Jean-Louis LeRoux

CONDUCTOR WITH A CONTEMPORARY MUSIC MISSION

With an introduction by
Charles Boone

An Interview Conducted by
Caroline Crawford
in 2002 and 2003

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Copy no. ______
Creation of the Chamber Symphony of San Francisco, 1978
Conducting the San Francisco Ballet Orchestra, 1975-1984
Remembering Ballet Directors Helgi Tomassen and Michael Smuin
Leaving San Francisco for Punta del Este, 1984
A Return to San Francisco and Marriage to Jane Roos
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INTRODUCTION by Charles Boone

I was aware of Jean-Louis LeRoux for a couple of years before I actually met him around 1965. At San Francisco Symphony concerts, it was always he who played on his oboe the A to which his colleagues tuned. I also remember very well seeing (yes, seeing) Jean-Louis play a work by Morton Subotnick at the San Francisco Tape Music Center at 321 Divisadero Street, also about 1965. It was Mort’s Play I for woodwind quintet and electronic sounds. The score called not only for usual (and, in this case, exceedingly unusual) kinds of instrumental sounds, but also a variety of theatrical poses and gestures for the players to execute. To this day I recall the look of the piece and, in particular, Jean-Louis’s intense and thoroughly engaged stage presence. When his part instructed him to look intently at other players, he didn’t just glance their way, he absolutely riveted them with his eyes; no half-way rendering of the part from this guy.

In 1966, the Tape Music Center moved to Mills College where Jean-Louis conducted the orchestra and appeared with the Mills Performing Group. I became coordinator of the Tape Center and Performing Group that year and quickly discovered that the best part of the job was being in touch many times a week with my new-found friend. During this time the San Francisco Symphony asked me to write a brief piece for use on their youth concerts; its purpose was to demonstrate a variety of new sounds and musical techniques. The result was Shadow for solo oboe (Jean-Louis, of course, playing multiphonics and other special effects), orchestra, and electronic sounds. Jean-Louis also conducted the Modesto Symphony and in 1967 he asked me to write a piece that I myself would conduct with that orchestra. So it is thanks to Jean-Louis that my first two orchestra pieces came into being and were actually performed.

I have a theory that certain people can take chances and others can not, and the reason for this, at least in some cases, is that those who can take chances are, somehow, genetically gifted in this way. I also have the theory that Jean-Louis is one of those genetically programmed chance-takers. I started some modest concerts in 1971 called BYOP Concerts—as in Bring Your Own Pillow; they were held in galleries and other places that generally had no seats. When I moved away from the Bay Area in 1974, Jean-Louis and Marcella De Cray took over this small series and turned it into something quite grand, known today as the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players. Jean-Louis’s chance-taking abilities were evident again and again in these programs.

For example, I had heard (and, once again, seen) a performance in Paris by a young American composer named Eugenie Kuffler. The piece of hers that blew me away, Pièces Detachées, consisted simply of her taking apart her flute, the resulting sounds of those actions being the sole sounds of the piece. It caused more than a bit of a stir among its Parisian listeners. I told Jean-Louis about it and without losing so much as a beat, he said, “We’ll schedule it here.” And he did. It wasn’t long before he brought Genie to San Francisco for a Contemporary Music Players concert that also included another of her works in which, this time, she lay directly on the strings inside an open grand piano, acting as a sort of mega-damper, while her gentleman friend played on the keyboard. It was wonderful fun; and, by the way, perhaps to Jean-Louis’s disappointment, the local stir was significantly less than the one in Paris.

Jean-Louis programmed and conducted all kinds of music on his Contemporary Music Players concerts. He did twentieth-century classics that, very stupidly, are rarely heard live; most notably, some of the important chamber works of Arnold Schoenberg. He generally tackled the most difficult and challenging sorts of scores. By contrast and, in my view, taking an even greater chance, he scheduled a series of programs of non-avant garde—let’s call them “representational”—American composers from the recent past. For a period in the seventies and early eighties, SFCMP concerts were in the galleries of the former home of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. This provided many wonderful opportunities for programs that related directly to concurrent shows at the museum. If I recall correctly, the non-vanguard
programs just mentioned were done during a show of American representational painters such as Edward Hopper. One of my happiest concert experiences there was hearing Jean-Louis conduct one of my pieces, *Trace*, directly in front of the museum’s large Agnes Martin painting, *Falling Blue*. Jean-Louis was always interested in making all kinds of connections on these programs, both from piece to piece and from the general theme of the program to whatever might be on view in the museum.

As a conductor, Jean-Louis has an ability to get things exactly right. I was very impressed during a San Francisco Ballet rehearsal when the choreographer suggested that the music move just a bit more briskly. Jean-Louis responded by adding, perhaps, just one or two beats per minute. It was amazing. He was actually able to adjust the tempo by that infinitesimal, more or less imperceptible amount and then able to repeat it as the scene was rehearsed further. He brought this kind of music-making professionalism to pieces like Jean-Claude Eloy’s *Equivalences*, which he conducted with the San Francisco Symphony, Pierre Boulez’s *Dialogues sur Mallarmé*, Aaron Copland’s *Sextet*, Henryk Gorecki’s *Canti Strumentali*, Morton Feldman’s *Rothko Chapel*, and many, many other works of our time. These were exquisite performances. The pieces had probably been done as well before, but they had never been done better.

Jean-Louis has done all of these and many other things and he has done them for us and with us. We have been able to share in his ability to take chances and to be adventuresome. We have also shared his gifts of generosity and professional spirit. Congratulations, Jean-Louis, for your decades of devotion to the music scene in San Francisco. Thank you, Jean-Louis! Thank you, thank you, thank you!

Oh, yes, one more thing. Besides all this, Jean-Louis is a magnificent cook. Since most of you readers missed it, I must report that the all-husbands cooking event in 1971 must never be forgotten. Jean-Louis, Jim Grant, Karl Kohn, and I did the honors, but it was Jean-Louis’s Beef Wellington that, well, took the cake!

Charles Boone, 2004
INTERVIEW HISTORY—Jean-Louis LeRoux

Jean-Louis LeRoux was born in 1927 into a family in which music was a priority. From an early age he and his two brothers left school in the late afternoon and walked an hour across the Brittany town of Rennes to their studies at the local conservatory.

LeRoux focused on music theory (solfege) until 1940 when the first German bombs to rain down on Rennes damaged the family apartment and the piano. After another bombing in 1943 the family took their remaining possessions to an uninhabited farmhouse in the countryside where they lived for a time. During the war years, the family endured hardships as the boys’ lycée was moved to a village and they went from farm to farm in search of food, but the children were able to continue their music studies intermittently, and after the war Jean-Louis was admitted to the Paris Conservatory. The lack of a keyboard meant that he had had to concentrate on the oboe, which led eventually to his settling in San Francisco and taking the position of principal oboe with the San Francisco Symphony for two decades.

LeRoux auditioned at the prestigious Paris Conservatory in 1945. The first to be called to perform on the appointed morning, he fainted, was dispatched by the jury to purchase a cup of coffee and a croissant, and reauditioned brilliantly within the hour. The music scene was rich: it was the Paris of Stravinsky and Pierre Boulez and Olivier Messiaen and of the battle between the 12-tone school (Leibowitz) and the traditionalists (Milhaud). LeRoux performed, attended concerts and learned to listen to, hear and appreciate all styles of composing.

During his student years LeRoux met Boulez, Messiaen and Darius Milhaud, who became a close friend during his Mills College years. Messiaen visited LeRoux in San Francisco when he programmed the Quartet for the End of Time for the Contemporary Music Players.

Beyond performing on the oboe was a second calling, that of conducting. Because jobs in the field were hard to find in the Paris of the late 1940s and 1950s, LeRoux accepted an oboe chair with an orchestra in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, in 1950. When the concert orchestra went bankrupt, he persuaded three of his French colleagues to stay and founded a small chamber orchestra, which he programmed and conducted. Up to that time he had conducted only one concert in Rennes, stepping in for an ailing conductor, but it was clear from the start that he had natural podium talents, charisma and security, and more importantly a quite extraordinary rapport with musicians.

Another skill was parsing contemporary music scores, of which LeRoux read many hundreds during the nearly two decades he programmed and led the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players. Roy Malan, violinist with the Players, claimed LeRoux could look at a score and know fairly precisely how much rehearsals the piece would need. “That’s something I know by instinct,” he says in the oral history. “I look at the score and I think, *I need four hours. Not six, FOUR hours.*” He also says that he enjoyed introducing a slight element of risk into the performance by “giving the players a good deal of trust so that the excitement of the concert made up for whatever could be done better through more rehearsal.” Audiences picked up on the excitement and formed a solid core of LeRoux loyalists, and the audiences always included a dozen or so composers.

In 1960 Jean-Louis LeRoux and Marta Bracchi-LeRoux, a pianist he met and married while living in Montevideo, settled in San Francisco. In addition to his symphony position, he played with the opera orchestra for several years, conducted the Modesto Symphony, San Francisco Conservatory and Ballet and Mills College Orchestras, taught oboe and played duet recitals with Marta, and started the Chamber Symphony of San Francisco. After Darius Milhaud left California for Paris in 1971 he handed his baton to LeRoux and asked him to take over the conducting of the famous Mills Performing Group. “I had put
together all the elements that gave sense to my life,” he says. “I had done a great deal of oboe playing, some conducting, and it was time to try to find some new venue. I had fallen deeply in love with all the new things that were happening in music, and I thought I had to do something constructive about it.”

The new “venue” was to be the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, which started as a series of informal bring-your-own-pillow concerts. Co-founded by LeRoux, composer Charles Boone and harpist Marcella De Cray in 1971, it is today the oldest such ensemble in the western United States, with dozens of recordings and commissions to its credit.

I first met Jean-Louis LeRoux when he interviewed me for the position of the Players’ manager in the early 1980s. During the two years I worked with the ensemble I was enormously impressed with the range of his programming and the grace with which LeRoux dealt with composers from all over the world and brought their work to performance. He was always open to new ideas: in the 1970s he invited Frank Zappa to conduct a benefit performance of works by Varèse and Webern (he rented the Opera House and nearly filled it for the occasion). During my years concerts were presented in the galleries of the Museum of Modern Art, paired with exhibits of German Expressionism or French painting and photography, and Christmas concerts filled every corner of the galleries with trios and duets.

The Regional Oral History Office invited LeRoux to be a memoirist in 2001 and in spring of 2002 we scheduled interviews in my San Francisco living room between rehearsals of the San Francisco Ballet, to which LeRoux had returned for some conducting assignments (he was a regular conductor with the company from 1975 to 1984). On one occasion he looked at his watch and said he had to be on his way to pick up a wedding license that afternoon because on April 13 he and Jane Roos, a family friend for many years and first president of the Players’ board of directors, were to be married. It was a moment of another joyful new “venue” for LeRoux, who still conducts and has taken up the study of French impressionist composers and of structuralists Derrida and Lacan.

In terms of editing the oral history, I gave the text to LeRoux as it was recorded and asked him to review it. We talked about changes to be made and decided to keep any editing to a minimum, leaving the story in its original and highly charming form.

The Regional Oral History Office was established in 1954 to augment through tape-recorded memoirs the Library’s materials on the history of California and the West. Copies of all interviews are available for research use in The Bancroft Library and in the UCLA Department of Special Collections. The office is under the direction of Richard Cândida Smith, and the administrative direction of Charles B. Faulhaber, the James D. Hart Director of The Bancroft Library, at the University of California, Berkeley.

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University of California, Berkeley
INTERVIEW WITH JEAN-LOUIS LEROUX

I. GROWING UP IN FRANCE: 1927-1949

Life in Brittany
Grandparents and Parents
The Breton Language
Catholicism and the Family
World War II Wartime Experiences
Exposure to Music: the Paris Conservatory
Paratrooper Service in the 1940s
Mouvement Republicain Populaire
Three Sons and Three Careers
More about the Conservatory: Tonal vs. Atonal Music
Music in Paris

[Interview 1: March 11, 2002] [Tape 1 Side A]

Crawford: Let’s start with your telling me when and where you were born.

LeRoux: Yes, of course. I was born in France, in what we call Le Mans, which is famous for the twenty-four-hour car race. I was the second of a family that was eventually a family of three children, three boys. I was born a great deal of time after my older brother, because there was a span of six and a half years, and then five and a half years between the three of us.

My father was an employee of the railroads and we moved a little bit around, so I didn’t stay very, very long in Le Mans, enough to go to school and enough to have my first lesson of music. Actually, when I think about it, I am not sure exactly when we moved from Le Mans to Rennes, which is in Brittany, the old capital of Brittany, when Brittany was still an independent state.

What amazed me--I probably was maybe eight years old. I had gone maybe the three or four years of elementary school, but I have seen in my papers that I brought from South America a picture of me, about six or seven years old, and I was at the head of some kind of défilé.

Crawford: Parade.
LeRoux: Parade, where I have a snare drum which had been fixed for me because the harness was much too big, but I was already showing obviously some gift for that because I was in the parade, and I was in a white costume. I remember that. I remember that--I don’t remember anything; I have seen the picture.

Crawford: What are your first memories?

LeRoux: Well, my first memory is the memory of my school also, because it was a religious school, and what stayed with me all my life I think is my first meeting with death, because our teacher all of a sudden became ill very fast and died in a few weeks. Something I would never do, and it was done to us, the students of the school, was to have the body there, and we had to go around and give him a kiss, and I think it was awful.

And that always remained with me. You are asking about the first memory, and I remember also being, if I may say so, the head of my class. I was head of my class for a long time, until I think I was not head of my class any longer. But that will come much later.

Crawford: Did you like school?

LeRoux: Oh, I liked school. I loved school. But I have been punished because, for one reason, I was sent with a little friend from school, from the class, to go pick up something from the pharmacy. Somebody needed something. And then I was punished because I took advantage of being out of school to do a little wandering around in the street, and then when I came back I had to go to the corner.

Crawford: Was the school very strict?

LeRoux: Yes, definitely yes. And there was still corporal punishment at that time.

Crawford: Spanking.

LeRoux: Spanking, yes, with a ruler.

Crawford: But not for you.

LeRoux: I don’t remember. [laughter]

Crawford: What home do you remember first?

LeRoux: What home? I don’t remember where we were living at that point, not at all. What I remember is the interest of my mother, especially, for our education. She insisted right away, as soon as we were old enough, six or seven or eight, besides going to school, that she was going to send us to the conservatory, the music school.

Crawford: The conservatory in addition to the regular school.

LeRoux: At that time, I remember the school, not so much that one I am talking about, when I was very young. But as soon as we moved to Rennes, that was the last two years before
high school or before middle school as they say now, and the school would start at eight o’clock in the morning, and we’d have four hours to noon and then two hours of lunch, where we could go back home.

Crawford: You would go home for lunch.

LeRoux: And then another two hours in the afternoon, two to four. The school day was always like this, and with a free day on Thursday. Saturday there was [school]. So no weekend, I mean. Only Sunday and Thursday.

Crawford: Oh, all day Saturday?

LeRoux: Yes.

Crawford: What do you remember of your grandparents?

LeRoux: Very little. I remember my maternal grandmother because when I was born, we lived together. My parents were staying in the house that belonged to my grandmother. I remember her. For a while, until she passed away, and that’s very early. But I remember her, and I remember Sophie Neuf, a young lady of neighbors. I remember particularly in that time there were certain persons who had certain gifts. For instance, if somebody would get burned, the gift of passing the hand on top of the burn and healing it. I remember that because that person told my mother “whatever I know, whatever my gift is, I’ll give to you before I die,” and that never happened.

Crawford: She never gave it to your mother.

LeRoux: No, she never gave it. But that was one of the things that came back much later with another person. I was already sixteen, and I got in touch with—oh, I will tell you a little later about that, because it was kind of strange beliefs in certain powers and what you experience. You see it yourself, but it’s very interesting because you have the impression that it worked.

Crawford: Was that attached to Catholicism? Was that a religious belief?

LeRoux: No. No, no, not at all. No, not at all.

Crawford: It was a natural gift.

LeRoux: It would go from female to female, only, in certain conditions. But men never.

Crawford: I never heard of that.

LeRoux: Well, let me tell you, when I was seventeen, because of the war and so on, the bombs, the school was moved to small villages around Rennes. So we were all living in houses, where people would shelter us. One person here, another here, and I was living with an old lady there, and I heard a commotion one night, and I got up. There was a little boy—a little boy, yes—that had been boiling water and [the kettle] had fallen on him. It was terrible.
She said, “Yes, the parents are bringing them to me because I can fix that.” And she did. And she said, “You see, nothing will happen now, and tomorrow morning nothing will be there.” And exactly so.

Crawford: And it was true?

LeRoux: I have seen it. It was absolutely the truth. It was nothing special. She said no prayer or anything. I talked to her about that. She said, “Yes, well, I don’t know why, but I know I can do that, so people come to me.”

Crawford: What do you call that in French?

LeRoux: That doesn’t come to my mind right now. Probably it will come back around the conversation.

Crawford: The only time I’ve heard of something like that was in Haiti, associated with voodoo.

LeRoux: Yes. That’s why I said voodoo, but from what I know of voodoo and what I learned when I was in Brazil, for instance, it’s a different thing.

Crawford: Did you ever run into that again in your life?

LeRoux: No, never. No, never.

Crawford: This wasn’t your grandmother. Your maternal grandmother did not have the gift. A neighbor said she’d give it to your mother.

LeRoux: She promised to give it. It never happened. And my mother was very sorry because she believed in it, I’m sure, without giving it much importance.

Crawford: And the feeling was you could transfer it.

LeRoux: Oh, yes. And I don’t know how. I have no idea how, no.

Crawford: Fascinating.

LeRoux: It is.

Crawford: I think so. So the maternal grandmother. How about the grandfather?

LeRoux: My grandfather, the paternal grandfather I met—he was already retired when I met him, only because we went to visit him, to the house that he was living in. You know, there’s one thing interesting about my grandfather, if I may tell you about that. He was a farmer, and the farm didn’t belong to him; it was rented. There was a famous election of—I think it was 1906. That was the time when the state and the church were going to separate themselves. So my grandfather voted in favor of that separation, and let it be known, so he was kicked out of his farm, to be too much to the left, I suppose. He couldn’t find any kind of work for many miles around, so he went a little bit farther--
There were seven children in the family, and that eventually made some kind of rift between certain members that didn’t approve of the separation and wanted to stay very close to the church, so they thought he had made a mistake. And that was the case of my father, who remained very religious and Catholic all his life. My favorite uncle, the youngest one in the family, my father being the oldest, was exactly the opposite.

Crawford: All within one family.

LeRoux: The one family. But they were good friends. That’s the kind of thing that happens in Brittany, because my grandfather and my father were from Brittany. My grandfather barely spoke a few words of French, and my father learned French in school.

Crawford: Oh, because they were speaking?

LeRoux: Breton.

Crawford: Breton. What is Breton related to?

LeRoux: It was a Celtic language. It’s related to Welsh.

Crawford: Yes. Irish too?

LeRoux: Well, Irish is much farther out, but Welsh, yes. The north coast of Brittany is renowned for onions, and so the onions were put on boats and taken to England, to Cornwall, and the young people would put onions on their bicycles and sell them from door to door, and they could understand each other, between the people from Brittany and the people from the English coast.

Crawford: It’s such a difficult language?

LeRoux: Yes, well, it’s very harsh.

Crawford: And it’s not a Romance language, is it?

LeRoux: Not at all. I’ve never gone very far in finding out, but I know that all over Europe--until Hungary--all western Europe was Celt, and they used that language, and the northwest of Spain also. A lot of them still speak a language that’s related to Breton.

Crawford: Did you know the language?

LeRoux: Not a word, but one of my nieces married an architect and decided to relearn the language and to teach it to their children, and now in their home they speak only Breton. And they founded a school because now it’s legal. So Breton is totally the first language and French is the secondary language.

Crawford: It’s very un-French. I’m surprised it’s allowed.

LeRoux: It’s not only in that part. I think the same thing is happening in the south with the Provençal or the Languedoc. Certain schools do that since ten years ago.
Crawford: Interesting. Were both grandfathers farmers in Brittany?

LeRoux: No, no. Not my maternal. My mother was French; my father and his father were from Brittany.

Crawford: What about the LeRoux name?

LeRoux: LeRoux is very Breton. In two words, separate. That’s from Brittany.

Crawford: The words mean the red one?

LeRoux: Yes, red one, but in that sense that, I suppose, anybody with red hair was considered like a potential leader, and that’s what it means, the leader. But it has to be in two parts, LeRoux.

Crawford: Where did your parents meet?

LeRoux: I don’t exactly know the circumstances, but they met immediately after the First World War, the last days of the First World War. But my mother had a little higher education than my father. That’s why I owe to her that good education and musical education, not only for me but also for my two brothers who were in the same situation. They went to the same school I went to, a music school.

Crawford: Did they turn out to be musicians?

LeRoux: Not really, no, no, but a great deal of taste for literature and theater, yes, but not so much for music.

Crawford: What was the exposure to theater?

LeRoux: My younger brother became a professor of ancient Greek, and he was in Madagascar. First it was in the high school, and then he organized a theater group, and eventually he quit being a Greek teacher to work at IUT, a technical university. He was more or less in charge of educating the students how to behave on stage or in a group, how to speak.

Crawford: So a professor of dramatic arts?

LeRoux: Yes, but he never taught in a theater. It was something else.

Crawford: Elocution?

LeRoux: There was that, and stage behavior.

Crawford: What was your life like at home? What do you remember of your parents? What did they like to do?

LeRoux: My younger years were very happy, essentially very happy, and we had something that was not very common at that time, is that every summer we would go and spend seven weeks at the beach. They rented an apartment year round on the beach in Roscoff, and
then we went there until the Second World War started. When the Second World War started, I was twelve years old.

It was in the north of Brittany, and it came to have a certain fame because there is a harbor now that didn’t exist where a ferry from England made a direct line between the British Island and Brittany, so there are many English people there.

Crawford: Was such a long vacation uncommon?

LeRoux: That was very uncommon. Especially in the thirties, yes. I remember paid vacations had just come in.

Crawford: That was Blum, wasn’t it? Wasn’t that Leon Blum who brought that in?


Crawford: Your parents weren’t pro-Blum, were they?

LeRoux: No.

Crawford: They were not Socialists, then.

LeRoux: Not at all, no. My father was very much union-oriented, Catholic union-oriented.

Crawford: Catholic union. So he wouldn’t have wanted socialism and the Blum program.

LeRoux: No, he was not interested in that at all. I knew what happened later on because he was already active in the political party and so was my older brother, but that came much later on.

Crawford: And what party was that?

LeRoux: The Mouvement Republicain Populaire.

Crawford: Were your parents political? Did they discuss politics?

LeRoux: Once in a while, yes. Yes, oh, yes. And my mother was not always of the same opinion, so sometimes there were some pretty heated discussions. So I was going to the conservatory every evening after school. You know, the school finished at four, and the conservatory started at five. I just had time to go, walking, to go from one place to another.

Crawford: In Rennes?

LeRoux: Still in Rennes, yes.

Crawford: Rennes is what, about 200,000 people?

LeRoux: At that time it was about 100,000. Now it’s over 200,000.
Crawford: When did you start at the conservatory?

LeRoux: Oh, I would say ‘34, ‘35. I was born--by the way, I didn’t tell you, I was born in 1927, and I remember the date because it’s attached to the 15th of April.

Crawford: That’s a great date. Famous day.

LeRoux: [laughter]

Crawford: What about your aunts and uncles? Who was particularly close?

LeRoux: There is one thing that I forgot to tell you. For some reason, in the eyes of my mother, there was some predestination for me because I was born on Holy Friday. It was very late that year. Easter was extremely late, and--it’s called Holy Friday, isn’t it?

Crawford: We call it Good Friday.

LeRoux: Good Friday, Good Friday, and I was born at three o’clock in the afternoon. That has to do with when Jesus was supposed to have been born. Three o’clock in the afternoon.

Crawford: I never heard that. And your parents were struck by that.

LeRoux: I suppose so. She saw it was some kind of sign.

Crawford: What importance did she attach to that?

LeRoux: No, not much, but she joked about it once in a while.

Crawford: All right, well, what about your aunts and uncles?

LeRoux: There were not that many because three of the boys of the family were killed during the war. One of my uncles had been wounded--he had been gassed, so he had a very weak stomach, and he was always complaining and so on. He eventually died of that.

Both were in the navy during the First World War. That was a tragedy not for my father, but for my uncle because my uncle would get to sea and get sick. Maybe that’s something with his stomach, too, but he wanted to stay in the navy, but he was sick.

Crawford: So he couldn’t go into the service?

LeRoux: Well, he fought but it was a tragedy for him. He wanted to be a sailor.

Crawford: So they kept him on land during the war. And he survived the war.

LeRoux: Ah, yes, but three of them were killed, so there were only four left: these two, and there was another one, and then one girl from the family. I knew them, but I didn’t see them very often. There was no cross relationship.

Crawford: You didn’t have Sunday dinners.
LeRoux: No, no, they were living in different places.

Crawford: I see. What were the rituals in your family? You mentioned vacation. That was one.

LeRoux: Yes. My father said that this family goes during three months to the beach because we would start in July. The 14th of July we were at the beach, and then it was August, and then the 7th of September we would come back, so that was July, August, September, three months.

Crawford: You were a very close family.

LeRoux: Oh, yes, very close, very close. But something I remember is the difference in age. We were not really three brothers, because it was almost another generation.

Crawford: Did you become close?

LeRoux: Oh, yes. We were pretty close, but I mean I was like this [demonstrates short stature] and my brother was already big. I was much younger, and I was already almost six when my younger brother was born, so I was like an uncle a lot more than a brother.

Crawford: It’s a big difference when you’re small, that’s true. What about godparents? That’s often so important in France, isn’t it?

LeRoux: The godfather? My uncle was also my godfather. Parrain. That’s really of no importance. Because, again, we were following the ritual and the rites of the Catholic church, absolutely; but I always detected in my mother some kind of reluctance. She really didn’t believe strongly, but we were doing all the gestures, because of my father.

Crawford: So your father was closer to the church.

LeRoux: Yes, but not my mother. Yes, she was doing it, and she was doing whatever was supposed to be done.

[Tape 1 Side B]

LeRoux: But, of course, I was twelve years old. Then I was not quite in adolescence. It was a very critical time for a young man. Twelve years old is important. The war came in. That was 1939, and a great tragedy, one year later, 1940, when we were invaded by Germany. This I remember very vividly.

Crawford: Talk about that. I think your house was bombed.

LeRoux: Yes. In 1940, we were not far from the railroad station, and there was a train bombed by the Germans. There was an enormous explosion, and we were not that far. We lost our windows and so on, but that’s about it. The Americans came much later, much later.

Crawford: When were you first aware of the war or that there would be war?

LeRoux: Well, during the summer of 1939, I think everybody knew it was going to happen. There had been Anschluss in Austria and then when there was the attack against Poland we
knew that was it. So we all immediately came back to Rennes from the beach. We didn’t go back for five years.

Crawford: For the five years of the war.

LeRoux: Yes, we didn’t move. We didn’t get close to the seashore.

Crawford: Because of the possibility of an invasion.

LeRoux: Because it was forbidden. I was already a musician in the sense that I was playing oboe. Maybe the piano, not much, but I was playing oboe, and working with a little theater group with music, so during the war I had a special pass so I could go out, because one thing, there was curfew every night, so from twelve years old to sixteen years old, I never could spend an evening outside.

Crawford: That’s such an important time of life.

LeRoux: That’s right. That explains, I suppose, a trait of my personality. I am still afraid of authority. That means a policeman on the street.

Crawford: You’d never get over that, would you?

LeRoux: No.

Crawford: Because you remember the Germans?

LeRoux: Oh, yes. I remember we had to take a tiny, very local train to go to a concert somewhere, and members of the Resistance had taken over the train--I had seen them--and the train stopped along the way, and they got out, and then the next day the Germans were waiting for us, and we had to show [papers]. That was terrifying. And eventually I saw my friends, older friends, that had been deported to Germany. A few came back. It was so awful to see them.

Crawford: These were Jewish friends?

LeRoux: Not necessarily. No. Jewish--I knew of a few, but there were not that many in Rennes, not in school anyway. I didn’t see anybody disappear. I heard about it, that’s all. On the contrary, I had a friend that was totally pro-German, said we would never be able to win, that the Germans were here to stay, and you better realize it.

Anyway, all these years I kept going to school and doing music. But when I was sixteen, there was an important teacher that year--that was the year before the end of the high school. I started to write some kind of paper to say what I wanted to do when I became an adult.

I said I wanted to be a musician, and I explained, and he said, “That’s not a profession. What are you talking about?” I mean, he put me in ridicule in front of the whole class. I didn’t like that at all.

Crawford: Did it change your thoughts about being a musician?
LeRoux: Well, I knew my father and he were in the same political party--

Crawford: What about your parents? Were they happy you wanted to be a musician?

LeRoux: No, they were not happy. They said, “Yes, fine, you want to be a musician, but it’s a very difficult profession, and you better go to university first, and get a diploma or something, and then we’ll see.” But that was a little later on because then the war was finished and so on, and that’s when I went to Paris and became a student in Paris.

Crawford: What about the lycée?

LeRoux: Yes. I had a real tragedy. It won’t sound very much like it, but it was a real tragedy in my life. I was in what we called the fourth grade. The numbers of the classes are the other way; the last one is the first, and then the baccalauréat is always in two parts. The last year of high school is number one, and then after that was another year. That was when I had the main teacher, which was essentially Latin and French.

Crawford: Latin was required.

LeRoux: Latin and Greek. The first day of school, and I was the head of my class the year before, when I arrived they said, “How old are you?” I was then fourteen. They said, “You are too young for this class. I don’t want to know anything about you, so you go to the back of that class, and I don’t want to know anything about you.” So it was so easy. I didn’t have to study or anything, and I let myself go. I really thought that that was a terrible thing to do. He had no right.

Crawford: You probably couldn’t appeal that, could you?

LeRoux: No. I lost status in class and so on, and then I was not really studying very much until I realized what I was doing, and so I started studying again, but it was a little late.

Crawford: How was the bac for you?

LeRoux: Let me tell you what happened a little before that, before we get to the baccalauréat. In 1943 we were bombed. It was not the first that I had seen, but I was writing a paper on Voltaire at home--I remember that--and I was sitting at my desk, and I heard the sirens, so I went to the windows and I saw little flies very far away, coming toward us. I thought, “That’s it.” It had been recommended first of all to open all the windows so you don’t lose all the glass if the bombs fall near, and then to go downstairs to the cellar, which I had no idea where it was because we were on the third floor.

It was a pretty big apartment; there were quite a few windows. I managed to open all the windows and to go down as far as I could before the first bomb fell. You know, it’s a matter of maybe two or three minutes, I was alone in the apartment, and my mother was doing some errand or something, so I got out.

We learned later that there was a restaurant and a coffee house two doors away, and there was a christening, and everybody died except the baby. The baby was in a cradle and so it survived. Everybody went through the rubble, to try to find survivors and so on. I remember that was in front of the station, a bathroom or a men’s room, and there
was a space [below] the floor and then I found the rest of the bodies and was putting them into sheets and so on.

Crawford: You were twelve years old. No, you were fifteen years old.

LeRoux: I was almost sixteen then. But for a year I was dreaming about that.

Crawford: How many times did it happen, Jean-Louis?

LeRoux: One time. The one time I did that because immediately we moved. My father brought a horse and cart from the country--and we moved. We could not stay there.

Crawford: Oh, you didn’t have a car then, no automobile?

LeRoux: Even if we had one, we couldn’t use it. There was no fuel or anything. But we didn’t have one. We had to do everything on bicycles.

So we went. I mean, we moved. And then I came back the following day with my father because we had taken whatever we could have taken on that cart, but it was not very much. Our apartment was not in shambles. It had been hurt but not very much. But he wanted to save the wine that was in the cellar. There was a big hole. We couldn’t get through the normal entrance; it was blocked and so on, but there was a big hole, so I went down, and then was passing the bottles to my father, and then somebody came and said, “What are you doing? You are completely out of your mind. You don’t know there is a bomb there that didn’t explode?”

Crawford: [deep intake of breath]

LeRoux: Oh! So we took everything--and the man that warned us died there because the bomb exploded not very long after. And he was there.

Crawford: And that was in your house?

LeRoux: That was in my house. It was an apartment building, and it was only one apartment per floor. There was nothing else left, so we went, and it was ten miles away. It was a farmhouse that was not used at all, and there was only a fireplace and one big room and that’s it. We managed--my mother and I don’t know how she did it--but we lived there for over a year. Not only that, but even the lycée moved; that’s what I was telling you.

Three months later there was another one in another part of town. So anyway, we went, and so I would leave on Monday morning and then come back on Saturday night. Another ten miles, ten miles or a little more, on bicycle.

Crawford: But it was too much to do every day, too many miles a day. So you stayed at school, then.

LeRoux: Specifically because of the kind of life of a student at high school. At that time, we came back home with a lot of homework, a lot of homework. I spent at least two or three hours, until some time into the nights.
Crawford: What was it like, living away?

LeRoux: I enjoyed it. I was eager to come back for the weekend, or for Sunday at home, but that lady I told you about was absolutely wonderful. We had no electricity; it was gone. But we had some light in the following fashion: We were next door to a very powerful radio station, and we had enough energy through an antenna to put a little bulb of light, a little bicycle bulb, and it was enough to give us light.

Crawford: Really! To light a room. How did you do it?

LeRoux: Everybody knew how. I remember the name of that radio station, Toury.

Crawford: How many students?

LeRoux: I wasn’t even sixteen, fifteen. And there were probably forty.

Crawford: Was there a continuity of friends?

LeRoux: Friends at school, of course. I went always and made some friends, in the same class, yes. I probably had--yes, actually, I remember, yes. There were two of them. Both of them became physicians. But that was survival, absolutely.

Crawford: Yes. Was there hardship? Was there enough to eat?

LeRoux: All my weekends, all Sundays I spent on bicycle. I would leave Rennes and go to whatever farmers I knew and so on, and I would gather a half a dozen eggs and chicken or something like this I could buy, and then come back. And on the way back there was a bridge under the railroad, and we had to look carefully if there were some Germans under the bridge who would confiscate everything, so we tried not to cross that bridge; we would take another way, and go much farther out, because to go and make another I don’t know how many miles on a bicycle and gather the food that we could get and then have it taken away--

Crawford: Did they take it ever?

LeRoux: Oh, yes, of course. Not so many times because we knew after a while that they were there and you shouldn’t cross there.

Crawford: What else did you find?

LeRoux: Oh, a rare piece of meat, sometimes a little thing of pork or some flour, because if we had some flour we’d make bread. What I remember very vividly in ’43 is that it became so bad just before the bombardment--it became so bad that we had tickets--you know, tickets to get so many grams of bread and so many eggs and everything. We had, for instance, per day we had a little loaf of bread that was about that big [demonstrates], and we were fighting for it. So what my parents decided to do was to cut the bread in five parts, and we would get whatever we had and we could do whatever we wanted with it and we could eat it all at once or divide it so it could go several times during the day, but that’s all we had. Plus what she could manage to cook, some vegetables and things like this. But we were hungry.
Crawford: You were hungry.

LeRoux: Oh, yes.

Crawford: What do you remember of your meals before the war? Was there a lot of ritual about the family table, and your mother liked to cook and so on?

LeRoux: Yes, my mother cooked, yes. I would help with the dishes. We took turns to sweep and do the dishes. My father did the dishes also, once in a while. But she was a good cook, and it was always very, very pleasant.

Crawford: She didn’t work. She stayed home.

LeRoux: She didn’t work, no. She had a job when she got married--she was secretary of a lawyer, and that’s how I learned how to type, for instance, because she was a very good typist. When you were working for a lawyer, you could not afford to make any mistakes. If you made a mistake you had to start all over again. She was a good secretary and she taught me. I am not a very good typist but--

Crawford: How else was the family affected by the war?

LeRoux: When we were in that farm, my father wasn’t there. I mean, he would come also on weekends.

Crawford: Oh, he was working in Rennes.

LeRoux: He was working in Rennes, so he would come only Saturday afternoon or something. What else?

Crawford: How about family pastimes? Had you gone to concerts before, and plays and so on before the war?

LeRoux: Oh, yes, movies and so on. Yes, of course. Yes. I was very young still. I have very dim memories of that.

Crawford: Let’s talk about music, when it started for you and how you chose the oboe and so on.

LeRoux: Well, the first years I took solfège. You know, that means the theory part of it, how to read music, how to listen to it, how to make dictation--ear training, if you want to call it. And then a little bit of harmony and those kind of things. A little basic knowledge of music. And then instruments. I started on oboe and piano at the same time, and then when we had this bombardment, the piano was very, very, very seriously damaged, so I thought, “Well, fine, now I will dedicate myself more to oboe,” and that’s what happened.

When I was sixteen I was already a pretty respectable oboe player. When the war ended, there were two things that happened. As I told you, the baccalauréat was in two parts, and still is now. There was one one year and the second part the following year. That was impossible to be done, and they decided to do everything in one shot, so I got the baccalauréat only with one exam.
My parents said, “No, I don’t want you to become a musician right now without a diploma.” I said fine. So I went to a business school. That was two years. Then I went to that school I had in mind, in Paris, and then finished two years later, going from that school to another one, and did some law at the same time.

Crawford: Business and law, yes.

LeRoux: Business and law, for two years in Paris. And so I went to live with my uncle, my father’s younger brother that was living in Paris. I went to live in his house. It was very convenient.

Crawford: Where did he live?

LeRoux: In Paris. I mean, out in the suburbs of Paris, in Clamart. It was very nice, a very nice house, and I got along with them, my uncle, my aunt, very well. It was very nice. And so I did these two years, and then when I finished, I had a diploma so I could get a job. I said, “I would like to be a musician,” and my parents said, “Fine.”

Crawford: Where was the school, the business school?

LeRoux: In Paris. Now it’s a very famous school, the *Ecole Supérieure de Commerce de Paris*. It was not that famous at that time, but it was a good preparation for the most famous school, which was called *HEC*. It’s the *Hautes Études Commerciales*.

Crawford: Was that the best school?

LeRoux: No, but you could get into *HEC* later. It’s still famous now, but there are several others.

And so I said, “Fine, how shall we go about it?” I said I would present myself to the *concours* of the Paris Conservatoire, the conservatory, which is always very difficult because there is a limit of students. I wanted to present myself to the oboe class, and it’s a limit of twelve students, and you have to stay there generally between two and four years. That means that out of the twelve, there was maybe two or three openings, that’s all. And that year there were two openings, period, and there were maybe–oh, I think about sixteen candidates.

A very strange thing happened. I took some lessons there from the teacher, the conservatory teacher, and they said fine, yes, so I went to an early morning session where there was a jury, and they would say yes or no. I drew number one. It was early in the morning. I had not had a very good breakfast because I was a little bit nervous, so I started playing, and then I fainted. [laughter]

Crawford: Had you ever fainted before?

LeRoux: No. There was no oxygen. It made you use your lungs and so on. I fainted. I had not made it, but the jury said, “Mmm, well, we understand, so you go to the coffee shop, have a cup of coffee and a croissant and then come back.” So I was the first one. And then after that I was the last one!
It was my only chance, because there was an age limit, and it was eighteen, and I was going to be eighteen a few months later, and that was it. So it was a kind of karma.

Crawford: A kind of karma. Tell me where the conservatory was.

LeRoux: It was very close to the Gare St. Lazare, one of the two stations for the west. It’s northwest.

[Tape 2 Side A]

LeRoux: I got the baccalauréat in ‘44, then in October I started at the Paris Conservatory. No, sorry, in ‘46. For two years I went to this business school, then in October ‘46 I started the conservatory. Then at the end of the first year, I was called to the army, and I could ask for a deferment for later on, but I didn’t want to do that. I wanted to get it over with. So I said, “Fine, yes, I will do it now, but give me a few weeks because I want to finish this year of the conservatory, and then will I join you.” They said, “Okay, all right.”

But they told me, “Of course you go to a military band.” I said, “I don’t want that. I don’t want to go to a military band.”

Crawford: Why?

LeRoux: I don’t want to do this kind of music. They said, “You have another choice. You can go to the paratroopers.” I said, “Fine, fine, yes.” [laughter] So they told me, “Okay, you will be late, but that’s a matter of a few days, so you will catch your boat in Marseille and go to Oran, and from Oran you go to Marrakech, in Morocco.” So I did that. In Morocco I had a very good time in the army because that was not in France. It was the new army, in a way, because it was an elite corps. It was much more open than what was in the normal army, I suppose. I had a very nice time.

First of all, I discovered what the sun was. I mean, from Brittany going to Morocco, that’s quite a difference. Then I was stuck there, in the sense that we were living under a tent and I was responsible for the tent and so on, and then I was told by an official, “We understand that you are this and that, and we would very much like you to go to school and become an officer.”

I said, “No, I am not interested. I am antimilitarist,” and so on. [laughs]

Crawford: Oh, really!

LeRoux: They said, “We understand that,” they said, “but okay, we’ll talk again.” And then a week later he was back, and he told me how nice it would be to go to school, to do this and that, and I said, “All right.” So I went to the commissioned officers school after finishing the training as a paratrooper. That meant I jumped from the air--

Crawford: Did you do it?

LeRoux: Oh, yes. I did a lot of foolish things. I jumped, and then I went to the commissioned officers school for, I don’t know, a month, and then from there they told me, “Well, fine, but now we’d like you to write an essay to see if you are eligible for the officers
school.” That would be a year of military service only, not becoming a professional; not at all. But I would get into the reserves eventually. I can’t remember exactly, but they said something about, “It’s not necessary to have a career in the military, to go forward; that’s not necessary and so on.” What do you think about that? It’s a famous saying—I thought about Albert Camus.

Crawford: You wrote an essay.

LeRoux: I wrote an essay and [they] said, “Fine, you are in.” So I went from one place to another in Morocco. I have seen a lot of places. I went from Marrakech to Casablanca, from Casablanca to Agadir, and from Agadir to Mogador, which is along the coast. Mogador, and the famous Jewish ghetto on top of a hill. It was extremely beautiful. A few years later, there was a famous earthquake, and practically the whole ghetto went down, but at that time it was still wonderful.

Crawford: What was your impression of that society?

LeRoux: I had very little contact, except some contact with the desert because some of the exercises we had were in what they call the Small Sahara, which is within Morocco, where it took place, and we had to walk in the sands and to shoot and to do this and to do that.

Crawford: Is that kind of an endurance training?

LeRoux: Endurance training. It was a very good experience for me to jump, because we were not only twenty-year-olds, we had some people that were thirty and even one that was forty. The kind of physical endurance you need, you get that when you are twenty. When you are getting to be forty, that’s much more difficult. And I remember an officer, thirty-and-some years, could not go through the door. He grabbed the thing like this [demonstrates], and he was crying, “Mother, mother!” and then in this case they threw him out. Twice. The third time, they said, “You are finished. Okay.”

Crawford: He wanted to be a paratrooper.

LeRoux: Oh, yes.

Crawford: But he just couldn’t do it. Was it hard for you?

LeRoux: Yes. Others went ahead of me, and that’s when it makes sort of the fear of God. I’m not going to do that. [laughter]

Crawford: What did you write about Camus?

LeRoux: About the myth of Sisyphus. The fact that he has to take that rock up to the mountain and then immediately start all over again because the rock would come down, and the fact that doing that, I probably was convinced that Camus was right, that there was some kind of inner joy in the fact of doing it.

Crawford: Accomplishing that.
LeRoux: Yes, without any purpose. It was without purpose whatsoever, and that was exactly the subject of the essay.

Crawford: Camus was alive then. Had you read him in school? No.

LeRoux: No. No, I read [Jean-Paul] Sartre, of course. I was reading also at that point Marx, and Engels. That’s off the record. I was reading [Karl] Marx, [Friedrich] Engels. I was very interested in that. At that time, it was the kind of thing you had to go through, I think.

Crawford: You were attracted to it.

LeRoux: Attracted? Yes and no. I was curious more than anything else. Maybe not that--I was not convinced, but I thought there were many things that were wrong. I thought it was necessary to see another point of view, I think. So I was reading a lot of philosophy at this point.

Crawford: What did you sense that was going wrong?

LeRoux: There was a lot of hope when the war ended that whatever the injustices of the society were might become solved, and it didn’t happen, of course, because that’s not possible, that’s all. That’s not the nature of any society, and ours in particular. So I read about a different kind of life, not necessarily socialist or communist or whatever. But I am glad that I did that, actually. I’m not sorry. It was important.

Crawford: But almost everyone did that at that age, didn’t they?

LeRoux: Absolutely.

Crawford: There’s no reason not to say it. Would that have been something your parents would have not wanted you to do?

LeRoux: Yes, I was left pretty free, doing whatever I wanted to do. They did not say, “Don’t do this and don’t do that.” No, it was not that. No, but I’m glad I could do it, of course. But that was part of my direction when I said I don’t want to become an officer because I don’t like the military. But I said it truthfully. I didn’t try to hide it or anything. I said, “I don’t want to.”

Crawford: And it was all right?

LeRoux: And they said, “Oh, okay. Well, we understand that, of course.”

Crawford: I remember the opera director-designer Jean-Pierre Ponnelle went through something similar. We didn’t talk about this, but what authors, what literature were you particularly involved with in your school?

LeRoux: In school? The classical, not much of the modern in school itself, no. Even if you had a literature teacher that was very open. It was Jeanson. I remember his name and so on, because he was very special. We were told to read, not necessarily modern literature or something like this, but the classics and Racine and all that.
Crawford: Not [Honoré de] Balzac and [André] Gide and--

LeRoux: Yes, maybe. There was no library or anything like this during the war.

Crawford: What was your parents’ library like?

LeRoux: Let me see. Well, my parents’ I don’t really recall, but my brother, my older brother, had quite a few books, and of course I would read them. A little bit of Gide, Céline, this kind of French, and Shakespeare and so on.

Crawford: Céline. That’s interesting. Well, you might talk a little bit about your brother and your father’s activities at the MRP.

LeRoux: What’s interesting about my brother is that he was extremely religious, my older brother, and he wanted to become a priest, so he did actually two years of seminary. It was during the war. And then he quit. I don’t know why, but he was very sorry, but he was also very interested in social work, and what he did was wonderful.

He founded an organization which is a national organization now, but it was at that time just between two friends. That was some kind of a post-education for the young. At the end of the war in France, the country people got very preoccupied by the fact that all the big farms were cut in pieces, because they would go to the heirs, so it would become smaller and smaller, and that was becoming impossible because each farm was so small that--

So there was a law by which they were able to regroup all these things. Youngsters, eighteen or nineteen, that could have become some kind of leader in the country, leader in their field, didn’t have anything to do. They didn’t have any position or anything. So they all of a sudden found themselves in the cities without anything to do, without any idea what to do. And then my brother had an idea of taking the basis of whatever they knew, whatever they learned in school--that was quite a bit, actually--and then oriented them toward whatever they could do.

He started with a friend, and then it became--it was a fantastic idea.

Crawford: What is the name? Does it exist today still?

LeRoux: Yes. I don’t know what it’s called.

Crawford: But that’s what he did for his lifetime, then?

LeRoux: No, no, no. He was a newspaperman. A journalist. Associate editor-in-chief for the largest newspaper in France, which is published in Rennes, called Ouest France. And then he didn’t agree with the political direction that the paper was taking, so he quit. He left.

Crawford: What, going to the left?

LeRoux: No, on the contrary, going to the right.
Crawford: So he was the one who was more aligned with your father.

LeRoux: Oh, yes. And the MRP was not leftist—not at all. It was essentially a Catholic party. If I say socialist, that’s not right.

Crawford: Union-oriented?

LeRoux: More in the middle.

Crawford: What about the other brother?

LeRoux: Well, the one that was much younger had some problem himself. He was very good in school, but at the university, in the beginning of the last year he didn’t want to work, so I remember writing him a letter saying, “You’re foolish, and you better go with it and get whatever you need,” which is—how do you call that?—agrégation? It’s not a Ph.D., but it’s something that gives you the right of teaching. It’s a teacher’s credential for the university, essentially. I said, “You better get that piece of paper because if not, what are you going to do?” So he did. And then he went to Madagascar and so on. As I said, he became interested in theater, and that changed all his life. He’s a very talented man, too.

Crawford: All three very talented.

LeRoux: Yes. The interesting thing is, you know, we got more or less the same background, the three of us, in different fields. That allows us to talk and to respect each other, I suppose.

Crawford: And that was your mother’s influence, you think.

LeRoux: Oh, yes. Ah, yes.

Crawford: What happened to your parents after the war?

LeRoux: What they did, they realized that they were close to retirement age, so with my uncle—the one in whose house I was living in Paris—together they said, “We both own a house. Let’s sell them, and then build a house on the beach.” Which they did. They came up with a strange solution of building a big family house, all divided into small units, where the three boys, because my uncle didn’t have any children—the three boys and the grandchildren could come and spend the summer.

Meanwhile, my uncle would live there all year ‘round, and my father part of the time. He didn’t want to leave the town.

Crawford: Was he working?

LeRoux: No. He was at that point—I’m talking about probably ‘57, ‘58. My father was born in ‘91, in the nineteenth century, and my mother in ‘99. And they organized their lives in a totally different fashion, and very well, I think, I must say. It’s still the house we own, between the three of us, and we spend always all together a month with the grandchildren.

Crawford: How many grandchildren?
LeRoux: My elder brother had four daughters, and between them they have--it must be eleven or twelve. Plus three of mine.

Crawford: Your three, yes. Well, Jean-Louis, after your service.

LeRoux: Well, the service. I finished as an officer then, and I did an extra three months, three months that was paid, with which money I bought another piano.

Crawford: Because your piano was destroyed in the war.

LeRoux: Yes. So what happened, I went back to the conservatory and did another year. That was two more years, ‘48, ‘49. And then I realized to my horror at that point that I had absolutely no future in music in the sense that I couldn’t get a job anywhere, because everybody that graduated during the war, immediately after the war, they got all the possible openings, so all the orchestras were full of very young people, and that meant for a long time I couldn’t do anything, and I didn’t want to go and get a teacher’s credential or something like this. I didn’t want to do that at all. I wanted to be an active musician, to play.

During vacation in Rennes, somebody had the idea of giving little concerts, some new work, and I was playing, and the day of the concert, absolutely it was horrible because the conductor was sick and wasn’t going to be there to conduct. So I said, “I’ll do it.” I did!

Crawford: Had you studied conducting?

LeRoux: No. Absolutely not.

Crawford: Had you ever thought of being a conductor?

LeRoux: No. No, I had taken a few lessons in the conservatory, of course, but it didn’t occur to me. That was the only time. I just did it, and that’s it. I forgot about it.

Crawford: You just looked at the music? You read the music?

LeRoux: I had played it and so on, with somebody else. They brought another oboe player, and I conducted, and everything went fine. So I said fine. That’s all.

Crawford: What was the program? Do you remember?

LeRoux: Oh, no, absolutely no idea. But it was new compositions. But anyway, what happened to me, I heard in the conservatory that somebody was looking for a few musicians for an orchestra in Brazil. So I said, “Where is that person?” “In Hotel So-on-and-so-forth.” So I went there.

Crawford: This is in Paris?

LeRoux: In Paris. I was still in the conservatory. I went one day, and I played, and he said, “Fine, you are hired. You leave in a month,” or something like this. “We’ll give you a ticket, a paid ticket.” I said, “Okay.”
Crawford: Great! Well, you didn’t tell me who was at the conservatory, on the faculty, and whom you worked with.

LeRoux: Pierre B-a-j-e-u-x, a very nice man. He had problems, but problems that had to do with the fact that he had been a prisoner of war, and he couldn’t play all the time.

Louis Fourestier was teaching then, and [Olivier] Messiaen was there. He was on the faculty.

Crawford: Did you study with him?

LeRoux: No, but I went to some of his classes of analysis.

Crawford: What was he like?

LeRoux: He came to see me here. He came to our house in Washington Street. The year when I had programmed the *Quartet for the End of Time*. He heard that I was coming out of the hospital or something like this and he came in the afternoon. I was barely walking after my back operation, and he was speaking about a very important topic, the virtue of taking a nap in the afternoon.

Crawford: [laughter] He took a nap in the afternoon.

LeRoux: Oh, yes. He said, “I couldn’t live without it, and then if I don’t do it, I can’t do anything.” In the afternoon now I have to nap myself twenty minutes. I do. Well, I got that from Marrakech, because that was mandatory. First of all, in Marrakech, anyway, you couldn’t cross the yard without a hat. That was forbidden because it was very dangerous. The sun was so hot in the summer that you could conk out, and then immediately after lunch, you had to go to bed, sleep or not, but you had to take a rest.

Crawford: Because of the heat. What are your memories of Messiaen? You must have known him for a long time.


Crawford: Milhaud you knew in Paris then?

LeRoux: Yes, oh, yes. I met him for the first time in Paris. Well, it was an atmosphere that--again, you had factions. You had the faction that would do whatever the teacher was doing, and then that was the beginning of serial music. [Pierre] Boulez had just left the conservatory two or three years before, and he was writing these incendiary articles about art.

Crawford: How did he affect the conservatory, Boulez?

LeRoux: Well, the guru at that time was [René] Leibowitz, not Boulez, for twelve-tone music anyway. And then there were the people that had heard it and decided to obey the ukase--is that how you say it?--ukase from Russia. When [Dimitri] Shostakovich said so they stopped writing modernist music, some of them, because he said so, in Russia. It was very interesting. So there was discussion everywhere.
Crawford: With the twelve-tone people on one side?

LeRoux: That’s right. And then the traditionalists also, the people with Milhaud and so on, who were still writing their stuff, writing tonal music.

Crawford: Who else did you play?

[Tape 2 Side B]

LeRoux: I played Dutilleux, his *Sonata for Oboe*. I played it there.

Crawford: Nadia Boulanger was there also. Did you ever know her?

LeRoux: No. No, no, I didn’t even know the house where she was teaching from.

Crawford: So was Paris a lively music scene? Was there a great deal going on?

LeRoux: Oh, yes. Stravinsky was there. I remember going to hear a student of Stravinsky--Pierre Sancan, who became Marta’s teacher. [Marta Bracchi-LeRoux was Jean-Louis LeRoux’s wife.]

Crawford: What’s the name?

LeRoux: Pierre Sancan, S-a-n-c-a-n, Sancan, very famous for being a teacher. He came and he played here once, the Stravinsky *Capriccio* with orchestra. He was a great teacher that could look at somebody’s hand and say, “Well, I think you cannot play like this. Let’s try something else.” And he was absolutely fabulous for the position of the hand and so on. He was great for Marta, anyway.

Crawford: Did you go to concerts in Paris?

LeRoux: We didn’t go to very, very many of them because it was expensive, and I didn’t have much money, that’s for sure. But when I was a student I had to make some money. I had organized a little thing called Night Club. A dance band. Another student was a pretty good pianist and I was playing percussion. We were four, and we played all night long on Saturday nights and then Sunday night. We finished about four or five o’clock in the morning, and I would take the train and come back to Paris and I had a class at nine o’clock.

Crawford: Where was the club?

LeRoux: In Caen, in Normandy.

Crawford: You went on the train.

LeRoux: We went Saturday morning, Saturday noon. The pianist had his family there, so we’d sleep there. It was very nice. I mean, it was very tiring, but we made some money.

Crawford: Oh, you were so young!
LeRoux: Oh, absolutely. I did that in the army, too, except that there we had a combo for three or four people. I played double bass. [laughter]

Crawford: You played a double bass? Did you know how to play the double bass?

LeRoux: No! There was a double bass there, so I looked at it, and I kind of figured out how it was, and then it was not that big a deal to me, the tonalities and going from tonic to dominant and so on.

Crawford: It’s such a wonderful instrument.

LeRoux: Yes!

Crawford: Jean-Louis, did you do any more conducting then?

LeRoux: No. No, I only started conducting when I got to Brazil. That’s another topic.

Crawford: I think we’ll start there the next time. So we’ll stop for now.
Barette’s Club Band, an all-nighter in Caen, France, 1948. LeRoux is on the right.
II. THE BEGINNINGS OF A CAREER IN SOUTH AMERICA: 1950-1959

Playing, Conducting and Working in Belo Horizonte, Brazil
Engagement with the Opera Orchestra of Rio de Janeiro
Living and Working and Creating a Chamber Orchestra in Montevideo, Uruguay
Marriage to Marta LeRoux
An Introduction to the United States: Touring with the Roger Wagner Chorale

[Interview 2: March 13, 2002] [Tape 3 Side A]

LeRoux: We got to the point where we were speaking about Brazil. That was ‘49, actually, ‘49 or the beginning of ‘50. We were feeling very deeply the effects of the war and so on and so forth, in France. It was such a change to take a plane and then get to a country that was in a very good situation. Of course, it had not suffered at all. On the contrary, things were progressing very fast.

And especially in this case, I went to a city called Belo Horizonte, which is a city that was at that time about a half a million. Very industrial city on a plateau of about 2,000 feet in some small mountains that are said to be very, very rich in iron.

Of course, during the colonial times, there was a Franco-Belgian company or something like this—a European company that exploited the iron, and whatever forests were around all disappeared. I remember my first surprise when I got there and I started looking around, that outside of the city there is a HUGE, absolutely huge bridge, and under the bridge is a little stream of water, like this [indicates width] that used to come from the ocean all the way.

Crawford: Not the Amazon River.

LeRoux: Oh, no, no, no. Belo Horizonte is right under the equator, but it was perpetual spring, except in the summer.

Crawford: Always spring.

LeRoux: Always spring, except in the summer, when it rained at six o’clock every evening for an hour, so much that you’d have to be careful not to stay in the street because you might have water up to your knees.
Anyway, I found myself in a rather nice orchestra. We were not big, about sixty people, and we did a very good job for a while. And then tragedy struck. The government that was sustaining that state [failed], because Brazil, like the United States, is divided into states that are more or less independent, less so than the United States, but it’s built on the same principles. So we were offered a ticket back to France.

Crawford: Who was your conductor?

LeRoux: An Uruguayan conductor, actually, a man named Santorsola. And so we had to go back. We were four French people. There were about four Italians and four French: a harpist, a viola player, a cello player and myself were French; and then the Italians, and some other people, like a violin player from Hungary.

So we had a meeting with the French people, and I said, “What are we going to do if we go back to France? I think we should stay. Things will change. It will come back. Money will come back, so let’s try to survive.” So that was when I founded my first orchestra, my first chamber orchestra, essentially around all these people. There were about half a dozen who stayed.

I managed to get the owner of a department store to finance a concert once a week on the radio. And then this concert on the radio was pretty much a success, so we gave public concerts too.

Crawford: So you had a handful of French players and Brazilians.

LeRoux: Brazilians. The Italians left.

Crawford: What was the quality of the chamber orchestra?

LeRoux: It was essentially strings, mostly strings. We did a lot of Baroque music and, of course, some Brazilian composers, Brazilian artists—soloists, pianists and so on, that I invited. So that was my first professional experience as a conductor. And from there on, I always conducted.

Crawford: You didn’t play oboe so much anymore, until you came to San Francisco in 1959?

LeRoux: Oh, yes. I’d play oboe all the time. You know, that was not enough for sustaining all of us, so I started teaching French at the Alliance Française, of course. And somebody, a music lover, said, “Well, I have a job for you if you want to take it.” I said, “Yes, fine.” “I mean, I understand you have some knowledge of trade and so on, and I need somebody to head a new factory that I’m going to open.” “Ah. Fine. What kind of factory?” “Enameling.” At that time there was not that much plastic yet, so that was needed for the hospital, and for kitchens and stoves.

I said, “Fine. Well, all right.” So I went to the library [laughs] and found a book in English, and I studied, and I started that, and immediately he told me, “We build ovens. Here are still all the electric parts, the resistors and so on, and we need a certain degree of heat to cook, so would you take charge of that?” I said, “Sure.”

Crawford: You were a manager.
LeRoux: I was a manager, general manager. So we did that, and production was relatively high. That’s usual for this country, and it did work. The thing was working twenty-four hours a day. After that, when somebody told me, “Oh, the Brazilians are lazy.” I said, “Lazy? You should have seen them in that factory. They were worried they weren’t producing, and the quality control was very tight.” It was wonderful. It lasted for two years.

Then the orchestra started again, as I had thought, and I conducted the big symphony orchestra. And then I kept the chamber orchestra, and that sustained us. Not only that, I also was invited to teach in the conservatory there, all kind of things, everything that I could think of. So we survived. Not only survived, because there were two boys and two girls, so usually what happens? We got married.

Crawford: You all got married?

LeRoux: Got married, so there were two couples.

Crawford: Oh, talk about that.

LeRoux: I got married to a French lady then, the harpist, very good harpist. Marie, Marie-Louise Malnou, M-a-l-n-o-u, Marie-Louise.

Crawford: All right, yes. And?

LeRoux: And then we had a child, Olivier, there.

Crawford: Was your thought to stay there?

LeRoux: No, not really. I had the feeling that something would happen, but we managed to make a niche there, a very big reputation as musicians and so on. What happened is I received a call from Rio de Janeiro, from the big opera house, Teatro Municipal, saying, “We need a principal oboe for the international opera season.”

So I went there. I left my wife behind. And I played there for three months, and during these three months, one of the conductors was an Italian, and he said, “I know they are looking for a first oboe in Montevideo, in Uruguay, and, you know, in my opinion, that’s the best orchestra in South America.” So I said, “Fine.”

Eventually I received an offer from Montevideo. As I was young and foolish, I said, “Yes, I am very interested. I accept. But, you know, here we are four French people, so it will be the four of us or I don’t go.” And they said fine. We were all hired, and we moved. I started in Belo Horizonte in 1950, and I left in 1954.

Crawford: Talk about Brazilian life.

LeRoux: Brazilians are very happy people. There was some racism, because that’s what happened in every place where Portuguese were. The Spaniards objected very much [to intermarriages], but not the Portuguese or the French. So there were more interracial couples in Brazil than in the rest of South America.
It’s a very, very happy people. The carnival is something so unbelievable. I mean, the street in carnival was fantastic. Everybody in the street, singing and dancing for several days and so on.

And, to come back--I found a little bit of contact with voodoo. I was invited, because my second oboe was a black man, and of course he was allowed in certain circles where white people would have had difficulty in getting into, so he invited me, and I went twice to a voodoo session.

Crawford: Was he a voodoo priest?

LeRoux: No, he was not a voodoo priest. I saw a chicken killed, the feathers and all that business.

Crawford: Do they call it voodoo in Brazil?

LeRoux: They call it voodoo, but the real name that they use is makumba.

Crawford: You didn’t circulate with black people easily, or you did?

LeRoux: Oh, yes.

Crawford: You did. So there was nothing unusual about going to each other’s homes.

LeRoux: No, no, not at all. No, no. Of course, generally they are not very rich. I mean, they are poor in Rio. But even in Belo Horizonte I never thought, “No, I’m not going to walk around there at night.” Never.

Crawford: Perfectly safe.

LeRoux: Yes, it was. People were relatively well off at that time, and happy. That’s what I remember. Not depressed like I would eventually find when I went to Uruguay. So anyway, I stayed for four years, ’50 [to] ’54.

And one of the things I did, to go back during these years, I worked quite hard in the afternoons, especially, and even in the factory I was practicing the instrument, practicing the oboe, of course, but I realized that one thing I had gotten out of the conservatory is a knowledge of how to practice and how to learn, all by myself. It’s not that I got out of the conservatory with technique, with a general knowledge of music and so on, but I had learned how to learn.

Crawford: You had learned that in the conservatory.

LeRoux: Yes, but I had learned especially how to go about it, and how to learn, discovering whatever I didn’t know too well and so on and so forth. So I dug into it, everything I could. That was wonderful because yes, I was busy and doing a lot of things, but I was young, and I had a lot of energy, so I didn’t mind.

Crawford: Did you move to Rio?
LeRoux: No. No, we had the house in Belo Horizonte. We stayed there until the time that we were ready to move to Uruguay. That was 1954.

Crawford: Did you have more than one child?

LeRoux: No. But when we moved, we were expecting a second child, who was born then in Uruguay, in Montevideo.

Crawford: And your wife was working still as a harpist?

LeRoux: Oh, yes.

Crawford: What about reading scores, Jean-Louis. Talk about that a little bit, because you have seen thousands of contemporary music scores. They’re certainly hard to read.

LeRoux: Yes, of all styles, kinds of writing. I have a story to tell you that came much later, when I was practically a constant guest at the Milhauds’ house, and [Karlheinz] Stockhausen came. He was invited for dinner, and Milhaud was there, too, and Stockhausen was looking at some manuscript paper on Milhaud’s piano, and he said, “Ah, tell me, Milhaud, you still write with a staff. You still write music on a staff.” And Milhaud said, “Yes, yes, of course.” “Oh. Ho. [laughs].” And that was, well, typical Stockhausen. At that time, that was the moment of instruction music.

Crawford: Aleatory music?

LeRoux: Someone wanted to do such and such a thing on his own, and then have the other people react accordingly and that was called instruction music.

Crawford: In other words, an instrumentalist would be told, “For this number of measures, you play whatever you want to play.”

LeRoux: Well, not the measure. That didn’t exist.

Crawford: Measures, no. [laughs]

LeRoux: Let’s say for fifteen, sixteen seconds you do this, and so on.

Crawford: How did you conduct that?

LeRoux: No, that wasn’t conducted necessarily. I remember one piece of Stockhausen that we were going to play, and things didn’t work out too well--maybe our improvisation skill was not too good. Anyway, I decided to write out some of the things, at least to have a sort of basis on which to work. I remember that well because the man who is now the administrator of the ballet orchestra at Mills College was a student then. I asked him to do certain things for me. I gave him instructions. We did it together, and it was very interesting. But that’s much later.

We’re still in Brazil. So I am moving from Brazil with four years behind me of all kinds of experiences--you know, being the manager of a factory, being a conductor, and of course, again, at that point with a very, very good technique on the oboe.
Crawford: At that point, had you decided you really wanted to conduct more?

LeRoux: No, no, not yet. No, it would take me a long time to get to that point. But we arrived in Uruguay, where I found myself in quite a different kind of situation than in Belo Horizonte. [They started] to build an opera house. It never got built until I left, anyway, because they started and then they ran out of money so they stopped the work and so on. That was a big opera house. We had had a small hall for the orchestra in Belo Horizonte.

Then the situation was totally different in Uruguay in the sense that the government several years before, maybe ten years before, had organized what was called SODRE, S-O-D-R-E, which was an organization covering everything to do with music. That means an orchestra to play concerts, an opera, a chorus, a ballet, and of course a big theater, and everything in the same building. It was absolutely a wonderful idea, and it was working wonderfully well.

SODRE stands for Official Services of Radio Diffusion and Spectacles. Anyway, that was there, and they had a big-name conductor, [Carlos] Kleiber. Paul Paray, the French conductor, was there for a while, and then when I arrived it was Umberto Baldi, Italian conductor.

Crawford: So it was a very good orchestra, then. Better than the Brazilian orchestra?

LeRoux: Oh, yes. Yes, bigger and so on. It was a very good orchestra at the time. We played contemporary music, Stravinsky and [Carl] Orff. They had at almost every concert a premiere. It was very interesting work.

Crawford: Uruguay is a very cultured country, isn’t it?

LeRoux: Oh, yes.

Crawford: And the government was fairly democratic in the fifties and sixties, wasn’t it?

LeRoux: Absolutely. We even had a system almost like the Swiss. Instead of one president, they had five, and a five-year term during which one of them was the president each year. And it did work well because there was money. They had meat like Argentina. Uruguay is a country of beef and wool like New Zealand, so they made enough money during the war.

Crawford: And more Spanish demographically than black people?

LeRoux: Oh, there’s no black.

Crawford: No Indians either?

LeRoux: No, the last Indian from Uruguay died in Paris in the international exhibition of something like 1890 or something like this. You know, they were taken to France for the exhibition, and then they got the flu. [Claps hands.] There was probably a Brazilian pavilion and a Uruguayan pavilion also, something like that.
Crawford: Were they Spanish-speaking Indians?

LeRoux: They are the guaranis. Who are still in Paraguay, but not Uruguay--

Crawford: Why? Why was that?

LeRoux: There were very few Indians in South America. They had no horses. They were only traveling in canoes, on the big rivers, and there were very few.

Crawford: So who worked the plantations? Spanish?

LeRoux: There were no plantations, just very big ranches. Immigrants, yes, especially from Galicia, from Spain. Some Italians, because the cooking is very Italian, and a lot of people in the country used to live exclusively on beef. That’s all. The cowboys, the gauchos, would kill a cow once in a while and then make a fire, and then that’s it. The only thing they had is mate, green tea. That takes the place of vitamins and whatever, and whatever greens and so on. It was called hierba.

Crawford: And you lived in Montevideo?

LeRoux: In Montevideo, yes, in an apartment. And immediately as I arrived, I started a chamber orchestra again. I wanted to keep on going. And this time it was essentially strings but once in a while I had a few winds. And then I started with that orchestra giving a concert about every month, in a smaller theater in the same complex, and then I started giving choral concerts, too, with a little choir of that organization, a smaller choir. I did the premiere for South America of Stravinsky’s Mass. I remember [playing] Piazzolla, who was played by nobody at the time. Argentinian. But it’s next door; it’s almost the same country.

Crawford: I love his music.

LeRoux: I said, “I know you write not only tango.” He said, “Yes, I just finished a piece for clarinet and strings. Would you be interested?” So I gave the premiere of a piece by Piazzolla.

Crawford: Did he come?

LeRoux: Oh, yes, he came, absolutely.

[Tape 3 Side B]

LeRoux: I made some friends, of course, in Uruguay, and there was one very, very talented composer named Hector Tosar who later came here. Once I played a piece of his, and Marta played the piano. That was--oh, it must have been fifteen years ago. His name and his work and his Symphony for Strings is mentioned in a book of Leonard Bernstein.

Crawford: What did you do about the language?
LeRoux: Well, I had learned Portuguese very well. I told you I was interested in everything, in their music and so on, but also the language. I really worked on it, with books, and I had a very nice accent. Beside the concert on radio with my own chamber orchestra in Belo Horizonte, I was doing also new French work from the Continent. So I spoke in Portuguese and so on, presenting all these works. It was very nice. I was in Brazil then.

Now in Uruguay I started in ballet, for instance. I managed to convince the choreographer, Chabelevsky, who was Polish to do *L’Histoire du Soldat*, of Stravinsky in the original version with dances and so on, the way Stravinsky had in mind.

I had the French text translated in Spanish so people would be able to understand what was going on, and that was the first time it had been done in Spanish, as far as I knew. We did it about seven or eight times.

Crawford: Did you do any atonal music?

LeRoux: Yes, I did. Whatever I could get my hands on. Pierre Boulez came. At that time he was music director for the Jean-Louis Barrault theater group.

Crawford: *Comédie*? Was that the *Comédie Française*?

LeRoux: Not *Comédie Française*, but it was Jean-Louis Barrault and Madeleine Renaud’s group. They were traveling with a little orchestra, and Pierre Boulez was the conductor. So they were invited by the ambassador, I think, to give a little conference on contemporary music, and I did some Poulenc and then some other works.

Crawford: By Boulez?

LeRoux: Yes. And then part of the Messiaen *Quartet for the End of Time*.

Crawford: The audience must have been a good one!

LeRoux: Oh, it was. The audiences at that time were eager for anything that was new. People would flock to the concerts. It was wonderful, absolutely wonderful.

Crawford: How big a theater was that?

LeRoux: Oh, about 1,500. 1,500, and there was another hall, a little smaller. A lot of activities. You know, the concert was played twice every week, there was Friday night and Saturday night. That was the regular concert. And besides, chamber music was on Tuesday generally.

Crawford: So you performed three times a week? About three times a week. What do you remember of Boulez? Did you get to know him then?

LeRoux: Yes, I got to know him. He was--how do you say?--very wild and writing all these articles against everybody, saying that all the opera houses should be destroyed because they are good for nothing and so on. I mean, this kind of thing. You know when he was arrested.
Crawford: Talk about that.

LeRoux: He was arrested in Switzerland because somebody had kept in their file an article or something in which he had said the opera house should be destroyed. [laughter]

Crawford: The Swiss! Was he jailed for that?

LeRoux: Yes! He was arrested, and he went, of course, immediately to the ambassador or something like that.

Crawford: What was he like personally?

LeRoux: I had met him before in Paris, you know. He is only about two or three years older than I am. I think he was born in ‘24, something like that.

Crawford: So he must have been at the Conservatoire.

LeRoux: I met him there. I went to the conservatory, and he was still coming around, and writing incendiary articles. There was only one music, twelve-tone music, serial music.

Crawford: But he didn’t write opera, did he? He could have written something for the opera stage instead of just “Burn the opera houses.”

LeRoux: No, he said that whatever is traditional, traditional music, tonal music and so on is for the birds, so let’s finish it, finish with it, that’s all, and whoever was writing tonal music was not even worth a thought.

There was so much in that city. It’s difficult to believe. I remember going to an Italian theater group, to the Piccolo Theatre di Milano, or other French theater groups, too--and it was full, full of people all the time. And ballet. There was the visit of the New York Philharmonic and the visit of the National Symphony of Washington. This kind of thing. And we had chamber orchestras from England, from Germany.

Crawford: There was just a huge demand for music and theater.

LeRoux: Yes, it was constant. I mean, every week we had some event, and it was absolutely fabulous. Of course, the Lycée Français in Montevideo at that time was the second biggest French high school in the world. The first one’s in Cairo, number two was Montevideo.

Crawford: Why was there such a big French colony?

LeRoux: Most of the business was English, not even Italian, English. The big agricultural enterprises were relatively few. Half of Uruguay was owned by twenty people, and most of them were descended from England.

Crawford: Not Spain.

LeRoux: No, no. From England, English, absolutely. The foundation of Uruguay is relatively new. It’s a matter of a century and a half or something. But at one point Montevideo
was under siege by Argentina, and do you know who was fighting with Montevideo? Fifty percent were pure French. It’s incredible. And then they disappeared. After that, I don’t know. There’s quite a few left, but not certainly 50 percent.

Well, anyway, then the relationship with my wife didn’t go too well, and we had two youngsters, boys, and they were both going to school. I decided it was time to get separated from my wife, and then I decided to divorce her. But I was faced with a very serious problem, that I considered she could not really raise the two boys herself. She was a wonderful young lady, but she had a family problem and she had problems herself.

Let me tell you a very short story. [Her family] was a very wealthy family from Bourges in France, a very wealthy family. Part of the family, for instance, owned Grand Marnier. But once she became twenty-one years old, she was presented with a bill for everything from the birth, the cost of her birth--how much she ate, how much--

Crawford: A strange family.

LeRoux: The father died, so the mother took all the inheritance that was supposed to go to her daughter.

Crawford: Did she pay the bill?

LeRoux: Oh, yes. Everything was taken from her. When this happened, we were newly married. [I called] a lawyer, and he told me, “Yes, you probably would win; it would take about five or six years, and it would cost you so much money, I advise against it.” But she was not the ideal mother, for example. You understand what I mean by that.

So I borrowed money and then I went to pick the boys up at their school--they were three and five. And one of them was going to school. I told them, “We’re going to take a plane, and I arranged for grandmother to pick you up. The only plane I could find was going to Madrid, so she will be waiting for you in Madrid, and you take care of your little brother,” and so on. And so I took them to the airport.

Crawford: Oh, you didn’t go. You just felt she was dangerous? Or not stable enough.

LeRoux: Not that. I won’t go into details, but that’s what happened. So they went and spent the following two years, three years in France, with the grandparents. So I got divorced, and then eventually I married Marta.

Crawford: Marta was Uruguayan, and a musician too.

LeRoux: Pianist, yes.

Crawford: A very fiery lady.

LeRoux: And how. Yes. And then--that was ‘57--that means ‘54 to ‘59, a little over five years, I was in Uruguay, and [in] ‘59--you know, I had met a lot of people because I was in a position that repeated itself in a way in San Francisco later on, that socially we were known and we had good friends and so on.
I became friends with the cultural attaché of the American embassy. At a party he said, “I would like to talk to you. Please come with your wife. Come to my office tomorrow. Then we’ll talk.” We went, and he said, “In my opinion, the future of this country is very bleak. I don’t see you staying here. I will help you to go to the United States, and after that, it’s up to you.”

So that’s what we did. We eventually came to the United States. That was Christmas ’59, with a little detour to France. We went to France and then Paris–Los Angeles. We did a concert with the local orchestra in Rennes, a concert with the symphony orchestra there which I conducted, and Marta played the piano concerto.

Crawford: How did France look to you? Did you think of staying in France?

LeRoux: No, because I was coming to the United States. I had met Roger Wagner, the then-famous leader of the Roger Wagner Chorale, and he had said, “Well, come and we’ll make a tour together. I will need a very small chamber orchestra to do some pieces I want to do with my choir, and we will go all over the United States. That will give you a chance to meet people, and you can audition whenever you have a chance.” Which I did.

At that time, I auditioned in Washington, I auditioned in Detroit, and I auditioned in San Francisco, and I got the three jobs. When I auditioned in San Francisco, I got a call from Washington saying, “Our principal oboe is leaving. Please come as soon as you can.” I said, “I’m staying in San Francisco,” and I stayed. I was in love with San Francisco.

Crawford: Who was the conductor of the symphony? Was it Jordá?

LeRoux: Enrique Jordá. I had met him before, but I auditioned beautifully for him, and I auditioned for Kurt Herbert Adler. So I got both jobs with the opera and with the symphony.

Crawford: Talk about the Adler audition.

LeRoux: Well, he said, “Come, I want to listen to you.” I auditioned for Jordá first, and then the word got around to general manager Skinner.

Crawford: Yes, Howard Skinner, that’s right.

LeRoux: Skinner told me, “Why don’t you audition for Adler?” So I played maybe ten minutes, and he said, “Fine.”

Crawford: How did you come to San Francisco? Why were you here?

LeRoux: Well, the tour with Roger Wagner started in Los Angeles, and we went all around the United States, including Florida, we went to the East Coast, we went to Badlands and crossed the Badlands, we went to Seattle, we went to Portland, and we ended up in San Francisco. The tour was finished. I decided to stay a few days in order to see about a job. That’s exactly what happened.

Crawford: You had no idea when you left France.
LeRoux: No, not at all. I was here from Christmas, ’59, to March. A very long tour. So I said to Skinner, “I have to finish my contract in Uruguay. I know that you don’t want me until October, until September, for the beginning of the opera season.” He said, “Go finish there and make sure you come back. I’ll pay half your salary.”

Crawford: He really wanted you.

LeRoux: That was wonderful. So that’s what happened. Marta stayed behind a little bit when I came in September because she had certain things to do, sell the piano. I started the opera season in San Francisco, and then when we were in Los Angeles she came.

Crawford: And did she perform?

LeRoux: No, she didn’t perform. Of course, in Uruguay and so on, but here no, she didn’t perform. I mean for that tour, no, she didn’t perform.

Crawford: Who had Marta studied with?

LeRoux: Marta studied with a man named Wilhelm Kolischer in Montevideo, who was Russian-Polish, and when he studied in Warsaw he was roommating with Rubenstein. They were like brothers, really, and he was a very good pianist, and an exceptional teacher.

Then she had contact with Yampolski, who was the pianist for David Oistrakh and spent three weeks in Uruguay, so she took lessons from him, and she eventually took from Pierre Sancan, a French teacher.

Crawford: That brings you to San Francisco. We can stop here or we can go on. Which would you prefer to do? That’s exactly one hour, just about one hour.

LeRoux: I think we better stop here.

Crawford: Let’s stop here. Thank you.
III. SETTLING IN SAN FRANCISCO: 1960

Joining the San Francisco Symphony, 1960
Thoughts about Enrique Jordá, Josef Krips, Seiji Ozawa
Concertizing with Marta LeRoux, Playing in the Opera Orchestra
Conducting the Modesto Symphony Orchestra and the San Francisco Conservatory Orchestra
The San Francisco Tape Center
The Mills College Performing Group
Darius Milhaud and the Mills College Music Department
The New Music Scene

[Interview 3: March 15, 2002] [Tape 4 Side A]

LeRoux: What I wanted to add to the Montevideo era is that I was very active in music because I was playing in the orchestra, the SODRE Orchestra. Also I forgot to say I formed a woodwind quintet, with which I toured extensively all over Uruguay going from small towns and playing works such as the Schoenberg woodwind quintet, which is very difficult and not a very easy piece to listen to either.

Crawford: How was that received?

LeRoux: Well, it was received, people accepted it. Not with much enthusiasm, in fact.

A friend of mine who was living in New York, a well-known violinist who was concertmaster of ABT for a while, came the other day with his wife. He was playing in Las Vegas. So we had dinner together, and he said, “Do you remember when you played the oboe concerto?” He said, “All my life, I never heard such oboe playing.” I thought it was ridiculous [laughter] but he made me feel very good because I know very well that after quite a few years here, I was not interested in playing oboe any longer. But that was much later in San Francisco.

Crawford: What made you decide to not be an instrumentalist any more?

LeRoux: Essentially because being an instrumentalist is very rewarding for a while, but it’s very limited. Unless you are, like some people that I knew, thinking day and night about
instrument playing. For instance, a very good friend of ours, Marta and I, is Alicia DeLaroccha, who is going to play this Sunday. It’s absolutely amazing. She cannot spend one day, even though she is traveling, without practicing two or three hours, minimum. Her whole life, except her daughter and her husband when he was alive, is the piano, period. I have much deeper interest in music than that. An interest that goes beyond, and I realized after arriving in San Francisco that I had to find a way of doing other things.

Crawford: Well, let’s talk about the San Francisco Symphony and your twenty years there.

LeRoux: Yes, I had several directors. Enrique Jordá, to start with. When I started I was assistant principal, and then Josef Krips made me principal player. Then after Krips was Seiji Ozawa and Edo DeWaart and that was it.

Crawford: What would you say of the difference in their approaches?

LeRoux: I think they were all efficient, and inspiring conductors in their own ways. A great deal of difference between Krips and Seiji Ozawa, for instance. Seiji Ozawa would really inspire people and go a little wild sometimes, while Josef Krips was settled and a man of tradition. He came from Vienna, and I have heard it said that the man with the great Viennese tradition of opera was Josef Krips, not Karl Boehm. I wouldn’t know, because I never worked with Boehm.

Crawford: He conducted here, *Frau ohne Schatten*. Leonie Rysanek brought him here, as I remember. So Krips would be the Viennese prototype.

LeRoux: Well, for Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, and Brahms. You know, Seiji was certainly wonderful in the *Symphonie Fantastique*, for example, Charles Ives’ Fourth Symphony, and other things he did. We did a recording of Beethoven’s *Eroica* Symphony, but it really didn’t work out too well. Played properly, and still the spirit of the music wasn’t there. I think he was one of the first Japanese postwar conductors to have traditional training.

Crawford: Were there certain conductors who could do better?

LeRoux: You really have to understand Beethoven to know what it means. You have to have several generations behind you who had careers in Western music. His training was Japanese, and I remember once he told me, “You know, my training is purely Zen. At school I remember a conducting teacher in a class had me raise my arm, feel the weight of the arm, and let it fall. Six months, nothing else.” And that’s why he had an extremely elegant and controlled way of conducting. Sometimes a little wild, but very different from Josef Krips.

I was going to the Bohemian Club with Krips often, and his wife told me, “When it doesn’t go well with the orchestra he comes home and cries on my shoulder.” How could you believe that Josef Krips could break down?

Crawford: So august.

LeRoux: Absolutely.
Crawford: I heard he was slow with a contemporary score.

LeRoux: I wouldn’t say that. He was traditional. He would never have done what I heard Mexican composer-conductor Chavez do. He conducted the Beethoven Eighth Symphony. Beethoven didn’t write [sings first movement theme]. He wrote [sings again]. Krips played it according to tradition. It was done I don’t know how many generations that way and it has to be done that way.

Crawford: Krips was said to be very much against women.

LeRoux: Oh, yes, obviously he never liked to have women players in the orchestra. But he never showed any antagonism. There was a terrible story. He didn’t like very much the first horn, and the day we started rehearsing the Schubert Symphony in C Major, the Ninth, when the horn came in late, he said, “Ach! Again! Ach!” And you know what happened? The first horn player took some vacation and committed suicide.

Crawford: Oh, Jean-Louis. I never heard that story.

LeRoux: Well, I was there. Nobody made a big fuss, of course. Of course. It was not even made public, I suppose.

Crawford: Did Krips connect the incident with the suicide?

LeRoux: No. No.

Crawford: You were close to him?

LeRoux: Well, no, he was sometimes giving me hard times. He told me once in a Beethoven symphony I didn’t come in right, “I know you are an amateur--you should know that by heart!”

Crawford: That was the only time you were admonished? Well, Jordá was supposed to have been very musical but had problems with George Szell when he came here to conduct.

LeRoux: Yes, Szell didn’t have many good things to say, and you cannot do this with a colleague. He said the orchestra was in terrible shape and that was the fault of Jordá. Actually he got the orchestra from Monteux, and his programming was very good and intelligent; he did adventurous pieces and he did them well. It was very difficult for us that he spent so much time on a few measures of music. The time was limited and we would get to the dress rehearsal even without having looked at part of the program.

But he was a very very cultivated mind, a very nice man and for Szell to do that was unpardonable.

Crawford: Alfred Frankenstein defended Jordá. Did you know Frankenstein?

LeRoux: And so did Fried. Yes, he was lecturer at Mills College.

Crawford: He served music well here.
Crawford: Alexander Friedman too. Well, did the quality of the orchestra, which you say was low, improve?

LeRoux: That wasn’t quite true. Szell said that, and we did a very good concert with Szell, when he came to conduct. The orchestra was working when I arrived twenty-six weeks of the year only, and we had another eleven weeks of opera, that made thirty-seven, and then the other fifteen weeks you have to go to unemployment, and little by little things got better, and then there was a strike, and a very bad one in 1966, something like this.

So things changed, very rapidly. Who was the manager at that time?

Crawford: Howard Skinner was there?

LeRoux: Skinner had more or less left, and his assistant became executive director. Until Peter Pastreich, I think.

Crawford: Monteux complained that he couldn’t do enough French music, that the board of directors insisted on four Tchaikovsky pieces for every--you know--[laughter]. Was that the case?

LeRoux: I don’t know. I have no idea.

Crawford: Who did the best programming?

LeRoux: Seiji was the most adventurous. Krips I remember having trouble with Stravinsky even. He put down the baton and said, “I don’t understand!”

Crawford: So he found twentieth century music difficult?

LeRoux: He didn’t like it. He didn’t understand it.

Crawford: What was the rapport?

LeRoux: In general it was friendly. There are always certain individuals who don’t like each other. The first and second bassoon never exchanged a word. They gave each other their backs and they were right behind me.

Crawford: Did you enjoy the life?

LeRoux: Yes, it was a very good orchestra and a good time in my life. A really first-class orchestra, so it was wonderful. People like Paul Renzi, my age, is still playing today.

Crawford: Didn’t you have to retire at sixty-five?

LeRoux: It was recommended, but somebody like Renzi, who is over seventy, still plays. So it wasn’t mandatory.

LeRoux: Oh, DeWaart was a good conductor, matter of fact, and very nice. Not as flamboyant as Seiji but very good and very solid technique, solid knowledge. But you know I was starting to think of leaving the orchestra so I wasn’t as interested then.

Crawford: How much does charisma count for with an orchestra?

LeRoux: A lot. You have to receive some ESP [laughter] from who is in front of you. An orchestra can decline into routine playing. After fifteen years of playing you know the repertoire, you have done it several times, and if you take a look at the strings now, they play better and with more enthusiasm than they did eight or nine years ago. And this is because of the conductor. And also the concertmaster, a very important position.

Crawford: Why is that?

LeRoux: He is a second conductor. He is the man who shows the bowing, the way you use your bow, and makes sure that everybody behind him plays together and with strength and so on.

Crawford: What is the proper balance of authority?

LeRoux: Well, it is impossible to be a Toscanini, or a Furtwaengler, or a Richard Strauss today. Now you have to be more democratic, not to offend anybody, because immediately you will have a problem with the union. If you have some problems, you call the person into your room if necessary with the representative of the union.

Crawford: Can the conductor fire a musician?

LeRoux: He can yes, with a reason, and he must take certain steps, and again work with the union and now with the orchestra committee, and the colleagues in the same section of the orchestra.

Crawford: When you came in ‘64 what was the union situation?

LeRoux: It was probably stronger than it is now. There was a good union president.

Crawford: That was Jerry Spain?

LeRoux: Yes. He came shortly after I arrived. He was a great man. The union was strong, but in a legitimate way, and the balance seemed right.

Crawford: What did the union want?

LeRoux: Well, to have year-long employment, to make a decent living, a better living, and it was well achieved. And I think now somebody in the symphony makes a really decent living.

Crawford: Do you know what the base salary is?

LeRoux: I knew that when they went on strike two years ago.
Crawford: I think it was close to $100,000.

LeRoux: Maybe not quite that.

Crawford: Did you do well?

LeRoux: Reasonably so, but I did other things. I was at Mills, I was at the conservatory, and then I had the Modesto Symphony.

Crawford: How much solo work did you do?

LeRoux: Not very much. My last thing was the *Symphonie Concertante* with the four winds, solos, and I played the Bach, oboe and violin, but not that much. I played recitals with Marta, outside of the symphony.

Crawford: Tell me about that. That is probably worse than a couple trying to play tennis together!

LeRoux: No, that was no problem. [laughter] She was the pianist and we could discuss things together--oh, no, that was fine. Mariedi Anders did the booking. She is still living. I met her the other day at a party.

Crawford: Where did you play?

LeRoux: Played around here, in Palo Alto, Sun Valley music camp, Idaho, in the summer. We went four or five years to that festival, and in the summer we played almost every night there. I had got acquainted with the Divisadero Tape Center.

Crawford: Oh, I wanted to ask you about the San Francisco Tape Center. That was wild, and I remember the marathons very well. What piece did you play?

LeRoux: Morton Subotnick--and I love that piece called *Play Number One*.

Crawford: What about the issue of tenure at the symphony? That came up around your time. I remember Elayne Jones didn’t get tenure.

LeRoux: When you are in an orchestra you are given one year of trial, probation, the conductor but also the orchestra reviews your playing. It wasn’t only Elayne Jones, there was at that time a bassoon player who was the principal and who was brought in forcibly by Seiji Ozawa. He was Japanese and we didn’t like him. I was on the jury--that was in 1974. The first part of the audition was always blind, so it had nothing to do with racial discrimination, that I guarantee you.

Crawford: I gather she thought it did. She was a vivid character [laughter]. Well, did Felix Khuner really play chess in the pit as he claimed?

LeRoux: I have never seen it. That would not surprise me though. There were very long operas.

Crawford: Let’s talk about the opera. I don’t know how long you were with the opera.

LeRoux: About four or five years.
Crawford: Did you deal much with Kurt Herbert Adler?

LeRoux: Not much, no. He was certainly a character, but he knew what he was doing and he was very efficient. The opera company was the best.

Crawford: *The New York Times* said it was among the ten best companies in the world. Well, let’s move on, Jean-Louis. Do you want to say something about Modesto?

LeRoux: That was a very good experience for me, because I had conducted smaller ensembles, except on some occasions, and that was very good for me to program and to rehearse once a week, Tuesday night. It was difficult to commute, but it was nice. Marta was working, but not very much, and you see, I had to make a living, and I was teaching a lot. I had thirty students, some of them only a half hour, and I was going to many places. I was going to the Peninsula, I was going to Berkeley, and the conservatory. I was working my butt off, literally. [laughter] Marta was teaching at the conservatory too—not piano, but chamber music. She was able to produce excellent results.

Crawford: You had to love Marta. When she played the Spanish repertory it was quite wonderful.

LeRoux: It goes with the territory. [laughter]

Crawford: Robin Laufer was at the conservatory?

LeRoux: Yes, he invited me there and I taught oboe. And then he was looking for a conductor for the student orchestra, and when I competed they voted and it was an overwhelming majority for me. And you know who was competing with me? Denis de Coteau! [laughter] So then I got the job and it lasted three years. Because the orchestra was too small to do any really interesting work, I brought together the conservatory and the Mills College orchestra, and we rehearsed separately, and then for the dress rehearsal we combined the two orchestras, and it was wonderful! I thought it was wonderful—of course I was the conductor, but it worked very well.

Then what happened, my contract was not renewed. What happened was that Seiji Ozawa and Milton Salkind were going to make of the orchestra and the conservatory one single organism, and then the man responsible for the conducting class would be his assistant. And that was Nikolaus Wyss.

Crawford: How does the San Francisco Conservatory of Music compare with the one in Paris?

LeRoux: You can’t compare. I mean it was a good place to learn music, but it’s become much bigger and better now. It was Milton who did a wonderful job of raising money. Better faculty and students, and that’s the whole point of a conservatory.

Crawford: The Tape Center started there in 1960, with Ramon Sender and Morton Subotnick.

LeRoux: Yes, and they invited me to play and I was delighted to play. I became a colleague and good friend of Morton. He was an excellent clarinet player, and we played often together. I met him when he was on Divisadero at the Tape Center. But it was a wonderful time and it lasted for about ten years, and when it moved to Mills the excitement lasted for a long, long time. It was new pieces, new composers, new ideas;
new things were happening. Incredibly wild, when you think about it. For instance, to bring a piano onstage and set fire to it! And the music was when the strings would explode---pang, pang, pang---

Crawford: What drove this Tape Center?

LeRoux: Well, new ideas, and for some reason it was really centered at Mills College, and the reason for that is that Milhaud was there, I think. When they moved to Mills they invited me to play, and the other activity was the French theater that Madeleine Milhaud was directing at Mills College. The French Consulate was involved and one of the things staged in probably 1962 was “Treize à Table,” and they were desperate for a leading lady with a slight Spanish accent.

Somebody thought about Marta, and she was fantastic! I was then playing in concerts with Milhaud conducting. I remember that incredible day when he came onstage, barely able to move, and dropped into a high seat to conduct and after the rehearsal he said to me, “I heard you conduct. From now on, you conduct.” And that’s what happened. From then on, I conducted the Mills Performing Group.

Crawford: Please talk about the performing group.

LeRoux: Well, it was a touring group essentially. There was Bonnie Hampton, cello, and Nathan Rubin, the concertmaster of the Oakland Symphony, and a clarinet player. A trio or quartet, and they went places together. That was the core of the group, and then they had students and other players. Responsible for the programming was the violin player, Nathan Rubin. He was extraordinarily gifted in everything. I know he wanted to go to Europe one day and stop playing the violin because he had enough. Wonderful man, little personal problems, but a wonderful man. We took all day Monday for that, and then we had dress rehearsal on Monday afternoon, and I was automatically invited for dinner by Madeleine. I would go for dinner at their house and get dressed for the concert. I was like a son of the Milhauds, in a way.

Crawford: What was he like? Dave Brubeck said he loved jazz so.

LeRoux: He was open to any kind of ideas.

Crawford: Why did he like it here so much and stay so long?

LeRoux: He was very grateful because Mills had saved his life. He was Jewish and he was in the thirties in Portugal, but he knew about the situation in France, the invasion, and somebody here sent him a telegram and said, “Come here and we’ll find you something.” Somebody else telegraphed that he had a position at Mills College and he would be very welcome here. After the war he got the position of composition teacher at the conservatory and said he would take it for only every other year and then go back to Mills. And every year he would go to Aspen.

Crawford: Would he have been able to do in Paris what he did here with jazz, with blues?

LeRoux: Oh, yes! He started his career at about seventeen with Paul Claudel, and Claudel was sent to Brazil, Rio de Janeiro, and Milhaud went as his secretary. And that’s why he
wrote *The Creation of the World*—he was truly fascinated by Brazilian music. And the relationship with Claudel was very good and that is why he wrote operas and Claudel wrote the text.

Crawford: He went back to Geneva, didn’t he?

LeRoux: Yes. It’s so quiet there and normal [laughter], and in Paris he lived in an exciting part of town. It’s almost on top of Place Pigalle, very noisy, and they are on the second floor! So imagine the noise at night, but she loves it. We always have lunch in Paris. She knows all the restaurants around and everybody knows her.

Crawford: Is she still alive?

LeRoux: Yes. She is a hundred, I think.

Crawford: A great personality in her own right.

LeRoux: Yes. And they were cousins, you know, so they had to get special dispensation to marry. They had a son, and you know this big portrait she has—that was done by the son. I just learned from a sculptor in Uruguay who goes to Italy that the son lives in Carrara most of the time.

Crawford: Were you on the faculty?

LeRoux: Yes. I conducted the orchestra and had responsibility for some chamber groups, and I taught oboe to two or three students. Not many students. That was a difficult time for the Mills girls, the time of LSD and drugs, and I wasn’t used to that. We would have early morning rehearsals and I remember the bleary eyes. And after one or two hours we would take intermission and they would lie down on the floor and go to sleep. And besides that, they had their own rules of justice among themselves. One of the most talented viola players, Kiki Nelson, brought a bottle of wine to rehearsal, and she was kicked out of Mills. And all the teachers in her departments wrote letters, but her peers, her colleagues, were pitiless.

Crawford: That doesn’t sound very good.

LeRoux: No. So she took a year and then decided to go to Berkeley and study Arabic, and then she got a Ph.D. writing about the music in the Koran. That was published and I have a copy. And then she married Charles Boone and was invited to go to Cairo with some students from England and write a modern dictionary, Arabic-English. She fell in love with one of the English boys and married him, and they are still there, employees of the Ford Foundation. I saw her recently because her daughter is now at Berkeley.

Crawford: Was the musical center of Mills Milhaud?

LeRoux: Yes. Schoenberg was at USC, in Los Angeles…

Crawford: Stravinsky too.
LeRoux: Yes, but not at any school. And of course you had Henry Cowell and John Cage. Cowell was very important, I think.

Crawford: He was jailed for homosexuality, wasn’t he?

LeRoux: Yes, he was caught at Mills College. I didn’t know him but I played his music. Harry Partch was here, too, and then there was revolution within the walls at Mills. Terry Riley, and…

Crawford: Terry Riley studied with Milhaud?

LeRoux: I don’t know, but he was very important in establishing minimalism. I remember when John Cage came I was conducting a concert on the stage and he was onstage playing chess. The chessboard was connected to a computer and every move would change the tone. Something like Erik Satie at that time. Mills was a wonderful place.

Crawford: What were some of the highlights?

LeRoux: One of the first big works I conducted was a ballet by Milhaud, *L’Homme et son désir*. The dance department collaborated, fifteen percussion players, and the great thing is that the players didn’t have to be professional. He insisted on a metal ratchet, a children’s toy, and finally I had to glue a piece of metal--you know what they use for shoes.

And then we had to use all kinds of conducting techniques, because we were following the trend, the fashion in new music. Keeping time was very important, and there were no bar lines, but only an indication of seconds--so we’d start and go 15, 30, 60 seconds and go all around. [laughter] We tried improvisational music of Lukas Foss.

Crawford: Pauline Oliveros told me that she went to Los Angeles to perform and saw that there were music stands onstage and she asked Foss about that, and he said, “Oh, the stands are so the musicians can read the music.” “Well--that’s not exactly improv!” [laughter]

LeRoux: Well, he liked to have certain things written and then go into improvisation.

Crawford: What was your relationship to the Tape Center?

LeRoux: Not very much. The coordinator for several years was Charles Boone. I believed very much in Charles, and I played two pieces of his in Modesto and another for the San Francisco Symphony children’s concert, which I commissioned from him.

Crawford: What will live of this music?

LeRoux: I don’t know, but what it did was allow us to have a better understanding of the essence of music. Many were trying to go away from composed music, trying to find something new as the basis of music, and the Tape Center was trying to build another kind of sound, of musical instruments, through electronics. All that is important, though there are few pieces composed in that time that will stay in the repertoire, I suppose. For instance, Bob Moran was here two times, and he did an enormous piece that involved cars going up Twin Peaks.
LeRoux: Yes, it was the same kind of thinking in music--trying to do something new. Crazy ideas like the week-long opera by Stockhausen. Already *St. Francis* is a little long, five hours, so some things have to be abandoned. But it’s interesting that through all this, acoustic music is likely to remain the most important.

The composer I had the closest relationship with was [Yuji] Takahashi, and I just learned he is somewhere playing the piano again. Messiaen. He was a follower at that time of [Iannis] Xenakis, not Boulez, he studied with Xenakis, just out of school, and when he asked Xenakis to take him as a student, Xenakis said, “Ordinarily I don’t take students, but how much mathematics do you know?” He said school mathematics wasn’t enough, he had to study this and this, and so Takahashi did that and went back and said “Maestro, now I know.” And Xenakis took him. I remember a piece he wrote based on architecture.

Crawford: What else was going on in San Francisco?

LeRoux: There was some contemporary music played by the symphony, and they invited Copland and invited me to conduct works by Jean Claude Eloy, who was teaching in Berkeley. A Boulezian composer, and that worked out very well. Based on resonance of percussion instruments and you have to figure out how to make it work, so to conduct it was not too easy.

But I had already done some, everybody knew I could conduct, and we did use the members of the Mills College Performing Group--the Eloy piece took twelve or thirteen players. That was maybe ‘72. We did a lot of educational concerts--two schools once a week--and played for Young Musicians, and generally we went unbelievable places, like the worst black area--Hunters Point--and there wasn’t a problem. That was before the big trouble, I suppose. I wouldn’t go there any more.

But the worst thing I remember was a Lutheran school across from Stern Grove. We had to leave and say we couldn’t do it--the children were so unruly we couldn’t believe it, and the teacher couldn’t do anything. That was surprising to me because it was a religious school.

Crawford: Much better at Hunters Point?

LeRoux: Yes, much better. [laughter] But that was the only thing I wanted to say, that I was very active. For some reason all of that is a little bit in a haze. Hunters Point and the Lutheran school, yes--Modesto--all the details of the concerts aren’t very precise in my memory.

Crawford: When you took Milhaud’s baton, how many concerts did you do?
LeRoux: It lasted three or four years after that--five or six concerts a year. But I never programmed them alone. Nathan or Bonnie would do it, and we talked about it, and there were composers, students of Milhaud’s who were invited and we played some of their music, and always Milhaud’s, of course.


Bring Your Own Pillow Concerts: Charles Boone and Marcella De Cray
Creation of the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, 1971
Programming for the Players: Messiaen, Krenek, Carter, Babbitt and Others
Frank Zappa in Concert and Players Programs
Studying Contemporary Music Scores
California Composers
Creation of the Chamber Symphony of San Francisco, 1978
Conducting the San Francisco Ballet Orchestra, 1975-1984
Remembering the Ballet Directors Helgi Tomassen and Michael Smuin
Leaving San Francisco for Punta del Este, 1984
A Return to San Francisco and Marriage to Jane Roos
The Canadian Ballet and Thoughts of the Future

[Interview 4: March 18, 2002] [Tape 6 Side A]

Crawford: Interview number four with Jean-Louis LeRoux for the oral history office.

LeRoux: What I wanted to say is that in about 1970, ‘71, when [Darius] Milhaud left, I was at a crucial age. I was forty-and-something, forty-four in ‘71, and I never thought about it, but now that I look upon my life, with your help, I realize that I feel that I had put together all the elements that gave some sense to my life. I had done a great deal of oboe playing, some conducting, and it was time to try to find some new venue.

And especially because I had fallen deeply in love with all the new things that were happening in music, and I thought I had to do something constructive about it. Now that I look at it, I never thought I was going to do this. No. It just happened. It just happened, for instance, that Charles Boone, after the departure of Milhaud, put together a program once in a while and presented them somewhere in Emeryville.

Charles had decided to spend one or two years in France, invited by a very famous publisher in France, Mrs. Salabert, S-a-l-a-b-e-r-t, who was a Romanian lady. Salabert was the name of her husband, but she was a very powerful figure. Coming back from one of these concerts, we were the three of us on the sidewalk before he was to leave. Marcella De Cray, Charles Boone and I.
That’s when I said, “I think it’s time. What you are doing, Charles, is very good, but we have to make it larger-scale and better organized. I think we should put together a company, and make out of that a corporation, a nonprofit corporation.”

In twenty-four hours Marcella had gone to Sacramento and organized the whole thing, and we were a corporation.

Crawford: So that was related to the BYOP [Bring Your Own Pillow] concerts?

What did you want to do?

LeRoux: I wanted to keep on doing whatever the Mills Performing Group was doing before. I thought it was time to take our activities of contemporary music out of a teaching organization, out of the university. That’s not a criticism of Milhaud, but I realized that it had to be done differently at that time, to be independent of academia.

So that’s really the start. We had the help of a lady that didn’t work out at all that we had to--I wouldn’t say fire, but we had a discussion and so on--she wanted to do some programming, and I didn’t want that to happen at all.

Crawford: She was an administrator.

LeRoux: Yes. And so Marcella decided to take over the administration, that’s all. Well, that was the beginning. We started at the Grapeshake Gallery very fast, and we said BYOP is very nice, but we wanted to give it a little more respectable name.

So I said, “How about something like San Francisco Contemporary Music Players?” Immediately everybody said it’s fine. By that time, Charles had left. Charles wasn’t there, he was in France. I would communicate with him and say, “I have this program or that program in mind; what do you think of it?” That kind of thing. And we had already a group of players, that’s not exactly the same one that we have now, but I remember that the violinist at that time was Peter Schaeffer. He stayed one year and then went back to Australia. He was in the symphony, I suppose, and Marta was the pianist, and we had the former principal cellist of the symphony, who just resigned. Our first recording was a quartet of Loren Rush. He was teaching at the conservatory. That was the first recording I made, and some other things.

Crawford: Roy Malan must have joined fairly soon, no?

LeRoux: Yes, but not yet, not yet. Nancy Ellis was viola.

Crawford: You had an outstanding initial board of directors too. In Jane Roos, Agnes Albert, Larry Campbell, Charles Boone, Alexander Fried, Gunther Schuller, Alan Stein, you and Marcella. Well, let’s talk about the venues, because the Modern Art Museum was so important.

LeRoux: We did! After two or three years in the Grapeshake Gallery, we tried to find some other place to play because it was becoming very heavy on the gallery side, and the owners, the Meyers, were reluctant to go another year, I think. Actually, they sold that building very shortly thereafter.
So we finally found the Green Room, and that’s what we adopted for a long time.

Crawford: The Green Room in the Veterans Building.

LeRoux: Yes, very close to the Museum of Modern Art.

Crawford: Very Baroque for a contemporary music place?

LeRoux: Yes, but the way we were sitting people, the sound was okay. It was a nice-sounding room, and just the size we needed at that time. We had already a pretty good following, a group of followers that would come to the concerts. That’s when Roy joined it.

Roy was a member of the symphony at that time, he was principal second, and was just coming out of Juilliard. But he immediately said he was very interested, and that was it.

Crawford: And he’s still there.

LeRoux: He’s still there.

Crawford: How did you make the connection with the MOMA gallery? How were you allowed to be in the galleries?

LeRoux: I’m terribly sorry about names. I don’t know how I got in touch with him or for what reason. He was responsible for education in the museum.

Crawford: Bob Whyte--

LeRoux: That’s right. He opened all the doors and he had all these fancy ideas that I had to give some concerts in the big rotunda, it was called. I think, together with some expositions and so on. He always opened all the doors and the facilities to us. I’m thinking about the special concerts on expressionism. I have a catalog, and we were mentioned in the catalog. On the last page. It was very nice. I was always tempted to do that elsewhere, like we went to the Berkeley Museum too for its special expo on Joan Miró. We did a concert there about the relationship of Spain, France and cubism.

Crawford: Marta played Spanish music, I remember.

LeRoux: We did some song cycles in French. The voice was very important because many composers took texts--George Crumb, for instance. Well, we had a marvelous singer. That was Claudia Cummings. She was ready to do anything.

Crawford: Great voice for new music.

LeRoux: She’s marvelous. She had a beautiful voice. She would sing. And anything I suggested, she said, “Okay, all right.”

Crawford: She sang [Hans] Henze with Spring Opera. *Elegy for Young Lovers*. Many times there were concerts right in the galleries, with the paintings?

LeRoux: Yes. When there was some link, some obvious link, we would do that.
Crawford: *Pierrot Lunaire? Was Pierrot done?*

LeRoux: Yes, we did the *Pierrot*, half-staged, too. Twice, I think. And then we did Feldman’s *Rothko Chapel*, with the chorus. That was so beautiful. I was so happy. He wrote very long pieces and very, very soft, very soft.

Crawford: I worked with you on the multimedia performances at Christmastime--a lot of fun!

LeRoux: Well, that happened at least, I think, three times. The reason for the first time was that we did something a little special, we had a meeting of all the Players and asked them for a list of the works they would like to perform themselves. And when the list came, there were a lot of things that were very interesting. I said, “There are so many things, and I don’t want to disappoint anybody, so let’s make it a three-ring circus. We will have seven people performing at the same time at different locations in the museum.” And then make some kind of a catalog where everything will be done to the minute, so when people that were playing finished they could go somewhere else and perform and it would be absolutely organized--

Crawford: One year, when I was managing the group, I asked to have Scott Beach reading Dylan Thomas’ “A Child’s Christmas in Wales.” And you said, “Whatever you want.”

LeRoux: [laughs heartily] It was wonderful. I remember Scott doing that. I liked that. Yes.

Crawford: Well, Jean-Louis, what were some of the program highlights that you want to talk about? There was a Hopper exhibit, I remember, and what did you program for Hopper?

LeRoux: We had to perform some classical and modern contemporary works, American contemporary works. I can’t remember what the program was, but it did seem to make a lot of sense.

Crawford: Did you look at the art? Did you study Hopper and then try to figure out--

LeRoux: Oh, yes. We didn’t play some ultramodern work. Twelve-tone and so on. We did some other things.

Crawford: Because it’s very literal art.


Crawford: You said that in 1978 Messiaen came for a program.

LeRoux: Yes, for the *Quartet for the End of Time*. He had something with the symphony. It was a little difficult time for me because I had problems with my back and was just coming out of surgery. I told you I was at home, and he came to see me because he knew that I couldn’t move very much, so he came, and we spent an afternoon together. His wife came a little later. We had a chat. We chatted not very much about music but about the virtue of taking a nap in the afternoon. That’s very essential, very important! [laughter]

Crawford: His music is so whimsical to me. Is he whimsical?
LeRoux: What does that mean, whimsical?

Crawford: Whimsical. Fantasque.

LeRoux: Oh, yes. That’s very true. He had gone to Muir Woods, and he didn’t have a tape recorder with him to tape the birds. He took some notes, but he wanted really to have a tape of the sounds. Which I did eventually.

Crawford: How about [Ernst] Krenek?

LeRoux: I have a letter of his, almost an insulting letter, not insulting but he said, “Last year your programming worked well. I was very happy. How come you didn’t program any work of mine this year? I mean, I am an important composer. I should be programmed every year.” I have that letter.

Crawford: What did you write back?

LeRoux: What did I say? That I would program something with the chamber symphony, and I did program something. Homage to Webern, actually.

Crawford: I remember some very charming correspondence with Elliott Carter.

LeRoux: Ah, yes. I performed his Triple Duo, also in Buenos Aires later on.

Crawford: I don’t remember if he came to the concert. It was his eightieth birthday, I think, but there was correspondence, and he was thrilled that you were actually performing this work.

LeRoux: Yes. Well, he’s a very, very important composer.

Crawford: You didn’t do much of Elliott Carter.

LeRoux: No. It’s also that you have to not only have the composer in mind but to find the right work with the right kind of performers, because it’s not always that it’s easy to program a work with six or seven performers. I was very careful about the budget for a long time. We tried to combine works using not that many players.

Crawford: That’s true, you couldn’t do great big pieces.

LeRoux: No. But, you know, I didn’t care about the money. I was making a living at the symphony. I was not paid for about four years or five years, and then very little, by the Players. [laughter] But that didn’t matter. It wasn’t important.

Crawford: And now the Players’ budget is half a million dollars.

LeRoux: Just about, almost.

Crawford: It’s almost half a million. But that reflects escalating costs, doesn’t it? The Players make more, the administrators make a lot more.
LeRoux: That’s the funny thing about administration of all these companies. I remember starting with the symphony, with the same executive director, Howard Skinner, and then he had no more than eight or ten people around him in the office. And he was doing the opera and symphony. And now there are at least eighty people in each, eighty just in the administration.

Crawford: That’s right. Well, Gunther Schuller was on the board.

LeRoux: For a very long time, yes.

Crawford: How did that happen?

LeRoux: He came to conduct. I think that was Marcella’s idea. She knew him.

Crawford: In 1983 there was a benefit concert of Varèse and Webern with Frank Zappa. Talk about that. How was that put together?

LeRoux: I had heard that Zappa had conducted some pieces in New York. He had a tremendous admiration for Varèse, so I think I called him on the phone and said, “I would like to organize a concert. That would be the 100th anniversary of Varèse and Webern, and how about sharing the conducting—you conduct the Varèse pieces and I take care of Webern?” He said yes almost immediately. And he said, “My only problem is that I need a little bit of instruction, how to conduct, to handle these pieces.” I said fine.

So I went to Los Angeles. I spent an entire day with him in his house, talking about music, and we talked about what to do and what to watch out for, and I told him it would be so well received and the Players would be so happy to see him and to be working with him, and he would not have any problems.

And he came with only one request, to be in a hotel where they have twenty-four-hour service, so he could eat anything at any time. [laughter]

Crawford: And you rented and nearly filled the opera house!

LeRoux: We had more than 2,000 people. I still have a hole in my stomach about the risk we were taking. [laughter] No, I don’t know how much it cost. It’s a lot of money to rent the opera house, a lot of money.

Crawford: You don’t remember how much.

LeRoux: No. There were stagehands and everything that goes with it. It was a lot of money.

Crawford: But the board agreed. It was a great accomplishment.

LeRoux: We did it, and we made quite a bit of money, too. Several thousand.

Crawford: Grace Slick was the mistress of ceremonies. How did that happen?

LeRoux: I think that was Frank’s idea to ask her, said she would do it, and she did, and she did a wonderful job.
Crawford: I always thought the Players should tour more. We wrote the proposal for the Cheltenham tour, and of sixty letters, that was the one offer that came back. How did you choose the programming for that?

LeRoux: That was William Kraft who went with the Players. I didn’t do it. I can’t remember for which reason. Marcella was not too happy with me because of that. For some reason, I couldn’t go.

Crawford: What about touring? Was it worth it to tour?

[---]

LeRoux: Yes. There’s an agent here that knows just about everything you can do in Europe. I don’t know if you know about that. His name is Vogt, V-o-g-t. He was part of a big firm in Munich, and I just happened to meet him because he’s now in the United States, the agent of my nephew, François. We had plans together. We had a drink, and he knew what conditions were for conducting abroad. But it’s a difficult thing to find two good programs, very good programs of American music. It’s not that difficult, but we had to put our heads together.

Crawford: Offhand, what would you choose?

LeRoux: You mean American composers? Some of the traditional ones, like Henry Cowell and John Cage, Lou Harrison, Elliott Carter, Richard Felciano, Wayne Peterson and Charles Boone. They would have to be very effective, very special works.

Crawford: The booking would not be a problem.

LeRoux: The booking wouldn’t be a problem. If we could travel with a group of eight at the most, it’s not that expensive, and we certainly could get bookings, because there are at least three or four festivals of contemporary music in France only, and then Germany and Barcelona probably and Italy, Florence, or something like this, to make a tour--it’s not impossible. It must be done at least two years in advance.

Crawford: Let’s talk some about the commissions that you did. Which ones do you think are most important?

LeRoux: We did some commissions, but not very much, in my time anyway, because we didn’t have much money.

Crawford: What did a commission cost, if you commissioned William Kraft, say?

LeRoux: I don’t know. I have no idea. I lost track. I never worried too much about that. I worried about money, to make sure we didn’t go over budget, but for commissioning, nowadays it has changed so much because you have several foundations and so on that are dedicated to this kind of thing. I don’t know if they existed at that time or not, but we took some advantage of that situation, yes, with commissions, I suppose. What we commissioned at that time was with a consortium. We were three groups commissioning at the same time the same composers, so that the work would be played three times.
Crawford: That was under the National Endowment for the Arts, wasn’t it?

LeRoux: Yes, we had to guarantee three performances.

Crawford: You played such a variety of music here, world premieres by Milton Babbitt, a difficult composer. Would you say it is rather academic music?

LeRoux: Yes. What I was saying before is that we were independent, so we were free to choose absolutely from whatever source, and to play everything that was offered--I mean, not offered to us--everything we had access to. All kinds of tendencies, all kinds of styles, and that I think was always important. For instance, I think we programmed only once or twice minimalist music.

Crawford: I was going to ask you about that.

LeRoux: For one reason: John Adams was doing that with the symphony. I didn’t see any need for duplicating his efforts.

Crawford: You would have programmed Philip Glass, say?

LeRoux: Oh, yes, of course. But I didn’t do it much because it was being done elsewhere. I did--what was it?--Charlemagne? He had some players, and whatever was played by the player was done again through the tape machine. And we could not finish the work because we ran out of tape before the end. [laughter]

Crawford: I remember times when the computer didn’t work, which nobody knew, of course, but you and the Players.

LeRoux: Yes. Well, we had some accidents, you know. [laughter]

Crawford: Was the press good, responsive?

LeRoux: I think so, yes. Absolutely.

Crawford: Robert Commanday wrote during your time.

LeRoux: And Heuwell Tircuit.

Crawford: What about--you don’t have to commit yourself, but were there local wealthy people like Gordon Getty, who asked to be performed?

LeRoux: Yes, a song cycle of his based on Emily Dickinson’s poetry was presented by us. Same poetry that Michael Tilson Thomas [set] that just was played by the symphony last week or the week before.

The man in charge of the hall recorded the first half, and he forgot to put the machine on for the second half, so Gordon [Getty] never forgave me for that.

Crawford: So there was not a good relationship.
LeRoux: After that.

Crawford: For the Players, how many scores did you look at?

LeRoux: Hundreds, literally, when I was with the Players. Again, now, this year quite a few. When I resigned in 1988, it was [because] I couldn’t face the responsibility of choosing. I thought, “Who am I to set myself as a judge? It’s not right, not any more.” I was so confident, I did it for many years, but now I can’t do it.

Crawford: It must be so hard. What are the mechanics of opening a score and looking at a score?

LeRoux: When you receive a score generally you have a letter from the composer, so you know something about the composer, himself. That’s number one. Number two, you open the score and immediately you know, by looking at two or three or four pages, what style it is, the way of writing, the style. And after that you look closer to find out how it’s put together, more or less a pre-analysis, if you want.

Or if it’s a tape, that helps a great deal, so you listen. But not necessarily. To be frank, if you have a work that’s twenty minutes long, and you’ve looked at it and you have doubts, you’re not going to listen to the whole twenty minutes of tape.

Crawford: It’s a big responsibility.

LeRoux: It’s a tremendous responsibility, but if you look at all the composers from this area who came to the party last year, on the thirtieth anniversary, it seems that I did a few things right, because they were all there and are very good. It was wonderful, a great feeling.

Crawford: A great tribute! Let’s talk about California composers and their importance in the overall scene.

LeRoux: Well, all the big and not so big universities have a music department, you know. In this area, you have Berkeley, of course; you have Davis, you have the University of California at Santa Cruz, you have Stanford and you have the state colleges.

San Diego is very important, University of California. So is USC, of course, and UCLA. All of these schools have two or three composers of name. But we really paid more attention to Berkeley and not so much to Stanford.

Crawford: I’m trying to think of who came from Stanford. Leland Smith?

LeRoux: Yes, Leland Smith, that’s right. But practically everybody at Berkeley I did work with. To start with, Richard, of course, Richard Felciano.

Crawford: Who of those, if you can say, who of the Berkeley composers will live, do you think, most importantly?

LeRoux: If anybody, Andrew, Andrew Imbrie, of course. Andrew Imbrie, and then Richard Felciano. I just heard a piece of his, a long piece, for soprano and a small group of instruments that is absolutely wonderful. It was performed in Los Angeles very recently.
Crawford: You had some composers on your staff with the Players. I remember Randall Packer.

LeRoux: You know, I soon felt that I needed some help. Tried to get one of the most talented of the students at Berkeley. Randall Packer was one. Christopher Fulkerson was my first one.

Crawford: Yes, a composer also. Let me ask you this: Are there any composers that you feel were too academic for your purposes?

LeRoux: That’s a very loaded question.

Crawford: It is a loaded question. Maybe it’s not a fair question.

LeRoux: No, I think it’s true for most composers that teach. They are on the staff of a university because of their work with students, so they are not absolutely free to do exactly what they like. They have to produce things that are acceptable to their peers. I don’t know if that is fair. It’s a situation that’s a little difficult for everybody, especially for them, for the composers, themselves.

That’s much less now. You know, the freedom produced by what we call postmodernism or whatever, all of a sudden, as long as you compose things that are played once in a while, then you are accepted. Before, it was not quite like this, I think.

Crawford: So are you telling me that you think that Roger Sessions and Imbrie have affected the Berkeley faculty, that that’s the kind of music they want, would you say?

LeRoux: That’s in a way what I am saying, yes.

Crawford: John Adams would not be at home on that faculty, perhaps.

LeRoux: No. Well, he would have been at home when he was young. Let’s put it that way, yes. Now I think the situation is quite, quite different. When I look at all the young composers that I have met recently, like Pablo Ortiz or Jorge Liderman—I heard his work recently.

Crawford: Yes. What do you think?

LeRoux: Wonderful. I thought it was really great. It’s complicated and difficult, not absolutely necessary—it could have been a little, maybe written in a little simpler way, but I felt it that difficult, for the players. I think David did a wonderful job, David Miles, absolutely wonderful.

Crawford: We always hear about composers’ composers; that is, composers who write just for composers’ ears and can’t really be understood by the public at large.

LeRoux: That was the case for a long time, yes. After this period following the Second World War, it was true.

Crawford: Would Boulez fall under that category?
LeRoux: No, Boulez was totally independent. Boulez is Boulez.

Crawford: Cindy Cox is on the faculty. And you’ve performed her work.

LeRoux: Yes.

Crawford: Do you see a similarity of style among Berkeley composers? That’s important to know.

LeRoux: You know, there was a generation of absolutely neoclassical composers, and even Spanish, French-Spanish. That was followed by, as you said, the Imbrie and Sessions school. I don’t want to be too technical about that because I know there are certain similarities between their works, between them, for instance, and Milton Babbitt.

But that has changed and it is a kind of adaptation to the demands of the audience. I remember Milton Babbitt saying, “Who cares if you listen?” That’s not true any longer. That’s not true. Composers care very much about being listened to.

Crawford: I see, they want to be more accessible.

LeRoux: Of course. Most of the time, I think.

Crawford: What about Wayne Peterson, who won a Pulitzer Prize?

LeRoux: Yes. I can’t remember when it was; it was probably the eighties, ’88, ’89.

Crawford: Was that for a certain work, a particular work, or a body of work?

LeRoux: A body of work.

Crawford: A whole body of work. And you like his music, obviously, because you have programmed it often.

LeRoux: Oh, yes, I like his music, of course, yes.

Crawford: I’m looking at the recordings that the Players did over the years. Any of those in particular that you remember? The Felciano, of course, Angels of Turtle Island.

LeRoux: Yes. Yes, this I recall.

Crawford: And Loren Rush is on the list.

LeRoux: Loren Rush’s string quartet.

Crawford: And Conrad Cummings on several lists.

LeRoux: He was a young composer. I mean, he was local because his family lives here. Actually, I can’t remember if I knew his mother, but I asked him to do something. I have some recently discovered tapes in my car, right here, and one of them is a work by Conrad Cummings, a big work.
Crawford: I remember some wonderful French programs with Gerard Griséy, for instance.

LeRoux: Ah, yes.

Crawford: Did you do much French programming?

LeRoux: Not very much, no.

[Tape 7 Side A]

Crawford: What about John Cage?

LeRoux: He came to meet us. I programmed some work of his, quartets, *Music for Seventeen*.

Crawford: He has a California connection, of course.

LeRoux: Of course. Of course. And it’s the last thing that I remember is when he came to give a lecture in Herbst Hall. He asked me to introduce him.

What he wanted to speak about was his connection with a printer—the things he had printed. They’re good. They really are. I watched him work. And collage, something like this. I’m very unhappy not to have more precise recollections.

Crawford: I want to ask you about Lucky [Stephen Mosko] and Donald Palma, your successors.

LeRoux: I have seen Lucky in action, after I supposedly retired, and I think whatever his programming was was very intelligent and very interesting, and [he] did a very good job, no doubt. Donald Palma, I don’t know at all, not at all.

Crawford: Was Lucky’s programming different from yours in any very distinct way?

LeRoux: Well, I think he programmed more American music, and people of his generation, which is perfectly legitimate. My system was a little different. The focus was different, and that’s the way it should be.

Crawford: There should be a fresh approach.

LeRoux: Yes.

Crawford: Shall we say something about the Chamber Symphony of San Francisco, which was started in 1978-79?

LeRoux: At that time, one of the members of the staff of the S.F. Ballet was Victor Wong, and he made the mistake of bringing a Russian ballet to Berkeley and lost money with that. But that was the chance for the ballet orchestra to have a chamber orchestra. So we organized a nonprofit corporation. Who started it with me? I mean, as an administrator, as executive director?

Crawford: I don’t know. But you were very active. You toured, I think?
LeRoux: And we toured, yes, a very big tour in ‘88, of France and a little bit in Spain. From festival to festival. The reviews were fantastic.

Crawford: Local reviews. Did Le Monde review it?

LeRoux: No, but the local Cannes—I mean, all the local papers. We didn’t even do anything in Paris. It was in the middle of the summer, so nothing much is happening in Paris in August. But what I tried to do is balance the programs, to always have or almost always have one work of contemporary music and a well-known composer in France or America or whatever, and to have something of Russia.

I think that was very important, and I think part of the success of—or the non-success of that—it should have developed into something much bigger, if you look into whatever became of the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, for instance, or the St. Paul orchestra. That was a period when chamber orchestras should have developed, and something happened. It didn’t work out wonderfully.

I think the problem in a great sense was the fact that we didn’t have a medium-sized hall with good acoustics. We tried. We ended up in Herbst. It’s not good. Herbst was not very good.

Crawford: There was supposed to be a 300-seat theater in Davies Hall.

LeRoux: Well, yes, but that’s too small. We wanted to have 800, 1,000 and to fill that.

Crawford: The size of Herbst. But, you know, in the seventies there was a proliferation of chamber orchestras.

LeRoux: Here, too. Yes, competition. That’s true.

Crawford: Did any of them survive?

LeRoux: Only the so-called San Francisco Chamber Orchestra has. Mine was Chamber Symphony of San Francisco. But the San Francisco Chamber Orchestra is still going, yes, I suppose.

Crawford: You had a lot going on. You had the Players, you had the ballet orchestra, and you had the--

LeRoux: Well, what happened is when Denis DeCoteau became the music director of the ballet, he needed some help to conduct, so he called me up, and that was ‘75. So we split The Nutcracker, and then after that he invited me to stay, to do a little more, and little by little for five years my activity became bigger and bigger, but I never went on tour with him because they were touring with the orchestra, with the San Francisco Ballet Orchestra, and I never toured until I got to ‘78, ‘79. At that point I was practically not playing very much anymore in the symphony, and I finally left in 1980, when I became full time with the ballet.

Crawford: We didn’t talk very much about that, but I wanted to ask you what your approach to ballet conducting was.
LeRoux: Well, the choreography is set generally to existing music. It’s very rare that a score is commissioned totally anew. We did that. We did that one full year. It was very interesting, but generally choreography is already set to existing music.

And so we have to get as close to the recording as possible, with certain variation in the sense that when the piece is finally choreographed, little by little the dancers get used to that choreography, and they accept all the demands made, such as for a little faster tempo. That’s quite often true.

And that’s one of the problems of conducting for ballet because when you consider, let’s say, a Beethoven symphony, you can play at a certain speed and it feels comfortable; that’s the way it should be. And then if you change it, you cannot just make it a tiny bit faster. You don’t feel good. You have to go quite a bit faster. I mean, “quite a bit,” an important amount of going faster, so then you feel comfortable again.

For dancers it’s not true. When they say, “Please go faster,” that means a hair, and it’s very difficult sometimes, or slower.

Crawford: I would think it would be so exacting in terms of tempi.

LeRoux: Yes, but again, you have to be able to make music anyway, and that depends on the conductor, of course, but also the orchestra. That’s why our orchestra, for instance, is very used to that. They don’t mind. And they are able to do it even without rehearsing, from one to another, if they can do it. It’s fantastic. But it’s a little different kind of requirement than a concert orchestra or even an opera orchestra, because the opera orchestra and the opera depends a lot on the conductor. The ballet doesn’t—it depends on the conductor, of course, but you are tied to certain parameters you cannot change, which is the choreography itself.

Crawford: That’s the difference. Is there a lot of give and take between dancers and the players in the pit?

LeRoux: Yes, if the go-between, the choreographer, lets it happen, or the ballet master or the ballet mistress or the artistic director lets this happen. Sometimes they don’t like it. We have to go through channels. But that’s how we got to talk to the ballet master or ballet mistress. It’s complicated.

Crawford: Yes, so there is kind of a hierarchy.

LeRoux: Yes, but with the principals. I always make a point of saying, “No, talk to me.” For instance, before I go in the pit, I’ll be there onstage and [I say], “Don’t hesitate to ask me if you have something special. Just talk to me.” I always make that very public. Sometimes they don’t like it too much, but they have to realize what my intention is and that I know what I’m talking about.

Crawford: I don’t know if you want to say anything about Michael Smuin and Helgi Tomassen. You worked with both pretty intensively.

LeRoux: That’s another question. Smuin was a difficult man, but I loved him very much, and he was very creative. Now that I see what he has done and was doing, I like him very
much. That doesn’t mean I don’t like Helgi. That’s a totally different kind of personality.

Crawford: Yes. How different?

LeRoux: Well, again, with Michael you could get in very heated discussions and not agree, where we had almost a fight, but that doesn’t mean we’re not good friends and so on. We didn’t agree, and so he would yell at me and so on. But there was some weird reason underneath, and I accepted it. It’s very difficult to understand what Helgi has in mind, very difficult, because it’s very difficult to talk to him.

Crawford: Oh, he’s more introverted, is he?

LeRoux: That’s right. He has wonderful qualities, there’s no doubt, but I haven’t known him that much. I didn’t work that long with him, either.

Crawford: There was a lot of upset when Smuin left. Was he was let go by the board? I don’t know the politics there.

LeRoux: No, what happened is that a certain member of the board and the president, himself, Richard LeBlond, didn’t agree with him and the path he was taking.

Crawford: Is that why they let him go?

LeRoux: Yes. The big mistake he made was not to take the programs in Los Angeles at the time of the Olympics seriously. He took quite a few short little ballets, very entertaining, but people considered it was not appropriate. And, of course, some members of the board didn’t like that at all, and he fought very hard. It was divided, I think, but most of the board agreed with letting him go. And I think Lew let himself be convinced that it was the right thing to do. Lew Christensen. He was sick already.

Crawford: Do you want to say something about De Coteau and what’s happened since his death?

LeRoux: De Coteau first of all was a very good musician. He had a Ph.D. from Stanford in conducting. That means something. And we were very good friends. I respected him a great deal, and that was mutual, so we each conducted whatever we did best. I was doing the most contemporary pieces and the most difficult technically for a conductor. That’s why I came back—for Agon, for instance.

Crawford: You came back to do Agon specifically?

LeRoux: Yes. After I left, Denis had trouble. Michael didn’t think he had always the right tempi and so on. I was offered twice to become the music director, and I said no twice.

Crawford: Why?

LeRoux: Because I thought first of all it was a very difficult situation for the ballet, to fire a black American. It was enough for Denis to have all the complex that goes together with his age, with his generation, all of what he had to go through, without having to be fired. And there was no real reason if not a whim or something. Whim?
LeRoux: That would have been a disaster for the company. And there was no reason, because he was very competent. So I don’t regret that. On the contrary, I think I did very well.

Crawford: Before we move on, I wanted to say that Roy Malan told me that--and this refers really to working with living composers--that it was wonderful to see you work with a composer when you were premiering a work, and that you would not talk much, but you would play the way you felt and bit by bit the composer would agree.

LeRoux: Ah! That surprises me very much.

Crawford: That’s the way one of your players thought about it, anyway. He said many times a conductor would talk to a composer, finish a phrase and say, “Was it okay?” But he said you didn’t work that way.

And the other thing Roy said that was so interesting was that when you got a new score, you knew how much rehearsal it would take. You had a good idea.

LeRoux: That’s very true. For instance, this season there were too many rehearsals scheduled. I really don’t need that. It’s much better to work very hard, very hard until the point where you know the players have understood what it’s all about, and then to leave a certain degree of--“chance” is not quite the word--but give the players a good deal of trust so the excitement of the concert, of the situation onstage will make up for whatever could be done better through more rehearsal. On the other hand, there are certain situations where that’s not good. So you have to get to the right balance, and it’s not easy, but that’s something that I know by instinct. I look at the score, and I think, “I need four hours. Not six, four hours.”

Crawford: The players must love that, that economy.

Well, Jean-Louis, let’s talk about your leaving and going I think first to South America.

LeRoux: Yes. I could have stayed there as long as I wanted, actually, at the ballet. I was even offered a substantial raise to stay. But I think that was the right time for both of us, Marta and myself, with the trouble we had had and so on, to try to live our last years in peace and enjoying life. We had bought a house, by chance that famous year we were talking about, the year of the Olympics in Los Angeles.

What happened is that when I was in Los Angeles, I was called by somebody with the Philharmonic of Buenos Aires who said, “What happened is our Russian conductor just got sick, and we have two programs he won’t be able to do. Can you come in three weeks?” I said, “Sure. What do you have in mind?” And he said, “What we have to do is Rachmaninoff’s Second Symphony, and we are sure you know that symphony.” I said, “Of course. Of course, I do.” So I went to buy the score. [laughter]

I had a big success. One of the reviewers said, “A great conductor we didn’t know about.” Anyway, an Argentine, a friend, said, “Oh, if you go to Buenos Aires, go to Punta del Este. That’s absolutely the right time. It’s wonderful. You can buy a very nice house for little money. Buy something.” So I had a bit of money, and with Marta we
looked around and found a house that was not finished. It was half done, half built. The skeleton only was there. And so we bought it.

Once we had that house, Marta went back there two years later to finish it. She stayed there for three or four months to finish it, and we decided to go there. I had an agent over there so I could give some concerts, conduct some concerts, which I did at that time until I had an argument with that agent. Well, then I was called and I did two concerts in Chile, too. That’s when I was invited to go conduct for the Chilean ballet. Ivan Nagy was the director.

[Tape 7 Side B]

**LeRoux:** Punta del Este is very beautiful. I spent one week last summer in Saint-Tropez, France, and Punta del Este is bigger, but it’s similar and, from what I have heard, the Saint-Tropez of South America. That’s very true.

**Crawford:** And Marta’s family was there.

**LeRoux:** Well, she doesn’t have family anymore. The mother passed away; the father too. And she had some cousins, that’s all, because she was an only child. But as you know I cannot stay still, so I created a concert-giving organization, some kind of circle of collaborating organizations in Buenos Aires and Montevideo, bringing artists from Europe and so on. We were giving, during the winter months, one concert a month. That was about five or six a year, and I was doing that for four or five years, and it still exists, even though I am not there anymore. Because of Marta’s health, I had to resign.

That was--let me think, ‘86--I was in Chile. Marta didn’t come with me. She called me and said, “They discovered that I have breast cancer, and I need to have surgery as soon as possible.” So I came back. At that time, surprisingly enough, Cecile, our daughter, had lived in France, in Paris, and had said maybe two months, three months earlier said she had learned a lot about social security in France, and said it was very possible we had a right to something there because I had worked in France. When I was a student at the conservatory I played in an orchestra and so on, and they paid me, of course, and so they had to pay social security.

So she found the records and found out that the fifteen months I spent in the army counted. With that I’d get a pension of about fifty dollars a month and full medical coverage.

**Crawford:** Weren’t you a citizen, too?

**LeRoux:** I never lost my citizenship. I had my American citizenship, but I never lost my French. Anyway, it doesn’t matter even for a long duration like this. That’s why we went back for treatment to France, and then we decided to move some place in Brittany, and we lived there. She was treated in a big hospital in Brittany. The extraordinary thing: When I was wasn’t there, if I was working somewhere like here or Chile, whatever, you could order an ambulance. They would take you the thirty miles to go to the hospital, back and forth, and you didn’t have to pay a thing. That was all covered. And then every single drug, absolutely nothing to pay.
So Marta was treated marvelously. She was in “remission,” I believe is the proper medical term, everything disappeared, and then it came back three months, four months, six months later. The breast situation was very good. She had not lost her breast. The tumor was removed with a little tiny opening in the breast, but it came back to the liver, and that was bad news. So she was treated again, another remission, and it then came back, and then she was treated again until the point where it was almost to zero, so they decided to operate on the liver too. And a few days after the operation, it was back. So we said we might as well go home. And whatever treatment we will do here, they can do over there also.

Crawford: So you went back to Uruguay.

LeRoux: She knew that was the end, too. And it lasted--what? September. Came back in September, and she died in December, so that’s three months.

Crawford: And then what did you do, Jean-Louis? You stayed in Montevideo that time?

LeRoux: No, Cecile, my daughter, came. I just told her to come back and fast, and she arrived on a Wednesday, and Marta died on Saturday. She was still conscious.

Crawford: They could visit.

LeRoux: Yes. Then I was mad, angry, so I said, “Let’s finish with everything. I have nothing to do here. I have no reason to stay.” So I organized everything and to take back to France whatever I thought essential, not furniture and things like this, except for chairs and so on, and then all of the paintings that I had, and I had a lot. I bought a few, and then people gave me some also. The whole wall was covered with paintings.

Crawford: That was in Brittany, at the family place?

LeRoux: No, I’ve got them at my son’s house in Tours.

Crawford: What are your children doing? What are their professions?

LeRoux: Well, the older one, Olivier--his specialty, in a way, is making loudspeakers--a special loudspeaker for when somebody wants a sound system in the house. He comes and analyzes the acoustics. So he has a store, and now he expanded the store, not only audio but also television. So he’s doing all right. His wife teaches French in a college. And they live in the middle of the country. A big house, a huge house, old house in the middle of a tiny town, but with caves, in the Loire Valley--you know, where you can keep your wine?

My older son was in the wine business because of me for some time, and then he quit because he realized the wine business was not the romantic thing that it was supposed to be. It’s a cutthroat business.

Crawford: You were involved in the wine business, too?
LeRoux: Well, yes, you know, the S.F. Contemporary Players were not doing too well and so on. I said, “Well, I’ll do something and make some money to help.” So I stayed making my living with the symphony, and put together a business, and--

Crawford: Importing wine?

LeRoux: That was all right for two years. It went relatively well, and then it collapsed. But in the meanwhile, he had learned the business with me, so he was a specialist in wine, actually, but he quit, and now he’s working for Volvo. In Orange County, on the other side of the fence. [laughter]

Crawford: Well, now, you have a new venture we haven’t talked about, and that’s the Canadian Ballet Orchestra.

LeRoux: Yes, that’s true. The ballet orchestra was going to make a recording with the Lark String Quartet of New York, and they asked me to do that recording. That was at the George Lucas facility.

Crawford: Oh, yes, yes.

LeRoux: And then when I was rehearsing that at the ballet building in San Francisco, I bumped into Mikko Nissinen, a former dancer, and he said, “I was just appointed artistic director in Calgary, and I don’t have a conductor. Can you come for the season and help me out?” I said, “Sure. Why not?” After that, everything went so well that I became the music director of the company and will return next season.

Crawford: What do you see as the balance in your life now, from now on?

LeRoux: I don’t know, but let me tell you--first of all, let me tell you a secret. I’m going to get married with Jane Roos. Jane has been such an important part of both the Contemporary Music Players and the S.F. Chamber Symphony.

Crawford: Oh, congratulations!

LeRoux: I think it’s very nice.

Crawford: I think it’s wonderful.

LeRoux: The work in Canada for me was wonderful because wherever we were going with the ballet, I had different orchestras to conduct, which is marvelous. And we got along so well in Calgary, in Edmonton, in Spokane with the local orchestras. It was such a good feeling.

I became good friends with Mikko, and we could talk, we could discuss, we could make projects, and, of course, he just got a new job in Boston.

Crawford: And so all those connections.

LeRoux: It’s funny because I have with the ballet mistress and ballet master such a feeling of confidence--you know, it’s not a big company; it still has the feeling of a small family,
with the dancers and the two ballet masters--master and mistress--and an artistic
director that you can sit down with around the table over a cup of coffee and talk. Same
with the dancers, anyway. I mean, you cannot pay for anything like this. It’s really
wonderful. And then you do your job, and people find you are able to do that, and it’s a
good feeling, too.

Crawford: So you see a very close connection there.

LeRoux: Yes. Yes, because here it’s such a huge company, and it’s not that kind of atmosphere. It
probably is not possible in such a big company. It’s not possible. So I am doing what I
can do here, and I know I have one more year in Calgary, and then after that, I don’t
know.

Crawford: Would you say your life has been full of serendipity?

LeRoux: What is serendipity?

Crawford: Well, just luck, really, a lot of good fortune and a lot of luck.

LeRoux: Yes. I always have been at the right time and made the right decisions, and when
something was offered, I didn’t have any choice in a way. Yes, I had a choice, but I
made the right choice without knowing, without knowing that was the right choice, I
suppose.

Crawford: What might you have done differently? If anything, in your life.

LeRoux: I could probably have become a real conductor. When I say “a real conductor,” I mean I
wouldn’t have had to make a living and have the job playing oboe. If I had started much
earlier, maybe--maybe--I probably had the talent. I am not sure, because I think the
things have been progressing in my life from the beginning, from my birth if I can say
so, and my family--I am satisfied. I am happy with it.

EPILOGUE: June 4, 2003

Crawford: When we last interviewed in April of last year you told me that you and Jane Roos were
going that afternoon to get a marriage license. You have been married to Jane for a little
over a year now, which is certainly a new chapter for you both.

LeRoux: Yes. It is the conclusion of a long--Marta became a friend of Jane’s when they were on
the board of the Community Music Center in the late 1960s. Later on, when I needed
funding and some help for the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, I asked Jane
to help, and she was president for a very long time. The same with the chamber
symphony. You know because you were part of it yourself.

Then one very private thing--I had health problems with my lungs and I had surgery in
France and it was a cancer. I stopped smoking in 1980 but I still had to pay the price.
When I came home Marta was ill and in bed at the time and I couldn’t do what I had
been doing in the house--we were in Brittany. Jane took a plane immediately and spent
over three weeks with us, doing the cooking and so on. Jane and Marta had long
conversations and I heard Marta laughing a lot. It was wonderful. After Marta died I
went back to France, and when I was asked by the San Francisco Ballet and the Players to come back I asked her to get married, and we were married on April 13, 2002.

Crawford: You are obviously very happy. Well, I wanted to talk to you in some depth about conductors and conducting today and find out who influenced you especially.

LeRoux: I would say Nicolai Malko. His book is one of the best ever written on conductors, detailed and precise, and it happened that he conducted in Montevideo. I went to see him and I practically saw him every day, and he helped me out a great deal. A Russian, he had figured out just how the upbeat is that gives the tempo to the orchestra and then he analyzed for me the exact motion--the click for 4/4, for example, is always at the same place--we talked about this and that and other things.

In 1956 at Tanglewood I heard Charles Munch. He didn’t like to rehearse--he did, but reluctantly and not much. He left it to the concert and he was a romantic, so he projected the feeling of the music--it’s a kind of ESP--in the hands, in the face, in the HEAD. You know what he wants. That is the fact of all great conductors. Even the opposite of Munch, someone like Pierre Monteux--he conducted very small but projected what he wanted. I played under him here when he was a guest conductor.

Josef Krips was a conductor in the great Viennese tradition, but he didn’t make an impact on me. On the contrary, Seiji Ozawa’s expressivity was very strong and important. He was also not a great rehearser, but I learned something when we talked. It didn’t happen often, but he was accessible. I asked him about his baton technique.

Crawford: Yes, we talked about that.

LeRoux: That he studied a whole year just to feel the weight of his hands. Surprising that he told me he has learned music by numbers. Szell was something else again--he knew the score after studying it so well he claimed he could reconstruct it. He was unique!

Crawford: You often read that orchestras have distinctive sounds. Haitink said recently that the Vienna Philharmonic has a female sound and that the Berlin Philharmonic has a male sound. Anything to that?

LeRoux: Orchestras do have different sounds, and they sound different under different conductors.

Crawford: I’ve heard that about you and the S.F. Ballet Orchestra.

LeRoux: Yes, an orchestra is an organism so it changes, sometimes with different conductors.

Crawford: The Vienna Philharmonic gave a benefit for those killed on 9/11 and they had no conductor.

LeRoux: It’s possible because the concertmaster is the assistant conductor and his bow [is read by] the strings, winds and brass, but do I think having no conductor means a loss of precise identity. It may be done with well-known works.

Crawford: What about Herbert von Karajan?
LeRoux: Videos show he didn’t have a lot of precision, but he was very expressive. He conducted from memory and you would think the orchestra would get a lot from his eyes, but then he conducted lots with his eyes closed, looking inward and drawing in the air the music itself.

Crawford: He claimed that his tempo was always attached to his pulse. Does that figure with you?

LeRoux: Yes, I suppose so. Women are supposed to have slower pulses than men. Mine is very fast!

Crawford: *Molto agitato.* [laughter]

LeRoux: Well, relatively fast.

Crawford: What about the current music scene?

LeRoux: Postmodernism in music. Well, modernism was the era opened by Schoenberg. Then there was disenchantment except in certain academic circles. Audiences were sparse, and then it seemed every possibility had been explored. The reaction to that was minimalism, using tonality a different way.

Crawford: John Adams is often considered the greatest composer of our time. Do you agree?

LeRoux: Adams has done a lot, especially those concerts in Japantown for the San Francisco Symphony.

Crawford: What are new trends in contemporary music?

LeRoux: Young composers try to escape from what they are learning, to take new [directions]. At Mills they stopped teaching counterpoint, just harmony, in the sixties--taught that as part of the music history course. Counterpoint is an important and striking thing--it is the core of tonality. I don’t know about now.

Crawford: Mills was important to the scene.

LeRoux: Yes, Margaret Lyon was there as music department chairman when Milhaud was there and Mills was more important than Los Angeles--it was the heart of the West Coast and the concerts were wonderfully attended. Monday evening concerts were important too, and they were open to any kind of music, except as they announced, to Carl Orff. Because of his typically looking backwards. [laughter]

Crawford: Are you still looking at scores?

LeRoux: A little.

Crawford: Who are the leading composers now in your view?

LeRoux: Well, I left in ‘91 so I’ve been away. But there are many--a half dozen young composers who are very talented and looking at music in a fresh way. Chris Burns at Stanford, very
intellectual, and a great deal of knowledge. There is an Argentine at Davis commissioned to write for Chanticleer and for the Players who is good, Pablo Ortiz.

Crawford: How about Santa Cruz--Hi Kyung Kim?

LeRoux: Yes, and I’m thinking of someone else at Santa Cruz, an acoustician named Veronique Larcher, who had worked at IRCAM and does computer music. She is a powerhouse! I wanted to do the Boulez anthems, but IRCAM said I’d need to send the equipment from France in order to perform them and later she told me she could have done it for me!

Crawford: What does the future hold?

LeRoux: May 11 was my last day at the San Francisco Ballet, and I have felt another tournant. I am letting go, going back to the music of Martinu, Debussy, Ravel--the impressionists and their followers for the next two generations. I don’t know about postmodernism--structuralism, [Jacques] Derrida and [Jacques] Lacan. Jane says that is happening only in Europe, but I think it is important to look at everything.

I don’t like criticisms like “eurotrash”--again, we must look at everything. We are in a dangerous time in the world, a crucial time. Globalization is good, but we are looking down on those who don’t agree with us--people like Lacan and Derrida, for example. It’s a kind of arrogance when people who don’t know about something look down on it, same with radical staging, et cetera. We must take a fresh look at what is happening, just like in the Renaissance, when new things happening were accepted--this has made our civilization.

I’m looking at how it went from Debussy and Ravel and Poulenc to Schoenberg. It was a reaction to war, with Schoenberg reflecting inquietude before the war. A new method of writing was adopted.

So this is another era of my life, centered as always on music. I am satisfied with what I have done in this regard. I have always played contemporary work, even with the chamber orchestra. What I’ve done has been done and I’m satisfied. I have been invited to go back to Canada, but I think I will say no. I lost confidence. This happened before with the Players.

Crawford: But the Players always say how much they enjoy working with you in terms of the rapport and knowledge of the music.

LeRoux: Yes, I don’t know how to explain it.

Something I’m doing now is an in-depth analysis of the Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun--I will speak about it. An agent named Matteus Vogt has asked if he could find some conducting assignments. I’m not sure.

Crawford: You have just turned over the reins of the Contemporary Music Players to a new director, David Milnes, and you said there may be an issue of over-rehearsing, which brings us full circle to something we discussed at the beginning of the interview. That is the idea of rehearsing just enough to get the concept of a piece and not overwork the detail; rather wait for performance for everything to come together.
LeRoux: That’s right. I told a composer at a recent concert, the Players’ concert of Mexican music, to trust me. He wanted us to rehearse something more, and I said, “Trust me.” I know and they know, and it’s enough. It is something you feel.

EPILOGUE 2: [Note: attachments A, B, and C referred to below are deposited in the Bancroft Library along with the taped interview, they are not included in the bound volume.]

Crawford: We have been discussing the experimental music of the 1960s, music approached by composers with the idea of trying what was new and unorthodox and music you found to be fun. You have brought some materials from Source, a music periodical that was produced privately in the Davis area in the early 1970s, late sixties. About eleven issues, you said. What was the purpose of the periodical?

LeRoux: Source reproduced the new scores of composers who were creating a new kind of music through the free use of imagination, music that gave a larger role to the performers.

For example, Steve Reich’s Pendulum Music, a piece written in 1968, consisted of half a dozen loudspeakers around the stage, with microphones rigged on a pendulum that went very close to the loudspeakers. The six performers would take a microphone away, and then they would let them go at the same time and go sit in the audience. When [they swung] close to the loudspeakers there would be feedback, and then the feedback would lessen and the piece would end when the microphones would stop in front of the loudspeakers—the noise was tremendous! [laughter].

Crawford: I will attach Reich’s notes about the piece (attachment A). Now here I am looking at a score that has nothing written in the staffs other than a few ragged holes. I know what it is because I have a photograph of the “composer.”

LeRoux: Yes, this is even further away from composing than the Reich piece. Here is a picture of a man shooting a machine gun at an orchestral score--holes are what you see and that became what was played (attachment B). I did a similar piece with John Cage and David Tudor. I was in a loft above the stage, conducting an orchestra that was playing some classical music and John and David were playing chess onstage. Whatever plays they made would attach to an electronic device, and this was transformed electronically so that the sound of what we played was modified. What happened wasn’t planned. That was a lot of fun.

I think the intention of these composers was to show that music is not only what Western music had turned into. That there were new sources of sound and new ways of putting music together—a turning away from the strict serialization of Boulez, Castiglione and Stockhausen, which was very composed, calculated and structured. This was a kind of tragedy for Boulez, I think, because he came to be a friend of Cage, briefly, and he was astonished because he realized that the results of what he was elaborating and Cage was writing were very similar! [laughter].

Boulez, though, always had a regard for the quality of sound, different from Stockhausen. Debussy was the first revolutionary composer, and his regard for the beauty of sound per se was important and I think it is still there—it is still a consideration for young musicians today.
Crawford: You frequently use the word “fun” to describe the music of that period. What pieces stand out in that regard?

LeRoux: I remember Robert Moran wrote a Twin Peaks Symphony [39 Minutes for 39 Autos], which was something like Cristo wrapping the fence, because it involved everybody and everybody in the area had to see it, become involved. Cars took a certain route [driving up to Twin Peaks], and it was not precisely calculated, but what was involved was the coordination of the car horns and the lights.

Crawford: Was it music?

LeRoux: Yes, I think so. Well, musique concrete--music based on noises of any kind, in the street, for example—is being reintroduced. For example, I just heard two pieces by a French composer named Dhomond at the Other Minds Festival. This was made up of recordings of sound in the street, which shows that any kind of sound can be considered music. Essentially it comes from anger on the part of the composer, rebellion, but it is as well a new path to music. Secondly, of course, was electronic music from electronic sources. John Adams was at the concert and he was complimenting Dhomond’s music. So somebody still combines sounds in this fashion, but generally this is a product of the sixties, demonstrating that music can be anything.

In Crumb’s Dream Sequence for four instruments—I conducted that—he was concerned not only with music but with the beauty of the score and also numerology (attachment C). The instruments include temple bells, crystal goblets, and all the way through is the glass harmonica as a sort of drone. I loved his music at that time, the beauty of the sounds, the way he used instruments in a new fashion. For example, he played the inside of the piano, producing harmonics through the use of a chisel on one string, making glissandos on the corresponding string and moving the chisel on the strings. I think it will live.

Crawford: Here is a piece by Nam June Paik here that uses a surprising part of the anatomy to create music.

LeRoux: That has nothing to do with music! [laughter] But to show you how far out he was--he wrote Symphonies 1, 2, and 4, and when he became aware that there was no Symphony 3, he asked a student to write something. None of this had anything to do with music, except that it was totally nonsensical.

Crawford: Audiences liked the outlandish, didn’t they? A kind of release from rules. Well, John Cage may have been the best known of these composers. He wrote silent music; what do we make of that?

LeRoux: Cage wrote about five minutes of silence, and it was a kind of theater, because the pianist sat down, looking fixedly in front of him. He didn’t make a sound but set a stopwatch and put it in front of him and then exactly when the time was up, he got up and left, again showing that music can be anything, even silence, that new things could be discovered. Of course there isn’t silence, because you hear other sounds. I saw that piece performed by David Tudor.

Crawford: What else comes to mind?
LeRoux: Charles Boone’s girlfriend is an artist and they had an exhibition in which someone started a painting and then someone else came and continued the painting, and there were loudspeakers and sensors so that anyone who passed would activate music on twelve tracks. So if you walked by you made music—it was musique concrete, made by the steps of people walking on a wooden floor.

I was very much involved with all of this music for a while, and I am always interested in taking a look back, now—to go twice a year at least to present Schoenberg from the first period or take something from twelve-tone music, or Debussy, or whatever. That is where everything written today comes from.

There was an article in the *New Yorker* around March 22 by Alex Ross, on *The Quartet for the End of Time*. He wrote that he had just heard Beethoven’s *Missa Solemnis*, then the Bach B minor Mass, and then the quartet by Messiaen, and he wouldn’t say that Messiaen was a better composer than Bach or Beethoven, but that he was very impressed by the Messiaen, that it went so deeply into his emotions. I played that at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music years ago, and it made such an impact that the students, now in their mid-fifties, they remember it still.

That period of music we are talking about is gone now, but I think it was very important, because it was like going into total abstraction in the visual arts, going into chance painting; dropping paint on canvas—like Jackson Pollock.

Crawford: Will the music of that period continue to be played?

LeRoux: I don’t think so—it isn’t the same thing. We can always look at the art, but to listen you have to play it and revive it and that involves a lot of expense, so it might not be worth it.

Now young composers are looking to Europe again, where the music scene is very intense and the governments supports it. People coming out of Berkeley are trying to go to IRCAM (Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique) in Paris or to London or Vienna. What is happening today I’ve lost touch with—but the spirit of the sixties and early seventies—I don’t see it any longer. It was a fascinating time, full of enthusiasm, and I loved it.

Crawford: What brings about the switch back to tradition?

LeRoux: One generation is rebellious and then after that there is a reaction—one step backward and two steps forward. Debussy represented that for his time. John Cage did for the 1970s. You know David Lang [Bang on a Can] became a musician because of a piece by Henze, *Voices*, that he heard [me conduct] at Stanford. He said, “That concert changed my whole life.” So it is important, and we are waiting for it to happen again. I am optimistic it will happen again.
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Bundesrepublik Deutschland
Der Bundeskanzler

Bonn, den Februar 1990

Herrn Jean-Louis Le Roux
Chamber Symphony of San Francisco

Herrn Dietrich Erbelding
The Pacific Singing Society

San Francisco, CA. 941 09
USA

Sehr geehrter Herr Le Roux,
sehr geehrter Herr Erbelding,

von den Bundestagsabgeordneten Dr. Heinz Günther Hüsch und
Horst Eylmann habe ich erfahren, daß die "Chamber Symphony of San
Francisco" und die "Pacific Singing Society" am 7. Januar 1990 ein
Konzert gegeben haben, um die Öffnung der Berliner Mauer zu feiern.

Ich möchte Ihnen im Namen meiner Landsleute für dieses Zeichen der
Verbundenheit mit Deutschland herzlich danken. Bitte grüßen Sie
alle, die das Konzert ermöglicht und daran mitgewirkt haben.

Mit freundlichen Grüßen

[Signature]
Greetings

WHEREAS: San Francisco is proud to recognize those whose dedication and skills add immeasurably to our local quality of life; and

WHEREAS: JEAN-LOUIS LeROUX, founder and Music Director of the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, is an outstanding example of civic leadership at its finest; and

WHEREAS: JEAN-LOUIS LeROUX, with his colleagues Marcella DeCray and Charles Boone, have presented over 600 new compositions to Bay Area audiences over the past 12 years and provided important performance opportunities to local musicians; and

WHEREAS: San Francisco is pleased to commend JEAN-LOUIS LeROUX and to wish the Contemporary Music Players every continuing success; now

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT I, Dianne Feinstein, Mayor of the City and County of San Francisco, do hereby proudly proclaim May 18, 1987 as JEAN-LOUIS LeROUX DAY IN SAN FRANCISCO, and do commend his exemplary public services to our community.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Seal of the City and County of San Francisco to be affixed this twelfth day of May, nineteen hundred and eighty-seven.

Dianne Feinstein
Mayor
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Caroline Cooley Crawford

Born and raised in La Cañada, California.

Graduated from Stanford University, B.A. in linguistics.

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