

Transcript – Gwyneth Walker '68

Transcribed by Karen L. Schneider (Class of 2000) in October 1997.

Narrator: Gwyneth Walker

Interviewer:

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Tape 1, Side 1

This is a career forum for music students held at Orwig Music Building with Gwyneth Walker (Class of 1968) in Providence, Rhode Island on December 5, 1997.

In conjunction with the visit, an evening concert of the music of Gwyneth Walker was presented by Denise Walker, wife of Philip Walker (Brown '71) and pianist Estrid Eklof. This program featured the World Premier of a song cycle entitled "No Ordinary Woman," based on the poetry of African-American poet, Lucille Clifton.

Audience member (male): Music's probably my major passion; it's really- I'm sure you know - really risky going all out and going the music route. I love you to death, and I'm willing to be on the streets for it.

Gwyneth Walker: Actually, I came to Brown as a physics major.

Audience member (male): Really?

GW: Since my father was a physicist. But, I had always written music and I just thought, you did music and you studied science, but when I got here and saw how many courses there were in the course catalogue, I wanted to take them all. And, I took physics and music for a while and I did well in both, but I really enjoyed the music more. I just felt that pursuing a life in music would mean that I would have, always, just a lot to do with other people. Just to write music and performing music with other people. And, I was afraid that in the sciences, it couldn't be, kind of oblique, like, I mean was, my physics labs were me and my lab partner shooting lasers down a hallway in a darkened building. And, then I would come out into the daylight and down to the Music department, and I was in the Chattertocks too, so I was always singing with other people. And, there was no way, you know, you'd be shut off into a little room. So, that was, that was that. But, I stayed with what I do and I'm making fine. It's very possible.

[Person walks in]

GW: No, I didn't come up with the title, "Making of My Music." But, I think the idea was in making the choice into going into music and that you still are able to stay with that career. Making a career is a neat thing to do, it's a possible thing to do. What do you do?

Audience member (male):

GW: Do you play or create music?

[Person walks in]

GW: Pembroke and Brown- I guess it was all Brown by the time I graduated, it was Pembroke when I came in. And, I graduated in '68 and this is my thirtieth coming up, not that I've come back for them all. So, that would make me fifty. And, I will say that when I was an undergraduate, fifty seemed awful, awful. But, I will tell you in this career that I'm in, writing music.

[Person walks in]

GW: Figure out just what I wanted to play for you all, I thought I'd see what kind of group I got. I write music in different genres- orchestra music, choral music, and chamber music - all three, as you will see in the brochure, that's why I handed it out. And, so I'm going to play tapes in each genre. And, most of the tapes will not be very long, so, don't worry about that. As the catalog with all of my works, you will see that I do span those genres. You might see, also, and I think I'll give you a quick-like tour so, through this music, sort of says it all. We'll start with the cover. Notice it just says my name, it doesn't have an awful picture or anything. This is a tool of the trade, I think. If you're interested in the music, you can open up the brochure and find out what I have written. It does not open with accolades about me, it simply opens with lists of the different pieces as well as a brief bio. There is quite a bit of orchestra music. And, if you turn the page, there's even more orchestra music. I've been doing some concerti. And, there's some band music. And then, brass quintets. And, what I do in chamber music is I tend to stick with regular ensembles, such as brass quintets, string quartets and woodwind quintets because there are a lot of those groups in the country, and, also, I like to tie things together. So many orchestras have within them, brass quintets, woodwind quintets, or string quartets. Sometimes they are the outreach groups in the orchestra and the orchestra will send their string quartets into the community or one of the groups. So, therefore, I try to write in areas that will keep helping me. It wouldn't help me to, then, start writing something for vibracone and tuba, you see, because I don't, that's not going to help. There are not many duos in the world that are vibracone and tuba. I'm a very practical person. I love to write music that can get into circulation, that lots of groups have played. It's not mine just to write for only one group. So, therefore, orchestra and I mean regular orchestra - usually, I write, a full orchestra, but occasionally for a chamber orchestra which maybe has only a few brass, that's about it. Then, I write brass quintets and woodwind quintets, you'll see those there. If you turn the page, I get into strings. I do write string quartet music and once you get involved with knowing people who play string instruments, you very soon get requests for an individual, like cello and piano, or even solo cello. Or violin and piano, or solo violin. And, then sometimes, violin and cello and piano, a piano trio. These are all categories that work well and when you meet people at performances who are playing your music already, these are very often the same people who might be in a chamber group. And, I do go to concerts, to as many performances as I can, while still maintaining my writing, because I'm interested to meet people who play the music and, very often, these people are people who are going to come back and perform other works of mine and I do keep their addresses. You know, when I come back home, I have a pocket full of cards with people's addresses and I put them on my computer because those people mean a lot to me. I'm not trying just to get ahead. I really care about the people who play my music and, hopefully, they care about me and that is why I keep them on file. So, after you get through the strings and then you see piano and organ music, then you will find a whole, huge part of my catalog devoted to choral music. And, choral music is a wonderful genre. In fact, if I were writing nothing but one genre, I would probably do choral music because I have always sung and I think voice is a very wonderful, expressive instrument. There are thousands of choruses in the United States. So, if you write music that one chorus can perform well and if it's a good piece, there's no reason that a thousand choruses couldn't perform it. And, it's very gratifying, not that I can get to all of these, but just to know that this music can really get out there. So, that's it and then there are some songs at the end of the catalogue. And, I will play some choral music and explain about that. And, also, about publishing and choral publishing and how that works versus, you know, pastoral publishing. And, I have two different publishers. I use to only be with Lucy Shermer, which is a great choral publisher, but they don't do enough with orchestra music, so I moved my orchestra music over Amanda Clingy, which is more of an orchestra publisher. So, I do have two, but it's by category. And, so they're not fighting. You don't want to be in the middle of a war between your publishers. So, they're happy, each does their own thing and et cetera. Now, I believe I have put up here a brass quintet called "Raise the Roof" and it's only a four-minute piece. And, I live in Vermont on a dairy farm, that's why I wear my cow pin. And, my community loves music -they love music. No event goes, passes without them commissioning a new piece. And, I wanted to commission a new piece to celebrate the tenth anniversary of them having fixed up the concert hall in the town, called Chandler Hall. They had fixed it up themselves in that sort-of New England way of everybody getting together, like a barn-

raising almost. They all came together and hammered and put this music hall back in shape so they could have concerts. And, after ten years, they wanted to celebrate that and they asked me to write a brass quintet. They were going to bring in brass players from central Vermont. So, I wrote a piece called "Raise the Roof" which means, "Let's get together and put this building together," or "Let's celebrate in such a way that you almost feel that you have raised the roof." And, I'm one of those people who puts in extraneous sounds in my music. I don't do it on, to be gimmicky, it's just, when I thought about raising the roof and hammering and everything, I walked down my road and some people were fixing up their garage and I could hear them hammering and I thought, "Why not put rhythms that were like hammering?" And, what I heard was one guy, you know, in November, everybody is trying to frantically finish all their- and the other one came in, they were together. They started together and then the hammering got, like that. And, I thought, "Why not just have the brass players give me these sort of taps?" So, you hear the taps and then the music starts. "Raise the Roof."

[Music starts]

GW: There we go. My first brass quintet, "Raise the Roof." I really like writing brass quintets and, subsequently, have done a couple more. Since I hadn't done one before, I didn't just leap into the fray, not knowing anything about what to do. I felt comfortable with the trumpets and horn. I did not know how to write for the tuba in a solo capacity, so I made an appointment with a very fine tuba player - tubist - in Vermont, Mark Nelson. And, we spent an afternoon in a practice room at the University of Vermont. And, subsequently, we got whole who played all of that intricate stuff. I became very fond of the tuba and I've written now a tuba concerto. And, people call me all the time for tuba festivals. And, it was, simply, because I did not know how to write for the tuba that I made a special point of having a tuba player show me what certain things would work well and what would and what wouldn't. And, there's no harm in asking, either, you know, and showing a player a rough draft. Much better to show the player in advance and get some help with pointers, rather than being shy and saying, "Well, here's what I have, you know, play it or don't and having a mediocre quintet. So, to me and what I'm here to say on this visit, because I know you have other artists coming in, is that for me writing music has a lot to do with other people, especially performers. And, respect for performers. You don't write something that's unplayable on the tuba and then expect the brass quintet to sound good and want to play your music again. You, instead, show a little humility in saying, "I don't know very much about the tuba, will you show me?" And, then, you go to rehearsal and if things aren't sounding right, sometimes the players will point out to you why it isn't and that's when you should be grateful and say, "Thank you for pointing out why this isn't working. What can we do better?" And, most times the players, especially if they have to go in public to play your piece, will be very happy to show you how to do this. So, for me writing music has to do with other people. Other people ask me to write this piece. I wrote the piece and got it ready on time. I don't want to offend my hometown by having something that was barely learned by the players. I got it ready. I got a performance. I talked to the performers. And, then, now, this has to do with business and music, what do you do after you've written a brass quintet in the span of a year? Wouldn't you like to have other people play it, rather than have it sit on a shelf? What a lot of times people, composers, write music and then, I think out of shyness for one thing, or maybe much more interest in writing a new thing, you put it away, you know. And, I'm the first to say that I'd much rather move on. But, it just irritates me to think that I would've spent that much time writing a brass quintet and only one brass quintet got to play it. Therefore, I keep those lists, those mailing lists, of all those brass players I've met over the years and I either drop them a note to say that I have a new piece, or, what the heck, I just send it to them. It's only a few pieces of paper and get the piece in circulation. Then, brass players will themselves share the music, tell each other about it. The point is don't let the music sit on the shelf. Get it out there. True enough I have a couple get it out there too. When I first write it, I simply photocopy and send out the score and the tape, immediately, to every brass player I know. "Raise the Roof" has been played by more than fifty brass quintets and those people contact me and I issue them the works. Somebody plays it on NPR all the time; there's a recording on National Public Radio of "Raise the Roof." People who have never heard any of my music, except for that, will have heard that only because it made it to National Public Radio. Where did it start? In downtown Randolph, Vermont, not in Lincoln Center. It started with a group of brass players and a very small, lower-middle class town in

Vermont, raising the money to celebrate the music hall. You don't have to start in Manhattan for the music to get to Manhattan. This piece has been played at Avery Fisher Hall. They thought it was the greatest thing. I had to tell them that this was how we, this is music in Vermont. I don't mean it was the greatest, the most wonderful thing they ever heard. But, they thought it was kind of unique, you know. But, this is just how we folks in my dairy farm make music. And, you don't have to say, "I want to get to New York." You just think, "I want to write a good piece for my neighbors." That's the first thing. "I want to write a good piece for the people in Randolph. If it's good enough for them, then it's good enough for other people." So, I just try, you know, to keep it very focused here-keep it small, focus on all that. Now, are there any questions before I go to a choral?

Audience Member (male): One question. There was one point in the piece where you have to see that.

GW: Oh, not only did they start with that, but then their feet go around and, you know, back and forth. And, you'd be amazed that the brass players could play everything fine, they always get screwed up - left, right, left, right, left, right. And, the, I talked to a couple of groups who recorded this and they told me that when they went in to do the recording, they got the music down like this and they kept going back over that last spot. I mean, they don't overlay it, mind you. They just have to put that tape in. And, you know, very skilled musicians cannot go one, two, you know. For some reason they can't. But, if you saw it, it goes like this, then, it goes like that, around. And, it's kind of cute and I think that when you go to a concert, if you're the audience, you're looking at these players and it certainly is more interesting if they're doing something, you know. If they're looking at you and all of a sudden "whew" and then "whew-whew," you know. And, then, when it's done, I often have things that are visual that happen. It's just because, I mean, you're looking at them anyway, they might as well do something. And, you know, when you've seen performers who are really good- I know that Itzhak Perlman was here and other- isn't that right? Wasn't he? Yeah. I mean, he's somebody who, he just doesn't play. You know, you give and you entertain in the best sense of it. If you are enjoying that particular passage, there's nothing that says you cannot smile or come forward. And, of course, that's one reason why I like singers so much because many times with singers, you know, are right there. Whereas, with string quartet, often it's trying to get further back away from them. I would like to have them right there in the audience. Now, I brought a score of something that I'm not going to play on a tape, but I was just thinking about the visual things. I always played a lot of tennis when I was here at Brown - I was on the tennis team and I grew up playing tennis. And, it occurred to me at a certain point to write a piece of music about tennis. And, I did. And, of course, the yellow cover is like the yellow ball - it's called "Match point." And, it is a dramatization of a match point in tennis. The bouncing of the balls and the conductor with the racket. And, my hero my entire life, Billy Jean King, conducted this in New York. Not- I, again, wrote this for the Randolph High School band, but the next performance was with Billy Jean King, you'll see on the back of the brochure - that's me. And, I put it there because that, truly, was the highlight of my life. I mean to meet Billy Jean and she helped, she wasn't the real conductor, they had a real conductor, but she sort of conducted and she bounced balls there. And, it was an awful lot of fun and I never, when I was at Brown, you know, I never dreamed that I would go on to write certain entertaining pieces. I mean, not that anybody told me not to. But, I really needed to think about it. But, what I would say to all of you is that whatever you have within your personality that is you, you should use. If you're a very reflective, quiet person, then you don't have to go around writing about tennis balls. But, if you have any spark of something special about you, then that is what should go into your music. Because that is what's going to reach other people, whether it's sincerity, a sadness, a sense of humor, a quirky way of viewing the world- that's what should go into your music because that will keep you going your whole life. You'll be putting so much of yourself in the music that you will flourish. What will not keep you going is if you trunk you must write something on a certain style because you studied that style. You'll dry up and you will not stay and then you will say that there's no such thing as a career in music. Well, you did it to yourself because you don't realize who you are and what you could do. Now, I'm going to move over to choral music just so you get the whole view and then if you have more specific questions. Now, will you pass these out and maybe people should share. And, the reason it's nice to have a score is

to follow the words and I'll talk about choral music because it is such a different genre from brass quintets. So long as there's two people per thing. I don't know quite how to start this. I always sang. I was in the Chattertocks and I always sang a lot of folk music. So, then, I was in all of the choruses here and loved it and that was great. When I went to graduate school, I went to the Hart School of Music in Hartford. And, as it turns out that's a strong school for choral music and they have an opera department. So that's a really good thing that they had at the Hart School and I got to meet some of the faculty - Jerry Mack was there and he was always very helpful to me. And, of course, many of the students who were at the Hart School when I was, went on to conduct choruses. I mean, this is back when the main theme music was about other people. When you go to school, there are other students there too and many of them go onto music and some become choral directors or orchestra conductors. And, you've met them and if they like you, they're going to want to help you. So, I met a lot of choral directors at the Hart School and I started writing some choral music and this piece was very early. I think this was twenty years ago that I wrote this particular piece. But, it has done well. It's performed frequently in All-State festivals, so I thought it would be a good piece to play. I like to use twentieth century American prose. I mean, it wouldn't be very becoming for me to try to set something German when I don't even speak German. I'm an American-American, I might as well deal with American poetry written in this century because that's something I feel an affinity towards and I've done a lot of different poets and tonight's concert is a song concert. I'll be using some poems of Lucille Clifton who's a living African American and I love her poetry. And, a few are May Swenson. But, this is e.e. cummings and I have a whole book of e.e. cummings poetry and I love this poem, "White Horses," the actual title is "After All the White Horses are in Bed." People always say, "What does that mean? What are the White Horses and what are they doing in bed?" The point is it's more an image and I just love the words. And, when I write choral music, I try to select words that will carry when singers are singing it. You know, for example, I love Dylan Thomas' poetry and I'm Welsh myself, but you cannot, I don't think you can really project that singing. A lot of it is very wordy. But, e.e. cummings, some of *his* poems are very direct and a chorus can stand on the stage and you can be in the audience and you can understand what they are singing about because the words are all regular English words. The unusual thing is the way e.e. cummings reorders the words. And, I actually didn't take the whole poem. I just took five lines of the poem that I liked and that's poetic license and I can do that. I took these lines: "After all white horses are in bed, you'll be walking beside me, my very lady. Touch none to my house and send light out of me. And night absolutely." To me, it's just a love song, a night time song; perhaps, we think of the days of the knights and the troubadours and the very lady. Perhaps, you get that image or perhaps you don't. But, that's the sort of poetry that I love. And, of course, the piano accompaniment emaciates the song has got to create that mood. Just the Schubert did in all of his songs, it's always the piano. The accompaniment that creates the moving of the song.

[Music plays and finishes.]

GW: One should never be afraid to be simple and straightforward and write something of simple, straightforward beauty if you are so moved to do that because other people do appreciate that. I think that that's one thing that was hard to do after having gone to graduate school and getting a Masters and a Ph.D. I think I was a little terrified to just write my own music, however, as soon as people sang it and wanted more music like that, you know, it certainly encouraged me. And, this was me. What you hear in this music was the Gwyneth Walker who went to Brown University and was in the Chattertocks. You don't hear, this isn't, you know, I tried this style, then- this is me. And, so, it's easy for me to write in this style. Whatever style is you, whatever kind of things interest you, is what you should write in. But, we don't talk about that at college. No, we study this, that, and the other. And, I don't remember ever being asked by my professors, "Well, what is you? Who is, who are you? What is it that you want to do with music?" Of course, I mean, there's a difference between taking a course in psychoanalysis, but you must write your own music. And, if you don't have your own music by the time you're at twenty and you're at Brown University, and, then, maybe, you should question if you really want to be a composer because most composers are just, you know, go charging out of marks. By the time

they are young people, they really want to write. They cannot live without writing music. And, it's a passion that is in you from, hopefully, the time when you are a child and you have something to say. When I was a student here, there was a senior when I was a freshman named Ann Warner, who is a very talented musician. And, she did a lot of arranging, she did the Chattertocks, and she's in Hollywood right now. And, I mean, I revered this person. I thought that she was the most talented musician and we were both in the orchestration class, I as a freshman and she as a senior, with our wonderful assignment that we could write a piece that the Brown orchestra was going to read and perform. I thought this was exciting and Ann just she wasn't excited at all and I said, "You know, what are going to do, Ann? Where is your piece?" And she said, "I have nothing to say." And, it's true. She had absolutely nothing to say. I don't mean it in a negative way. She's not a creative person. She's just not a creative person, she's just an extremely skilled musician, which she didn't have anything to say. And, she's not a composer today. She works in Hollywood with something like movies. I don't even know, if it's music oriented. You know, she was a very skilled person, but she didn't have anything to say. Most creative artists have plenty to say. They don't have enough hours in the day to say it. If that's not you, then maybe another part of you is into being [?]. You asked who recorded this and this is a group from Connecticut called Conn Chora- Connecticut Choral Artists from the Hart School of Music. I mean, they're not there anymore, but they're in the area. And, I keep up with them. I mean, God sakes, they're terrific, you know. And, once again, music is about other people.

Performing- if you can write something other people can perform and they like, and the audience likes me and most people want a program that they think they're audience is going to like, then you've got some help. It's not only the notes on the page, it's what the notes on the page have to do with the performance. Can they perform those notes? Does it mean something to you, to them, and to the audience? If so, you may find that a career in music just lands in your lap and you're having to fend it off, you know. So, now, you all have to crawl up top- that's what they call an octavo because there are two systems on the page- an SATB, 4 and 4 is 8, so that's why it's called an octavo. Isn't that right? These octavos are kind of an odd size. They're not really 8 1/2 by 11. They're actually - it's basically an 11 by 14. It's just the way that choral music is done. This is how choral music is published. And, a publisher will take a, you know, you hope with music like this you would get a publisher because otherwise you're going to be standing at home folding the photocopies all the time, trying to, you know- which I did before I had a publisher. I would be selling this myself. And, the publisher can see the dollar signs go by when they realize that a chorus which wants this piece will, perhaps, buy forty copies of it. So, if you write choral music, you definitely need a publisher. And, if you write good choral music, a publisher definitely needs you. So, it's a happy- this is the business of choral music. When you write the piece- let me get the chronology. I'm sitting at home on the dairy farm, looking out at the cows. The phone rings. A choral director, perhaps, one of those nice people I went to Graduate School with, phones, or it's somebody not like that. You know, someone from another part of the country calls and says that C-word: commission word. They say, "Can we commission a work? It's going to be to the centennial of our town, or the twenty-fifth anniversary of our chorus, you know, those occasions." So, my first question is, when do you need it because I'm not free at that moment. Oh, it's two years in the future, good. How long a work is it? And, they want a - hmm, you know. And, what size of a chorus is it, so I get an idea. And, then, we tend to say how much money are we talking about here? Now, when it's just chorus, you don't have parts to copy. You don't have to worry about- if this were band, it would be a whole different matter because you have all those parts to copy, it takes a lot of time. And, then, when the band performs it, you've got to get everybody their music. With the choral thing, you only need one copy and then they photocopy. So, you get that and you know that now in two years from now, you have to produce this work for their event. Then, time passes and you're able to write it. You get to that point in your schedule. You write the piece. You tell- oh, you decide early on what you want to use as a text, cause it can take a long time to get permission to use the text. Sometimes when you write to a publishing house, they don't even answer you for six months. They're very lackadaisical and relaxed about this and their permissions department is usually not the most dynamic department. So, you know, so I would immediately, if it's two years from now, think, "What would I like to do?"

And, maybe it would be obvious for me, the kind of course and the kind of vocation, at what sort of thing would be better than another, just in general sense. Whether it should be more popular or more reflective, depending on - and more difficult or simple- depending on. You get permission from the - if the poem is not in the public domain, you have to get permission. So, you get that lined up right away. You write your piece, send the piece to the conductor. You want to tell the conductor in advance what poetry you're doing, so that they can plan the rest of the program to work well. You go to the dress rehearsal, if the composer wants it right. Maybe even earlier, making it an earlier rehearsal - the dress rehearsal and the concert. I mean, it's your baby, you've got to be there, you know, to be sure that you wrote exactly what you wanted. You may have thought, "Who could possibly perform this without a crescendo, I mean, maybe 47?" But, performers don't add things that aren't in the music, necessarily. So, you have to be there after the premier - uh, now this is when you try to get it published. I mean, if you have a publishing contract with a publisher, then you just send it to them. But, other than that, send score and tape to publisher. Once they accept it, it's not yours anymore. You can't then start selling it. It's theirs to sell. They will engrave it. They will sell it. You go on to the next piece. So, it's good and bad to have a publisher and, certainly though, you're not going to get much money because you only get ten percent. Let's say they charge \$1.50 per octavo. You can imagine, you know, it takes an awful lot of octavos to sell before you get very much money. But, the fact is, they are selling it and getting it out there and doing all that work and getting it on to the conferences where the music is showcased and stuff like that, and you go on to the next work. So, it's, it's sort of working in that progression. And, it's just like, I mean, I don't have any children so this is like my baby and I help the baby through the first performance and sometimes I even go to a couple more. I don't necessarily hand it to my publisher right away. Let's say that there is something I wasn't satisfied with. Well, don't give it to a publisher yet because they are going to put it in print and you're going to have to live with that dissatisfying section. Wait till you're sure it's right. Then, you must let go of your child and it's someone else's baby and you have other things to do. So that's how it goes. It's a little different than writing brass quintet because you don't need to get permission for words. That's a whole different - you don't make very much money from chamber music because you only get ten percent of the sales. And, they don't sell thousands and thousands of copies of chamber music. This piece sells three thousand copies so E.C. Turner's very happy the day this came into their life. The brass quintets, you know a couple copies so it's a totally different thing. I did not study economics at Brown. I knew nothing about the business of music at Brown. There's no course in the music business, but neither was there at the Hart School. So, you just jump into this pond of uncertainty and you learn, if you want to make some money, this is, all you have to do is be fairly practical. You will make money from commissions. People say we would like a new choral work and because I'm not just out of Graduate School, because I've done a number of these, I can command a higher fee, but you don't want to get so high that community chorus can no longer afford you. Are you familiar with the composer, Ellen Taft Welch, who won the Pulitzer Prize a couple years ago? And, she's a big name in New York and she charges by the minute. Thousands- sorry, Ellen, I don't mean to be telling your secrets- but she charges a lot by the minute and this is how New York does it. She's a graduate of Florida State University. They have a wonderful grad school. They wanted to commission a work to take on tour by their graduate, Ellen Taft Welch. She charged so much money that her own university could not afford to commission her, so they went on tour with "Raise the Roof." And, you can imagine how Ellen Welch felt, sitting in Avery-Fisher Hall, listening to the Florida State Brass Quintet play the work of another woman composer, sitting by. And, it was all because she kept her price too high. You have to keep the price to suit the groups you want to write for. But, not so low that you say, ah, gee, fifty dollars or something, if you're doing this for a while.

Man: But, there's another side of it. She's been writing for Peanuts. GW:

(laughs) She's been writing for cartoons recently, right?

Man: She teamed up with Charles Schultz and she set Peanuts to music. It's a pun.

GW: It's a pun. I understand. At any rate. I love to write choral music. It has very little

to do with writing brass music. Most composers don't write in every single genre. Most composers have their specific thing. And, I don't write in every genre. I try to narrow it down to standard chamber groups, orchestra, and chorus. But, that even is more than a lot of people do and the reason I do that is I get asked to do it and I hate to say no. I really do. So, I say yes and then I learn how to do these things. It's hard to say no, so I do that. But, I love writing for chorus and you just have to remember: is it singable? And, especially, the words, words can't sing by themselves, you can't have people screeching around with Cajun. When I was at Graduate School, my teacher was an Italian, Arnold Pamcetti, and he was a Puccini disciple and a Leonard Strauss also. And, that was very fortunate for me because he loved Gulielm [?] and [?]. I was in Graduate School in the Seventies and a lot of people, a lot of universities did not encourage people to write melodious music. But, my teacher did and so I was able to come out less scathed than other people that hadn't gone to Hart. Now, I'll do the orchestra piece just to finish up with a different genre. And, you don't necessarily need a score for this, okay. So, if you want a score get one. This is a fourteen minute work that I wrote over this summer for the Vermont Symphony and I kind of like it. So, I wanted to play it for you.

Man: I have one quick question before you start because I noticed you use commission with the Vermont Symphony. But, you wrote it for a very small section, just one or two clarinets.

GW: They gave me the instrumentation. Oh, that's another- that's a good point. Most times when people commission you, you can't just write anything you want. You have to write for the instrumentation that they request and if they request something that's so odd that you don't think that anybody else is ever going to play it, then maybe you don't want to accept that commission. But, the Vermont Symphony wanted me to write a piece for them to take on their Fall Tour. And, when the orchestra tours, they can't take all of the instruments because they wanted to play in country churches and town halls. Just my sort of thing, so the whole commission just seemed like something I'd like to do.

Man: Did they want this to match another piece?

GW: Yes, well, several. I was on a two week tour, the rest of the program changed from week to week. So, I was the lowest common denominator. These instruments were needed for both weeks. They did "Appalachian Spring" with just one woodwind. They did something, I don't remember, that used the two clarinets- I think it was a Mozart symphony. So, that's how this weird orchestration came about. But, I wanted so much to do this that I went with it. And, I figured that all orchestras have these and many more instruments, so. They told me who to write it for and where they were going to perform it and when they needed it and how long and what it should be. They wanted something based on Robert Frost poetry - inspired by Robert Frost poetry. They sort of asked, would I do something like that and I said, yes. And, what happened here is I thought you could even read the poem, I mean, somebody could read the poem beforehand, but they didn't get that organized enough, so. Let me get the poems and I'll be right back to you. There are three poems of Robert Frost and each inspires a movement of this work which is called, "About Leaves." And, notice the cover show leaves so that when this is placed at a conference by my publisher, people could see this right away. I mean, I'm not going to be shy about it. This is a piece about leaves, not everybody has one. Here's the first movement, called "A Leaf Treader." And, this has to do stomping on leaves and trying to get them down and out of the way. I have been treading on leaves all day until I thought, God knows all the color and fun of leaves...

[Tape 1, Side 1 Ends. Tape 1, Side 2 Begins.]

GW: "All summer long, I thought I heard them threatening under their breath, And when they came, it seemed for the will to carry me with them to death, They spoke to the fugitive in my heart as it went leaf to leaf, They tapped at my eyelids, they touched my lips with an invitation to brief, But it was no reason I had to go because they had to go, Now, up to my need to keep on top of them."

[Music plays and stops.]

GW: That is one of the movements. This is the movement that uses the two clarinets that I was given in advance. They chase each other musically around like leaves, "Gathering Leaves": "Spades take up leaves no better than spoons, And bags full of leaves are light as balloons, I make a great noise of rustling all day like rabbit and deer running away, But, the mountains I raise, all of my embrace, flowing over my arms and into my face, I may load and unload again and again, Till I fill the whole shed and what have I been? Next to nothing for weight and since they grow duller in contact with earth. Next to nothing for color, next to nothing for use, But a crop is a crop and who's to say where the harvest shall stop. Spades take up leaves no better than spoons, And bags full of leaves are light as balloons."

[Music plays and stops.]

GW: This last one has to do with the sadness one feels when autumn comes and all the leaves turning leave trees:

"Nature's first green is gold, Her heart is for you to hold, Her early leaf is a flower, But only so within an hour, Then leaf subsides to leaf, So Eden sang to grief, So Dawn goes down today, Nothing gold is dead."

[Music plays and stops.]

GW: And then, some of you students developed score reading abilities. I'm not sure how much score reading I had done when I was an undergraduate.

Man: That was beautiful.

GW: Well, it's how I generally feel at the end of autumn and I just tried to write how I felt. And, it seemed to touch other people, so you know, it's so easy to stray into doing things that aren't really what you feel. You get going, you say, "I have to finish this, any old thing." But, when you actually can write what you like, it's most successful when you feel as though you have connected with what you are creating. And, it doesn't always happen. You end up, sometimes, not writing when you're most inspired. But, neither did Mozart. You know, you try as often as you can to write something that you generally feel. And, to bring together the two things which are your feelings and your training. So, I don't mean to sound as a schmaltz saying write from your heart when I have a Ph.D. in composition. And, I don't mean to schlep that off because you need to study how music is put together so that you can have a form. I mean, one of the things that makes this piece work is that it's very tightly structured by form. But, I don't think you're sitting there thinking, "Oh, here comes the recapitulation." However, it was planned very carefully, so that when I had some ideas, I had something to hold them up and make them work. It doesn't help to sort of explode emotionally all over the page and meander. What helps is to have some ideas and then think very carefully, what can I do with this idea? And, even let it flow. I'm not saying you say to the idea, "No, you can't have any more measures here" because you want the idea to grow, but you also want to stand back and say, "Hm, I know I've got to get myself to a different tonal area, so that I can return." And, one of the things that works in this piece is that it is in D Major, I'm talking about the last movement, and then it goes into C Minor and it goes towards the A Flat up here, which is a tri-tone away from D. All that stuff in the storm near the end is A Flat Minor, I mean you can't get any darker than that. And, then it comes back to D Major. And, I used a little bit of training to do that. So, writing from your heart, writing from your soul, writing for the glory of God if you're a spiritual person, these are good incentives, but you must also know how music is put together. And, also about the instruments because I really don't play any orchestral instruments, but I have had many fortunate encounters with both string players, I mean that last movement is all string writing and I was thrilled to see the cellos' bows flying through the air in patterns that were quite playable. And, I thought, whew, you know, and it's all second-hand knowledge from someone else. You don't want to just write for the strings on one string, you know. I mean, there are four strings. It's easy to grab wide chords with string instruments. Some chords, but other chords not. And, to know which things. So, it's a mixture of who you want to be and what you want to say in music. While I was at Brown, I was in the Chattertocks. I mean, I sang folk music. And, I studied music at the music

department and I think those two things have helped me. I'm a folksy kind of a person and I certainly like to write music that can be performed. But, I try to write things that use some planning and so that I can hold my head up in the orchestra world - it's not a welcoming role. There are thousands of composers who are trying to get orchestras to play their pieces and until recently it did not help at all to be a woman composer in the orchestra world. Now, people have changed, but when I started doing this the only thing I could find was the professionalism of the music. And, you see, you are looking at a very nicely copied score, which I did not do. I had copies made. But I would not dream of handing in an uncopied score because I am a woman composer living on a dairy farm in Vermont. Can you imagine how a conductor is going to then look at a hand-copied score about Robert Frost - "Oh that's so sweet, dear"—you know? But, if you make it a score that is really- I mean, you cannot flaw anything in this score. And, I'm talking about notation when the strings, the violins - so everything is perfect. Then, the conductor says, "Hm, maybe I should listen to the tape. Maybe it's not as, maybe this person knows what she is doing." And, then, when you hear a really nice performance, the score and tape, the conductor quickly forgets whether you're male or female. The conductor thinks, "You know, I'll bet our audience would like to hear that." The conductor's always trying to think what is going to bring them an audience. I'll bet, even the most conservative audience person who says, "I hate new music," could still swallow this, you know. And, I wouldn't think of that. I don't try to please the masses, this is just too wet, Walker whatever music you write will be what you are and it can be much more challenging. You know, I use to do things that were much more complicated, but I just came back to, basically, tonal music because it's my background. And, instead of just doing that, I try to pick interesting texts for the choral music. And, if people suggest anything to do with poetry or orchestra music, I like that because I think I'm more of a theatrical composer, then an erudite [?] composer. And, so I will be doing more things that have to do with programmatic aspects because there are an awful lot of people in the audience who are interested in Robert Frost poetry, just to start out with and thought that taking the poem to writing music that expressed it. I mean, I hope you felt that the music connected to, at least, somewhat to the poems. But, just understand that that would happen is a real unusual - how do you express the fading of the autumn foliage in music? You know, and you can't really just express your feelings about it and you can have reflight tremolos in the strings, you know, you can do that and I have the blurry colors of the strings the way you would look at the foliage in the autumn, it's all mixing together, so I had a lot of the strings overlapping. I mean, I just tried to do that. And, it seemed to be something that intrigued a lot of people and me, the most. And, so I know that if it interests me, I'm going to do well with other folks. I wouldn't want to encourage everybody to go onto writing professional music, because it really is kind of discouraging to try to get orchestras to play the music. Unless, you sell your soul to the devil, unless you are married to a famous musician and live in luxury, and whatever. But, if you are completely unconnected to any of that and you simply write well and you think orchestras are going to play it because you simply write well, you've got to have forty-two. You know, I'm a very persistent person, you know, otherwise I probably would have been beaten up a long time ago because I see pieces programmed that I don't think are very good and I know damn well why they selected that composer. You know, it wasn't based on the music. And, it makes me really angry, but, you know, the only way I can correct that is to speak out and say, "I think music should be for everybody." I think that some little town in Vermont should have a newly composed brass quintet that is so good, that people in Manhattan will think it's pretty good too. And, I think that you should write choral music, I mean, that choral music should be written for the average chorus, for the average singer, and I think that everybody should be given a fair chance. I really do and I am a Quaker, you know, I think fair is fair and I think I should be given a fair chance in orchestra music, which I'm not always done. In other ways, I've been so greatly rewarded with, you know, positive quintets that I can handle it. But it is hard. And, I don't think going into orchestra music is necessarily the sign of the time. I think that orchestras are floundering right and left, and some of them think that they should only quote Beethoven to get by. And, then they wonder why you're writing it, since they're all in their nineties. And, I think that anything vocal and choral is really good because people are always going to see them. And, chamber music is good. And, then, newer technology stuff that people are interested in, you know,

certainly doesn't exist. Anything that you think is going to be an interest level. And, I only write for orchestra because they ask me and because I like to do it, but I would never put all of my eggs in that basket, because, you know what I see in orchestras all over is that they're so archaic, they really have got to get with it. Or they won't be around at all. That's that.

Man in the audience: [laughs] A fellow was in my office saying the same thing, only yesterday. Poor fellow, orchestra's not picking up, oh, what am I going to do. You know, the orchestra is so fragile it's going to disappear and here I'll still be around and I'll have nothing to conduct.

GW: Oh, yes, I never thought how a conductor would feel too because he has to put all of his eggs into one basket, that's true. But, there are so many different kinds of music out there, including chamber music and Copland and everything else. There are many avenues to follow in that.

Man in the audience: Maybe this is a good time to ask if there are any questions, or...

GW: Any time anyone has any questions, just barrel in.

Woman 1:

GW: Brown or graduate school?

Woman 1:

GW: Ah, yeah. I was a heavily academic person in that I went to Andover, Brown, then the Hart School of Music for a master's degree and then the Hart school of music for a doctoral degree and a job at Oberlin. Every year my year was September to June, you know. September 1 was like New Year's. That's when we always started our academic schedule. And, then, I found myself at Oberlin teaching in this wonderful job and I thought, "This is it. I am set for life." Haha, dangerous thing to say, isn't it? And, I had a wonderful job, a wonderful apartment, I was teaching the best students, I was also the tennis coach, I got our girls to win. You know, I went all over the state of Ohio with the tennis team, so you know, I really had it - I had a key to the gym, I had wonderful students for music too. So, you know, that I had a wonderful life at Oberlin. I didn't have time to write. None of my colleagues were writing. They would write maybe in the summer or on the weekend. But, no, no, no, you know, I tried to do my best to juggle my schedule so I would have Tuesdays and Thursdays to write and, you know, and I'm fanatically in over the weekend. And, I did start writing some things and they were played all of the country, so then, I was flying up in the airplane every weekend and I thought, "Teaching is wonderful. My job at Oberlin is just wonderful. And, writing," I said. "And, I will never forgive myself if I don't really try this." So, I gave up the tenured track. I was there for four years, but I decided, in the middle of the third year, I would be very nice and tell them I would not be staying. That was a mistake because then they all thought that- the other faculty was not at all understanding. They were terribly threatening and I didn't even discourse it with them. And, I just didn't even discuss it with them anymore because, they all may have wanted to make that decision but with as too late. I was, after all this, I was about thirty-one years old - you'd think I was forty- five by the way I described my life. But I was, you know, pretty young and I just said, "If I don't leave now, I'll never leave because I'm going to get cozier and cozier and my house, you know, settle in Oberlin. And, I will never forgive myself when I am sixty years old, if I didn't try to write. So, I saved my money from my teaching job so I knew that I could live for a year or two. And, I tried just writing and knowing that I went back to where I grew-up in Buchanan, Connecticut which is not a place that supports music at all. And, I was terribly lonely and the phone was not ringing. So, I went back to Hartford and took a part-time job at a community school at the Hartford Conservatory of Music and Dance, so that I could teach just a little and write a lot. And, I did. And, after a few years of that, though, I got in the same position I was at Oberlin which is, you get very involved with academic things, especially if you're interested in it. And, I started teaching classes for music and dance, I was a choreographer, I mean we got this

little conservatory right on the map there, you know. Kids from the Hart School were coming over to this Community- writing for the dance and I said, "Uh-oh, I don't think this is going to work, I'm right back just where I was at Oberlin. I'm teaching too much and writing too little. And, now, I'm not even getting paid what I was at Oberlin." And, so I went, I lived in London- somebody suggested that I should get out of the country for a while and I really heard good music and I said, "Those composers," and I met Epherial and Kenza and all those people were there and I said, "Gee, you know, they're not correcting papers at the Hartford Conservatory for Music and Dance. They're not, I should just go back to the United States and live in the country and write my own American music, that's what I should do." And, I came back and I moved to Vermont and within one week, the first week I moved back to Vermont, my neighbor, Duffy, who conducts the high school band, who's a tennis player- the only other person who plays in my town. You know, we played tennis and he said, "Gwen, can you write us a piece for the band." And, I wrote "Match Point" and Billie Jean King performed it at Lincoln Center and E.C. Shermer called me up and everything just then- and Governor Kunin came to one of my concerts and I started the Vermont Composers Group. The whole thing just went, "Yes, yes, yes," and so it was, I never had to go back to teaching. It took couple of steps and it was terrifying and I got no support from anybody, but this is the right thing for me, you know. Nobody told me though that that was a career possibility. And, this is something - when I was at the Hart School, I won a Student Composer's award. Big deal. And I was the first doctoral graduate. They were so thrilled, so proud of me that other track members couldn't wait to help give recommendations for me to get a teaching job. The year after me, a guy won the Student's award - didn't even get his doctorate. They couldn't wait for him to get a Fulbright. And, he's not even composing anymore. In other words, they looked at a woman student as a possible teacher, even though I was writing music, they looked at me as going on to teaching. They looked at him as going on to become a composer. You know, nobody was really very helpful- he's not even writing anymore. Not that I shouldn't have a Fulbright because I'm such an American person, I mean, it would be ridiculous to be, you know, in a foreign country with a-you know, when I love writing for the local farmers in the bam. That's where I should be, you know, I'm best off here. It worked out okay, but people don't necessarily say, "Oh, you're talented. Why don't you try this out?" Instead, they will put before you the avenues that other people followed and you'll see that. And, also, expectations are never very common. I think that people don't actually think they're going to have students at their school could possibly ever grow up to be world-famous composers. Not that I am such. But, I remember going to the Hart School and looking to the library and seeing all of these books - Kostakovich and everybody - of course, and those are them. You know, Kostakovich never could have gone to the Hart School. I mean, obviously, it's, what's made here is never going to be as good as what's made there. And, instead, there's one thing they ever do back at that school, maybe I should do it here: "Somebody in this room could be a very successful musician, the kind we will read biographies about." Why not? Why not here? You know, and I just remember going back to the library at the Hart School and I've always given them copies and I was looking up somebody, Wilken Walton, and there was one of my pieces on the shelf in the library at the Hart School. And, I thought, isn't that incredible, you know, that I could be one of them, only in my own meager way. But we always study the Great Masters. Nobody ever trains us to be a Great Master. Had they ever asked a question like, "How are you going to carry yourself when you have become a successful composer, or a successful anything?" "What are you going to do with yourself when you have made it?" Well, they never asked, you know. So you also struggle a lot with that. Maybe, psychologically, you say, "How can I give back to them?" "What sort of person am I going to be when I go out traveling around?" No one prepared me for even a small bit of success because no one expected it; they don't expect it of themselves and they don't expect it of their students. And, instead, I want to think that anybody could succeed in their own certain way and what do you think you should have to know about, you have to remember that each one of us has specific skills. Some of us are more practical. Some of us are more whimsical. Some of us, you know those are the skills you need to know. And, it turned it out that I was fairly practical and I was able to make a living of this. And, you know I should have understood this in myself. And, each person should know within themselves and what is it within yourself that helps you

to love music so much that you could actually do music for sixty years. What is it in you? What's going to keep you going because they're going to be an awful lot of, "No, no, we don't want to perform your music. We know you. You're from our home town." "We couldn't possibly do that." Or, "we couldn't possibly do that." Or, "our audience doesn't like new music." There are so many things that people will say to stop you. Then, you got to figure out what do you have within you that will keep you going. What is it within you to keep going? Your stubbornness, your competitiveness, your oblivious to it all. Something in you will keep you going. And, what are you going to do as you get better? You know, what are going to do, how are you going to handle success? When I met Billie Jean King, I was so impressed because she can be in the public eye and she's not exhausted, she just acts natural. And, I thought, there's someone of stature. And, you know, I felt the same way about Governor Kunin. And, I'm also a friend of Joanne Paletam, who's an orchestra conductor. And, each of these people handle their success graciously and their manners never fall through. They never have to exhaust themselves. And, I see other people who I won't mention who won major awards, who are so, I mean, they don't the blessings they've been given. Question?

Man: That's great. Thank you very, very much. We certainly appreciate it. You were talking before about getting permission. Have you ever been in a position where you have been turned down on permission to write a piece, and you have been waiting, thinking you were going to get an acceptance? Did you create some kind of plan B in the event where the text would not be approved by the publisher?

GW: Well, you certainly cannot go ahead and write the work, if you don't have permission. I mean, you could write it for yourself, but you couldn't, then, give it to your publisher. And, so it is much better to put the effort in to find another text then to write something that you're going to show around. That's why it's very important to get permission early on, so you know you've got permission. If you've got set poems from a certain poet before and then you spot some other poem, chances are you will be, so sometimes you can go ahead and say, "Well, I didn't have permission for those, but I have already dealt with that publisher."

Man: Have you ever had anyone say, "no?"

GW: Oh yes, well, no. Most of the time they don't get back to you, but sometimes they say no. There are a couple poets, well, Maya Angelou, I couldn't get permission, even though I was in a festival where she read the opening poem and I did the closing choral piece. And, her agent never responded to me. I think one thing that didn't help was that I wasn't as nationally well-known as she was. And, maybe, also, I wasn't an African-American. They would've found it offensive.

Man: You went to an agent, not the publisher?

GW: Oh, I did, but they referred me to somebody who she- the literary agent gives the permission. I found out later from Lisa Shermer that that literary agent was known to be impossible. Also, anything to do with Martin Luther King's writing is very sticky, very, very sticky and they took years to get back to me too. Maya Angelou, also Mary Oliver is a wonderful poet. She simply won't let anybody do anything. Oh, she wants to hear it first. So she wants you to write the music and copy it and let her hear it. She doesn't understand that you don't want to do that. Well, I mean it's stupid.

Man: I actually had one publisher say no and then they eventually, I managed to convince them. And, the reason they said no was because the poet had just died and at point there was a flurry of people who were trying to get permission.

GW: Who was this?

Man: Petrof Trokowsky.

GW: Oh, yeah.

Man: It was really quite a scary situation because I had permission to do something and something happened. Fortunately, I was able to turn them around and convince them, but it was difficult. A lot of letters and stuff and promises of money.

GW: I'm always looking for texts, in advance. I mean, I have reams of poetry that are impossible things to do. Until somebody asks you to write something, I'm not starting from scratch.

Man: So you have things that you've already gotten permission to use, just in case something falls through.

GW: Yes, yes, which it is a sticky mess. And, sometimes the copyright expires and certain dates you have to plan ahead. They're a couple things that expire in the year 2000 or 2002, and I actually have to write the piece fairly soon and let people premiere it, but not give it to the publisher. They don't mind if you set it, you just can't sell it. But, if you, if money changes hands, you should, you can get into trouble if they give you commission. They commissioned it in the first place, technically, you're being paid to create something and you're taking advantage of its worth so. But, if you keep a low profile, then, the best idea is try to wait.

Man: I can understand going to an external publisher for choral music when there is such a large volume in and such a huge market for, but I'm curious to know why you chose to go to a commercial publisher for your instrumental music and chamber music and smaller works, rather than self-publishing to retain your publisher's share for these.

GW: I have over 120 works, that are performed every day of the year. I couldn't possibly deal with. Also, a publisher has their own promotional sale, in addition to mine. So, it's the sheer volume of it. I certainly, initially, photocopied and distributed, but once it is set, I give it to the publisher, they promote it. They really do generate their own group of sales, so it's the best of both worlds. You don't make a lot of money through chamber music, anyway, so it's not the sale, it's the commissions and the performance royalties. The commissions, it goes right to and, then, the performance royalties it is 50/50. It's the sales you only get ten percent on. But, I could never leave my house, at all, if I didn't have a publisher. I would be, right now, stuffing envelopes and sending out invoices. You know, if I had ten pieces in my catalog, that's one thing. But, I have 120 with more and at least ten more a year, so there's no way. And, the publisher likes it. I mean, they like having the music, they're nice to me, they're nice to the customer, it's their business to sell. I could self-publish it if I just had a few works and, especially, orchestral ones where you do make more money because you get every single penny, but you also are standing there, making up the parts, putting them in the envelopes, reminding the orchestra they haven't sent it back to you. When it comes back, they left out the trombones. I mean, how much time do you want to spend on this?

Woman: [unable to understand question]

GW: Yes, yes because the commissions are submitted and the pieces I have written, so, and the pieces I have written are performed and so I get performance royalties. Remember, it's the baby syndrome. The baby is still alive and kicking and it's generating income. Once you've written it, then, it keeps going. Yes, oh yes, I support myself on my copyrights. It's fun. You just have to keep your head screwed on, you know, because things happen fast. You know, but I never change. People pay me to write what I like to write, they don't want me to sound like Kostakovich. They like this piece, they want another one like this, you know, sort of. They don't want you to try and adopt somebody else's. It's very important. Also, you travel and you meet people all over the country and all over and they're always interesting. And, I remember them, all, they're all my little guiles. They're all on computer, under their instrument.

Woman: When did you start playing?

GW: When I was two. We had a piano in the house and I just, I heard my older sister play it and I thought, "Whoa, what is that?" And, of course, I had all the time in the world, so I crawled over to the piano and I [hitting the table] and I was there all day and every day and I just started making sounds that I like. And, when I was in first grade, my poor little friends came over from school, after school and they had to play my latest little piece before we could do anything else. They just got use to it. Every Monday, we went to Gwenny's house and Gwenny hands out her piece and then we play it and then you can go outside. And, they kind of enjoyed it. But, it was always something for other people. I always did that. And, it wasn't until I was in high school, that I got any period training and I think that is good because, if you try to take a young child, and teach them how music should be, they're going to quickly lose their own voice. In an attempt to please the teacher, they're to do it how it should be and the little child doesn't show themselves. No, let that child write something in that child's style. Don't tell them that they should write it like this. Just say, that's neat, you know, and what are you going to bring me next week. And, you know, what other instruments might you play. Just keep, what bigger world can that child generate. Not, "oh, no, don't you realize that there are too many beats in that bar." I mean, for god's sake, you don't want to tell them they're doing something wrong. They like it. That was their creative spark. But, most teacher's who handle little kids are not that, you know, most of the piano teachers have been teaching for fifty years already and they know how to lay down the rules. I don't think you should lay down any rules, until the child is so ready to write music and the child desperately wants to learn the rules of how chords are spelled- not know that they have to make-up every single note that somebody else had gone there before. That's it.

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

End.