

**FRED BOUCHARD:** Here it is, July 21. This is the seventh interview in a series that we're doing for the Berklee College Library. We're documenting Boston jazz history. Today on the hot seat is Bob Winter, a pianist who's been in these parts for many a year and has played at some of the great clubs with some of the wonderful society orchestras, has been a mainstay at Berklee College for a generation and Boston Pops for probably about the same time. Bob, we did something unusual last week in that we had sort of a pre-session which just brought out all sorts of marvelous details of your career. Like a good piano solo, we'll be highlit with lots of little filigrees and appoggiaturas and grace notes and witty asides.

**BOB WINTER:** I can't even follow that, Fred. I wouldn't try to follow that. Well, I must say that I'm also being interviewed by a very astute interviewer who I've known from many, many years, and is a jewel of his own in this business of entertainment and writing.

Well, I suppose the beginning would be the best. I was born in Malden, not twelve miles from here where we're sitting, north of Boston. I'd say a pretty blue-collar existence. I think the main reason that I started, or even got a piano, was the fact that my aunt was getting rid of an old piano in her playroom, moving it out. We didn't have a piano, but they noticed that I would always fool around with the piano down at my grandmother's house. At that time, going to your grandmother's on Sunday was something that everybody did. Everything was done with the family. As I found out later, one of the reasons that my aunts and uncle--my father had played the saxophone a little bit and, as a matter of fact, played some jobs. But I think my mother didn't like the idea of him leaving on Saturday nights to go out and play a gig. So he gave up the saxophone, which I later played in a junior high school band--C-melody saxophone, as a matter of fact.

**FRED BOUCHARD:** Those were hot in those days.

**BOB WINTER:** Well, the whole idea was that the family would get together at the piano and the C-melody saxophone was non-transposing, so all you had to do was read the piano music. My aunts, I had two or three aunts that could play the piano, as we used to say, could "fake" the left hand. They could play "Margie" with this stride left hand, that's the way people learned, and I imagine that was in the twenties or thirties. Finally when I came along, I don't know whether it was just a natural inclination that I had fooling around with the keys. As I say, I inherited that piano from my aunt and started to take lessons. I remember taking lessons from one lady that wanted me to play scales. I lasted about two weeks with that. I just didn't like that way of playing. I ended up, I guess, just playing on my own.

**BOB WINTER:** I finally started taking lessons from an accordion teacher who came to the house--he played accordion, piano, and organ. He was called the "flying fingers system" of piano playing, Lewis E. Bray. I can remember him coming through the door, he was a big, big man, redheaded. He used to bring me sheets, songs that I would learn, and we'd practice playing the stride left hand--you know, you'd play a root and a chord, and a fifth and a chord, root, fifth, chord.

**FRED BOUCHARD:** It's much more fun than doing scales.

**BOB WINTER:** Well, much more, but I had to do scales, but I would do scales in the right hand as I played the chord in the left hand. Here we are sitting at the piano. [Mimes playing piano] So you'd learn to do that in the key of C major and D flat, and D and E flat. So this was a way of learning songs. His songs were all written in what we would call 'lead sheet' fashion. We didn't call them "lead sheet" in those days. It was sort of a shortcut method where we would have the melody, and he would also put the words underneath, and they were all mimeographed. Since this actually was near the end of the war, I'm sure that paper was scarce, so he would put one song in one part of the paper and another song here. He would snip them off and give me different things and put them in a looseleaf form. I still have these books with all these old tunes.

**FRED** Did he use that purple ink that smelled wonderful?

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Exactly, it was that purple ink.

**FRED** You could get high off it.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** I don't know, I never, I was too busy trying to play these tunes. I'll never forget--I did that for a while. Then when I was about twelve or thirteen, I started studying with Lee Daniels. I remember Lee saying to me, "Play a song," and I played this song "Whispering" and I'm playing the stride way of playing. He said, "Oh no, we can't play that way anymore." He said, "That's so square, that's so old-fashioned." He said, "Now what we do is, we play a chord in the left hand and maybe a root, something like that. Because," he said, "you're going to be playing with a bass player or a drummer, you won't have to do that." So there I was, playing more tunes, and Lee would have me play. We'd learn maybe ten tunes a week, and that was my lesson, learn these ten tunes. We'd learn Cole Porter and Jerome Kern and Irving Berlin and all those types of...

**FRED** All the Tin Pan Alley favorites.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Absolutely, because that's what they played on jobs. When you played a wedding or bat mitzvah or whatever, that's what you played.

**FRED** These are all echoed from Broadway musicals, from Hollywood hits

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Movies

**FRED** ...and you'd hear them on the radio.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Exactly, exactly. So here I was playing tunes, I was probably in--I remember my first job, I think, was in junior high school, a tenor sax, piano and drums. I think I played I'm trying to think of where it was. It was in Maplewood Square in Malden, I think it was at either the Oddfellows Hall or one of those halls that they had.

**FRED** BPOE.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Yeah, and we'd play the American Legion Hall and that was a place to play. And then in high school I was working with a polka band from Chelsea named Johnny Sisk--his father was a cop, I remember. We had lots of jobs. And we would be working--this was more of a big band job, maybe three or four saxes, one trumpet, one trombone, or sometimes two trumpets.

**FRED** Playing polkas?

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** We would play polkas, we could play big band stuff, regular orchestrations, stock orchestrations. And that was a really good way to make some extra, make money. But more than that, it was the experience in playing. It was the live experience. And that's something that the students nowadays I don't think get a chance to do. That's really, really too bad. By the time I was fifteen or sixteen, I probably had memorized 1000, 1200, 1500 tunes, and that's not counting--that was the tunes from Lee Daniels, that's not counting the tunes that my father taught me just whistling. He'd say, "Here's a tune, it goes like this" [Whistles] "Always." And I'd start to play it and I'd pick out the harmonies. And I'd hear it on the radio and I could check it.

**FRED** You were a walking fake book.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Well, yeah, that was the story. Because according to Lee Daniels, if I wanted to play with the bands that were playing around, almost all the bands were pickup bands. You were called as a piano player, there was a drummer, bass player, maybe a saxophone player, trumpet player--five pieces, that would be a normal band. And then you would just start playing tunes. You'd learn the latest show tunes. If it was in the fifties--I'm trying to think of the shows, I can't think of it, but maybe a Rodgers and Hammerstein show or one that had come out in the late forties, or in the middle forties, "Some Enchanted Evening," and things like that.

**FRED** Oklahoma!, Showboat.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Exactly, all those tunes. As you said, Showboat. Other shows--Sigmund Romberg and Rudolph Friml.

**FRED** Yeah, operettas.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Yeah, you'd have to learn some of those songs.

**FRED** "Rose Marie."

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** That's right. So all those tunes I learned. Now maybe part of the reason was because I played those tunes at parties in high school. Another reason was that my family liked those songs so I would play them for them. I can remember in a particular house that I lived in, it was in a little cul-de-sac and I would be practicing--of course, the windows would be open and you'd hear somebody yell: "Play that song that you played before!" You couldn't practice too many scales or sometimes they'd say, "No, we don't want to hear the scales, we want to hear some songs!"

As a matter of fact, later on, John LaPorta--who I was lucky enough to play concerts here at Berklee and to record with--said that that was one of the things about me that was a big positive. I knew so many songs that it was very easy for me to play and then to improvise and move out of the mainstream of the songs. At first, even though I was playing jazz, my jazz was maybe dated because I had been listening to James P. Johnson and Art Tatum. Of course that's dated in a different way, I mean, what a monster of a player! I remember my brother bringing home recordings of Teddy Wilson. And of course bebop had come in and made its big--the Woody Herman Band and Duke Ellington, the old Ellington, Basie, and Jimmy Lunceford recordings. I can remember those coming in the house and listening to them over and over and over.

**FRED** The harmonies are a little advanced, there was less stride.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Yeah, well, of course, with Basie there was some stride playing. And with Ellington there was. But the solos--the saxophone solos, the trumpet solos and the trombone solos were well, that was the basis of the things that I heard. Then of course Charlie Parker coming in and Dizzy Gillespie, and those--that time, the fifties, late forties, while I was in high-school, I was actually playing in a polka band, but during the day I'd be playing bebop, listening to recordings. We didn't have any, you know, we had really old record players, so you'd have to get the record player and maybe if I was lucky enough to put it on the piano bench, I'd put it on and listen to that and try to play that. Then I'd take it off and put it on again and try to play with it. And of course it wasn't in the same key, it would be just a little different, so it was awful for your ear, but that's what we did. We didn't have the ability to change the key. This was one of the ways in which we learned how to play, which I learned how to play.

**FRED** Tell us about your first experiences at Schillinger House.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Schillinger House, which of course later became Berklee School of Music and then Berklee College, was a building on 284 Newbury Street at the corner of Gloucester. I can remember in high school taking the streetcar, the bus, the trolley, and the train to come in from Malden to study with Lee Daniels--who at that time, at first, I think, was in business with Larry Berk who started the Schillinger House. I don't know--that didn't last, they either didn't get along or they had differing ideas on how this school should operate. So Lee just was on the faculty there. I used to do a lot of accompanying of singers because Lee would have classes at that time. Teddy King was a singer there. We would play in classes Freddie Guerra and some of these players and then sometimes I would play at night with Freddie Guerra at the Totem Pole Ballroom. Well, that was after high school, I'm sort of blending this time in. While I was in high school, I was studying with Lee Daniels. Then once I graduated from high school, which was 1950 in the summer, that fall I went to Schillinger House. I think they gave me a scholarship, I think it was twenty-five dollars or something like that. [Laughs] I mean, it wasn't a big scholarship, but in those days that went pretty far. Of course in that class were Herb Pomeroy and Ray Santisi. Ray was already a wonderful piano player, very beautiful player, as he is now. They became kind of a clique, Herb and Ray Santisi, and John Neves was playing bass at that time. I started to play--rather than play the jazz jobs, which at that time weren't that lucrative, I went to play society music, where the piano player had a lot of leeway. It was sort of a swing style and sometimes a dixieland style of playing, but I enjoyed it mainly because the piano player was very important in those bands. Basically because--well, I mean, the piano player always played.

**FRED** Right, even the little interludes. You would do transitions between...

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** All transitions were played by the piano player. And the rule was that horn players, even bass players, would stop during the four bars--I was going to say three bars, no we don't do that--four bars or two bars to get into the next tune. In order to get into the new key, if the bass player didn't know exactly how I was going to do it, then they'd just let the piano player go by himself and then when you got to the beginning of the head, you'd play the tune.

**FRED BOUCHARD:** I think it's probably important to let people realize that rather than playing one tune for six or seven minutes with solos, you guys were playing a chorus or two of something and then moving right on.

**BOB WINTER:** Absolutely, absolutely. You'd play usually no more than two choruses of a tune. That would almost never happen, more than two choruses. What you might play--in some cases you might even play one tune per chorus. So you needed a lot of tunes. You figure that if a tune takes a minute and you're playing for four hours with little breaks in between, you've got 180 minutes. So there's ninety or a hundred tunes.

**FRED BOUCHARD:** It was a real kaleidoscope of melody.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Exactly.

**FRED BOUCHARD:** It was like a merry-go-round, almost. Because the pace was fairly quick too, you weren't playing these as a dead ballad, these were medium to up-tempo.

**BOB WINTER:** Right. There were very few very slow tunes, they didn't want that. Most everything was in a real--some people today would call it like a Mickey Mouse tempo, you know, "boom-chick" tempo. But that would be a way to play a basic thing. Sometimes the melodies came fast because the leaders weren't that smart to think of how the melody fit at the tempo. So if you were playing "Someone To Watch Over Me," which we would normally play as a ballad[sings melody] maybe something like that, you'd be playing at a tempo. [sings melody faster]. So you had to get with the program, that was the way you had to play.

**FRED BOUCHARD:** Would you often have things laid out in sort of suites or medleys that were prepared, or would they just be barking numbers at you?

**BOB WINTER:** That's right. They would be giving signals. Sometimes it would be two [fingers], two would be B-flat, three would be E-flat, three flats. As a matter of fact, there was a way in which--I think they said that out in the West Coast, they did this [gestures three fingers pointing down] for flats and this [gestures three fingers pointing up] for sharps.

**FRED BOUCHARD:** Teddy Casher gave a guy that signal last night. They were playing something in C-minor.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Ah, okay, there you go. There were certain ways to do it. As a matter of fact, I remember one time playing with the Pops, John Williams conducting. Of course John Williams was a marvelous pianist. We were playing this tune, it was a brand new arrangement for the Pops and it had a long melody, maybe like "Cherokee," but it wasn't "Cherokee." So it would maybe go [sings melody slow tempo] or maybe double time [sings melody at a faster tempo]. The arrangement went from the regular 4/4 time to an alla breve or into that fast background/slow melody routine. John looked up at the piano and he said, "Play some rides, some jazz up on the top." [holds up two fingers] And he said, "B flat." I didn't have a part at that time--my part at that time was all rests and he said, "Play B flat," and he says, "Yeah, that's good, that's what I want."

**FRED** Nice to have someone in high places in your corner.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** That's right. And he understood what a pianist had to do in the back.

**FRED** For people who don't know it, John Williams was a hell of a jazz pianist. He made a couple of great albums with

**BOUCHARD:** Zoot Sims and other people, long before he got into Star Wars and all those other film scoring activities.

**BOB WINTER:** Absolutely, a marvelous piano player! As a matter of fact, one time with the Pops, Stan Getz came in to play. I was brought up--he had his own drummer.

**FRED** Not Roy Haynes?

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** No, not Roy Haynes, but another marvelous drummer from New York came in with him. We had our own bass player. I'm trying to think of who played, might have been Dave Clark, could have been somebody come in like that. Anyway, John Williams was conducting. We were in the green room so there was just us, John trying to get the tempos, and he had the score. John said, "Okay Stan, Bob Winter is going to play piano," and Stan said, "Oh no. John," he said, "the only reason I took this job was that I thought you were going to play." I mean, he doesn't know me from Adam, I didn't take it personally. So John said, "Okay", he said, "I'll play. Bob, move aside." [Fred laughs] John sat down and he played this thing.

Then he said, "Look, Stan, could we do this one more time? I'm in kind of a funny position here, I'm conducting this big orchestra." He said, "Sometimes when you're playing, when you're sitting down at the piano, it's not easy to conduct and get everything right." So he said, "Let Bob play, just in case I might have to conduct." So Stan says, "Yeah, okay." So I played the tune. Then we played another three tunes we rehearsed. Then as we were walking out of the door, John Williams sidled up to me, he said, "You're playing tonight." That was it. He didn't want to tell Stan. Stan wasn't feeling very well--it was near the end, and he was having a lot of problems with his stomach.

**FRED** Oh, 1988, '89?

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Yeah, it would have to be '87, '88, something like that and he wasn't well. But anyway, he sounded marvelous. You know, just sounded great. And the arrangements were beautiful, trying to think of who wrote them, can't think of it.

**FRED** Do you want to give us a little bit about your career with Ruby Newman? And working your way up--we're back

**BOUCHARD:** tracking a little bit here because the Pops came much later.

**BOB WINTER:** Yeah, the Pops started in 1980.

**FRED** But this was when you were sixteen, seventeen again--but that whole thing about playing in the society

**BOUCHARD:** orchestras...

**BOB WINTER:** Yeah, the whole idea of the society orchestra was that the contractor or the booker would have a whole list of players. He'd have, let's say, five or ten piano players, maybe even more. He'd have so many drummers, so many bass players. I remember going up to Billy Croner's office who was what we would call a "chicken fat" conductor, a lot of Jewish weddings and bar mitzvahs. That was a very big group of work--it would be possible in a weekend for people to have a wedding on Saturday afternoon, Saturday night, Sunday afternoon, Sunday night, that was very possible. That was quite lucrative. With that and one more date in the middle of the week, even without it, you could support yourself in those days with that kind of work. And we weren't making a lot of money, it wasn't a lot of money. As a matter of fact, I think what we made is, I'd, say ten, eleven, or twelve dollars a night. Because in 1956 we raised that Saturday night from twelve dollars to fifteen dollars, Saturday night. So it's not that it was a lot of money, but the commensurate prices between what you made and what it cost to live, was much closer to what you made than nowadays. It's gotten way out of hand. So they would have a list. When I started, I was only sixteen or seventeen, but because I knew so many tunes, and I was a pretty good player even at that time, I immediately shot up to be maybe fifth or sixth on their list. And then I moved up even further.

**FRED** Some of the other guys you mentioned were Leo Grimes and Milton Brody and George Gould.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Yes. George Gould was the first pianist with the Newman office. And then Milton Brody was the first pianist with Billy Croner. I became eventually second or third, and that was really a big jump. It could be because, not because I was necessarily better than other players, but another player would leave, maybe to go with another contractor, and so therefore I would move up.

**FRED** But these were measurable skills, I mean, you had a batting average--because you knew 1,200 songs and the other guy only maybe knew half that.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Exactly. They knew that whatever they called, you could play.

**FRED** That was your resume.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** That's right--whatever they called. And if there came a tune that you couldn't, you would learn it either on the spot or for the next day. You would try to play it and if it didn't work out, you'd make sure that that tune, if there were a couple of chords you didn't know, you'd make sure that you learned that tune for the next day in case you were called. So that was the way that this was done.

**FRED** High demand and high production.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** One thing that even we talked about today... The return of the Cuban, you know, the musica tropical--the bolero, rumba

**FW:** Cha-cha?

**BOB WINTER:** Yes, the cha-cha and some of those things. We played all those things, we played them. We had to learn them, we had to learn "Green Eyes" and "Besame Mucho" and "Prisionero Del Mar" and different tunes that had to be learned. You had to know so many rumbas, you had to know so many huaraches "Cachita" would be another one.

**FRED** Cuba was wide open in those days.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** That's right, big--that was big. People who went down to Florida to dance at the hotels during the winter, which is something that I did in the early fifties, would be dancing and learning those things, so you had to know those.

**FRED** There was a whole raft of famous bands: Xavier Cugat, Ricky Ricardo, Perez Prado, Tito Puente...

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Yes, yes, especially Xavier Cugat, Noro Morales. And you had to know those kinds of tunes. If you listened to the radio you heard Havana, you heard Havana, Cuba. They were talking about "col-ga-tay" you know Colgate toothpaste? [Fred laughs] And things like that. But that was the way you had to learn. I remember living at the time with a maracas player down in Palm Beach. He played maracas and probably some claves, guitar, little guitar.

**FRED** Tres or cuatro, the little four string jobs?

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** I guess it was, I don't remember, but I can remember and I'm trying to think of his name. I can't think of it, maybe it'll come to me. I remember he was living--I moved out of an apartment which was my roommate was really very slovenly. I remember one of the guys in the band coming and saying, "Would your mother want to see you living like this?" So he sort of embarrassed me, and I moved in with this maracas player. He had been in the Navy. He was an older guy and I was only seventeen or something. He was maybe in his forties. He was retired from the Navy and he said to me, "Do you mind, I'll cook, you wash the dishes, do you mind?" I said, "No," and he cooked. He was making this rice and chicken, arroz con pollo, you know. It was really great because the guy, he was a very sweet guy, very nice guy. That was what we had to play, that musica tropical.

**FRED** This is down in your Florida phase?

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** This is in Florida and that is in Palm Beach. I played two winters in Palm Beach. I was young, very young kid. There were sometimes, there would be intermission bands, or we would play and then they'd have a latino band playing. Right now you'd call it a salsa band. I remember this woman playing the piano [sings a melody] and marvelous players.

**FRED** You probably run into some Latino kids now who are into that montuno stuff? And they'd come in for their lessons.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Oh yeah, oh they can, yeah. I mean that's something that's very easy for them. Then we have to just learn tunes, but they don't play as many tunes because they take one tune and they extend it. So one tune could be a long time, it could be five, seven, eight minutes.

**FRED** Oh in the tropical sounds.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Yeah, sure.



**FRED** That could bring us either to talking about hard lessons for students these days who don't know tunes or have a hard time learning tunes. Or you could talk a little bit about New York since you're already on the road talking about Florida.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Well, I went to New York to try to make it, as they say. You know, "if you can make it here, you can make it anywhere?" I didn't like New York. I don't know, there was something about it. It's not the Yankees and the Red Sox, although I love the Red Sox and I'm a Yankee hater. But it was just the way they conducted business. It was a little too cutthroat for me, and maybe I'm a small town guy, maybe just didn't like it. I didn't like having to look for a parking space every night at four o'clock in the morning and having to walk back at those late hours, maybe I didn't like that. I was able to--when I first got there, about the second week I was in New York, I got a call to play at Peacock Alley at the Waldorf to get into a steady job there. And this was--in one respect it was great because I had a paycheck that was going to come in regularly. But on the other hand, I wasn't getting to know people on the outside in the club date field, general business field. That's something that wasn't really good for me because by the time I finished there, I ended up going to Florida.

So things didn't really materialize in New York and I ended up coming back to Boston. I remember distinctly when I got on the job, I was the kid from Boston. I was in my twenties and the job was like "stump the piano player." That's what they wanted to do. "Oh yeah, we're going to get him! You know this tune? You know that tune?" Fortunately I knew a lot of tunes. At that time--I mean, I've probably forgotten a lot of them that I knew. When we used to learn a tune from a show. Like for instance, a show would have a very famous tune, maybe two tunes. The rest would be forgotten. Most shows weren't like *South Pacific* or *Guys and Dolls*.

**FRED** With one boffo hit after another.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** That's right, wonderful tunes after another. These guys would learn the third tune and the fourth tune, tunes that were very esoteric. And they'd say, "Oh, you know this one?" I'd say, "Yeah, I know that one." You didn't want to refuse more than one tune. They could probably go with it if you didn't know one tune, but I knew all the tunes.

**FRED** So they wouldn't call "Some Enchanted Evening," they'd go for "Carefully Taught" or one of the other tough ones.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** "Talky Talk" or what is it? [sings melody] "Happy Talk." But in the other shows, you know, Subways Are For Sleeping and things like that where you wouldn't know. In New York, they're at the Waldorf, you're at the big society, these people knew the tunes. As a matter of fact, I'll tell you if I may, I'll tell you a story which sort of points out the tunes that I know.

**FRED** You love stories, Bob.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** I probably have more tunes that no one will ever know about and no one will ever play than maybe anybody walking around in this corner here. I was playing in 1960 in that year that I went to New York. I took a job for the winter down in Palm Beach with a society band leader by the name of Paul Sparr. He was a really nice guy, very nice guy, and the band was all New York guys. I was the only Boston guy, but at that time I was a New York guy for awhile, [Local] 802. So we were playing at this hotel which featured, on the weekends, shows. They brought in a vocalist and we accompanied this vocalist. Now I'm desperately trying to think of this guy's name, but I can't. This vocalist came in and he was a Broadway--Russell Nype was his name. And you can say, "Huh? I've never heard of him." Well, Russell Nype had worked in Call Me Madam with...

**FRED** Ethel Merman?

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Ethel Merman, that's right. He was the second to Ethel Merman. Now Ethel Merman was historically famous on Broadway. Russell Nype had appeared with her in Call Me Madam. So to these people that we were playing for, he was a big draw, they loved him. Well, I had seen in the fifties, Russell Nype singing in a show called Goldilocks, which was written by Leroy Anderson.

**FRED** Whoa... that's a big name with a small book.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** That's right. Leroy Anderson had written this. I happened to have gone with my wife to the opening night, we went to opening night. In addition to going to the shows, which we used to do and we'd listen to tunes, we used to get copies--musicians' copies--of music. They would want us to play these showtunes so when a show came in town, they would come over--I was working at the Statler which is now the Park Plaza--and they would come in and give us some lead sheets. They would give us piano copies, because they wanted us to play.

**FRED** Man, that would be like a musician today giving a critic a demo copy of his album to go review it.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Exactly, same idea. So I learned the tunes from Goldilocks. Now people don't even remember the show Goldilocks, let alone the tunes! So I saw Russell Nype sitting at the table, and I said to the leader of the band, Paul Sparr, "I got the next chorus." I said to the bass player, "We're going to the key of F, just play it by ear." And I played a tune for this guy called "Shall I Take My Heart and Go?" Now, you never heard the song. I can sit down and play it on the piano, and after I played it someone would say, "So?" It means nothing. I started playing this tune and Russell Nype almost dropped--he was eating soup--he almost dropped his spoon. He got all red and he looked up at me and he waved at me. After that he was eating and looking up at me wide-eyed! When I got through with the set, he waved me over: "Sit down, sit down! What's your name?" "Bob Winter"

**FRED** Nothing speaks to people like a tune that they know.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** That's right. Why? Because he sang that in the show! He said to me, "I would never expect you to play that tune!" I said "Well, you sang it in the show." He said, "You don't understand, you don't understand this!" He said, "Nobody in the world would play this song." And I said, "Well, why?" He said, "Because they cut it out of the show after the second performance. And you learned the song." I said, "Well I saw you sing it on opening night." He said, "Yeah, but they cut it out of the performance, they never played it again!"

**FRED** Unbelievable!

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** After the second night. He said, "Nobody in the world would know that." And it was, what is it, serendipity, or a serendipitous kind of a moment. Well anyway, he got such a kick out of that. That's what music means--we're getting on another subject, but that's what tunes mean to certain people.

**FRED** Absolutely.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** They start thinking about where they were when they heard the tune. You talk about this music business or what we do, or what we have done in the music business. I'll never forget: I was at the Playboy Club. I was the musical director at the Playboy Club.

**FRED** Just down in the Park Plaza.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** That's right, it's now the Four Seasons. I was there for eleven years. As a matter of fact, I had the trio in the penthouse and we estimated that we played, in eleven years--hold onto your seats--more than 8,000 shows. And the reason was that we played--each show was an hour long with a comedian and a singer.

**FRED** Lana Cantrell or somebody?

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Yeah Lana Cantrell was an opening one. Teddy King was there. Billy Eckstine came in. I'd have to think about players that we played with, but comics? Billy Crystal, Jay Leno, you know, when they were nobodies. I was playing with my trio in the living room, which was a casual type thing, and I played a tune from a Marx Brothers movie, and it's called "Alone." It's sung by...you know, it's going [sings melody]...

**FRED** Chico sing it?

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** No, it was sung by a tenor or a baritone, probably a tenor. I think it was in A Night at the Opera, and maybe it was sung on stage, they were actually filming on stage. Now, that Marx Brothers movie, when is that, the thirties?

**FRED** Yeah, late thirties.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Yeah, a bunny runs over to me, absolutely gorgeous bunny, she probably worked there two nights or something at that time. And she said, "Oh, that's my favorite song!" What? A bunny's favorite song? I mean this was still in the rock era, it was 1966! "Downtown" maybe was the tune or "Up Up and Away in My Beautiful Balloon" or something like that. Chicago--not Chicago, but something five, I don't know, Jackson Five. Anyway, she said my family and I, we always used to watch Marx Brothers movies. And this song got to her. You don't think--sometimes you think of tunes that people might want to hear. You say, "This person is so old, such an age, they'll want to hear songs from this era," but it might now follow.

**FRED** Right, but you were really good at attacking people with signature songs when they'd walk in, even to The Four  
**BOUCHARD:** Seasons. You would associate somebody that you knew with a song. Sue Auclair said you used to do it to her when she'd walk in.

**BOB WINTER:** Yes, "Rainy Day," "Here's That Rainy Day", Sue Auclair!

**FRED** You'd play a song that you would associate with her and it was like your little memory of them.  
**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** That's right. I've done things like that in the past. Now the name escapes me--the famous Broadway actor and writer and comedy writer Mel Brooks. One night late at the Four Seasons, I'm sitting at the piano and looking out down the steps at the podium in the entrance door. Somebody walks in. It looked like it could be Mel Brooks, but I wasn't sure. And I'm playing a tune and all of a sudden, he comes a little closer, I said: "It's Mel Brooks!" I went into "Sweet Georgia Brown"--he did that in the movie, he sang it in Polish in one of his movies, also I don't know. Anyway, that was one of the tunes. I started playing this tune.

**FRED** Was it the one about Hitler?  
**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Yeah, maybe--yeah, "Sweet Georgia Brown." That's right, they sang "Sweet Georgia Brown" in Polish. [sings in mock-Polish] Anyway, he walked in, Mel Brooks walks up to the piano and he said, "You're so sweet to play that song for me." And he starts doing a little dance. He says, "André Previn thinks he plays jazz. He doesn't play jazz, you're playing jazz!" You know, this was Mel Brooks. [Fred laughs] But I mean, people love to hear the tune that makes them different, maybe some stand out. Oh, you play this tune for me or play that tune for me, and if you remember, that's really nice. That's another part of the business, that's the lounge business. I did plenty of that playing.

**FRED** And if you can make an impact on a regular customer, they will be back again and again and you have your  
**BOUCHARD:** own little aura of magic.

**BOB WINTER:** Exactly, exactly. It's funny because at one point at the Four Seasons, a new food and beverage manager came in. You can ask any of the piano players who have played in hotels. I don't know what it is, but it's like the, what is it--the mongoose and the cobra? They're like natural enemies? That's the food and beverage manager and the musician who's playing in the hotel. [Fred laughs] So there's a meeting between the contractor, myself, and the food and beverage manager. The food and beverage manager says, "I've been here now for a week and usually every place I go, I fire the musicians and hire new ones." And I said, "Why do you do that?" He said, "Well, that's what they do, that's what we do. We do it because we want to have our own stamp on the hotel, on the business, on the music."

I said, "Well, that's an interesting point of view, but did you ever stop to think that people like the music that are there? Why would you just want to change? If you came into a place and you were regular, wouldn't you like somebody that knows your music and is able to play the songs that you like? You don't just fire the bartender, do you, because you want a new bartender? You want somebody that knows the regulars and that's going to foster business." He said, "You know, I never thought of that. Okay, we'll keep you for a while." I was there for sixteen years. [Fred laughs]

**FRED** You must have had an impact. You probably learned his favorite tunes.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Well, it's strange, it's just strange because this music business is so fickle, it's really so fickle. The players today are trying to make a living. I try to teach my students here at Berklee to be able to play some songs. I know the music business has changed, there's no doubt about it, it's changed. But there are still restaurants that have a jazz brunch or they have people playing during dinner time or stuff like that. I tell my students, I say, look, if you hit it big with a rock band--and remember there are many many rock bands out there--if you're lucky enough to make it big, you're welcome to pull up in your limo, run up to the fourth floor at the 1140 building, 4N, knock on the door and you go [blows raspberry] to me. You're welcome to do that. You won't hurt my feelings. If you're making it in the music business, I'm so happy for you. But, who knows, you might not make it so big or it might take you a while to make it. You want to hang around, you want to be able to eat. Wouldn't it be nice if you could, if things really got bad, you go into a restaurant and say, "I'll play a jazz brunch for you for twenty five bucks and dinner, or maybe you'll feed my family and I'll work for nothing." If things got that bad, wouldn't it be nice to be able to have twenty or forty or sixty tunes that you could play, play a couple of hours, and be a playing musician if you don't make it? And if you're running a studio, suppose you want to open up a studio in Iowa or something like that, or wherever. Wouldn't it be nice for you to know the keyboard well enough so that you could not only get paid as an engineer, but also as a player? Maybe you pick up two paychecks, or you don't have to hire somebody to do that. Maybe your price can be lower and you can be more competitive.

But nowadays, the music business has changed so much that computers have taken over and you can have a student who can really, actually make a CD that's really quite good, quite modern and playable.

**FRED** Plausible.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Yeah, plausible. And yet, not be able to play one tune on the piano in time, in real time.

**FRED** It's all done with smoke and mirrors.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Well, it's done with technology. It was technology--I mean, I don't know, maybe other instruments, maybe the accordion was technology when they could move a keyboard instrument around and not have to play. You know, I mean, things change.

**FRED** Yeah, player piano rolls and all that stuff, that was a big innovation. 78 to 45 to 33 to CD to iPod, bingo!

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** So I've become something that you probably won't see anymore, somebody who knows 1,000, 1,500, 2,000 tunes.

**FRED** You used to be a jukebox, now you're an iPod. [Both laugh]

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Yeah, that's right, that's good, that's good! Yeah, think about the iPod, people taking their CD collections--I've got a record collection that's all one wall. I would love to be able to put it into an iPod. As a matter of fact I'm thinking of doing that. It'll save space, maybe I could move into a smaller apartment, a smaller house. So it's not a matter of saying to students, "You should do this, you should do this." What I do is I say, "Suppose you're a film scorer and they want you to do things, you're doing a movie that's supposed to represent the fifties or the forties or the bebop era or something like that. It would be nice if you could either play that stuff yourself or maybe you'd know who to hire and know what music, know the types of sounds that you want to recreate."

**FRED BOUCHARD:** Or just maybe be able to identify some of the music when you hear it, the sound of the band or the names of the tune.

**BOB WINTER:** Yeah, something like that. I remember talking to John Williams and he said that. He said you have to know a lot of music and you have to know it fast. Now I know that when John does a movie, sometimes he'll hire somebody to do the source music or some specialized music. He'll hire somebody to do that, to write those. But, I'm sure if he had to, he's going to be able to write anything that he wants to--and immediately and very quickly.

I remember one time, we were in the green room with Joan Baez, and John Williams is conducting and I'm playing the piano. Joan Baez said to me, "Is this the first time you saw this music?" I said, "Yeah, I'm just reading it." She said, "You're just reading that? It takes me, you know, I have to go and learn for weeks and weeks and weeks to try to learn a tune. You're just reading it." I said, "Well that's what I do, I look at the tune." And John Williams is conducting, and we finished playing this tune, and John Williams said to Joan Baez, "How do you envision this music?" She said, "Oh, it's a simple country tune." He said, "Hmm, okay. I'll fix the arrangement, I'll fix it." So we finished and walked into the library and John's carrying the score. I said, "John, do you mind if I look over your shoulder?" He said, "No, I don't mind." So he opens up the score and he's got this score in front of him. He takes this big magic marker and he goes [mimes writing rapidly]

**FRED** Knocking out parts.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Yeah, he just...

**FRED** Trimmed it back.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Yeah, very quickly. He finished the thing. I mean, it didn't take him three minutes. I said, "John, what did you do?" He said to me, "Well, the arranger who arranged this music is probably a very good studio arranger, but he has no knowledge of a symphony orchestra, what an orchestra sounds like onstage. If you played this, if this were all played, it would sound like Mahler." [Fred laughs] He said, "Because they doubled everything in the bassoons and in the contrabassoon. He's got bass clarinet, he's got bass trombone, he's got...This is a country tune and it's light, it's easy." I said, "Yeah, but John, you did it in like a minute. He said, "Bob, I've looked at scores for so long. I've written scores, I've studied them, I've written and examined them. When I look at that page, I see everything immediately. I know exactly where everything is in a standard score, I just do that." He said, "It was a nice arrangement, but the guy just doesn't know how to write for this type of thing."

**FRED** Not what Joan wants.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Yeah, it's a country sound.

**FRED** Yeah, I could think of a lot of analogies in other areas where simplicity is paramount.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** That's right. As a matter of fact, you know, we say it to our students: "Less is more."..."When in doubt, leave it out." And as one old piano teacher of mine used to say, "You always want to leave them wanting less." [Laughs]

**FRED** Amen.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** You know, I mean... It's supposed to be "wanting more," but it was his idea, just sort of a comic idea, but that's the idea. Just enough to make it musical. And what happens with a lot of musicians, they put in too much, actually.

**FRED** Yes, especially when you're young and you've got your chops, and you can play all the arpeggios and extra little

**BOUCHARD:** fills, and you never run out of breath, and your mind is bursting with ideas.

**BOB WINTER:** Yeah, and that's not just a jazz piano player, that's a commercial piano players too. Put in every, every kind of arpeggio and whatever they can put in. What is it that they said about the New York Times? "All the news that fits, we print."

**FRED** Well now, with the electronic media, that's really true. There's infinite numbers of monkeys typing out infiniteon

**BOUCHARD:** typewriters.

**BOB WINTER:** All over the world.

**FRED** More stuff than anybody could ever look at. You can become a blogger and a commentator and write reams of

**BOUCHARD:** stuff, and they'll be somebody out there that'll read it. You may not want to pay for it, but...

**BOB WINTER:** Exactly.

**FRED** Anyway Bob, maybe we should take that dictum of your forebears, leaving them wanting more instead of

**BOUCHARD:** possibly running out to another tape here. As much as I'd like to ask you about [Local Union] 802 calling Local 5 up in Boston before they even called you for that gig at Peacock Alley. Talking about being one jump ahead of the game and knowing all the rules and regulations! And the stuff you talked about, using Boston and New York, playing tunes in different keys?

**BOB WINTER:** Oh yeah. One of the tunes was "All The Things You Are." In Boston, we used to use the key of B-flat, which was the orchestration key--in New York, they played it in A-flat which was the piano key--I think it was the piano sheet music key. And as a matter of fact, because of the Real Book, the Real Book has changed many things. For instance, there's a note that I always fool around with my kids. [Sings one line of melody] I'm trying to think of the

**FRED** [sings next line of the melody] We know the song but we don't know the title.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Yeah, well anyway, there's a note in there that Bill Evans played.

**FRED** He probably flatted it or something.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** That's right, exactly. And it goes: [sings] That E natural, or F-flat. The original note--[sings]---it should be an F. In the original, it was an F. So I always tell my students, if they're movie buffs, this tune, which we will think of, maybe one time, came from a movie called *The Mummy*. 1932 or '33.

**FRED** Victor Price?

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** I'm not sure.

**FRED** Vincent Price.

**BOUCHARD:**

[Sirens in the background]

**BOB WINTER:** Oh, the police are coming after us. In this movie, *The Mummy*, there's a scene at a country club where they're all in tuxedos and they're dancing. And Victor Young did the music and wrote this tune

**FRED** "My Careless Love" or something?

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** No...[pauses] I can't think of the title.

**FRED** It's okay.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** And all the students are going to be watching this and say, why didn't he know that? I know that one. So he wrote this tune and it was as a waltz. [Sings] And there's this country club orchestra playing, playing this tune. It's my age, you know, that happens.

**FRED** No, no Bob, this is great. Notwithstanding--I know you got a lot more stories and maybe we can do it again?

**BOUCHARD:** Maybe we can do it again in [David] Friend [Recital Hall] with a piano and then you could really let it hang.

**BOB WINTER:** Well that would be great. I would like that, I enjoyed this very much.

**FRED** We're working on expanding this series and doing some new things with it. I bet you got some great Henry

**BOUCHARD:** Mancini stories too.

**BOB WINTER:** Oh yes, oh yes, wonderful Henry Mancini stories.

**FRED** Well maybe we better save those for next time.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Okay.

**FRED** I think it's, we're running out of...

**BOUCHARD:**



**CAMERAMAN:** We have just a little less than ten minutes on the tape.

**FRED** Oh we do? Oh, well then, let's do an encore! I thought we were way past it, but obviously not. Well, let's see,  
**BOUCHARD:** what didn't we get to? You want to talk about waltz parties and society parties? Or do you not want to go back that far?

**BOB WINTER:** Well, those kind of parties almost don't exist now. We used to start--sometimes in the late parties, we'd start at ten o'clock at night and go till three, four, five in the morning. Sometimes playing continuous music, never stopping. And in order to do that, the orchestras always had a piano player who played accordion or an accordion player. So if the piano player had to go to the bathroom or to have something to eat

**FRED** God forbid!

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Well, everybody got some time off. You'd probably get five minutes in an hour. And there was a lot of music, but there was a lot of dancing. I mean, that was just really society parties where people would just go into all hours. At country clubs, you know.

**FRED** That's kind of great. you know, you don't see it that much nowadays.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** No, no.

**FRED** Or unless it's a mosh pit or something. [Laughs]

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Yeah, yeah, I don't know. I mean, obviously it was a chance for more musicians to be working.

**FRED** And you said that you bring your accordion and sometimes do a little tea party or cocktail party in the afternoon  
**BOUCHARD:** before things started.

**BOB WINTER:** Yeah, sometimes you'd do that. You'd do a four to seven and then you'd go to a house and play a dinner from seven-thirty to eight-thirty or nine. You'd play a dinner. And then you'd go to the country club and you'd play starting at ten.

**FRED** The main event.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Yeah, the main event, that's right. These were warm-ups.

**FRED** And then what about breakfast gigs afterward?

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** I never played that kind of one. But I did play a job for a friend Fonstark, who was one of the trustees of the Boston Symphony Orchestra--at one time, one of the richest women in the United States--and she asked me to play for the Boston Symphony. She rented a bus and it was a little afternoon thing where you'd ride up to New Hampshire to look at the foliage. And she sold it--people would pay for this--the money went to the Boston Symphony. And she would rent the bus and Harry Ellis Dickson would be the moderator on the bus. And she said, "Bob, could you play the piano on the bus?" [Fred laughs] And I said, "Well, I can't play the piano, but if you can get a keyboard installed in the bus, I'll play on the bus for that." And she said, "Oh, I'd love that if you could do that!" So what we did was you got a small keyboard, she had it installed--she had a seat taken out--installed in the bus with me facing the people. And I would play all the tunes that they liked, Cole Porter and Jerome Kern, and things like that. And the people would be eating beluga caviar.

**FRED** Oh, baby!

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** And lobster and everything else. She had her personal chef on this bus. I'm telling you!

**FRED** And you'd be playing "Over the Waves."

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Yeah, I'd be playing tunes. When I was a kid--this was of course probably ten, fifteen, ten years ago--but when I was a kid, seventeen or eighteen, I was playing accordion over at her house, pre-Concord Country Club or some kind of country club there. She lived out in Concord and I'd be playing the piano or accordion or something like that at her dinners.

**FRED** Wow. Speaking of unusual gigs, you might comment on the wonderful things that you were able to do with such facility, like playing live to silent movies at the Coolidge Corner Cinema. That's an exceptional skill.

**BOB WINTER:** Well, this is something that I've done for many years now. And sometimes--well that movie at the Coolidge Corner Theater, was Greed. That was Greed, I'm trying to think of theis it Ernst Lubitsch or?

**FRED** Possibly, or not Cecil B. DeMille, the other guy. German name.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** That's right. Not Preminger, this is before that.

**FRED** Lubitch? No, no we said that.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** That's a long movie. That was originally a three-hour, even more, movie.

**FRED** Not D. W. Griffith?

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** No. They've cut it down now to be a little over two hours, but sitting at the piano, improvising--that's all it is, is watching the dialogue, watching the thing and improvising. I've done any number of films: Japanese films, French films, series at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, I've done some at Harvard, I've done some at RISD, Rhode Island School of Design

**FRED** Or the Harvard Film Archive?

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Yes, I've done a few there, but mostly at the Museum of Fine Arts. I've done Czech films, I've done Swedish films, all series of them. And that is really hard.

**FRED** I'm sure it is.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** It's hard to do physically because you just have to sit there, you don't stop for an hour.

**FRED** But you were building up that kind of stamina when you were sixteen with Ruby Newman.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Yes, I was. John Williams called me "Iron Hands."

**FRED** You're like the Bernie Glow of the keyboard.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Yeah, because of one series--one taping--that we did at WGBH for a musicone of the Pops series, TV series.

**FRED** Massive production, always in good taste, that's Bob Winter.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** We try, we do try.

**FRED** You're still going on with it. Unfortunately we do have to round this up now, and I would look forward to another session at a later date.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** I'd love to if I thought that I had--you know, I hope I haven't exhausted my stories.

**FRED** I'm sure we could just do some fine tuning and find a couple other lead sheets to guide us along.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Well, I thank you very much for inviting me here.

**FRED** Thank you, Bob.

**BOUCHARD:**

**BOB WINTER:** Thank you, production people, Ernie and Joe. That's really, really nice that they make you feel so comfortable, you know, so

**FRED** Yes, this has been a very pleasant session. Gentlemen, thank you so much.

**BOUCHARD:**