 - it was shortly after my 14th birthday - and Benny was l6. I said, "You got us thrown out of the class and we won't even know what the homework is" and I was upset. "Oh forget about it" he said, "do you want to go to rehearsal of the Philharmonic?" and I said, "How can we go to a rehearsal of the Philharmonic?" He said, "There's a broken door". I said, "Sure". So we walked over. The school was the old DeWitt Clinton High School which is now called Harren High School. But it was DeWitt Clinton High School then - it was one of the quality high schools in town, it was

on 59th Street and 10th Avenue - so we walked over to Carnegie Hall and we went in the entrance to the studios on the side and climbed up to the dress circle level - you walked down the hall and there was the broken door. Benny knew about it. We walked in and kind of got on our hands and knees and crawled.

CR: Were you a little scared?

JM: Well, I knew that if they saw us they'd throw us out. And then we just peeked our eyes above the level of the balustrade in front of the dress circle and it was Mengelberg. We watched Mengelberg rehearse for the next hour and a half. We became friends after that. Benny's father had a huge record collection.

CR: Really. Back then it must have been quite a luxury.

JM: Yes. It was quite rare. I'm now talking of 1927 and he even had things like movements of Mahler's Symphonies.

CR: Do you think that's where Benny's love of music came from?

JM: Oh, I don't know. I think it is a thing with all kinds of Jewish families at that time who were still terribly culture oriented. Now they're a little more concentrating on upward mobility perhaps. There was a lot of culture on the Lower East side.

A few weeks before I met Benny we had just moved to Brooklyn from the lower east side. I would go back on the subway. I'd be on the subway every night to visit Benny and we would go to concerts. Benny discovered that I was a very good sight reader on the piano and we began to dig up four hand music. We played an endless amount of four hand music and we played an endless amount of piano violin music. He was a violinist. Actually his violin playing was better than his piano playing but he could read at the piano and Louis his played the cello - that's Benny's younger brother - and we formed a trio. We even got a few jobs.

CR: What did you call yourselves?

JM: We didn't call ourselves anything. If somebody wanted a piano, violin cello trio,

there we were. That kind of thing went on for years - you know, the next few years my life and Benny's life were very intimately connected. I was at NYU [New York University], then Benny got a Juilliard fellowship and then the next year, I got a Juilliard fellowship so there was a year that we were both in Juilliard. We got some money somewhere and ran concerts. Benny conducted, I organized it. He played a lot of things of mine. I don't know - it was just that kind of relationship. The funny thing was, even if we hadn't seen each other for a long time, after ten minutes we were right back to the two adolescents. The last time I saw him - I had gone to London to make some recordings - that was in '72 - I called Benny and he came tearing over and we spent two days together but he wanted to monopolize my time for two days just as we used to monopolize each others' time when we were fifteen and sixteen years old. I was glad I had those two days with him because then he died in '75 - so three years later he was dead.

CR: Was that before he had his heart attach?

JM: It was before he had the first heart attack.

CR: Because I saw him in '73 and I think he'd only lately had it.

JM: Because he had the heart attack - Christopher Palmer telephoned me very wildly from London in the Fall of '72 that Benny had a heart attack, or was it '73? But anyway, it was after I'd seen him. I was hoping to see him again, but then he died in 1976.

CR: How do you explain to someone who didn't know him his personality, his ability to get angry on short notice?

JM: Well, Benny could probably be the rudest man that ever lived and he could also be the most charming man that ever lived. It was according to how he wanted to be, how he felt. He had a very sharp tongue, dreadfully sharp tongue, and it could be very caustic. He never unleashed it on me that I ever remember. Never! When we talked one another, it was always as equals. But I saw him do it to others. Sometimes

after he was through I'd say to him, "Benny, you mustn't do that. He'd say "why can't I do that. I do what I want." But he was terribly arrogant.

CR: In the sense that he felt his opinion was it?

JM: His opinion was it. Yet there were funny things about Benny. Having been an ardent Mahler devotee in his youth, the last time I saw him I remember we were walking, and by the way I'm talking of '72, February or March '72, he was still very alert, very active, the same old Benny, hadn't changed a bit yet, not the Benny you're talking about being debilitated. - and I said, "By the way Benny, suddenly Mahler is in. Everybody's playing him now. How do you feel about Mahler?" He suddenly said, "Mahler! he's vulgar." But he's right, Mahler is vulgar.

CR: In an interview he said, "suddenly a second rater like Mahler is a big thing and Strauss is suddenly Kitsch."

JM: Benny always adored Strauss. We both did. We used to grab all the peculiar operas. An opera of Strauss' called "Daphne" had just appeared and at the library - the library, which at that time was on 58th street - the music library - had gotten a copy and I remember we plugged our way through this god-awful score. It's really not one of Strauss's good ones. But we had it, we had to perform it.

CR: So you just played it at the piano?

JM: Played it, sang it, when we couldn't sing it, Benny played it, the vocal line on the fiddle.

CR: It's wonderful to hear of two kids with such enthusiasm for music. I come from an milieu where kids are more interested in movies or TV shows.

JM: Now wait a second, I'm talking of a time when you didn't even have radio. If you wanted to hear music, - if you heard the Brahms Second Symphony once a year - though after it came out there was a recording and Benny's father bought it. Benny loaned it to me and I finally could stuff myself with Brahms Second for about three or

four days. I just went out of my mind. But you couldn't hear pieces. You played them piano four hands. You got at them any which way you could. I think the kids who are interested in music now are surfeited with it, they're bored with it. Its easy to put on an LP and if you live in New York or London, where you have anywhere from 10 to 15 major concerts a night, you're just surrounded with it. But we had to search for it.

CR: Were your families middle class, lower class?

JM: Middle class. We were both middle class. Fairly comfortable. My father was in real estate and Benny's father was an Optometrist. **CR:** So his did had enough money to buy a whole collection of recordings?

JM: Yes. My father was completely uninterested in music. And also, we had to eke it out. I played the piano from the time I was 16. I was playing piano for dancers and writing music for the equivalent of off-Broadway plays, incidental music. Our trio played dates if we got one. Benny was doing the same thing. You scrounged around to make some money so you could have money to go to concerts. And after 1929, money got very tight. We were both in school still and it was very tight.

CR: What were his jobs, do you recall?

JM: Oh, he did editing for Edwin Kalmus. He played the fiddle in the theater pits once or twice. He wasn't good so he always got fired. He made arrangements, he did incidental music. We did the same things. I played piano in theater pits too. You just did everything. At a young age you just couldn't wait for a career to come to you. You had to go out after it. I was 18 when I graduated college and Benny was about 20 or 21 when he quit the Juilliard. We were both on our own and Benny was working on shows like Americana. By the time I was 21 I had a review produced by the Theatre Guild. We gave concerts. You had to, you couldn't wait. You couldn't wait, the times were to rough.

CR: Did it develop in you both a kind of resilience of spirit so that when you were

rejected you could say, well, I'll get it somewhere else?

JM: I think that happened to everybody during the Depression.

CR: You mean you just didn't allow yourself to get emotionally wounded?

JM: Well, I suppose a lot of people got emotionally wounded. The movies are full of people who are defeated - films of that period. But I remember that period as everybody getting beaten on the head and coming up for the next blow. It was a marvelous period in its way, horrible in the fact that you were always broke.

CR: I was most impressed with the art forms in the '30s, the popular art forms, music, theatre. It was so full of...

JM: Very alive, very alive. Benny had gotten himself a job with Johnny Green. Johnny Green had a radio program, In the Modern Manner, and he got taken with both of us. He played a piece of mine and he had Benny as his assistant conductor. Through that, Benny got to know people at CBS. Howard Barlow became intrigued with him and he got a chance to conduct various things, and then before you knew it, he was a regular on the staff. He took over from Barlow when Barlow quit about 1940. I worked for Howard too. Barlow gave me two commissions. Also I did the music for the March of Time radio program which Barlow conducted. But Benny was conducting at CBS.

CR: Did you guys think of this as music you would want to save at your shelf at home save or did you just throw it out?

JM: Well, a lot of it I have saved and a lot of Benny's has been saved. I'm not talking about the radio transcriptions, I'm talking about the other things we wrote - the ballets I wrote at the time. One of them, *Frankie and Johnny*, is still done all over the place. As a matter of fact, it's just been done on television and will appear here next month, a Chicago production. Our paths separated in a way because I began doing ballets for Ruth Page in Chicago, I began going out of town, I left New York. That was in '36. When I got to Hollywood in 1940, Benny was out there now. He was doing films.

CR: I know that he had connections with Orson Welles - how did you get out there?

JM: I just went. I had written this ballet for Chicago, it was the dead of Winter and I saw no reason to go back to New York. Nothing was happening there. This was '36 and I don't know, I'd had New York.

CR: It's funny for such a young man to say "I've had New York," but I guess you had.

JM: Well, I was twenty-three, nothing to tie me down and so I just went out to Los Angeles. A lot of my friends were there. They had moved on from New York. Nothing much happened to me there. They were doing *Porgy & Bess* on the West Coast and I had worked on the New York production. George asked me if I wanted to work on the West Coast production. I was delighted, so I worked on that.

CR: Was Gershwin a nice man?

JM: Oh, I liked George.

CR: ...It's a shame that there aren't any young kids that are as exciting as that company of people - of New York guys that I think really wrote music that was so full of life.

JM: Yea, full of beans. The academics have killed it. Music has fallen into the hands of academics. All the composers are now teachers. We all wanted to make a living at music so we played the piano, we played the violin, we'd orchestrate, we'd write hack stuff, we'd do anything but we wanted to make our living in music. And one thing I did know ... see, Benny got entranced with film. When he hit film, that was his metier.

CR: It was a love affair.

JM: It was a love affair. His concert music was so so but suddenly he found in the form of film music he really could express himself. He's one of the few composers who did and he wanted nothing better for the rest of his life than to alternate that and conducting. His writing would be for films and he would conduct. I felt differently about films. Writing for films didn't intrigue me that much. I wanted to write for concert and I wanted to write for theatre. I loved the theatre and I did write a lot of theatre pieces, a

great many of which were done - performed in New York like *Ballet Ballads, The Golden Apple, Gentlemen, Be Seated!* and others. Consequently, I would have to leave Hollywood after I'd made some money and come to New York and write what I wanted to write, until I was broke and had to go out again. But Benny was perfectly happy there. On the other hand, a lot of Hollywood composers used to say to me , "why don't you stay here?", not realizing that my Symphony and other things would never have gotten written if I'd stayed there. Benny understood that. He never once said to me "why don't you stay here?" He knew I had to leave, and I knew he had to stay. I also knew he had to go to London every now and then to conduct.

CR: He had to go to London to do it because he couldn't get a job here, is that why? What was the attitude, why didn't he have more success here?

JM: Well, in New York Benny was just considered too arrogant. Also, in America conducting requires playing a whole game with trustees of the orchestra and going to fund raising teas, etc. and Benny discovered that didn't exist in London - just go there and conduct. You didn't have to go wooing backers or any of that so he conducted in London.

CR: That leads me to a question. Where did this Anglophilia first manifest itself first?

JM: I don't know. When I met Benny he was sixteen years old and he had it already. He was always searching out things. He'd go looking around and find a copy of James Whistler's *Gentle Art of Making Enemies.* He adored Henry James. I never could follow him on Henry James. Anything to do with England or London he thought was just the end.

CR: He apparently like the romance of the expatriate too.

JM: Well, I don't think he was so intrigued by the romance of the expatriate. I think his fascination with Whistler and with James was the fact they had both made it in London and he hoped to. I think that was a subconscious reasoning there. By the way, that's a

book that's been forgotten that really should be dug up *Gentle Art of Making Enemies* by Whistler. It's a marvelous book. He wrote one of the most witty and fabulous books on personalities and on art. The New York Library must still have copies of it down at forty-second street.

CR: I'm among the most polite and timid of people but I enjoy these eccentric people who aren't afraid of making waves.

JM: Well, I never could make waves the way Benny did and sometimes it would embarrass me. He wanted once to introduce me to the head of RKO, Constantine Bakalanikoff, and he took me up to his office and introduced me and before I could do more than say "Hello Mr. Bakalanikoff," Benny started off and laced Bakalanikoff out. Murdered him, and then stalked out, and I followed him. I suddenly knew that as long as Bakalanikoff was at RKO I would never have a job there. Benny thought he was doing me a favor.

CR: There was the story of a sound man, James Stewart, who had worked with Herrmann and liked him and he recommended him to David Selznick for *Portrait of Jenny*. He talked him up to Selznick and Herrmann was brought in and he saw the film and told James Stewart (not the actor) "this is a piece of crap, I don't want anything to do with this, I think it stinks." Stewart went into Selznicks's office first and told Selznick "I don't know how to break it to you but Herrmann just told me it stinks. Selznick said "I'll talk to him myself, send him in" and Herrmann was charming and said "I just don't think this is the kind of film for me" - it was almost out of his usual character.

JM: I just old you that before, he could do that.

CR: Afterwards Stewart apologized to Selznick and Selznick said, "what are you talking about? This is the most charming man I ever met. He's a lovable guy and you told me he was some kind of porcupine."

JM: Well, Benny could do that. He knew what side his bread was buttered on and he

was always very careful about that. But if you had nothing to offer Benny, he could be cruel. I saw him be cruel to people and sometimes withered them. Franz Waxman always wanted to be a conductor. Waxman gave a whole series of concerts in Los Angeles. One day, the three of us were having lunch together and Waxman said to Benny, "I wish you'd come to my next concert, I'm going to do Beethoven's *Eroica*". Benny looked at him with a cold eye and said, "Who's interested in your idea of the Eroica?" It was devastating.

CR: It's amazing that the man could do that and have these wells of tenderness in him. Who were his circle of friends out in California and out here? (New York)

JM: I wouldn't know. For the first ten years of my acquaintance with him his circle of friends were myself and Abe Polansky, the director.

CR: He knew him?

JM: Abe Polansky lived around the corner from Benny. They knew each other from when they were little boys. I don't know, we were the three - it was a tight knit little group. We had a whole periphery of people we knew but for close friends, the three of us were close friends.

CR: When Herrmann had his *Moby Dick* performed he developed a close relationship with Barbirolli and he always had a special affection for Barbirolli and wrote a nice article about him in *The Saturday Review* in the 50's.

JM: Well, Barbirolli was a very, very nice guy. He really was.

CR: And Herrmann responded to that kind of kindness.

JM: Yea, and also Barbirolli respected Benny. The rough exterior didn't phase him one bit although he was one of the most suave people in the world. He was just all elegance and Benny of course admired Barbirolli. He was *the* famous British conductor.

CR: What can you tell me about Vladimir Dukelsky, or Vernon Duke? He talks about

Herrmann and you in his book. What kind of character was he?

JM: Vernon Duke? Vernon was nice, he was funny. He was like a movie caricature of a Russian emigre. We both met him - we used to hang around Harms, which later on became Chappell. Harms was the place where - Gershwin was there, Jerry Kern was there, Vernon Duke was there. The first show I wrote they published - you know it was the place to be.

CR: What was the process of hanging around? Did you try to harangue somebody into listening to your music?

JM: No, You went up and saw - Russell Bennett was the chief orchestrator - you hung around and you got to meet Max Dreyfus, Oscar Levant was there. Everybody was there. You know, you met people there. Tin Pan Alley had died and had moved uptown. Tin Pan Alley was originally on 28th Street. By the time we came around it had moved up to 45th street and Harms was on 45th Street, right off 6th Avenue. We went to school in Midtown, you must remember and in the afternoons we would go to all the places around town that we thought were interesting. There was Harms. Across the street from Harms Vince Youmans, who wrote *Flying Down To Rio*, *Hallelujah*, had an office. So we'd go to Harms, then we'd go up and visit Vince Youmans. It was a thing to do in the afternoon if you had an hour.

CR: Did they mind these two young kids coming up to see these big shots?

JM: No, I think it amused them. We got to know Duke very well.

CR: From what I have read he seemed to have been a frustrated classical composer.

JM: He had quite a bit of success with it. He had ballets done by Diaghilev, he had lots of performances, but then he kind of gave all that up. He wanted to go into shows. He was kind of laughed at a little for his pretensions but we were both intrigued with him because the songs were so extraordinary. At that time he was writing things like "April in Paris", "Suddenly". He was a very interesting composer, but that didn't last very long.

Benny couldn't take Dukelsky. He felt that Dukelsky was affected and I stayed friends with Dukelsky longer. As a matter of fact I didn't see him much but when I did we were still friendly whereas Benny would escape. But there was a period when we were hanging on to him with kind of an admiration for his songs.

CR: Can you tell me about the League of Composers? How did you guys get into that? Did it just seem like a good idea to get in with some other guys who would give you some solidarity?

JM: No. It started with Aaron forming the Young Composers Group. Meanwhile, Benny and Lehman Engel and I gave a concert at the Juilliard. They played a piece of mine, Benny played a piece of his own, he played a piece of Lehman's. Henry Cowell came to it and published my thing. He took us up. So there was Aaron, and there was this. Now the League of Composers was *the* organization of the time so it was just natural to fall into it. You were in the League of Composers set. They never played us at the League. They were playing that group of composers in their late 20's and 30's. They were playing Copland and Sessions, etc. We were in our teens and our twenties. They didn't play us. We were the next generation theoretically but by that time the League had kind of disintegrated.

CR: I've heard it said of Copland that he mainly engineered his chairmanships, his presiding opportunities, to get his own stuff played, self aggrandizement. Is that true?

JM: I don't know. When I first met Copland I was 18 and copland was about 32 and he was already an established composer. He didn't have to do very much aggrandizing and as far as I know Aaron was always lending a helping hand to everybody else. He told Ruth Page she should hire me to do ballets. Things like that. He was always doing things for us. No, Aaron is a very generous man.

CR: I think Herrmann, long distance maybe, but he was still cordial with him.

JM: You can't help being cordial with Aaron, he's a *great* man, a man of warmth and

dignity who had a genuine interest in seeing American music grow. He welcomed all of us and nurtured us.

CR: What was the attitude of you guys with the kind of Viennese music, the twelve tone and so forth? Did it range anywhere from cold rejection, to live disinterest to curiosity?

JM: Atonality, at the time, was coming in - was going to be the thing. As a matter of fact I started off writing atonally and then moved away from it. My first published pieces were atonal. But suddenly there was choice. There were all these people who came along. Besides Schoenberg, there was that Russian guy who had a system - he could teach you to compose by numbers or something - Gershwin went and studied with him for a while - Schillinger. And you know everybody was trying to devise systems. The idea was, that music was dead you you've got to get a new system. Henry Cowell at one time had an idea: let's try using the classical forms but instead of based on the 3rds and 6ths we'll do 5ths and 4ths. He called me and said, "I'm trying this out in class, you come down, you have a scholarship." I went down, it was sheer nonsense. Here we had just gone through a musical revolution. Music was now free, you could write anything you want, and you know, if you want to throw in a dissonant chord nobody's going to scream anymore. Yadisson and Prout were dead, they were the two theoreticians in the 19th century. They were the great theoreticians of the classical style, not the classical style, but the romantic style. They had codified it. They were great writers of text - you know, that German artifer, codifying everything. Suddenly I felt very free. Here was all this marvelous music coming along during the twenties. There were marvelous new Stravinsky works, Milhaud, Prokofiev, everybody was writing and it was all kind of free. Everybody did everything and here were a whole group of people who wanted to force it into a straightjacket, and I felt that was going to be a disaster if it happened, so I kind of moved away from it and decided that was N.G.,

and sure enough, after the war, slowly, slowly, the academics came in. They suddenly realized that these systems were things they could teach. You didn't need talent to get into University music course, you just entered the music course. And what did they teach you? They could teach you the twelve tone system and before you knew it they were all teaching serial music and it went on into other idiocies. I objected to it, I felt it was going to be the death of music and it almost has been. For some reason or other music things last longer than in other arts. In architecture for instance, suddenly there's a big revolt against the International style, this box-like glass and steel construction, and I suppose it started with Venturi, but Philip Johnson, who was a great exponent of the International style, suddenly is opposed to it...going the other way, announced that the International style is dead, much to the chagrin of all his pupils. The same thing is happening in painting where you have a whole batch of painters who are going in for representational painting and magic realism and all the rest of it. I'm thinking of people like Abel Katz and others, and even the Pop-Art and the Op-art.

CR: But there is still some kind of representation.

JM: But music doggedly sticks to the thing. Now there are a whole batch of composers who feel they want to get away from the rigidity of what happened in the last 25 years and they don't know how, so they've taken to writing what they call collage - - they'll do snippets of Mozart, and snippets of Rossini and cover it all with a facade of atonality and what not. I'm thinking of people like George Rauchberg. But they don't know how to write themes and develop them anymore. They weren't taught to. It's a pity. And the same thing has happened in popular music. Popular music has fallen into the hands of the amateurs and you don't get those gorgeous songs anymore.

CR: It's just damned dull.

JM: I know. And the lyrics are incredible. I happened, for one period in my life, to have worked with John Latouche, who was probably one of the greatest lyric writers that ever

lived, and to have that kind of brilliance, and now suddenly nobody knows how to write lyrics. Instead you get one phrase for a whole song sometimes. Oh, it's just too much! And besides which, this whole business of writing songs of protest! All these kids come along, they're writing songs of protest, they're making an album of protest. When you've got a girl out in the car on a date and the two of you want to sing a song together, you don't sing songs of protest. Driving along the road happily and singing about the starving miners, that's ridiculous!

CR: Love songs have managed to survive...

JM: Love songs or even genre songs, there are all kinds of songs. Think of that great period of pop songs in the 20's and 30's. They thought of all kinds of things to say.

CR: Yes, I think Richard Rodgers is my favorite and Gershwin is certainly a pinnacle.

JM: Even Jerome Kern, think of "All the Things You Are" and Dorothy Field's lyrics and others but Dorothy Field wrote "All the Things You Are." The tunes, the lyrics, the combination of the two. Oh, there was a lot of crap written too but the good ones had an extraordinary quality. It's gone. I wonder if it will ever return?

CR: It will probably return in bits but first of all the kids are going to have to discover the beauty in that music and then they'll emulate it, which is how those things always get started, but it might take a while. I'm not unique and if I enjoy it there must be others too.

JM: Yes, but they don't dance to it, they don't sing it. And if you don't sing and dance to popular music then forget about it. It's not alive. They listen. It's become a spectator sport. And so it has no vitality. Oh, they dance down at the discos but then they could just as well dance to a beat. First of all, they've got there ears stuffed with ear plugs and cotton anyway. It's too deafening and they don't half hear what's being played. I don't know why they have to play it that loud so all the patrons come in with their ears prepared - music for prepared ears. It started with the Hi Fi I think. They

began selling records on which you just had train noises or you just had boat whistles. Don't you remember when they were doing that in the late fifties or early sixties? They were buying them. The thing to do was to turn up your Hi Fi and have the sound of a rushing train; the Doppler effect.

CR: Did Benny Herrmann share any of your enthusiasm for pop music, as you've demonstrated here, or was he always interested in orchestral music?

JM: Well I'm interested more in orchestral music. I just happen to like pop music too. I like the pop music of the period. I don't like the pop music of this period. Benny never had a capacity for writing melodies so he always stayed away, though he would admire a good song when it came along. I remember when he was working on *Americana*, he was very enthusiastic about various composers who worked on the show. It was a review. Harold Arlen and others.

CR: I think Duke had something in that too.

JM: Duke had something. Benny did the ballets. He wrote the ballets for Charles Weidman.

CR: Does any of that stuff survive?

JM: I don't think so.

CR: One of his pieces I enjoyed is the Courier and Ives suite - it's fun. It's got a lot of kick in it.

JM: Oh yea, I remember that. Well that was our Charles Ives period. I discovered him and I learned part of the *First Piano Sonata*, and then we got the *Songs*...it was my copy of the *Songs*... and then Benny found a copy of the *Concord Sonata*. Now I'm talking of the time - I'm 14, 15 - nobody knew Ives. Well, by the time we met Henry Cowell a few years later...

CR: What times were these, to pin it down? When you were 14-15...

JM: We started to find Ives - '27, '28, '29 - we were searching around finding Ives. I

thought he was great. We were enthused. We were wildly enthused. Well, then when we both met Henry Cowell, which was in '32...the early part of '32 I was 19...and Benny was just going to hit his 22nd birthday - so that pins it down for you. At that time we both met Henry Cowell...no, I was 18 and Benny was going to hit his 21st birthday. When we met Cowell after that famous Juilliard concert, I played - I was interested in finding American music. Benny wasn't too interested in that but I had discovered an unknown composer named Gottschalk and I did a transcription of a piece of his called *The Banjo*. That two piano version is mine. I gave it to a two-piano team at the Juilliard and they played it all over the place and it got published. Benny was kind of cool to that kind of thing you know, American past, but I was interested in digging up American past. But anyway, he was fascinated with Ives, we both were, and then Cowell introduced us to Ives.

CR: How did he take to two young boys coming in like that?

JM: He adored it. This was what he had always been waiting for, that the next generation would like him.

CR: Proving that he was writing ahead of the times.

JM: That's right. Then, I had a chance to do some performances on radio. A friend of mine, Arthur Berger, who used to be a critic for the Tribune for a while and is now a professor of music at Brandeis University, was running a series of concerts on modern music for station WEVD. The EVD by the way, stands for Eugene V. Debbs. The station still runs and it's kind of mildly socialist and very interested in culture. Its influence has disappeared but at that time, that was before the all music stations and what not, it was important culturally I'm now talking 1931, '32. It was very important. I did two programs for Arthur on his series. On one of them I played - we only had a half hour - I played a section of Ives *First Sonata* and I played George Antheil's *Airplane Sonata For Piano*. And then on another program I did a program of Ives songs, and

Ives got wildly excited about it. It was his first radio performance - he wrote us letters. I called him to let him know it was being done. He was enthusiastic about the whole thing. Benny played a lot of Ives in the concerts he was giving. At one point Benny wanted to do two movements of the *Fourth Symphony*. We couldn't do that big movement which is a huge orchestra and a lot of noise, the big Scherzo - but Ives suggested that we do the Prelude and the Finale...was it the Prelude and Finale?...well, the prelude had been cleared up but the other movement...was it the Fugue or the Finale, I forget...but the other movement that we played Ives gave us the goddammed messiest photostats you've ever seen. And we had to edit it out from that. It took us weeks but then Benny played it. These were a series of concerts that we gave at The New School. I was the administrator, Benny conducted. Then later on, Benny moved up to Town Hall and gave some concerts. It was according to where he could get money. Benny was the fund raiser. He could scare up money. He was quite wonderful. Then, by that time, I was writing a lot. Ives was on his way. He didn't need me anymore. And I had more important things to do than act as a publicity man for Ives. Benny felt the same way I suppose and we drifted away from him.

CR: So you weren't really that closely in contact with him after the 30's.

JM: No, we were in contact with him for about five years.

CR: Did the enthusiasm sort of chart a course accordingly?

JM: It charted a course for me, I don't know about Benny. Benny always loved Ives, I do too but you must remember that Ives was showing everybody the goodies.

CR: And he had a lot of drek.

JM: He had a lot of drek, and now you get the goddammedest things you know, but the goodies - *Three Places In New England* and all those marvelous things, he was dragging them out first. We were dazzled, they are dazzling pieces. But then there's the rest of it. Then another thing was, Ives also, I suddenly realized, couldn't create

thematic material. He had to borrow thematic material from hither, thither and yon.

CR: Is that the explanation for so much Americana?

JM: Yes, Americana, he used Folk Songs, Hymn tunes, anything. And suddenly, I got a little uninterested in it. I wanted to see what he would do with an Ives tune. We used to absolutely melt with ecstasy at the *Alcott Movement* of the *Concord Sonata*, the way he used the *Fifth Symphony*. And now suddenly I realized, why didn't he write something instead of using the *Fifth Symphony*. I mean its all right - it's very literary to say that Bronson Alcott used to sit and play the *Fifth Symphony*. But it's an excuse, you know. My admiration for it has diminished. It's still high, but it's diminished a bit.

CR: Now when you hear a program about Charles Ives he's one of the big grandaddies...

JM: Oh, I know, and everybody scorned him so. But he had Henry Cowell who was beating the drum for him all over the country.

CR: Cowell must have been quite a man.

JM: Fabulous man, good, honest, fabulous man. No pettiness. He just loved music.

CR: Was he one of the founders of the Juilliard when it was called The New School?

JM: No, the Juilliard and The New School are two separate entities. The Juilliard was founded on a trust by Frederick Juilliard who made a fortune in woolens. You can still buy good Juilliard woolens. He left them an enormous sum of money, and they organized this school and when we went there it was a school that had 130 or 140 pupils.

CR: Were you in one of the earlier classes if not one of the earliest?

JM: Oh no, the school started around 1924. Benny entered it in 1930. I entered it in '31. The year I entered it moved uptown to Claremont Avenue to the new building that was built with Juilliard money. He had left money to build the building and that's now part of the Manhattan School. There was an awful lot of money and we were all on

fellowship. We had free lunches. If we wanted to stay for dinner we had a free dinner. Money poured all over the place. And you entered with very rigorous examinations. They wanted only talent.

CR: What did you guys specialize in, as composers?

JM: Both of us were conducting and composition.

CR: You were expected to come across with some music, weren't you?

JM: We did but unfortunately Albert Stoessel who ran the conducting classes hated what we composed and so we both were tossed out at the end of '32. Besides which, I wasn't intending to go back and I don't think Benny was either because by then I was writing music all over the place and so was Benny. We weren't learning that much at the Juilliard. I had been down at NYU where I had gotten intensive music training and Benny had been at NYU for a while and then when he went to the Juilliard he quit NYU. We both felt that outside of taking a composition course, studying composition with somebody, which the Juilliard wanted us to do, I felt that any teacher you had would impose his form, his style upon you, and so I wasn't going to study composition. We'd studied everything else, harmony, fugue, counterpoint, sight-reading, everything.

CR: And you'd supply the composition part.

JM: I'd supply the composition. And if I was going to have a style, I'd find my own style. I wasn't going to start off from Mr. X's style.

CR: It worked out. You sound like yourself.

JM: That is one strange thing. I don't think Benny never found a style. There is nothing that you hear which you can say, "this is Bernard Herrmann. If you know the piece then that is something else. But I mean stylistically. He never found a style.

CR: He has a style in film music. There is a...

JM: An exotic quality, but I'm talking of musical style, that never happened. But anyway, that's neither here nor there. By that time, I was not only writing a lot of

concert music but I was also writing ballets for Charles Weidman, for Ruth Page. I couldn't be bothered with the idea of a composition teacher.

CR: For those guys you have to do a lot of ? exercises, the majority of which you knew.

JM: I had been through that since I was ten on my own, writing that kind of thing. And Benny certainly had too. He had written and enormous amount of music when he was young. We had a violin and piano so we were busy writing music for one another and piano four hands. We'd write and play it ourselves.

CR: Have you saved any of that?

JM: No, it's all lost. Then, we were both out in the big world. That was it.

CR: Did you guys keep tabs on each other when you were in Hollywood over the years?

JM: We'd see each other. It wasn't a question of - if I was in London I'd call Benny. We'd run into each other in Hollywood. I'd visit him.

CR: You got a credit as an orchestrator on a film I enjoyed, Hans Christian Anderson.

JM: Well actually, I wrote the ballet. Frankie Loesser didn't let me get a credit on it. He objected to any other composition credit on it except his own. I also orchestrated Walter Scharf's music but Scharf called me back after he recorded the ballet. I wasn't there for the recording. So I got a credit as an orchestrator but I actually did the ballet. It's based on Liszt themes.

CR: Yes, I remember one of the beautiful themes from the *B-flat Sonata*.

JM: The *B-Flat Sonata*. Yes, that worked beautifully. I did some other things in that that were very funny. I did a big chunk of *Gnomenreigen* which everybody said couldn't be orchestrated. I orchestrated about half of it for that ballet. And I orchestrated *Au Bord D'une Source* which a lot of people say can't be orchestrated. Liszt never orchestrated it. Liszt orchestrated practically everything he wrote. All those piano pieces you can find in orchestral versions. But he never orchestrated those two so I

thought well, Liszt couldn't do it but let me see if I can, so I went ahead and did it. And then I had to write a lot of music to tie the whole thing together.

CR: So you had to take a little bit of Loesser and patch it together?

JM: No, a little bit of Moross and patched the whole thing together. We were a completely separate entity. I mean Roland Petit was doing the ballet, we had a different scene designer for the ballet - Antony Clavez.

CR: It was a separate unit.

JM: It was a separate unit. As a matter of fact that's one of the things that is wrong with the film. We did that ballet and then Frankie handed us a song, that you were supposed to do, and we did one of his songs - "No Two People Have Ever Been So In Love" - and remember that goes into a fantasy kind of thing? We did that. Then our two sections were put in the midst of this film, most of which was done like those illustrations for Grimms Fairy Tales in the books of the period, and suddenly here were these two very sophisticated looking, very chic things with different kind of orchestral sound, different kind of harmony sound. It destroys the film. We destroy it. The whole film should have been done in one style or another but here are two styles mixed.

CR: You're right, like a very elegant, an adult view of Hans Christian Andersen and then a child's view.

JM: So it destroyed the film.

CR: Maybe that's why I like it but I get that funny feeling...

JM: Well that's why.

CR: Everything was a high degree of style.

JM: Well, Zizi Jeanmaire coming down over the waves in peculiar little waves - very chic French sets, and I'm doing variations on Liszt, it's just out of it.

CR: How did you come to do *The Big Country*?

JM: I had done a picture for Sammy Goldwyn, Jr. I had done two pictures for him and

had just done one picture called *The Proud Rebel.* Willie Wyler and Gregory Peck were doing *The Big Country* on the Goldwyn lot and Sammy was very enthusiastic about the *Proud Rebel.* He adored the score and he had lunch with Wyler and effused about me and Wyler couldn't make up his mind as to who would do the music, he listened to Sammy, he went and saw the picture and offered me *The Big Country.*

CR: That's great. I wish he'd had a subsequent collaboration with you.

JM: God help me. He wrote me telegrams from Rome. We kept sending him the music and he'd write me telegrams. You know that main title of *The Big Country* has become one of the most famous main titles of any film. You should have seen the two-page telegram he wrote me, denouncing it, destroying it.

CR: Really?

JM: Really. I called my agent who came and I was lying on the couch with a headache practically and I said, "Bobby, I'm through with this film! Tell them to get somebody else!"

CR: That's incredible

JM: I know. He hated it. Never heard from him. Nothing. I mean he could have sent me a letter saying thank you for the score. I don't know what was wrong. There is an unfortunate thing about *The Big Country.* It was the first time a western score had been approached in that manner in Hollywood and it became a prototype.

They did what Tiompkin did in *High Noon*, they would write a Russian folk song. This became a prototype score. It's been imitated to death. It's a pity but...but still...

CR: You can diminish something by imitating it but you can never kill it.

JM: No, *Big Country* is very alive. I've made an orchestral suite from it. It's gets played quite a bit. And the picture album is still on sale 20 years later. There are very few scores that 20 years later are still being bought.

CR: How did you come to do this giant dinosaur movie - *Gwangi*? Did that have

something to do with Herrmann?

JM: No, Benny had nothing to do with it.

CR: Because he had done work for the same producer.

JM: Charlie Schneer. No, what happened was this apartment went co-operative, and I needed money, and I called around and I got three films in a row. That was the second one.

CR: What were the other ones?

JM: *Rachel, Rachel* was the first one.

CR: Did you do *Rachel, Rachel*? I would love to see that.

JM: *Rachel, Rachel* - it's a beautiful film. There was *Rachel, Rachel*, there was *Gwangi*, and then a terrible movie called *Hail Hero*. I had my money for my apartment and I was through with Hollywood. I've had Hollywood.

CR: That's too bad because I'm a film music buff if it's good.

JM: But they don't want film music. I couldn't do the *Star Treks* or those things, the disaster films. Once you get out of that even the romantic films, they want rock scores hoping to get an album out of it.

CR: In the event someone were to bring something to you like *Rachel, Rachel*, do you think you would do something like that?

JM: Yes, but in the climate of things that is not happening. I've written enough things that bring me in a royalty so I can live on it. And I have always been writing. A lot of things never got finished and now is the time to write them and finish them and I've been writing like a mad one. There's a new record coming out in June.

CR: I have your woodwind album.

JM: Oh, the *Sonatinas*. But I've got a new record coming out which I think is even more interesting. It's a *Flute Concerto* and a chamber music work for piano four hands and string quartet. That'll be out in June. A Hollywood company named Varese is

putting it out.

CR: Varese-Sarabande. They put out a good product. They've re-issued a lot of interesting records.

JM: This is new. I've been told that their surfaces are very good, their engineering is very good. I hope the record sounds good.

CR: Has it already been recorded?

JM: Oh yes, it's been recorded, they've gotten their masters, they've started to make the discs - what are they called, those discs that they try out. They had to go back and I don't know what, they are futzing around. Christopher Palmer did the notes and they're ready. The whole thing is set to go.

CR: Have you got any projects of any extraordinary ambition or are you taking things...?

JM: Well, I also finished a one-act opera based upon Lucy Fletcher's play, *Sorry Wrong Number.*

CR: Did you do it with her collaboration or with her blessing.

JM: With her blessing. And I'm in the midst of another symphony.

CR: How many symphonies have you written? I know you wrote that first one.

JM: After that I wrote two more that I didn't like so I discarded them. I used the material for other things, for films and things. I've got two more that are half - in sketch stages and I'm working on one of them now. When I get a symphony I like, it's going to be my second.

CR: A weeding process.

JM: Well actually, I've spent a lot of time going over everything I've written and weeding it out and editing stuff so that all the music I want to preserve is edited and available. (long pause)

When I saw Benny in London last, it was so amusing. He had joined a club - you know,

one of those London clubs so you have some place to go in the afternoons, and you know Benny always smoked a pipe.

CR: I didn't know he smoked a pipe.

JM: Oh yes, from childhood on he smoked a pipe. We wandered down the street - he had a pipe and a cane, not that he needed the cane but he thought that it added something, and we went to his club. The funny thing was that he didn't know anybody at the club but he was a member and - he was in a London Club.

CR: He had become a proper Englishman at last.

JM: Well actually, there was going to be a coal strike, an energy strike, electricity and coal, and Benny was very ardent, very indignant about the government not wanting to give the coal miners a raise - or was it the railway workers - whoever was going on strike. But he was involved there as I am in New York incidents. I get very involved in what's going on in New York.

CR: So he might have been a bit of a Labor partisan.

JM: He wasn't a Labor partisan so much as he felt...

CR: So he was an issue man, that was the issue.

JM: That was an issue and on that issue he was agreeing with labor. As a matter of fact, Benny was more conservative than anything, I would say.

CR: Referring to an incident when he met with Herrmann, he was surprised that Benny didn't want to talk about film music.

JM: He never did want to talk about film music. Film music you did. You didn't talk about it. And actually, I understand what (coughs) every now and then when a piece of mine gets played they say "write something about it" and they want - and you know composers have gotten in the habit of writing long, very involved and convoluted explanations of what they do. It all means nothing. What actually counts is what happens when you hear it. I read these things and they are saying all this and you can't

hear it in the piece.

CR: Stravinsky is the prime example of this.

JM: I wonder if Stravinsky really wrote all those things in his old age or whether it was Bob Kraft.

CR: Yes, it has the same fussy style.

JM: As Kraft does.

CR: It doesn't really serve any purpose but a music fan can't help but be interested and I read it in spite of myself. A lot of music criticism is like that too. There are shelves of it.

JM: You know, musical criticism is one of the saddest arts there are. When you are writing analyses of something like the great musical critics - I mean Berlioz or Schumann - that's one thing. Schumann coming across with a new publication and writing about it. Of course nobody now would write about a new publication, because most people can't read music. But, to read a review of a concert is ridiculous - you can't hear that concert again. Who cares what this man says about a concert that I can't possibly hear. Art critics I may look at because I may want to go to the exhibit. The exhibit's up for a month or something but an ephemeral one night concert? There used to be a critic in New York called Edward Downs - Olin Downs, Edward Downs is his son who is a critic now. But Olin Downs was a critic and he was really very nice. No matter what he said, and sometimes he could be quite devastating, but somewhere in his review he wrote something that the person could quote. Now, performers are interested in criticism because they need the quotes when they go on tour. A composer doesn't, though a lot of the conductors, etc. will go according to what is said by the critic. But Olin Downs became the most famous critic in America because everybody quoted him. And this was at a time when there were about a dozen New York newspapers, not three, like there are now. He made sure that they could always

get a good quote out of his thing. So Olin Downs became a household word throughout the musical fans in this country.

CR: That's interesting. He was more well known because of his quotability.

JM: But he could have devastated the person but there were this marvelous three lines in it. You always got a quote. Olin Downs said this. They don't tell you that the rest of the thing Olin Downs said "you stink." That was out. There were these three marvelous lines.

CR: What do you think of the overall musical scene? Do you prefer to remain aloof from it and sample it on the edges, remain a citizen so to speak?

JM: No, I plug for performances. Oh sure I do, you have to. But the overall music scene is so tied up with academicism, with chic, with all kinds of crazy things, that it's hard now, it's pretty rough. And then of course there are the dopey critics who as soon as they hear something that's listenable they say it's "conservative" - a horrible word. Then along come all the kids writing serial music, twelve-tone music, alliatory music and then they say its terrible, that's dreadful, the audience walked out, so there you are. You can't win in the present milieu. You know, I wrote a piece that I thought was a major piece and almost epic in its quality. It was a piece called *Gentlemen! Be Seated* and it was the history of the Civil War done as a minstrel show and the New York City Opera produced it. *Well*, the critics fell on me. They didn't just write one paragraph, they wrote columns! Absolute distaste! It devastated me. It took me a year before I could start writing again. Because this had been a major effort. To be so destroyed. Especially my previous theater piece, *The Golden Apple*, had been such a huge success. But I don't know, they felt that I had desecrated the opera house.

CR: That's just their opinions but when you get so many opinions -I've been involved in sculpture and when I do something - I know what it's like to have an ego like filament...

JM: Well, you spend two years doing a piece of sculpture, though no sculpture would

take two years, but if you were to and you finished up and had this enormous sculpture which you felt was a big epic piece of bronze and suddenly everybody says it's "piffle", it's a pile of shit, well, you're destroyed. It took a while to get back from it...it was very good because I suddenly decided it didn't matter...what was bad about it was until then I had gotten performed a lot and suddenly I wasn't being performed at all.

CR: It's mean, but on the other hand I wouldn't censure critics.

JM: No, because if the guys who destroyed *Gentlemen! Be Seated* suddenly were to praise my *Flute Concerto* wildly I'd be delighted.

CR: Those guys are perceptive.

JM: Yes, well let's not kid ourselves, that sells the piece. You know the reaction was so sharp that when the *Sonatinas* appeared I couldn't get a single review of it. Now I'm not an unknown composer and I've done a body of work that I think has a bit of respectability and If I come along with four chamber music pieces, I should be at least listened to. The album never got a review. It's practically unknown. I gave a copy to Bob Sherman, who runs a radio show here called "The Listening Room". He came down to see a revival of *Golden Apple* that was done last fall and I happened to be there that night. I hadn't seen the thing, I'd been out of town. I came by and he was there and he was wildly enthusiastic about the piece, he had never seen it, and he said "I want to hear some more of your things", so I sent him the *Sonatinas*. Well he got wildly enthusiastic about it. He gave me an hour a couple of days later of playing that, and chunks of *Big Country* and a piece of *Frankie and Johnny*. He said to me, "how come I've never heard of this record?" because he has a program which they review all the new records on WQXR. But the person who selected the records to be presented to them to review never bothered. The company had sent it in. So there you are. Well anyway, I got my innings in on his program so it made up for it.

CR: And you got the album. A lot of composers don't get that much. I'm on your side

as far as this should have been larger than that.

JM: Yea, but you want sales, you want audience. I mean sales not for the money but so people can hear your work. I don't know how one does it now. Benny was never able, after he became film composer, to get his other things played very easily.

CR: Herrmann was very hurt by the reception to his *Symphony* and his *Moby Dick*. It was either luke warm or I guess in the case of the *Symphony* it was cursed out.

JM: Really pooh-poohed, yea. Benny was right to be hurt. The piece is a good piece. But there is a snobbery about your being a film composer. Anything you write they yell is "film music" and film music has a pejorative sound in the academic world.

CR: Just this past weekend there was a program - Andre Previn has a program, maybe you didn't see it.

JM: I saw it.

CR: He of all people should resist but he had to bring up the fact that there is really nothing more pejorative than a film music composer.

JM: Well, no, he's just telling you a fact that it's so but look how Andre had to fight to become a conductor after having been a film composer. They just wouldn't accept him. I think this whole thing of Previn and Pittsburgh is marvelous. He does all kinds of things, he plays chamber music, he chats, he's wonderful. It's literate, it's interesting.

CR: I guess I'm being super sensitive about his airing that old shibboleth about film music composers.

JM: Well, he didn't feel that. He just said that this is the attitude. And that's true. And then he went and he did a piece of Benny's, he did *Psycho*. Good performance. Unfortunately, he picked two pieces by Rozsa and Johnny Williams which had the same quality of big, brassy noisy music. I wish he had made another kind of selection. But he didn't.

CR: Rosza's *Ben Hur* is a very moving thing in the context of the movie but it has a

circus sound and I think it's quite trivial sounding.

JM: Well, Andre is a very good friend of Johnny. He played his *Symphony* and he tried to get his *Violin Concerto* played. They're good friends, long standing. And it was nice that he played him again.

CR: I'm pleased that Williams is having the success that he is as a film composer. I'm happy in so much as he is a trained musician and he has the facility which is obvious although I don't think there is as much quality there as in your music or Benny Herrmann's but at least it isn't pop tunes.

JM: Johnny is very skillful.

CR: And the producers, they never know the difference. They just see that now that he's had that big bunch of albums sold, the *Star Wars* thing which is probably inextricably intertwined with the fact that the film is successful and youth audiences like the space opera - they don't make those distinctions, they just see that he's a hot number.

JM: Well, that's good. He was a hot number before it. That's why he got *Star Wars*.

CR: Yes, that's true. He had a film *Jaws*...

JM: He had a couple of films before that, he had an Academy Award before that, no Johnny had a huge success since he moved from television to films. In television he was always doing situation comedies.

CR: I remember some things he did in the same vein as *Star Wars* called *Lost In Space*.

JM: I don't know that but he had one program he did - it was all that kind of peculiar little scherzos, jazzy scherzos. He used to turn them out like sausages. But there is not that much going in films for composers any more. Maybe there are a dozen films a year at the most for which they want a big score, a big sounding score. The rest of it is all - they want trivia. They get it and it sells. And the composers come and go. Ice

Caves, big deal for one season.

CR: They have these goddamned disco films. Awful stuff.

JM: Saturday Night Fever, the Bee Gees.

CR: There were the Chipmunks. They sounded like chipmunks. Did you know them?

JM: No, there used to be The Beach Boys. Those are fads.

CR: Two of Herrmann's themes - from *Torn Curtain* and *Marty* and were turned into one of the most unprepossessing rock pop songs by one of the staff arranges at Universal. It had to be a pop tune.

JM: Oh, I've had that too.

CR: They even turned *The Big Country* theme into a song.

JM: A terrible lyric. "Another Day, Another Sunrise." It's certainly not the feeling of the music but one of the two guys who wrote the lyric was the head of United Artists music at the time.

CR: It did pretty well didn't it?

JM: No, I think it sold two copies. I'm standing because I can't sit for long periods..... END