

## TRANSCRIPT

**SCRC Series:** North Carolina State University Oral Histories – MC 00449

**Field Notes:** Henry Bowers

**Interviewee:** HENRY BOWERS

**Interviewer:** Virginia Ferris

**Interview Date:** Monday, November 10, 2014

**Location:** Raleigh, North Carolina

**Length:** Approximately 110 minutes

This interview was conducted in the Moreland Room of D.H. Hill Library at North Carolina State University. A native of Tampa, Florida, Henry Bowers is a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he served as student body president (1951-1952). Following graduation Bowers served in the United States Navy and earned a master's degree in history from Columbia University (1956). After working for the Alcoa Company for several years, Bowers became Assistant Director of Student Activities at North Carolina State College (later University) in 1957. He was named Director of the Student Union in 1962 and Associate Dean of Student Affairs in 1970.

Bowers succeeded Gerald Erdahl, former Director of the College Student Union, as Director of the Friends of the College Concert Series, 1962-1987. The Friends of the College Concert Series was started in 1959 as an attempt by North Carolina State University to increase its visibility and role in the local community. Some of the performers that visited North Carolina State University through the Friends of the College include pianist Van Cliburn, violinist Itzhak Perlman, the New York Ballet, Vincent Price, Burl Ives, the North Carolina Symphony, and many international cultural ensembles including the Royal Scots Guard.

Following his retirement from NC State in 1987, Henry Bowers and his wife Sory Guthery Bowers became closely involved in the United Arts Council of Raleigh and Wake County, the North Carolina State University Libraries Friends of the Library, and the Arts NC State program.

### START OF INTERVIEW

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Henry Bowers: It was a very small student body. The school was really pretty small at that time and I was in the Division of Student Affairs. Dean Jack Stewart was the head of it, Banks Talley was my boss, and he and I worked very closely together. We had sort of a long-term vision that what we wanted to do with student affairs was to create as

broad a cultural atmosphere and opportunities for students as possible. There was not very much of that going on here at the time, no academic departments in the fine arts, no academic departments in the arts; the School of Design was the closest thing that came to an arts program. So our long-range goal was to make as much possible and available to students as we could, and that was what we had worked on and what they continue to work on beautifully since then.

We started out, and the music department was very small. Bob Barnes was the current when I came and then Perry Watson followed, and it was in Pullen Hall. They developed a little collection of music and instruments and in 1965 the whole place burned down. An arsonist, student, got in there, set the fire, it burned down, so everything was destroyed, all the instruments, music, and everything, so they had to start from scratch. Fortunately by that time we had worked out a deal with the university to use part of the old Thompson Gym, which had been abandoned, and it was one of those wonderful times when there was a building available on campus that nobody wanted, so we were able to get the administration to permit the student center to operate out of that.

Virginia Ferris: And this was right when you first started at NC State?

HB: No, this was afterwards.

VF: Okay.

HB: The music department moved down into the basement of the Thompson Building and they were there until the new music building was built next to the new student union, and then of course the program there has developed beyond our imagination. It's just really wonderful.

So, that was the idea. The idea was to try to develop as many programs as we could in the arts, and the Friends of the College came along in '59. This was an idea that we developed to try to do that, to bring to the campus the best music we could available to the students. We started out by involving the community, very much so. The editor of the newspaper, all these people were very interested in this project. Sam Ragan, who was the assistant editor and a literary figure in North Carolina, was very helpful in that. Bill [00:03:09]

Joslin, who was a lawyer here and headed the Friends of the Library at one point, was very instrumental. He set up the charter for the organization and got it started in '59. The idea behind it was to try to bring to Raleigh the very best we could at the lowest cost we could, and we hit it just at the right time because fees had not gone up so much.

We were able to use the coliseum for the place to present it, which was something a lot of people believed could not have been done. But the student union under Jerry Erdahl, who was the director, had put in the Longines Symphonette once, just a one-shot thing, and it worked. You could actually hear it in there. It was very successful. Jerry Erdahl was the one we went to and asked to help organize this thing, and he was a genius at that sort of thing. He didn't particularly care for music, but he liked-. So he set up the structure very much like the United Way with colonels and lieutenants and workers all over the place and got that going, and then after the first season he died, so we took over from there. But his structure was the thing that made it function, and I've got some little notes on that. [Pause; searching through papers]

Let me make sure I've got the right spot here. Here we are. There were over seven hundred volunteer-. [Brief interruption] Seven hundred volunteer workers at the height of

this, all over this part of the state, and there were about two hundred communities involved in this thing. For example, in this area we had colonels working in little organizations in Apex, Chapel Hill, Shannon, Wendell, Youngsville, Buies Creek, Burlington, Clarksville, Virginia, Clayton, Clinton, Dublin, Durham, Elon College, Fayetteville, Fuquay-Varina, Goldsboro, Greenville, Henderson, High Point, Hillsborough, Laurinburg, Lewisburg, Lumberton, Kinston, Oxford, Pembroke, Pinehurst, Pittsboro, Roanoke Rapids, Rocky Mount, Smithfield, Southern Pines, Spring Hope, Wake Forest, Warrenton, Wilson, Wilmington, Zebulon. These little communities organized within the community. They sold memberships and sometimes got buses to [00:06:02]

come bring their crowds up and there were, as I say, about two hundred communities.

I've got a list of those things that goes on, which I won't read because there are about two hundred names on the thing here, and they were everywhere in this part of the state and some as far as-. Well, we had some people coming from Asheville.

VF: So you were saying it started as something you wanted to provide for the students, but it also provided for the entire state?

HB: Well that's right, and of course we had to have the community involved to pay for the thing. The students got in without charge and they could bring a date without charge, so it was to encourage them to come and to have it right there in the middle of campus. Now, there had been a civic music association in downtown Raleigh in the old Memorial Auditorium down there, which the students just couldn't or wouldn't get to – it was too far away – and they were having some financial trouble. We went to A. C. Hall, who was city manager at the time, and tried to see if – he was also head of that series – we

could get him to—. We suggested that they might join forces with us and do things out of the coliseum. Well he would have none of that, [Laughs] so we went our separate ways, but we had made that offer.

So there we started, and the membership was based on a couple of principles. One, you buy a membership. No individual tickets were sold. You bought a season membership and that was it, sold at one time and then it was closed. There were no reserved seats. You went and found a seat wherever you could, and a lot of people objected to that but it worked, because if they started to pick and choose between seats there's paperwork involved and that sort of thing would be very difficult to handle. We were doing it out of the student center office so we couldn't have handled that. But it worked that way and in membership people felt a part of it, and all these little communities, they really got—. We would have report dinners for the campaign, usually a dinner set up by the student center and they paid a dollar for I or something, and they would report and there was a lot of competition between who would sell the most tickets and so forth, and there was an incentive for selling tickets. I think if you sold twenty-five you could get one free membership, that sort of thing. But everybody was enthusiastic about the whole thing and the fact that you went to the coliseum, where they were used to going, and you could pick a seat that you wanted to, and the atmosphere was good.

VF: Had there been interest expressed by the students in something like this, or how did you—? Why did you—?

HB: No, it didn't exist so there was really no—. [Laughs] But then we tried to publicize it with the students and get as many to come as possible.

[00:09:03]

VF: And why did you feel that it was important to have some arts and cultural programming at a place like NC State at that time?

HB: Well I think the same reason you have it now, that it's important for students in engineering and agriculture and these other programs to have access to the very best possible in the arts. That's important for education. It's really vital, and we had good support from the faculty, particularly in the humanities, the English department, the history department, and so forth. They were very helpful and very enthusiastic about it, so that's how we did it.

VF: And how did the students respond? What would you see?

HB: Well, they responded. It was very new to most of them. There were a lot of students who came up and said they'd never seen a symphony orchestra before, never heard one, even though the North Carolina Symphony had at that time done some traveling around the state. That was about it. So they did respond and they would come up and say what a great experience it had been once they got there, but it was not easy to encourage them even though it was right in the middle of the dormitory area. [Laughs] All they had to do was walk over and walk in to the concert. We had to really promote it that way.

I don't want to bore you with too many statistics but we started out with a low price of four dollars for the concerts. That was for four performances, a dollar a performance. Then it rose in '61-62 to six dollars, and then to five dollars, and seven dollars, and then Van Cliburn came and there was such a huge mob that we had to turn people away, even people who had tickets, and parking was a mess, so we finally decided to go to two performances of everything, and three for ballets. That's when we really

upped the membership and it got to be—. Oh, let's see. Memberships jumped from eleven thousand in '63-64 to nineteen thousand in '66-67. That wasn't counting students. Those were the memberships sold, and it sort of settled around twenty thousand for most of the series. The series was considered to be the largest of its kind in the country. We had programs which, we were told by the agents, just weren't matched by other institutions, and certainly in this state there was nothing like it.

VF: Was there anything similar happening at Duke or at UNC at that time?

HB: Not much. I'm not too familiar with Duke's programs. They did have an in-house chorale and orchestra and that sort of thing, and we used the—. Chapel Hill had the [00:12:04]

Playmakers, but that was—. They had programs on campus but nothing like this. Now they do. They brought in a big promoter and in Memorial Hall they have these wonderful performances now, at very high fees, but they're there.

VF: It's just so interesting that at that time, so early, and in this region and at this school, to have a really rich arts program launched by you and Jerry Erdahl and all of your partners. It's a very fascinating, kind of rare phenomenon.

HB: Well, it was, and I think it was good for the reputation of NC State – College at that time, which was why it was called Friends of the College – but they couldn't believe this was happening at NC State. [Laughs] They'd come over from Chapel Hill in droves to these concerts and it was a good boost for the morale, I think, here, as far as the arts go. Of course it's a wonderful school in other departments too.

I'm sort of rambling.

VF: Well can I get you to just back up a little bit for us and tell us about your younger years and what brought you to NC State, and maybe what interested you in working with student affairs and the arts and Friends of the College?

HB: Well, I went to Chapel Hill as an undergraduate and after that I went in the Navy ROTC program and I was in the Navy for three years. I was stationed in New York and went to Columbia for a graduate program in history. I worked for Alcoa, the aluminum company, and then decided that I really was interested in something else than that. Banks Talley had been a friend of mine at Chapel Hill and he suggested I might come to State, and that was the route I took.

VF: Did you have an interest in the arts as a young man?

HB: Oh, yeah. In New York City it was wonderful in those days. You could go to anything, cheap. I remember at one point when I was working there I had been to every theater program on Broadway that was listed in the *New York Times*, but you could get in for a couple of dollars. It was amazing. Not the front row seats, but – and Carnegie Hall. They would have these evening programs Sunday – I've forgotten – matinee programs for fifty cents. You could sit in the top balcony. So it was all there and you could take advantage of it. Of course that's not true anymore, but it was then and it really did move along that way, so that really was my inspiration, I guess.

[00:15:03]

VF: And what were your impressions of NC State when you first started here? Do you remember your first days?

HB: Well, just getting to know the place. I had some friends over here when I was in Chapel Hill but that's about it, and it was small. But I was so interested in the faculty



reception for what we were trying to do. It was so wonderful, and the School of Design was—. Henry Kamphoefner was a great support, his wife even more so. She was a fanatic and sold tickets like mad, Mabel. So, that all worked. It was an impressive place. John Caldwell came shortly after. I was here under the end of Carey Bostian's chancellorship and then Caldwell came and he really shed a light on things, got everything exciting. He was a vital person, a lot of energy, very enthusiastic about it, supported all this very well.

VF: So do you remember when you settled on the idea that Reynolds Coliseum would be the venue for this programming?

HB: Well there was nowhere else. I mean there was nothing else on campus you could use, really. And, as I said, they had tried the Longines Symphonette, which was a small string group, in there and they said, well, you can put something in there, and it works. Of course basketball was the big place, but that's how we did it, just to try it, and it did work.

We had an interesting start for all this. The first season we had the Philharmonia Hungarica from Hungary; Vincent Price gave a talk, and that was hard to do, just a single person speaking; and then we had Lorin Hollander, who was a very young pianist, and he performed, which went okay; and José Greco and his Spanish dancers came on, and that was an enthusiastic thing. That was the start. Well, let me just—. I want to read just one little thing here. Kit Knowles, who was so active – he was on the English faculty – so active in the program, and this is what he wrote at the tenth anniversary, which I think sums it up pretty well:

“For those who believe in omens and portents, the first concert of the Friends of the College was an auspicious beginning. It was the fall of

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1959. The performers were the Philharmonia Hungarica, an orchestra made up largely of refugees from the tragic uprising in Budapest. The orchestra was new and untried, but so was most of the audience. An early Beethoven symphony led off the concert. The orchestra and audience took the music in their stride. Then came the test: Bartok's dramatic, difficult music for strings, percussion, and celesta. How would an audience relatively unfamiliar with modern concert music react to a score so unconventional in its instrumentation, its contrasting moods, its unsettling dissonances? There was no need to worry. The audience reacted with close attention and, as the music reached its climax, in an ovation. It reacted, in short, with intelligence, appreciation, and warmth.

“Those few minutes in Reynolds Coliseum were prophetic. In many ways the whole character of the Friends of the College was encapsulated in them. The remarkable success of the organization over the years to come was dependent on the truth of certain assumptions that were tested that first night, that an intelligent audience, whatever its previous experience, would know good music when it heard it, that good music, and for that matter good dancing, good singing, and good entertainment, need not be prohibitively expensive for the concertgoer, that art is more important than the environment and a basketball stadium can be a suitable concert hall.”

So that was the way it— It began that way.

VF: How did it feel to be in your position when it became apparent that this was going to work? Do you remember?

HB: Well I was happy. [Laughs] It was good. It was good to see it grow, and it grew very fast. We got to the point where we—. Well, as I said, when we came to Van Cliburn in 1963 in October, that was when we had our true test of capacity. He was a single pianist, made a great hit in Russia, won the Tchaikovsky prize, played in stadiums in Moscow so big crowds didn't bother him. So he put the piano right in the middle of the coliseum basketball floor, everybody sat all around, and they packed the whole place. There must have been at least twelve thousand people in there; they were standing all over. He came in, and he started out with "The Star-Spangled Banner" on the piano. It was wonderful. His mother was sitting in the wings back there. His mother followed him pretty closely in those days because he was a pretty young guy. She was sitting back by the dressing room and he went on and at intermission he'd go out and stretch out on one of the tables in the little classrooms near the entrance.

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Kit Knowles and I went out to pick him up at the airport, and we noticed that—. His contract called for a Steinway piano and we didn't have a Steinway piano. There was a Steinway but it was not available, I've forgotten exactly why, and we didn't know what to say. So we told him that we didn't have a Steinway and he said, "What you got?" [Laughs] We said, "We have a Baldwin." [He said,] "Fine, fine." He wasn't bothered by that sort of thing. He was a very interesting guy, a little eccentric – a lot eccentric – but easy to work with, and he was very friendly to people too. That was a great success, and because of that mob we had to change to two nights for everything else.

But these concerts, you go back and look at them, for example—. Well the most dramatic one we had, in October of '62, was the Leningrad Philharmonic with David Oistrakh, famous violinist at the time, the same status as Itzhak Perlman, a Russian, and Yevgeny Mravinsky as the conductor. He was a very famous conductor. This was a real gem. But they came at the height of the Cuban crisis and the settlement had been reached just a day or so before they came. We were very nervous about this because it was, you know, we were going to be bombed, and I didn't know what was going to happen. But it was settled, but the audience didn't really realize this, so when they came in they played "The Star-Spangled Banner," beautiful, wonderful performance. Everybody was up cheering and yelling. Then they played the Russian national anthem, which was a little hard to follow, but that was great, great concert.

Oistrakh was an interesting guy to talk to. He, as I say, was a world-famous violinist and he came, but I discovered—. Russian orchestras, when they came, always had these agents of the KGB wandering around, making sure that nobody was going to defect or that nobody was talking, and I was talking to the conductor a little bit and this guy was all of a sudden in the background, trying to see what I was saying. [Laughs] But anyway, Oistrakh could come and perform but they always kept members of his family in Russia. He could not bring his wife or children into this country with him. They knew what had happened before: they'd get over here and they'd stay, because they could demand a huge fee here. But anyway, I took him down to the hotel afterwards and I said, "Can I help you [00:24:05]

with your violin?” and he said, “Well, it’s a Stradivarius. I think I’ll carry it.” I said, “You’ve got a Stradivarius?” He said, “I’ve got two.” [Laughs] Interesting guy. So that worked out well.

VF: How would you go about planning and scheduling these major international performers?

HB: Well we had to work with agencies. I mean that’s the way it works. Columbia Artists, Hurok, ICM, and other smaller agencies would let us know who was available for a tour, and as we went on they became more available because we were in a wonderful location for a tour, because from Washington down to Atlanta there wasn’t anything, so stopping here was great. The first I guess, or maybe the second, season we had—. [Pause] Yeah, it was in ’61 when we got Leonard Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic to come down. They came on the train and stopped at the station where Logan’s flower market is now. They pulled up and they had a car for Leonard Bernstein and he got out. So here was the New York Philharmonic, and they charged ten thousand dollars for all of that, train fare back and forth from New York City. Bernstein was a big draw in those days because of his TV work, and then we got him and he came over and gave a performance and went back, and you’ve got a picture out there of his signing autographs. He came back to this building, the student center, and talked to students and signed for a long time. He was very friendly, and that really lifted the series, that whole concert.

Of course we went on—. I won’t go over all these things with you, but we had some wonderful starts, Birgit Nilsson, who was a great soprano, one of the top-money. She performed with the National Symphony; Howard Mitchell was the conductor. She

did not like Howard Mitchell, and they did the overture to *Tristan und Isolde* – I mean the love-death scene from *Tristan und Isolde* – and after her part of that is finished you're supposed to stand there while they finish it, which is a long time, so she just got up and [00:27:02]

walked out after she had done her part, [Laughs] which upset Mitchell, but anyway.

VF: Do you remember if any of the performers had major impressions or responses to being at NC State? Do you remember them commenting on what it was like to be in Raleigh or on campus?

HB: Well, the size of the place really – and again, going back to Bernstein, when he came I went with him and the orchestra back to the coliseum to try it out, the acoustics. He had this assistant who–. [Pause] One of my senior moments. He was the head of the Boston Symphony, came back here, Japanese. [Pause] Isn't that awful? When you reach this age you cannot–. Seiji Ozawa. He's a famous conductor now. He was wandering around and he told me that the sound's the best in back of the stage. He came back later and conducted the New York Philharmonic, many years later, and of course he went on to a wonderful conducting career at Tanglewood and everywhere else, and the Boston Symphony. It was really interesting to meet people like that.

VF: So they were surprised at how well–

HB: They were surprised,–

VF: –the acoustics–?

HB: –yeah. I think one of the examples I mention in this thing was when the Hague Philharmonic came here they had been down at the Fox Theatre in Atlanta, which has about four thousand seats, and only about fifteen hundred people had shown up. They

came here and it was packed, and they just couldn't believe it. They were taking pictures of the audience. [Laughs] They were just delighted, and the word got out that we had this audience and that you could actually perform, and a lot of these people came back, which was a sign. If it was so bad for them they wouldn't come back, but they did. They came back a number of times.

Of course the Philadelphia Orchestra – I've written a little bit about this. Let's see:

“Several days before the concert schedule with the [Philadelphia] Orchestra on April 7, 1973, I received a handwritten letter from the renowned music director, Eugene Ormandy, saying that he was looking forward to his appearance in Raleigh and would I be sure to have the air conditioning turned on in the hall the day before the event? Well, as everybody knew, there was no air conditioning in Reynolds Coliseum at [00:30:00]

the time. It never had. To make matters worse, the publicity pictures featuring Mr. Ormandy standing on the podium in Philadelphia clearly featured four air conditioned vents around the podium and that was obviously important to him. I knew that Mr. Ormandy had suffered from polio as a child and that this was no casual request. Well, that is why you have booking agents. The agents were not happy to break the news to the maestro but somehow they did.

Two things happened that helped: the weather was fairly reasonable the night of the concert and the audience was huge, which I

discovered covers a lot of sins. We rented Ormandy a limousine and that helped too,” and so forth.

But the reaction to the audience was just—. They’d come in and they wouldn’t believe it, and that was, you know, who would object to this huge audience? A singer would perform here, which would be the same thing as performing four times in the Metropolitan Opera House to reach that size audience.

VF: Were there any kind of changes that you noticed in the types of performers that audiences wanted to see or that they responded to over your time with Friends of the College, because you were there during many years with a lot of change?

HB: Yeah. Well, they responded to celebrities, which is understandable. I mean Van Cliburn, Beverly Sills, Leontyne Price, Artur Schnabel, and then the spectacular things like the British Tattoos. We had about three or four of those. They would come in and they would be, you know, gigantic displays of marching bands, marching soldiers. One was during the time of James Bond movies and they brought an Aston Martin – he had been featured in that – and they drove it around the coliseum floor. They had motorcycles riding around the floor, people jumping down on guy-wires, Marines, and it was just a real show. But they did a beautiful job. The bands were wonderful.

So, those things were – and then the various folk groups. They liked José Greco. So it varied. Some things that they were not familiar with and not well known didn’t draw as well, of course, but that’s what you would expect. Celebrity is everything. I mean Perlman was interesting. He came back three times and he just drew a huge crowd. Of  
[00:33:04]



course he was very much handicapped. He had polio and he had to walk on crutches and he had to sit to perform, and getting up on the stage—. We had this great debate about how we were going to do it, so we offered a choice of steps or a ramp and he chose the steps, but we had to hang curtains so nobody could see him walking up this thing. But he was good-natured, took it all in stride, and then he went back and met with some handicapped organizations in this building after the concert, and that was interesting. I was pushing him down in his wheelchair from the coliseum to here, and he was clutching his Stradivarius, and we went down there and we hit a bump and I thought, oh my God! [Laughs] Fortunately I didn't dump him on the ground. Chancellor Poulton was around and he said, "Who is this?" But anyway.

VF: I know Leontyne Price was also a very famous performer.

HB: Yeah, she was very wonderful. She's from Mississippi. Let's see. I wrote down something about her. Her mother worked in the kitchen of the plantation where she was living, and—. What did I do with that? [Pause; searching through papers] Well, I won't bore you with all that. Anyway, the family was very supportive of her and the head of the family traveled with her and came here with her and sort of looked after her. She, as I say, sang three times here, and, I've forgotten the name of the people, but—. [Pause; searching through papers]

VF: Was she well-received by the audiences?

HB: Oh, yeah, yeah. In fact I think I've got a little review of one of her concerts:

“Audience thrilled by Leontyne Price. Ten thousand people were in the presence of greatness here Tuesday night. Leontyne Price sang at Reynolds Coliseum to a capacity audience which had waited fifteen years

for her to appear in Raleigh.” This was in—. Anyway, “Everyone expected to hear a wonderful voice. Only a few were prepared for the depth of

[00:36:03]

feeling, the delicious humor, the perfect diction in three languages, the very essence of artistic interpretation which this remarkable and beautiful woman poured into the music. The program itself was unusual,” and so forth.

I won’t read the whole review, but she sang a variety of things, ended with spirituals: “Ah, the spirituals: here was a great voice in the depth of emotion coupled to the shining personality. Yes, it is an audience that waited fifteen years. It was not disappointed.” That’s the kind of reaction she got.

She had a series of people who would—. One was a boyfriend, who later they did not get along, but the last time she came with her brother, who was a general, Gen. Price, and he walked into the Army [Laughs] place where she was going to have her dressing room, and said, “Gen. Price,” and they all leaped to attention. [Laughs] So he got things under control very quickly.

VF: Do you recall if there were African-American and white audience members attending her concerts?

HB: Yeah, there were. But this was the time when—. In the early days there was a lot of segregation, as you know. [Arthur] Mitchell, who was a great black dancer, came, and I’ve forgotten just which company he was with. He was not his own company at the time. But I remember walking around behind and hearing one guy say, “We just don’t do that sort of thing here in Raleigh.” It was largely a white company and here he was saying

that. Anyway, so, yeah, and of course we had—. André Watts came very soon and he was black. A lot of them were black performers who did a wonderful job.

VF: This was a time in the South when a lot was changing.

HB: A lot was changing on campus too. One time when we had a couple of blacks in the band in the music department they could not play in South Carolina at the football game because there was one black, so they cancelled the performance, didn't go down. In fact one of the presidents of the organization was Vivian Ervin, who was a leader in the black community, so we had good support from the black community and attendance too. Because, you know, they came in; they were used to going to basketball games. Everybody was used to going to basketball games, so it was not a forbidding place to go to.

VF: It seems like the arts are traditionally a place where progress can take place.

[00:39:00]

HB: That's right, exactly. Let me just plow ahead on this other thing I was reading to you. [Pause; searching through papers] Ormandy came back twice. The Philadelphia Orchestra actually flew down to Raleigh once, flew down from Philadelphia here, played the two concerts, got on a plane and flew back, which was, you know, a tribute to—. It says:

“The dealing with performers became part of the excitement and pleasure of managing the concerts. In the second season we brought the New York City Ballet for three different full performances with the last-minute requirement of fifty sandbags to prop up lighting trees, dry ice to produce fog for the last act of *Swan Lake*. A large proscenium curtain

managed to come loose and fall on the stage at the beginning of the first night's performance, leaving the dancers exposed in various poses while the stage hands wrestled the curtain back into place. Despite this the performance was a great success, but there was more to come.

“Kidd Brewer, who some of you may remember,” – He was the one who owned the property for Crabtree Valley Mall. He had a big house on top in a field down there. – “had asked if he might host the entire cast in his home, which was big enough, on top of the hill overlooking the meadow which is now Crabtree Valley Mall. Sam Ragan, first president of FOTC, attended and reported the events in the *News & Observer* as follows:

‘Dancers don’t eat before a performance and naturally they were starving when they arrived at Kidd Brewer’s place, but there was no food in sight and since Kidd was a teetotaler there was nothing to drink. Moreover, Kidd was nowhere in sight. Some of us had forethought to send out for some beer and hamburgers but by the time the food arrived Kidd suddenly appeared. He was dressed in tights and he had a ballet barre erected in his living room, and he proceeded to perform for the ballet company. [Laughs] They were less than amused, but some of them laughed and stared at each other in amazement.’

“After the hamburgers and beer had been consumed they took their departure back to the Sir Walter Hotel. ‘I tried to apologize to a ballerina

on the way back,' Sam continued, 'but she just laughed and said it was the funniest thing she'd ever experienced.'" [Laughs]

Anyway. [Pause; searching through papers]

VF: Did dance performances like that pose a special challenge for logistics and [00:42:01]  
setting up a stage and a set?

HB: Yeah. Well, that stage, actually it turned out to be pretty good for dancers because it had a little spring to it so they liked it, and they would put down a cover on the thing. Well, it was limited in the lighting they could have and scenery they could have, so pretty much minimal, but they worked beautifully. [Pause; papers rustling]

Well, I mentioned this Oistrakh concert with the Leningrad Philharmonic. Two weeks before Charles Munch led the French National Orchestra in "La Marseillaise." We asked these foreign orchestras to always play their national anthem, play our national anthem and then their national anthem, and that of course got the audience all worked up and they would pay attention, but two elderly ladies in the front row who were hugging and so overcome I was afraid they were going to collapse. There was one exception to this business of the national anthems. When the British Orchestra struck up "God Save the Queen" the audience almost always started singing "My Country 'Tis of Thee," a little embarrassing, [Laughs] but anyway.

Charles Munch gave his last concert here in '68 with the Orchestre de Paris. He was very tired, and we drove him back to the hotel and he was sort of clutching the dashboard like this. He was just obviously worn out. The next day he died. He went up

to—. They drove him up to Richmond and he died there, so his last concert in this world was in Reynolds Coliseum.

VF: And how many students, would you say, were attending in relation to other community members?

HB: Well of course a lot more community members than students, and we had no way of really counting the students because they could come in and just show their ID and that was it, but there were far more community members than students.

VF: Did you see the impact in the student body, sort of over time, how they were impressed or what they would take away from these concerts?

HB: You know it's hard to say. It's really hard to say what effect they had, but I think all the arts programs ended up designed to incorporate students. For example, the theater, Thompson Theatre program, which we got started with Romulus Linney, who [00:45:05]

was over at Chapel Hill. John Ely had encouraged us to maybe get him to come over here for sort of a—. We had him as an artist-in-residence, one who would develop a theater program and a literary program, and he had a lot of influence on the students. Edward Albee came. He was a friend of Edward Albee and he came down and gave a talk, and he sent Rom a letter before he came and said, "I'm looking forward to being there. I've got this new play opening and I don't know how it's going to go." *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* was the play, and of course it was huge hit and he drew a huge crowd when he came down here. He came back. In fact he was here a couple of years ago, at Thompson Theatre, watching a student performance and commenting on it.

Anyway, this contact that the students have with performers and with artists has a tremendous effect. André Previn, after one of his concerts, students just took him out to dinner and that was a wonderful experience for them, just students and André Previn, who was good at that sort of thing. One experience I had with him that was kind of interesting: He was with the London Symphony Orchestra, which was a self-governing orchestra – they elected their conductors – and they were here during the time of the Irish troubles. There were a lot of protests going on in this country, the British against the Irish, and in Boston they had some real problems. They asked for extra security down here. Well we didn't think it was going to be a problem, not that much Irish nationalism down here. We were a little alert but we didn't think anything was going to happen.

He came and started to conduct, and hardly had he started to conduct the first piece than this loud [alarm] sound went off, and I thought “bomb” and he thought “bomb.” [Laughs] So we all were running around, trying to find it, and there was a little old lady hugging her pocketbook. She had a burglar alarm in her pocketbook which had gone off, and they grabbed it and got the batteries out of that thing and stopped it. There were no cell phones in those days so it was not something you look out for but, gosh, she was just—. She hugged it hard as though that would make it stop.

But he was very relieved, [Laughs] and the orchestra had started picking up the tone of the burglar alarm and were playing that tone a little bit, realizing it was not

[00:48:03]

going to go off. So they got started and finished the concert without any problems. I remember I got so nervous with that. We took out her batteries, so I went back at

intermission and gave her my Roloids instead of her battery. [Laughs] They were the same size.

VF: Quite a false alarm. [Laughs]

HB: A real false alarm, yeah. Not many of those.

VF: So how are you doing? You want to take a break or anything?

HB: No, that's fine, as long as you all can put up with me.

VF: Oh, no, we're absolutely wonderful. So, I'm curious also about your role in student affairs and with the student union beyond the Friends of the College. What other duties did you have?

HB: Well I was responsible administratively for the music department, the theater program, the crafts program, and then later on the gallery. We had a little gallery in this building but it was inadequate for much of anything, so we did get, you know, with the new building down-. The old Talley Center had a nice gallery in it and that was the result of our working on that. But we put the Crafts Center in the basement of Thompson Building when the music department moved out, and that really has-. Have you been to it?

It's one of the best crafts centers, I think, of any college I know of, wonderful program. That came from almost nothing. They had one room in this building with one person running it and you see what it is now. And of course the theater we got started-. When we got that building we went into it and it was a mess. I mean there were pigeons all over the place, the track around the edge-. There was a track for running around it and that was sort of falling apart. It was just a mess, but Rom Linney had a friend from Carnegie Mellon who was interested in theater construction and he got him to come down



and evaluate the place. He drew up this plan for changing it from a basketball arena to a theater, and then now in the last few years they've changed it from that form to what it is now, which is wonderful. So it's all been a progression of improvements in access for students and the actors, as you've probably noticed, at Thompson Theatre are all students who are in engineering or something else. It's a wonderful opportunity, exposure to the arts, for these people, and the music department's the same way. They've got a variety of opportunities to perform and good people to teach them.

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I was reminded the other day, the symphony downtown did a Copland program just last week, and we got Copland to come down here and speak and conduct, which was really difficult to do. The Harrelson Lecture Series provided an honorarium, which helped to encourage it, but he came down and he worked with our student chorus and the North Carolina Symphony and he was wonderful to work with, the students said. They did a piece from *The Tender Land*, a chorus piece that he did with them and the symphony. There he was, you know, a world-famous composer, not so much a conductor but he did that, and they got so many students. We had a number of programs involving students. He did *The Red Pony* without the students and then he did this *Tender Land* and some other things, but it was a really remarkable performance.

The thing that—. I mean Paul Green – you remember the Green Theatre? – Paul Green came over here with a friend of his, Wesley Wallace. He was sort of an assistant to him. He brought him over to the concert and he was sitting in the audience, and he got so carried away he told me, he said, “You know, NC State is the center of culture for the

University,” which I thought was an exaggeration, [Laughs] but nevertheless it was really wonderful that it has that effect.

VF: You and Gerald Erdahl really kind of planted the seeds for a major flowering of the performing arts here.

HB: I think it did, and I think that the Friends of the College, which lasted only thirty-five years, with all these volunteer workers out in these communities and the attendance from all over, really, I think, laid the groundwork for the growth of the North Carolina Symphony. We had the North Carolina Symphony on the program a number of times. Twice they did Mahler’s eighth symphony, which is this huge—. “Symphony of a thousand,” he called it. But we had student choruses from here, from Meredith, a boys’ choir, seven soloists, just big performances in the coliseum, and did that twice. I’ve forgotten the years now but I could look it up. And we did a program with Duke – let’s see; which was that? – the Duke orchestra. It was toward the end of the series. [Pause] Well. [Pause] Well, we did one with Gerhardt Zimmermann conducting the North  
[00:54:04]

Carolina Symphony, a Hector Berlioz requiem with the NCSU choral organization and the Meredith Chorale. We did a number of things in that—. I can’t put my finger on this Duke thing, but anyway. [Pause] And of course the student music organization, Alpha Phi Omega, served as ushers for the program and we contributed to their program for that.

Well, it’s—. [Pause; searching through papers] Lots of stories, but you know it was a pleasure for me too. Because of this organization and my work with it I went to New York. The Association of College and University Concert Managers had a meeting in

December each year and I went up to that several times, which was a real experience. I made some little notes about that. One of the experiences I had was, at the old Met on Broadway and 39<sup>th</sup> Street Roberta Peters made her debut – I got to hear that – in *Marriage of Figaro*, and that same season Leontyne Price had her introduction to the Metropolitan series in—. Chisholm: that was the name of the family that took care of her, in Laurel, Mississippi.

Interesting point: I notice in looking back over this stuff, the Metropolitan Opera tickets for that particular performance were a dollar and seventy-five cents up to ten dollars, and now, you know, hundreds of dollars for tickets now. I got to meet Francis Robertson, who was the Metropolitan's sort of public relations person, did a wonderful job, highly regarded, a Southerner. He had served with John Caldwell in the Navy, in the Pacific, and at one point later on he had contacted Chancellor Caldwell about the possibility of bringing the Metropolitan Opera to here because he had heard all these things. We discouraged that, said we couldn't really handle the logistics for that, but I thought it was a nice thing. We did have the Metropolitan National Company, which was a company formed by Risë Stevens, and that lasted a very short time because Rudolf Bing did not want to spend that much money. He thought that was a tangent which should not be explored and she was very upset about that. But she came  
[00:57:00]

here with it and they did a couple of operas, did *La Boheme*—. No, not—. Yeah, it was *La Boheme*.

VF: When you would go to these meetings in New York, were people surprised to hear about what was happening in North Carolina?

HB: Yeah, they were, and the agents made a point of [Laughs] mentioning these things. We got a lot of inquiries about how it was done, but nobody really wanted to fit that format. They couldn't believe you could not have reserved seats and you could not sell individual tickets, the niceties that you can in different situations, but you really had to do that to make it work.

VF: You really built a reputation—

HB: Yeah,—

VF: —for yourself in relation to this.

HB: —and I got elected president of that organization and got to meet some of the leading artists' managers. Ronald Wilford was the big Columbia man, who was a difficult man to deal with, but apparently very successful. He *was* successful; he took over the organization, and André Watts told me once, I asked him what he thought, and he said, "He's a horse's patootie but he can get the dates." [Laughs] He was effective in that, and I really think he was the one who was responsible for Peter Gelb getting into the Metropolitan Opera now, because he managed James Levine, who is the star conductor there and music director of the Metropolitan Opera. A lot of the stars were opera people, so he had a good—. Peter Gelb worked for him and the latest thing he did was a division on video for CAMI, Columbia Artists Management. His father was one of the managing editors of the *New York Times*, which didn't hurt, and he'd gone to Japan and worked with Sony over there in their recording.

I had the pleasure of introducing him to our workshop, nice guy, very down to earth, really into electronics. Have you ever been to one of these high definition opera performances in the theater? Well he's responsible for all that and he gets a lot of

criticism of it but he knew what he was doing, and he had done some international video recordings before that. But I think that was a wonderful move he made, really expanded their audience. But he's sort of courageous and he's done interesting things, an interesting guy.

[01:00:00]

VF: Can you tell us about how the Friends of the College—? You stepped down in the late 1980s?

HB: The '87-88 season was my last one, yeah.

VF: And how long did the program continue after that?

HB: Not very long, and let's talk a little bit about that because it is interesting.

[Pause; searching through papers] I'm sorry to be so disorganized here. The last season was just one performance. The last season was '94. In '93 Isaac Stern came back, and the North Symphony with Doc Severinsen, the National Radio Orchestra, Argyll of the Highlands, one of these big British things came, and then the Dresden Staatskapelle was the last in '94. It just wasn't sustainable for a number of reasons. One, there was a lot of competition developing. The audience was far more sophisticated. They wanted to have reserved seats. They wanted to be able to buy tickets. They didn't like the format much. Then we got—. The prices though, for the performers, really skyrocketed.

This is an interesting book, by the way, written by a British music critic: *Who Killed Classical Music?* He talks about the fact that—. [Laughs] "He made it his mission to prove that the business is in fact a sewer of greed and depravity, distinguished from the vulgar pop sister only by pretensions and secrecy." It's a little strong statement, but it is interesting. He goes into great detail about Columbia Artists but he talks about the growth

of artists' fees. For example, José Carreras came here and sang with a quartet. He didn't have any money when he came. He was so poor he just didn't know what he was going to do and so forth. He gave a lovely performance with this quartet with Robert Merrill, and I forgot who else was with him, beautiful concert. Then after that he became one of the highest-paid tenors and he was one of the Three Tenors with Pavarotti and Domingo, and of course they racked it up and they drove prices up so you couldn't afford it. Pavarotti you just couldn't get. I mean he did perform out here at the coliseum in his

[01:03:02]

declining years, I mean at the new basketball place.

For example, the Gewandhaus Orchestra in '78 was twenty-six thousand dollars, in '82 forty-eight thousand dollars, and in '85 seventy thousand dollars. Perlman in '82 was forty-five and in '85 seventy thousand. André Watts in '81 was twenty-four thousand, in '85 sixty thousand. British marching bands went from twenty-three thousand to thirty thousand. So, you know, that's a long way from Leonard Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic for ten thousand dollars. It skyrocketed, so it got to be too expensive to do this thing.

It was sort of a three-legged stool. One leg was you had to have the celebrity artist, a well-known artist which would draw in a huge audience, and the huge audience created the money to make it possible for a low fee. So it had a low fee, big audience, celebrity; that formula worked for a long time, but finally it got to the point where the fees were going up so much that you'd have to charge—. I think the last fee we charged was thirty-five dollars, and that's in—. That was the last, I believe. Let's see. [Pause] Well, twenty-five dollars, and then the last thing ended up being thirty-five dollars.

Of course then, you know, it was always a problem with the coliseum because it was—. I couldn't get dates far enough in advance because basketball was going to take priority, so it was a real struggle to get it. I went back and talked to Jim Valvano and he said, "This is my classroom. A professor cannot be removed from his classroom." You know, he had the Carmichael Gym over there, but nevertheless I can understand it. His job was to create a super basketball team and he didn't give a hoot about the Friends of the College [Laughs] and classical music. But it got to be more and more difficult to use the coliseum and then the coliseum business office began to charge more fees for the use of the coliseum. They were charging parking fees, and that got to be a real hassle. So the fees went up and then of course just, as I say, there was a lot of competition that developed.

VF: What were some of the specific places that were developing that were in competition?

[01:06:00]

HB: Well the North Carolina Symphony, for example, was wonderfully developing, all sorts of musical activities all over the community and in Durham and Chapel Hill. Toward the end of the '80s it was a pretty tough battle. And of course the coliseum, no air conditioning, and it's interesting that just recently they've proposed a change to modify Reynolds Coliseum. Back in the early days Charlie York, who was Willie York's brother and Smedes York's uncle, developed this plan. He was on our board, very interested in music, went to Vienna almost every year, rough and tumble old guy, but he developed this scheme for creating a theater seating with air conditioning in the coliseum. He had it all worked out and it looked very good. Of course it would cost

money, but he could not sell it to the administration. But now they're going to do it. The plans are almost identical to what he had proposed, with air conditioning. We were just too late, and they're not interested in doing this sort of thing over there, so anyhow.

VF: So you guys came in, you and Mr. Erdahl and your group, and had a very opportune moment to create—

HB: That's right.

VF: —broadly accessible programming.

HB: Yeah.

VF: So what did you go on to do after you left the Friends of the College?

HB: Well, I left it when I retired from here and went down and started United Arts Council of Raleigh and Wake County.

VF: And what is that?

HB: Well it has grown now to be a major fundraiser for arts groups in Raleigh and Wake County, particularly for programs in the schools. They just celebrated their twenty-fifth anniversary of the formation of that organization. First it was the Raleigh Community Foundation which then merged with the Wake County Arts Council to form this thing, so that's what I did.

VF: And how do you see the arts programming landscape at NC State and in the area today?

HB: Well, I think the time for bringing in huge orchestras—. They tried it at Chapel Hill and they have brought in a couple but it's just so expensive, really so expensive. I think otherwise it looks very good. Here the students have lots of



opportunities. We, at one point, had the Raleigh Chamber Music Guild performing in this building and then they moved to Stewart Theatre and that was, again, one of these

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things open to students. Not too many took place. Not too many of the people in the music department took place – attended – but nevertheless, there it was; something to think about, look at, hear about. We had the Julliard Quartet; I mean all the major chamber groups came.

I think you just have to encourage the—. Let's see if there's anything else I wanted to mention. [Pause] Oh, yes, another interesting thing, and of course the makeup of the community, the public, had changed. This was the Baby Boomer time. I dug up some statistics. "The Baby Boomer generation, the largest group to form a generation in our history, now reached the median age of thirty-two and makes up half of the adult population and forty percent of the workforce. By 1990 it will provide fifty-one percent of the nation's spending power. Just two small side effects to illustrate the impact they've had on our society: In 1950 there were, in the United States, two hundred and forty-five Little League organizations, in 1960, eleven thousand, and in 1984, only four hundred and forty-five." The pig and the python, this move through the population. "In 1960 seventy-five percent of the population drank coffee. By 1984 this had dropped to forty-two percent." The makeup and interest of the population were changing, and of course we hit the Vietnam business. Of course that was in the '70s and moved on until the end of the '70s.

VF: How did that impact your work and the programming that you were seeing here?

HB: Well it was a mess because it was a wild time. Some of your displays talk about it. They had a cancelation of classes, not permitting—. The chancellor urged people to go to classes. I mean it was just wild. This was the sit-in time; hard to function in those times, yeah.

VF: Did you have a lot of student resistance to any of the work that you were trying to do through Friends of the College?

HB: No, not really, not really. They were more interested—. We did bring—. We had an organization, I've forgotten the exact name of it, but it was all the popular groups. Gus Gusler and some of his friends had a good series of people that came and performed, so we developed that a little bit. Let's see if there's anything else, but I think this business [01:12:01]

about the cost is so interesting. [Pause]

Well, the review of Beverly Sills:

“Incomparable Beverly Sills made her long-awaited first appearance,” February 13, 1978. “It’s an event that was supercharged and Reynolds Coliseum was jammed. Despite chairs in every possible nook and cranny, there were many standees.” This was two nights now, she did this: full coliseum, no curtain behind her. “Thunderous applause greeted her entrance and Miss Sills, looking even more radiant in person than in photographs or on TV, did not disappoint her enthusiastic audience. The program, a relatively short one, was representative of music with which she had been associated throughout her career.” Then he lists some of the things that were performed. “The almost instantaneous standing ovation

which followed Miss Sills' performance of this vocal showpiece," from *Mignon*, "resulted in her announcement of two prepared encores, the first Rossini's *Barber of Seville* and then a Portuguese folksong, 'Tell Me Why You Bid Me Leave You,' which was her traditional recital final, sung in tribute to the late Estelle Liebling, Sills' only voice teacher. The singer had been given this song when she was ten years old as testimony to the remarkable phenomenon which is Beverly Sills."

She had an accompanist at that time, Charles Wadsworth, and these accompanists who came with these—. He was a fabulous guy who started the chamber music program down at the Spoleto in Charleston in the Dock Street Theatre, I think it is, down there, and it just got to be a stellar part of the Spoleto program down there, and he started Lincoln Center programs. But he was an accompanist and a performer and a composer. The quality of these people.

David Garvey came with Leontyne Price and he was just a wonderful guy, kept her, you know, and he was saying, "Oh, we had to—." He was rehearsing in the music department on a Baldwin piano and he was trying to clean this thing off a little bit — she was trying to clean it — and he said, "Oh, no. Don't touch it." She said, "Oh, I just believe in using—" what's that spray called, Glow? I've forgotten. It's common. "—on the piano," [01:15:05]

And he said, "Oh, no." He was amazing.

Then Perlman had an accompanist who came, and after his second performance of his first concert here Perlman called me up and said, "He's in the emergency ward. He says he's got some sort of heart problem," and he said, "I thought I noticed a little bit of

his timing.” Well before that concert that night he had come to me, after we had opened the doors, and wanted me to clear the place out so he could practice, and I said it can’t be done. He said, “Well, if Itzhak Perlman wanted this–.” So he was a little upset, but he went on and apparently his heart was the problem. But he was very valuable to Perlman as an accompanist. Then he went to the emergency at Rex and was in intensive care there, and they asked me to bring his stuff in from the hotel. I went down and got into his room and he had a table, about the size of this, which was covered with little medicine bottles. He had medicine bottles and medicine bottles. Apparently he had this sequence of taking these pharmaceuticals, which was unbelievable, and he was in the clutches of some heart doctor who had prescribed all this stuff. [Laughs] So I gathered them all up and put them in a basket and took them to him. So, you do run into this sort of thing.

VF: Did you have any personal favorite performances that really stand out in your mind?

HB: Oh, gosh. That’s hard to say. I think some of the symphony performances were my favorites. They really worked best in the coliseum. The vocalists had to be amplified, and that was not quite as good as it could have been for that reason. But, I don’t know. I suppose the Leonard Bernstein concert was right up there with them, and then Eugene Ormandy really was a wonderful guy when you got to know him. He was handicapped from the polio but he was very easy to work with, and I was amazed. He was pleased. He said, the second time he came back, “It was a little bit better. It worked a little bit better this time. I think the weather was a little bit better.” But he brought his wife along and talked about their–. He had one wife who died and he said, “I went to Vienna and got another wife.” [Laughs] He was an interesting guy, one of the great

[01:18:03]

record sellers of the orchestra. I don't think they rank him up with the best in conductors but he was right near the top.

So, anyway, that's-. Of course the Sills thing. After the Sills thing Jim Hunt opened the governor's mansion for a little reception for her, and that was nice.

VF: Did you know Jim Hunt when he was a student here?

HB: Yeah, I came here when he was a student running for his second term as president of the student body, and he had this cadre of people who went on to be part of his administration, Eddie Knox, Phil Carlton. You've got a lot of them in the-. I can't remember off the top of my head. Norris Tolson. And he never stopped. I remember I mentioned this to his wife. She was down here at that time and I told her later on I remembered him campaigning, and she said, "Oh, yeah. That's all he does." [Laughs] He's a great campaigner; very supportive.

VF: Did you remain colleagues or friends over the course of his career as governor and was he involved with the Friends of the College?

HB: Well he was very supportive, giving that reception for Beverly Sills, and he would come to some of the concerts. It made it a little difficult because you had to clear room for the state trooper to sit right there behind him, his bodyguard, and he was threatened sometimes, you know. It was interesting that he was. You know Banks Talley worked for him for a time in the administrative office down there. So, he was very helpful.

Hugh-. It's terrible when you get to be my age and you forget names. Hugh Cannon was Terry Sanford's administrative assistant and he was very helpful with

problems. We had traffic problems and he said, "Well, the highway patrol does traffic for the basketball games. We'll get them." So he told them to do it, because he could. He was the governor's assistant. So for a while the traffic control was done with the highway patrol, which worked out really well, but then as soon as he was out of office they sort of played it out and it was discouraging. We had all these buses that came in from all these little towns and we'd fill up that one side lot of the coliseum with buses, which was fine, and got people in all right. But when the weather got bad these damn buses would want to turn on their heaters and they'd gear up their motors and the fumes would become—. You [01:21:00]

had to send somebody around to tell them to turn off the motors and they didn't want to do it. It was just a hassle. I remember it interrupted some concert endings, you know, encore sort of things.

But entertaining these entertainers just—. The Berlin Philharmonic brought trunks of beer into the coliseum for their folks.

VF: For the audience or for the performers?

HB: For the performers. No, you couldn't—. Alcohol was prohibited for the coliseum, at least it was then. But those Germans liked to have their beer so they brought it in, and they were very happy with that.

VF: Where would performers stay when they were in Raleigh?

HB: Well, early on the Sir Walter was *the* hotel, and there wasn't much else. But then after that they were all over the place. They would get whatever the management could arrange. I didn't have to do that, happily. So, it was something else. [Pause]

Let's see what I have left out here that I wanted to mention. Well, you were talking about students. There was an interesting incident when we had one of these concerts involving students in professional performances. This was when we had— Betty Allen was performing with William Warfield, who was a famous black singer, and he sang with the student chorus and student orchestra, which was part student and part community professionals. It was an interesting thing. They were doing *Belshazzar's Feast*, as I remember, a long choral number, and the critic, Brian Haizlit, just took the concert apart. He was very critical of it and his point of view was, "You're selling this concert as a professional series," and so forth and so on, "and here we are with—," and he was critical of the students. Betty Allen was incensed so she called up Claude Sitton, who was editor of the *News & Observer* then, and—. Am I running out of your time?

VF: Absolutely not, no. We will keep you as long as you can stay. [Laughs]

HB: Anyway, she wrote this letter to the editor. She went down to see him, because she remembered him from the *New York Times* in New York, and he was willing to talk to her, [Laughs] but it really upset him when she—.

"When I arrived in Raleigh I was taken to the rehearsal at the coliseum and was filled with admiration when I saw the youthful orchestra in a time when the arts is shaky and artistic series and cultural centers in a [01:24:04]

state of collapse. It was heartening indeed to see so many young people prepared to give their all. I stress this, for if anything is to save us it is our young. The stimulation, the interest gained by working with professionals, is invaluable," because we tried to do some of this, you know. "In this day

of youthful estrangement the orchestra is remarkable. They are not the New York Philharmonic. No one knows this better than I. For the past two seasons I have been guest soloist for their final concerts with Leonard Bernstein. No one in the coliseum surely expects them to be. However, if they work and persist they will be a very valuable part of your community as well as a nucleus of young people who will be future audience.

“If music in this form is to survive, the juxtaposition of an English oboist,” who was one of our faculty members, formerly first chair with Beechum, “and a fifteen-year-old playing first cello is surely an admirable community effort, to say nothing of the way to bridge the generational gap. They had all obviously worked hard, and I can only wish that Mr. Haizlit,” the critic, “would have judged them by my shortcomings and failures in a truer light. I for one cannot be sure of the quality of anyone’s sound or true capabilities in a hall sitting twelve thousand equipped with microphones and speakers. Nevertheless, those who come, and many seem to come from miles afar, know this and persist in their support because they obviously believe that they can get unsurpassed value for their money,” and so forth.

Then she goes on and talks about some of the points in the criticism, but I think the point she’s making, that this is the sort of thing that is so valuable for the future, to get young people involved, and involved with professionals.

VF: And especially at a school like NC State where there is no major or–



HB: That's right. We try to do that in the theater and the good little dance company that the student center sponsors. Robin Harris is the person who runs that and does a beautiful job. But that's all volunteer, non dance majors. [Pause] So, I think I've covered a lot of that stuff.

VF: If I can ask also, having been an undergraduate at UNC-Chapel Hill, what [01:27:00] sort of difference do you see in the students and the climate of the university here at NC State?

HB: Well, of course I went there in 1948, [Laughs] so it was little different after the war. A lot of veterans and GI Bill people; it was just a different thing then than it is now, at Chapel Hill. But I have noticed, on this campus, after we got through that era of the Vietnam protests and all that, the student body here is very serious, very devoted, best I can tell, focused and interested in things. I mean this library is a wonderful example of that. You see the groups forming and it's just a different student body, serious. None of this garbage [Laughs] that was going on, you know, burn everything down. But it's very impressive, I think, the student body now. When I first came here I had the same feeling about the students, and then we entered that difficult era.

VF: Do you think there's something unique about NC State that also made it possible to put on the sort of programming that the Friends of the College did?

HB: Well there was nothing else. I mean at Chapel Hill I guess there was some competition from the Playmakers and the theater and from some of the music department, because they had an active music department there, but there was none of that here. So it was a vacuum – almost a vacuum – that we moved into, and that was what made it

possible. Of course the art thing, getting the wing on the former Talley Center, got the arts moving forward in a significant way, and of course the new center over at the old chancellor's house, the Gregg Museum, is going to be another step forward, which is going to be a major asset to the campus. So NC State has developed into, I think, a very significant—. Attendance at the Thompson Theatre is amazing. I mean they sold out for a lot of these things. So I think the whole business has worked beautifully. I'm very encouraged by it.

VF: It's a great compliment from Paul Green, to say that NC State is the center of culture for the University.

HB: Well, it was. It was hyperbole but it was—. [Laughs] He was really moved by it. Aaron Copland, I think, was the thing that got him.

VF: Did you get to know Paul Green very well?

HB: I met him, talked to him a few times, but he was pretty much in retirement by then. When I was a student he met with students. Well, I know I've rambled too much.

VF: No, absolutely not. We could go on for as long as possible.

[01:30:03]

HB: Let's see if there's anything I wanted to mention. There were some periods when we had—. Once, you know, Roberta Peters sang, in '63-64, with Jan Peerce. Jan Peerce and Richard Tucker were brothers-in-law. They were both Jewish cantors, which is where a lot of opera stars got their training, and it was very good training. Tucker was considered at one time, far more than Pavarotti – well Pavarotti didn't exist on the radar then, but Tucker was in that position as the leading tenor of the Met, worldwide tenor, and he came here a number of times. He was a delightful guy. The only problem I had

with him once was these people, backstage, are a little—. There are lot of superstitions and he had one, which was he had to have Sanka coffee before he went on to perform. Have you heard this story?

VF: No.

HB: He had to have hot Sanka, so I had to prepare hot Sanka and have it in his dressing room so he could have it. Well I overdid it. I made some Sanka and then I had a thermos of hot water so I could make some more if it was needed, and I had the grounds there. Well he came in and he saw the hot water and the grounds and he broke into a sweat, and he started to pour the grounds and the hot water together. I finally showed him where the real Sanka was, but he was just—. I've never seen—. I don't think he could have gone on if he hadn't gotten that Sanka. So you just run into this sort of thing. Not many others like that.

Yehudi Menuhin's sister, Hephzibah, performed with him – she was his accompanist – and he came in to perform, and we got almost to intermission and she said, “I don't have the score for the next piece I'm supposed to play. I can't play without that score. Go down to the Sir Walter and get it.” So, [Laughs] I went down. She gave me the key and I went down to the Sir Walter and explained to the desk [what I was doing]. I went in and the room was filled with Tiger's Milk and all this sort of stuff. I couldn't find any score and I went back, and she went down and she couldn't find the score. This was the intermission so the audience was sort of waiting and itchy. They decided to play something else that they did have a score for. She explained later. She said, “I had this  
[01:33:02]

problem of stage fright. I went to a psychiatrist and my psychiatrist said, ‘Take the score. You’ve always got that to fall back on and you’re okay, as long as it’s there.’” She said, “I don’t really use it but as long as it’s there I’m fine, but without that score I just can’t play.” Isn’t that interesting, and you find that sort of thing, a lot of it.

Anyway, they always had their quirks. Merrill and Tucker performed together and they were—. I’d gotten the idea for this particular concert from a recording that Merrill had done with Jussi Björling, the Swedish tenor, old recording, beautiful, of duets, tenor and baritone duets. So I proposed to the management that they get them to do it, and they [grumbled] but they finally agreed to do it. They came down and performed and it was a beautiful concert. You know there’s a lot of baritone and tenor operatic stuff that they could perform, and they did, and it was a great success. As a result they went on tour doing that sort of thing, and that’s when Tucker died, during that tour he died, and it was really kind of moving.

Then there was Rubinstein, who was an interesting guy. Sol Hurok was his manager and Hurok managed a lot of the Russian people. There was a little thing he wrote. Rubinstein, we finally got him to agree to come, and I don’t know quite how they got him because he was so in demand. He was more in demand than Van Cliburn. [Pause; searching papers] Harold Schonberg wrote a little piece about him – yeah – about him as a performing artist and how they communicated. He said:

“Performing artists’ egos are very sensitive and must be carefully considered. They come in all shapes. A number of years ago Harold Schonberg, the *New York Times* music critic, described Artur Rubinstein’s touch. He recorded Rubinstein on young, American pianists. ‘You know,’

Rubinstein said, ‘they are fabulous. They play better than I do. No, I’m not joking. I mean it. Such technique! Such musicianship! They do things I wouldn’t begin to attempt.’ Rubinstein paused and let the point sink in.

[01:36:01]

‘They might as well be soda jerks,’ [Laughs] he said.

“Nobody has ever accused Rubinstein of coming on stage like a soda jerk. When he strides out, walking briskly, and as often as not dodging the people who were lucky enough to get seats on the stage, it’s one of the few regal entrances music has left to offer. He is a master at audience control. His audience waits, breathless,” and he did it when he was here. “Rubinstein is in no hurry. He must compose himself. He must think of the opening piece. He must wait for the last cough to dissipate before he puts his hands to the keyboard. Suddenly the auditorium is filled with the golden piano sound and the Rubinstein concert is underway.”

And he did it here. When he would come out to the audience he had this sort of, you know, thanking them with his hands. I’ve never seen anybody do it quite like he did. Talking to him before the concert, he said, “Don’t let the tuner wipe those keys. I like them sticky,” and, “I’m seventy-eight years old. I don’t need to rehearse anymore. If I don’t know it now, I’ll never know it.”

VF: What would you say you’re most proud of from your time here, having accomplished through the Friends of the College?

HB: Well I think the whole cultural program, having a role in that – and it was a role; there were many other people involved – is the thing that I really look back on with

great pleasure, because I think it has—. We had a series of lectures. We had all sorts of—. Dos Passos was here speaking, Albee spoke. I haven't brought a list of them, but a whole string of outstanding writers came and spoke at the student center. Anyhow—. [Bell tone] There you go. Time's up.

VF: No, that's—. [Laughs] That's a false alarm. I'm sorry about that. So was the writing series, the writers' program, in place when you first arrived here or was that something that you—?

HB: No, that's something that developed. Sam Ragan had come out and done a writers' workshop for us at the student center. I've forgotten how long that lasted but that was his love, because he was the *News & Observer* editor, assistant editor, down there and he had a column called "Southern Accent" in which he published poetry on the editorial page, which was [Laughs] unusual. He did a lot, worked with writers all over the state. He was an outstanding man for writers and did the program down in Southern Pines, got that center developed down there.

[01:39:01]

But that's the sort of thing that—. [Pause] We had Rudolf Serkin perform. He was an interesting pianist, well known, probably the better pianist of any we brought here. We walled off a smaller section for his performance. He traveled with his own grand piano and his own piano tuner and they came down and set the thing up, and he just played so beautifully you blocked out everything in the coliseum except his music. He asked me, "Bellissimo?" I said, "Yes, indeed."

But you did discover these performers are—. Claudio Arrau came, he was a famous pianist, and I told him about the train coming by, that the coliseum—. That was

another problem we had. That train would come by. Not frequently but sometimes it would hit just before a performance and they'd have to wait until it got past. It made a lot of noise. I told Arrau that that could happen and he said, "It doesn't bother me. I was in Mexico City performing in their wonderful concert hall down there and I looked up at the end of the program and the audience was streaming out. I discovered that there had been an earthquake," and he said, "I felt a little something," but the earthquake went on and he didn't pay a bit of attention. He was so concentrated on his music that he just went right on and he ignored the earthquake. They have that concentration, which you've got to have.

VF: So what piece of advice would you give to students today at NC State who are—?

HB: Well I think to take advantage of the cultural opportunities that are available and broaden your experience. It's here, free, it's well done, and just a little effort can make a lot of difference, and I've looked at them and said this. So I think it's a good thing. It's a good thing. [Pause; searching through papers]

You know how the audiences—. You go to those high definition opera things and [01:42:06]

the person who's interviewing will say "toi, toi" to them as they go out, as a "break a leg" sort of thing. Well these singers all have something different. Some would cross themselves, some would say, "Let's go" to the accompanist, some would say, "God bless," some would say this, that, and the other. Marilyn Horne, very distinguished lady, she said to her accompanist, "Merde!" and then she'd go on stage. [Laughs] Anyway, you never know.

VF: Did any performers seem to have any kind of culture shock coming to the South?

HB: Well when they first saw it, if they hadn't—. Sure. They were, "What am I doing here?" [Laughs] But then once the audience got going it was fine, yeah, and the fact that we had so many returns. You know, otherwise they would have not done it, I think. The fee was important but they would not have done it. I think they are—. [Pause]

There was a concert, Carreras, Beverly Wolff, Robert Merrill, and Patricia Brooks did a quartet, and we did a number of these quartets because it gave them a chance for a variety of things. Beverly Wolff was an interesting woman. She had apparently done a lot of workshops with students who wanted to be singers and they just flocked backstage. I don't know where they came from but they came to see her. She was a wonderful person, a lovely person, but she smoked like a bandit. I couldn't believe that an opera singer would smoke but she was just a smokestack. I didn't really comment on that, [Laughs] but it was an amazing thing. Dancers smoke a lot, at least they did then. Apparently it has a calming effect. I don't know exactly why. You did dancing. Is that true?

VF: I wouldn't know, but it is a surprising quality.

HB: Yeah, I think it's not so much so now. Smoking has been so—.

VF: Were you involved with bringing Martha Graham here? I know Martha Graham's company performed.

HB: Yes, she did, and let me see just when that was. Let's see, dance companies.  
[Pause; searching through papers]

[01:45:00]



Well, I've got them listed this way. [Pause] I'll give you a copy of these things if you're interested, because-. Let's see. [Pause] I guess Martha Graham did not-. They did a number of her pieces.

VF: Do you remember having any personal interaction with her? Did you meet her?

HB: No.

VF: Okay.

HB: Oh, yeah. She was here in '86. That's right. I don't remember that I ever-. That was the dance company. Whether she came or not, I can't remember. She probably did not. The North Carolina Dance Theatre, which was a pretty active program at the time, performed here in '83 with Mel Tomlinson. I was down at a thing celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the arts council downtown the other night, and there he was. I remembered he came and it was an ecstatic reception he got. He was a wonderful dancer, went to Ligon here and then he went on, and Betty Kovach was his teacher here in Raleigh.

Let's see if there's some comment here. Yeah, "One of the most pleasant surprises was the audience reception given the North Carolina Dance Theatre and guest Mel Tomlinson late last year. 'There was as much excitement over that dance company as any dance company we've had,'" I said, [Laughs] "Bowers said," but I don't remember saying it, "which is quite a compliment because the list included the New York City Ballet and the American Ballet Theatre." He was remarkable. He looked like he had no limb control at all, just a beautiful dancer. But he looked good, he was still there, he

vaguely remembered it but not well. But I think it gave him a real boost because it was a big audience for it.

VF: Well, Mr. Bowers, this has been so amazing. These stories are just priceless. You've seen so much and experienced some incredible moments.

HB: Well here's the list by orchestras – well, different music groups – and here's the season list, which is relatively accurate.

[01:48:01]

VF: Great. [Pause; searching through papers] Well I think we've kept you so long.

HB: [Laughs] Well I've kept you too long.

VF: We can't thank you enough for sharing all this with us.

HB: Well you're a good interviewer and very patient.

VF: Thank you. Well I want to give you an opportunity, if there's anything else you want to share with us today before we wrap it up, otherwise we can just–.

HB: No, I can't–. Some of these other managers–. Sol Hurok was an interesting guy. He was a very famous Russian and he would give a party for the Association of Colleges and Universities. He did one at a major hotel in New York, I've forgotten the name, but he insisted that everybody who came had to wear black tie. So here we go up to New York lugging black tie, knowing this in advance, and a lot didn't want to fool with that. But he would have cocktails, a full course meal, entertainment, magicians and so forth, and that's what he did. He's the one that got Rubinstein to come down here, so it was interesting to get to know him. He had–. Who was the–? Well, we had booked one performer from him and he had called up and said that she had been offered a wonderful

opportunity to perform at another place which would mean a lot to her career if we could just cancel that contract. We agreed to do it and he was very grateful, so he sent the board a big tub of beluga caviar. [Laughs] I mean a lot of money in that. So we had a board meeting and had a caviar party. But it was interesting, yeah. He did that. He was the one who booked Marian Anderson. He was a big supporter of Marian Anderson. I got to meet her. She was regal, a beautiful woman.

VF: You've done so much for this university and this—.

HB: Oh, I haven't done that much. You're kind to even say that. You know, John Caldwell was an exceptional chancellor and he was so involved in this. Stewart Theatre brought all these wonderful performers down there. We had the original cast of John [01:51:05]

Houseman's American Theatre Company of *The Robber Bridegroom*, with Patti LuPone, Kevin Kline, all performing there on the stage of Stewart Theatre. It was wonderful, all these wonderful performers that came a lot through John Houseman's — and he came once. We did a program called "Thirty Days of the Thirties" and he did a play, *The Cradle Will Rock*, which was a thing during the—. This was all Depression stuff. But Stewart Theatre's program is—. I think they're going to put out a history of it, but we had tremendous theater performances in Stewart Theatre, wonderful, professional theater.

VF: What is your hope for the future of cultural programming here at the university? What would you like to see happen in the next generations?

HB: Well, I think just continue what they're doing and improving it. I wish the coliseum would cooperate. I emailed the architect [Laughs] and suggested that. Athletes are going to run places. That's just the way it is. They have to accept the fact. I mean

that's designed as sort of a reward for athletic events, but it could very easily be a major performing center, which we really need on the campus. We don't have anything like that, of that size, and it would adapt very well, but that's not in the cards.

VF: Shall we--.

HB: Well, thank you.

[01:52:50]

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcriber: Deborah Mitchum

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