

9-29-2015

## Neil Sorrell - Interview with Mark Slobin

Neil Sorrell

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### Recommended Citation

Sorrell, Neil. "Interview with Mark Slobin." Wesleyan Graduate Studies in Music - Oral History of International Graduate Students. (September 29, 2015) [http://wescholar.wesleyan.edu/grad\\_oralhist/15](http://wescholar.wesleyan.edu/grad_oralhist/15)

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Mark Slobin: Great to see you.

Neil Sorrell: You too.

MS: Here we are, so many years later. So, yeah, this project is great. I mean, I like getting in touch with everybody and I like the idea of leaving this archive of, for future generations to find out how this program really worked, and you're great 'cause you go back to such an exciting, more formative period. So, I have a kind of list of things I'm kind of doing with everybody so it'll be, you know, fairly standard the whole thing, if you don't mind. We'll cover some of those along the way. So, let me just start at the beginning—when were you born and how did you, and what years were you at Wesleyan?

NS: When was I born?

MS: Well, I mean it's nice to get.

NS: Forty-six.

MS: OK, so you're just a shade younger than me. Right, right. And when did you get to Wesleyan?

NS: I don't know, maybe 1969, I went there, like in the fall semester, 1969. So I was there for two years, yeah.

MS: Two years, right. So, how did you hear about Wesleyan and what brought you here?

NS: Well, I was studying for my master's in London with Nazir Jairazbhoy, and yeah, so he had been invited on some kind of lecture tour to the States, so he visited various schools. And he came back to London and he was enthusing about all these places, but particularly Wesleyan. And he said—Yeah, and at that time you see, the UK had almost nothing going on. The master's was about as far as you could go, so he says, right, if you want to carry on with this, you're gonna have to go to America. And he said Wesleyan would be a great place. So I thought, fine, I don't know anything about anything, so I'll just do what I'm told. So he said apply, so I did, and got accepted, and so I went.

MS: So you just turned up, right.

NS: And he left as well, of course.

MS: Yes, that's when I met Nazir, was right around then.

NS:—went to Canada, and I went to Wesleyan.

MS: So, when you got there, how surprised were you, in a sense, at the way a strange American place like that worked, 'cause that was quite a curious period in general.

NS: Well, not surprised because I had—it—yeah, I had no particular expectations or preconceived ideas, so I just took things as they came. But, it certainly was different. It shook me

up. I mean, there was nothing—I was just thinking earlier, in this country, anything that was remotely similar to it, the only place I could think of was, like, Dartington College of Arts, because they had a very liberal approach, all kinds of crazy things went on, and they had a small visiting artist program—that was the thing, so they had Indian musicians there teaching sitar and stuff. That was unheard of. So, and I thought, OK, so Wesleyan is that kind of thing, only multiplied fifty times, you know. ‘Cause that was it, a huge program, visiting artists, so it was just unbelievable, you know, you’re suddenly thrown into this place which is full of graduate students all over the place, and then visiting artists representing what seems to be every culture on Earth almost. And the other thing was, for the first time—I suppose, it’s, in London it doesn’t really count, because that was a kind of rarefied atmosphere and there were only a few of us studying there, but otherwise the idea that you go to a music department where the main thing going on is non-Western music, so the experience of, that Western music becomes the exotic outsider. [both laugh] That, you know, it literally turned things on their heads for me and just about every preconceived idea about music flipped.

MS: Exactly. What was your music background before that? How did you get interested in music at all?

NS: Well, I mean, I’d been sort of into music as a kid, and then I just went and did it through school. And then I went to Cambridge to do my B.A., my bachelor’s, which of course was a strictly Western music background, and—but it’s there actually that I started getting interested in these other things. And I always tell people it was partly as a kind of antidote for this cripplingly boring music course I was doing. I thought, I’ve got to find other things in life, because I can’t go on for three years doing this sort of thing. So I joined this, what’s called an “Asian music circle” I think, and it met in this guy’s house, and they were just listening to recordings of Indian music, which I’d never heard in my life. But again, it just changed things, and I thought, this is not only a music—I don’t understand it—but what grabbed me was the way people were listening to it, and I thought, I’ve never seen people listening to music and reacting to it in this way. There’s gotta be something in this music I need to study. So, I started studying what I could about Indian music, and then I found a little bit about things like gamelan, so, you know, it was like, reading books, listening to recordings, going to occasional concerts. And people on the faculty were just—I remember one guy who said, when you leave this place, for goodness’ sake, go and find somewhere where you can go and study these things. And I thought, right, I’ll do that.

MS: So that’s how it happened—

NS: And then, SOAS—

MS: So, when you got to Wesleyan, how did you decide what to study? Since you came at the high point—I think the year I came, in ’71—

NS: Well, I developed—

MS: I think the year I came, ’71, was the most number of grad students and visiting artists and fellows and that sort of thing. So you were there really at the peak of variety, as you said. So how did you—

NS: Yeah.

MS: How did you figure out what you wanted to study?

NS: Well, it's quite simple, really, because I'd got into Indian music, and then developed quite a strong interest in that, and then, by accident, I heard that there was this guy called Jairazbhoy teaching—well, not even then, he wasn't even teaching a course, but they said, you should go and meet him, so I went to London to meet him. And he said he was just starting up this M.A. course, so he signed me up for that. So I spent a whole year just immersed in Indian music with him, and so when I came to Wesleyan, it was to do a Ph.D. in Indian music. That's all I knew. But of course, when I got there, it was like everything else—the gamelan was there and I thought, well, I've always been interested in that, but I've never had a chance to see one or play in one, so of course I joined that. And, you know, just tried to take an interest in all the other things on offer, you know, Japanese music and, oh, I don't know, there was just so many different classes. So, I was just too—I thought, actually, I'm not really doing my Ph.D. at all, I'm just sort of soaking up all these musical experiences I found in the place, but I thought well, that's kind of a good thing to do, 'cause that'll be my only chance in life to be with these guys. I can go research and write a Ph.D. more or less anytime, anyplace—well, that's what I thought. So, I focused on that. And of course I took some courses on Indian culture and beginning Sanskrit, and goodness knows what/ But I was quite happy to be distracted like that and do other things. But Indian music was the thread running through that—that's what I thought, well, that's what I've gotta do, and I've gotta go to India and spend time there, and study there and all the rest of it. So that was still the plan.

MS: But Bob Brown was just finishing, so who did you study with, actually?

NS: Yeah, Bob Brown—

MS: He was on his way out.

NS: Yeah, well, I had about—I had about five or six advisors, you know, because first, Bob Brown, and as you say, in the summer of 1970, I think, he moved to Cal Arts.

MS: Exactly, yeah.

NS: So then, they switched me over I think to Ted Grame, and then, he kind of looked after me vaguely while I was there, but, as I said, I wasn't really—the amount of work I did on anything like a thesis at that time was negligible, so I didn't really have to sort of meet an advisor very often, at all. (unintelligible) getting on and doing all these other things. And then, when I left, it was odd because I thought, I've got to go and do at least a year's fieldwork, that was the sacred cow of ethnomusicology, in those days. I still remember Blacking saying that, I insist, you know, all my Ph.D. students must do at least one year's fieldwork. And I thought, well, OK, so that's how it was. I thought, right, I've got to go and do a year in India in that case. Who's gonna pay for that? And, fortunately, it was—I was falling between two stools because Dick Winslow said, oh, well you could get a Rockefeller grant or something. He said, oh yeah, you get that. And they said, no you can't, you're British, you can't—So, then I tried the Commonwealth universities, and they said, but you're not studying in a Commonwealth university, so you're ineligible for

that. So, I fell between those stools, I said, look, what am I gonna do? And, do you remember Barbara Benary at all?

MS: Yes, I know, I know Barbara.

NS: She's a composer and did South Indian (unintelligible) and I'd heard that she had managed to get Wesleyan to support her fieldwork in Madras or something for her master's. So I said, OK, well you did this for her, why don't you do it for me? 'Cause otherwise I can't do anything. And they were great, they said, OK, you can just carry on your graduate assistantship as if I was still in Middletown.

MS: Really, really. Those were the days.

NS: So I was a year in India, basically at Wesleyan's expense, for which I'm eternally grateful.

MS: Yes, indeed.

NS: And at the end of that, I came back to England because there was no point going back to America, that was kind of finished. So, while I was there, they got—Tsuge was an advisor. You remember Tsuge?

MS: Yes, yes.

NS: Yeah? He kind of took it on for a bit. And, I'm wondering even if David McAllester ever got involved. It's possible—all sorts of people, they were just wondering where—who on earth could sort of take me on because they had no real Indian specialists there when Bob left, you know. And then Jon Higgins came back from Toronto, I think it was, and joined the faculty at Wesleyan, so they said, OK, he can be your advisor. And he looked after me until the end, which was quite a few years later. But there it is. I tell people here I was ending up doing this thing like a correspondence course.

MS: Oh all right, I see, yeah. Well, I was Jon's advisor, I mean, that was very odd, you know. When I first came, and I was so young, I end up being Jon Higgins' advisor and Viswanathan's advisor, David Reck's advisor, because Bob Brown had left. It fell to me, and I didn't really know anything about that music, but it was, you know it was a great privilege to work with those guys.

NS: Yeah, yeah.

MS: So, among the fellow students, I mean, what was the atmosphere like among the students? There were so many grad students, what was the sort of regular life like?

NS: Well, it was—well, I don't know, in fact like, extremely lively—as I said, it was like, there just seemed to be so many graduate students around the place doing so many different things. As I said, I don't think I hardly met anybody doing Western classical music. They were all doing ethno things, a few were doing African-American, but all sorts of different things, from all over the world, I mean it was just such a hotspot, I'd never mixed such—And they were great, I mean, they were just open to so many things. I remember there were people like, Paul Berliner was in

the class there. And Hewitt Pantaleoni, I remember him being very, like, a bit of a leader figure because he was older than the rest of us.

MS: Oh, that's right, yeah.

NS: And he got me into sort of African drumming, and it was, yeah, but—You know, you think, oh god, the clichés about the sixties and everything, and everything was very *laissez faire*, so everything was great, you know. Everything you did was great. But I did hear the other side of things, it's not like we were all totally complacent. Because I remember David McAllester, probably, who was sort of saying, well it worries me a little bit that our reputation around the states is not good. Because, you know, that we just allow students to do what they like and no one does any serious work, there's no scholarship going on, everyone's just mucking about, playing music and hanging out and stuff. Which is absolutely true, and I thought, but this is, this is absolutely great. [both laugh] But it was, it was all round that way—it was just loads of ensembles, concerts all the time, Bob Brown and his famous curry concert series, ever hear of those? They were great, I mean, so it was just a nice atmosphere, because you cooked food and you'd eat food and you'd have this concert in a quite informal way. I mean, these were things I just had not experienced. And, you know, then things like John Cage turns up and hangs out a bit. I just thought, this is just, almost surreal. That's why I have such strong memories of it, and such fond ones, I'd say there's nowhere like it, in my experience. And it did, it changed everything, I just thought, I've been completely altered now from the kind of rather narrow-minded, conservative kind of guy I probably was before, to all these things, thinking, wow, I almost don't know which way to turn now.

MS: Exactly, exactly. What were the, where there—what were the classes like? There were actual seminars and classes and all that sort of thing?

NS: Well, I remember, I think Bob Brown vaguely tried to start a seminar with me and a couple of others doing various things to do with India, but I remember it didn't get anywhere at all, because we were all so different, and, I don't know, it just got abandoned. The one thing I do remember was, the—there was a weekly, and it was called an ethnomusicology seminar, as far as I remember, and a lot of faculty turned up to it. Bob Brown was usually around, at least in that year, Ted Grame was always there, David McAllester turned up quite a lot, and what happened was that, occasionally, you know, faculty would give some kind of a presentation. And I still remember David McAllester's, they've stayed in my memory ever since, 'cause I thought, again, I'd never seen anybody give lectures like that before. I mean, you know how he was, he'd just sort of [come] in, and then just after a bit he'd start singing some Native American song, and then he'd go off and start telling us all kinds of—I remember he told us Comanche riddles and stuff, and a very very long Inuit folk tale, which I just went away thinking, wow, this is the funniest thing I've ever heard in my life, and I've been telling people ever since. Those sort of things, I thought, well, if this is ethnomusicology, that's great by me. And the graduates were asked to give presentations occasionally, so we would think of something. And I remember Paul Berliner, we were given an assignment, like to present different aspects of notation or something like that. So I transcribed some Indian thing and came in and talked about that, because it was weird, and it was doing my head in, as they say, and I needed help with it. And I think Paul Berliner, it must have been—or somebody, I—just came in and said, here's my transcription, and he put on, like, a radio of some really loud heavy metal something, and started tearing his hair

and screaming. And I thought, this is quintessential Wesleyan, you know, just crazy things. So, you can see, it was not the kind of heavy theoretical—And I thought, well, you know, I don't know what I'm learning about ethnomusicology. I'm learning lots of different attitudes and crazy things people think and do, and I've got to try and piece it all together, but it was beautifully unstructured, so you'd never know one week to the next what was going to happen. And I thought, well I don't know if I'm ever going to learn all the kind of theory and background and method, the rest of ethnomusicology. Bits kind of filtered through, but it was so kind of beautifully chaotic somehow. And various people tried, but the ethos just didn't seem to be in tune with that, it's just people wanted just to do crazy things, and particularly—I mean, the great thing was that they wanted to make music, and I thought, well, after all, that's not a bad thing—come to a music department and people actually want to be making sounds and learning performance and stuff like that. I thought, well that's fine by me.

MS: Now were there composers around doing composition that you were connected with at all?

NS: Well, a few, yeah, there were—I mean, obviously Dick Winslow was there, and Alvin Lucier joined around that time, and I thought, right, I'll go to his class, which was called “electronic music” and, typical—I don't think, apart from maybe having a tape recorder in the room, I'm not sure we did anything electronic, but so many other things happened. He was just bringing in guest people all the time, like, you know, members of his group and Christian Wolff, and various people that—famous, and I just thought, well, you know, I'll just listen to these guys talk, I don't know what they're gonna say, but—And then there were, there was at least one Ph.D. composition student I can remember, a guy called Ken Maui, and he was into the most crazy things.

MS: Right.

NS: It's not like I've no idea about these things, because in England at that time, there were things going on, and I remember that, the interesting things was—and people have said this before, they said, you go to America and meet composers there, and say you're from England, they're not going to start talking about Benjamin Britten and people like that. They're going to talk about Cornelius Cardew, and first thing—have you met Cornelius Cardew, do you know these people? And I thought, well, actually I haven't, but when I came back to England, I made sure I did (unintelligible) with all the English experimental people, thinking, that's who they're mad about in America, so there must be something in this.

MS: Interesting.

NS: But again, these sort of composers—Richard Teitelbaum, I remember him. He was, well what was he? A sort of a electronic music guy, but a sort of composer. But—

MS: He had a world music band, where they would just get together and play, right?

NS: Oh god, you heard about that?

MS: Yeah yeah, I saw that, yeah.

NS: Oh, that was one of the—him and Alvin, the things they—yeah, ‘cause, yeah, Teitelbaum’s world music band, I thought, well, we’ve all got to join that, so I joined it, played sarangi, which I hardly knew how to play at the time, but I’d got one and I’d got some lessons from the tabla player, Sharda Sahai, who taught me. His brother played, so he taught me some bad fingering and I just tried. And, so we all sit around improvising, you know, everything going on at the same time. Did you ever hear, he got us, Teitelbaum got us a gig in Connecticut College, I think it was, is that the girl’s school—it used to be a women’s school or something.

And he got us there, and we played this gig, you know, and of course they didn’t know what the hell was going on. They thought they’d got some sort of a band, you know, a real group would come, but they get this completely chaotic—He said afterwards, they’d asked for their money back. [both laugh] I think after that we kind of probably disbanded, I don’t think it got much further than that. But I certainly played with them, but again I thought, well, this is all part of the fun here, we’re all just improvising in this random way, and there’s weird noise going on, and Alvin was doing things like that famous, you know, he got obsessed with gradual processes, so he—

MS: Right, I Am Sitting in a Room, yeah.

NS: Yeah, that sort of thing. And he transferred it to photography.

MS: Right, with his wife, well at that point his wife Mary then.

NS: That’s the one, yeah. And so he took us out at like seven in the morning in November or something—it was really cold—dressed like (unintelligible) is going to do this croquet match at the Taylor estate. And he got—and I said, oh, I play croquet, you know, absolutely mad about it. So he said, oh, we’ll have this kind of English country scene, all dressed up in your whites and stuff, pretending to be British croquet players. And then, but, in Connecticut in the winter, at seven in the morning, we were freezing cold doing this, and he was taking all these photos.

MS: Really?

NS: And—yeah, and it came out in some magazine, there are students in York who said, I saw you in some American magazine playing croquet. I said, oh yeah, that’s Alvin’s composition. You know, that’s the sort of things that went on. It was just, you know, crazy in the best sense. You talk about composers, and I think, yeah, well, I knew composers, but anybody there that I ever saw sitting with, like, manuscript paper, putting notes on staves—I don’t think I ever saw that the whole time. They’d—what are you talking about? We don’t do that sort of thing, you know. It just wasn’t—again, Dick Winslow must have done that.

MS: Yes, he wrote rather straightforward music, right.

NS: Yeah, and of course since then, ‘cause Neely wasn’t there then, but I know Neely’s music and he’s a bit more mainstream, you know, he’d do things like put dots on staves. But those days, no, I mean, that’s it, I just can’t think of any regular composers who weren’t doing something a little bit weird, and they were just called avant-garde, that’s how the non-American sort of graduate students talked about people doing Indian music or gamelan or something, and then that lot they just called avant-garde, they didn’t call them composers, they said—Yeah, so—

MS: Did you contact people in the other departments at Wesleyan, any other departments? Of course, we had Mrs. Mohan in the department, who did Sanskrit, right. So, were there other people that you talked to outside?

NS: Let me think. There was, oh wow, it's a bit, my memory's gone, I think we were kind of—so much going on in the music department, it got a little bit self-contained. But I do remember meeting—there was a British professor in theatre or something, wasn't there? Trying to remember his name, but I remember meeting somebody in the theatre department, but, actually, doing any sort of regular stuff with anybody in other departments, I can't honestly remember.

MS: What about Jon Barlow?

NS: Well, Jon Barlow was in the music department.

MS: Right, right, but did you, yeah, did you work with Jon at all, or get to know him?

NS: Well, that's an interesting question because, as you'll no doubt be aware, I mean, the politics in that department, they were not all under the surface, a lot of them were—all I'd heard, and I didn't know what it was about, but I'd heard some story about how Bob Brown and Jon Barlow were just [strikes fists together] like that. So it was like, I was with Bob Brown, and therefore you didn't talk about Jon Barlow. So I hardly knew what he was about.

MS: Oh, too bad.

NS: Well, yeah, because I thought, he's one of the most interesting guys around. I went to his lecture, he came to one of these seminars, and he gave one of his utterly impenetrable lectures—this one, I seem to remember it was called “harmony, a sermon.” And that's all I understood. I think I understood the title, but then what he went off into, I don't know what he was talking about, but I thought, this is fascinating. I don't know what he's on about, but this guy's obviously literally on another planet.

MS: Yeah, he's a true original, yeah.

NS: He's a real, yeah. So I, and then, when I was back there later on, I think I did meet him and talk a bit more and think, oh yes, we can have a kind of almost normal human conversation. 'Cause I'd just got him down as this kind of scarily esoteric individual who was in his own world. And I just thought, I knew he was into South Indian musical something and Gregorian chant, he'd got heavily involved with—

MS: Nageswara Rao.

NS: Nageswara Rao, that's the guy—I didn't meet, 'cause he had already left when I came, so he was just one of these big names I kept hearing.

MS: Right, right.

NS: Yeah. So, yeah, Jon Barlow.

MS: Yeah, well, it all—it really exploded after your time. When I came was, really the place was so divided, and so—difficult despite being so incredibly creative, that, yeah, that was not the easiest time.

NS: Well, it was like, I thought, well, Bob Brown was kind of, seemed to be fighting with everybody, and eventually—he really wanted to be in California, so he went off back there. And, but there was—I mean, when you talk about the atmosphere at the time, there was also, of course, the Black Power thing had been going on, and I'm trying to remember the name of the guy, but, I mean, Ken McIntyre was, started there, but there was another guy—

MS: Clifford Thornton, though.

NS: Sorry?

MS: Clifford Thornton.

NS: That's him.

MS: Yeah.

NS: Who was much more outspoken and revolutionary, really strong stuff. And there was a kind of—you probably heard about this—a kind of rebellion that went on, and a kind of palace revolution, and, you know, the lunatics took over the asylum. So, it was ruled by committee, so a few faculty and quite a lot of students, and we all had to meet every morning at about eight in the morning and have donuts and coffee, and then run the department. [Unclear—I think?] most of us couldn't have run anything, so we didn't know what the hell we were doing. And, I remember Dick Winslow, he was kind of presiding over all this in his very calm sort of way. He must have thought, this is complete insanity, but he kind of went along with it.

MS: Yes, they—he and David went along with it for a while, and then at some moment they blew the whistle and said, this has to stop.

NS: Well, I think (unintelligible) 'cause that probably was after I'd gone or something.

MS: Yeah, so, yeah, it was after you left, yeah.

NS: They probably knew that it was gonna just go anyway, because it couldn't go on like that. It was just a sort of a game. But it was that sort of time, you know, Kent State and all those things were going on, so people were in a ferment all the time. And that's quite nice, one can be a bit nostalgic for that.

MS: Right, I know, in our days—

NS: The students are all ultra-conservative and don't even know what politics is now, probably.

MS: Yes, it was a wild and woolly time. We aren't just being nostalgic or whatever about it, it really was a strange period.

NS: Yeah, yeah. And not real in a way. That's probably what they say, we could swan around on big grants and stuff and do what we wanted. These guys have now got to pay their way and worry about their jobs and stuff, so they're much more grounded and realistic.

MS: There's that, too.

NS: Maybe.

MS: Although you could've been drafted for Vietnam at the same time.

NS: Well, there was that, too, yeah. Yeah, absolutely.

MS: Some reality factor at work. So, well, so when you, when you came back, how did you then—how did Wesleyan then kind of work into the rest of your life, and your—the way you did your career and so forth?

NS: Well, in a way, I mean, let me think. See, I went to India, so I came back to England via a year in India. When I got back to England, I hadn't finished, anywhere near finished the PhD, I'd hardly even started it, you know. I was trying to sort of put that together and think about what to do. And, but in a way, the whole sort of experience, yeah, it was, it was difficult 'cause I was back here, thinking, well what do I do here, I haven't been in England for three years, I'm out of the scene, I don't know what's going on here, and what am I going to do for a job sort of thing. And at that time, there was just one university, it seemed to be, one university which was kind of crazy enough to be thinking about those things, because—so in a way, the Wesleyan attitude sort of mapped onto what was going on here, or the other way 'round if you like. 'Cause I thought, well, most British universities were still stuck in the past, doing things in a traditional way. They would not have even understood what I was into, they would've really been horrified. But the one place was York, 'cause it had already got the reputation for being far out, experimental, emphasizing composition. performance, you know, outrageous things like—you know, Wilfrid Mellers was the man behind all that. He used to say things like, well, I think music should be studied by making it. People were horrified at that. Well, it kind of makes sense, you know. And I remember thinking, well, if there's any place that's going to take me in this country, if I've got any hope in England at all, it's only going to be in York, because that's the only place that is just sort of open to this kind of thing. And fortunately, I remember coming here because, when Ram Narayan came over to the UK, he always grabbed me to be his tambura player. So I toured around the country, twanging this thing, in all these—and we had one in York, and I thought, oh great, this is my chance. And I met Wilfred Millers, and I more or less said, well, you got any jobs? And he said, well there's a couple coming up soon, so keep your eyes open. And I thought, great, and I really thought, well, it's here or nowhere, because—you know, he wanted—the thing was, and he used to make something of this, is that again no music department in this country was hiring ethnomusicologists. You know have to be careful about that, because, like, John Blacking—

MS: Well, except for Blacking, yeah.

NS: But he wasn't in a music department, see, that's the thing.

MS: He was in anthropology, right.

NS: He was in anthropology, and in fact, Blacking used to go around saying, I'm a social anthropologist, you know. And so I thought, right, the music departments do not have ethnomusicology, and Wilfred decided he wanted to have it. And he liked all the ideas, you know, about the kind of ways of doing music and performance and composition, creative, you know, and some experimental, you know, all the sort of things—and I thought, well, this is the nearest thing to Wesleyan I'm ever going to find in this country. But it's a long way from it, of course, there's nothing quite the same. So, in a way, I say that, indirectly, you know, the Wesleyan experience—I don't think I would have got this job if I, I mean, if I'd come and said, look, I'm an ethnomusicologist, and got stuff to prove it, maybe I would. It's not like I had to have gone to Wesleyan. But I think it fitted in well. And, certainly, the way I tried to do things since then—well, like, getting a gamelan here, that sort of thing. And everyone thought, oh, well, this is amazing, you know, and I said, look, there's nothing new in that, America's been doing it for ages, and I was doing what they did then. So I said, look, actually, you're getting a kind of American program out of me here, because it's all I know. You know, it's the Mantle Hood sort of, Bob Brown, that kind of approach. So it's directly traceable back to that, absolutely, yeah.

MS: And then that's had its impact over the long haul, when other places started to pick up on this, I mean, you had already set it up as a kind of model.

NS: Yeah, well, I mean, a lot of things that York set up, and the way that we did things, not that I set up particularly, but I followed, you know, did get copied around other places and so on. And of course, over the years a lot of other places have taken on ethnomusicologists, of all kinds of shapes and sizes and descriptions and backgrounds. So it's diversified quite a bit. In fact, well I don't know actually you couldn't say where the majority came from, I couldn't—

MS: Yeah, it's amazing, in England, how many ethnomusicology positions there are, it's just astonishing.

NS: Well, it's like everything about this country, you know, it's like—in the late '70s, I was struggling to get a gamelan, there were no gamelans here. In [ten] years or so, there were about a hundred, you know, just suddenly. And I said, this is typical, this place sort of is lagging behind everywhere else, it's behind Holland, it's behind America by miles, and then suddenly it has this spurt and starts, from—forging ahead, I mean, I don't know, it's just weird how it does things. But, always seems to be catching up with other people.

MS: And then you gave us Maria, for which we are very grateful.

NS: Ah, Maria, yeah, well, she just turned up and, as you know, did some gamelan, and then—it's mainly because she got that year in California, wasn't it? I think she spent—

MS: Well, Maria's the first person that I've interviewed for this project, so it's very logical to continue on with you, right. Because she was in Middletown, so I said, let's do an interview right now, you know. So it's just wonderful talking to her, and of course she credits you so much, too.

NS: Well, that's very sweet of her, but she was only there for two of her three years, of course, and then one of them she was in, San Diego or somewhere like that I think, I can't remember, somewhere in California. And she obviously got a taste for studying in America. But that's great, 'cause I, I was always, you know, anyone who remotely interested in going to America to study

ethnomusicology, I'd of course be telling them about Wesleyan and places like that and raving about it. So, I'm delighted that she made a thing of it, yeah. I mean, good for her.

MS: So, well I don't know, I don't know what else to ask you. I mean, it's all very interesting, and it's so good to talk to you from the period, from this period, that kind of formational period when the place was so exciting. It's great.

NS: It really was, I mean, but you know, I came back that semester in the late '80s, which I know is, what is it—I can't count—ten years later, not, no, what am I talking about, twenty years. Yeah, it's about seventeen, eighteen years after, it's—yeah, it's quite a gap. And I thought, oh OK, this is going to be unrecognizable. But it, things have changed, but there was still, I noticed it, the graduate student body, and that kind of buzz and the way they interact as well, you know, I just thought, oh there's something about this place, it hasn't gone. And hopefully it never will, so it wasn't such a one-off time.

MS: What year was that, that you came back? What year was it?

NS: '89, I think it was.

MS: '89, oh yeah, that was a good period, we had a lot of really good grad students that year.

NS: I remember, like, Dora, and—

MS: Yeah, Stan.

NS: Stanley, and—Brian Pertl, remember him?

MS: And Pertl, right. And Matthew Allen would have been there...

NS: Allen, yeah.

MS: A lot of good people.

NS: Really, yeah, there were some very good people—

MS: It was a good period, yeah.

NS: But, again, it was just—it was nice, you know, it was a good atmosphere. And there's something about that place, I don't know what it is, but it's unique. I mean, honestly, I really have to say that, I'm not going to say I owe my life to Wesleyan, but it really did do things and, you know, generously as well. God, it's so—I just think I've got an eternal debt to that place, and I don't feel it for any other university, really. I mean, certainly not for Cambridge, you know. SOAS, in a way, because Jairazbhoy was so amazing, but it was like just being in a small room all day with Jairazbhoy, you know, just listening to him talk. It was a real bubble, there's nothing—a couple of other people around, but nothing like that. It's not the same as Wesleyan, so that is special, yeah. So, if there's anything I can ever do for Wesleyan, you know, to repay that, I would. I mean, I'm not just saying that.

MS: Oh, endow a chair, you know, or something like that.

NS: Yeah, exactly, if I had something to give like that, that would probably be the place I would say, that's the one I most want to repay it to. Because of what I learned there, what I experienced, if you like. It was just, you know, really special, unusual. And, say, changed everything. It does, it does change lives.

MS: It's true. It does, it does. It changed mine, too. I mean I owe my whole career to Wesleyan too, in this way.

NS: Really, I don't? think you had one before you came. Because I remember, at the time, when your name was mentioned, about why you were coming, and it was precisely to try and give it some sort of substance. You must know that. Because I think David McAllester in particular was a bit worried that it was all a bit fluffy and nobody was doing any serious work, and nobody really knew about ethnomusicology and all these sort of things he thought were important, they thought they had to bring somebody in—

MS: There had been a visiting committee which noticed that they were giving a Ph.D., and no one in the department had a Ph.D. Because Bob Brown had left and McAllester was still in anthropology. So, they said, you know, you really have to get a young ethnomusicologist with a Ph.D. So, those were the terms on which I came, right.

NS: Oh, right, OK. Well I didn't know that. But I mean, in this country it was the same. In the arts, nobody had a Ph.D.—when I joined the music department in York, I didn't have mine yet, but they knew I was going to get one, and when I got it, I think I was one of two people who had one. And nowadays of course they won't even consider an application if they haven't got a Ph.D. It's all, it's all changed.

MS: Yeah, Jon Barlow just had a master's, you know. So, I mean, nobody—Winslow had a Juilliard degree, you know. There was nobody there with an academic doctorate.

NS: Yeah, well, that's the way it used to be everywhere, I think.

MS: Well, it's nice that there was a period before that, in a way, now. Well, it was great to talk to you, really, it's a pleasure just to talk to you in general, Neil, and to get you in on this project is terrific.

NS: Absolutely, well as you can see it's a pleasure to talk about Wesleyan, because, I have, honestly, no bad memories of the place. That's amazing.

MS: That is amazing.

NS: Difficult moments, of course. But no bad memories, nothing where I thought, I hate this place, I want to leave. I just, almost loved every minute. It was great, yeah.

MS: Terrific. Well, thanks very much and maybe our paths will cross somewhere.

NS: So, yeah. Thanks a lot, Mark.

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MS: OK, take care, Neil. Bye-bye.

NS: OK, then, bye.

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