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Felix Khuner

A VIOLINIST'S JOURNEY FROM VIENNA'S KOLISCH QUARTET  
TO THE SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY AND OPERA ORCHESTRAS

With an Introduction by  
Tom Heimberg

Interviews Conducted by  
Caroline Crawford  
in 1989-1990

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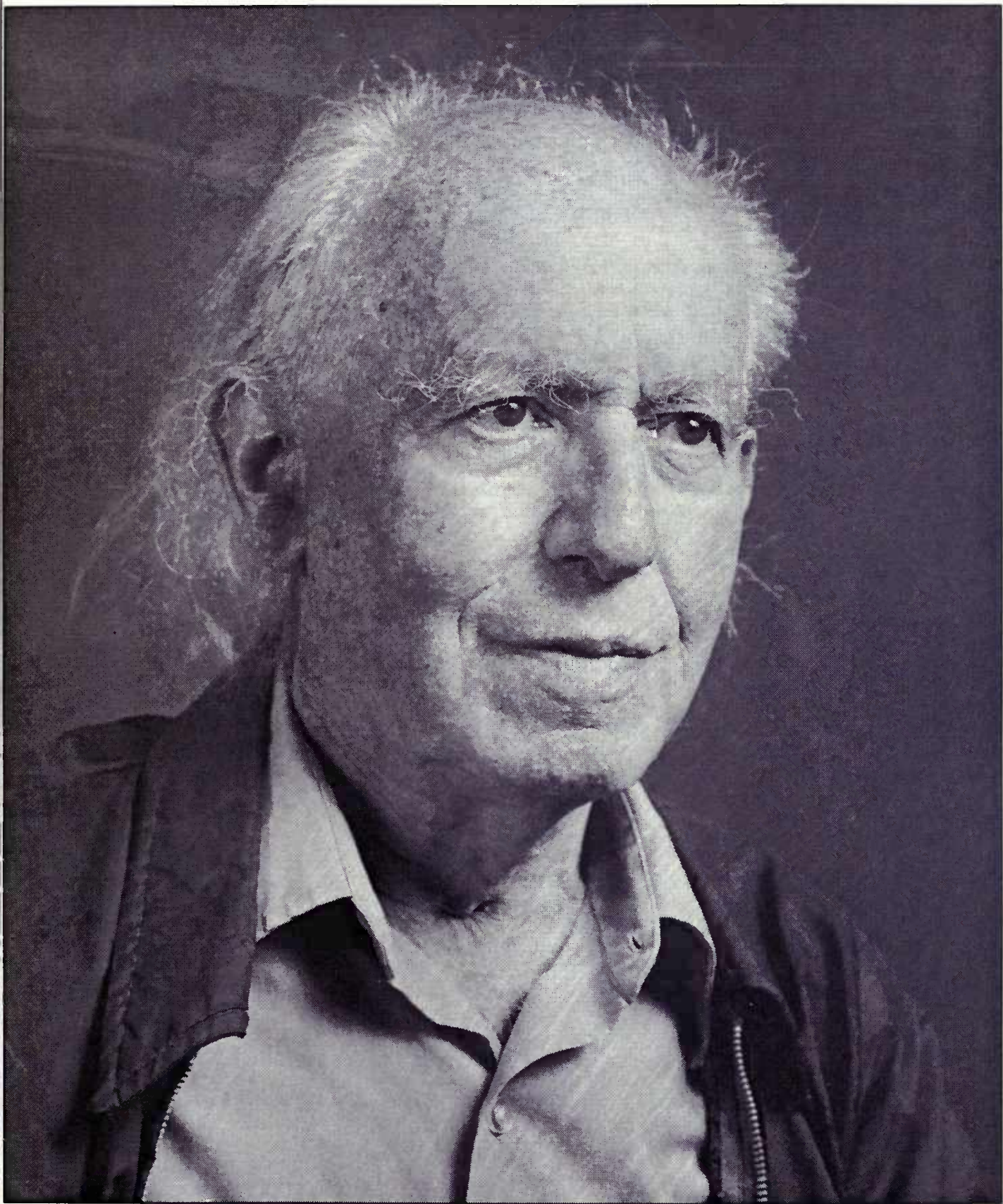
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Felix Khuner, 1991.

*Photograph by Eliot Khuner*





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INTRODUCTION--by Tom Heimberg

"Felix said...."

This book is about Felix Khuner, and what Felix said. Gathered and selected from interviews with him, it contains many of his words, much of his wisdom and his wit. It gives a glimpse of him the way a printed score gives a glimpse of the music. Those of us who worked with him, who took coachings from him, who respected, liked, enjoyed and loved him, have memories that surround his words. We remember the vividness of his presence, the music of who he was.

But words definitely went along with that music. Felix is often quoted in the musical world he inhabited. Downstairs near the orchestra pit in the War Memorial Opera House, backstage at Davies Symphony Hall, in carpools of musicians on their way to work, all around the Bay Area in string teaching studios or in living rooms set up for playing chamber music, whenever a story begins with "Felix said..." musicians know who is meant.

And if someone present doesn't know, we tell him. Felix Khuner is too important to us to be forgotten. We welcome the chance to share memories of this unique and distinctive man who influenced us so much--as performer, teacher, colleague, colorful character, and good friend.

During more than fifty years in the Bay Area, "Felix said"... a lot! His active, powerful mind was filled with memories, thoughts, and opinions which he expressed generously and energetically (sometimes, indeed, aggressively). His evaluations of music were based on deep knowledge. His appraisals of the musical world came out of long experience. His reminiscences of Europe, and of Viennese music and musicians from the period between the two World Wars--a period which seemed to some of us like legends from a distant Golden time--were for him a part of living personal memory.

We listened to those memories with interest and gratitude. And his personal memories took on an extra aura for us, because of what we knew about his amazing musical memory.

It was famous. Fabulous! Even people who didn't know him had heard of it. His years with the Kolisch String Quartet, playing the canon of Western quartet music by memory, gave his reputation an authority that pushed our respect toward awe.

Or toward incredulity. Musicians new to the Bay Area found his reputation hard to believe. They looked for evidence. Felix had retired from the San Francisco Symphony by 1972, but he was still being engaged as an extra player and substitute. At the start of the year, young Barbara Riccardi, a new member of the orchestra, found herself sitting at the back of the second violin section next to an elderly man who clearly knew what he was doing.

The program that week was especially challenging, and at one rehearsal some of the other young musicians who had recently joined the orchestra gathered around Barbara during an intermission: "O.K., you can settle this once and for all. Does he really know the second violin part of *Verklärte Nacht* by heart?"

"Yes, he really does," Barbara answered, "And what's more, he expects me to know it, too. He never turns pages!"

Later that same week, as the Schoenberg was being rehearsed, some questions about individual notes and the accuracy of the printed music began to come up. Then the depth of Felix's knowledge was made even clearer. When Maestro Ozawa himself wasn't sure how to answer some of the inquiries, voices from the orchestra started saying, "Ask Felix, Felix knows." And Felix answered the questions from his substitute seat at the back of the second violin section, commenting on how the harmonies were different in similar passages, correcting notes when necessary, playing violin lines, woodwind lines, bass lines on his violin. Felix knew, with a depth and passion that is more than memory. He knew the music by heart--the hold of a lifelong love.

(By the end of that rehearsal, the conductor seemed afraid to do anything interpretative without asking Felix's permission.)

Felix was often questioned about his memory. I once heard a colleague ask, "Felix, how on earth is it possible to memorize the second violin part of a Haydn Quartet?"

"It's not possible. Absolutely not. I memorized the whole quartet and played what was missing."

"Wait a minute! '...Played what was missing'?! If you did that everyone else would have played already. You'd be late!"

"Ah no," Felix said, raising an eyebrow, "Quick reflexes!"

A joke, but not far from the truth. How quick his reflexes could be is shown in this quotation from a 1991 interview with Eugene Lehner, the violist of the Kolisch Quartet, published in Strings magazine. When asked if the quartet ever suffered memory slips, Lehner said, "There was hardly a performance without one; the question was only how serious. The only one to whom nothing ever happened was Khuner. Once in Paris--we had traveled all night and were rather sleepy--we played the Beethoven Op. 95. You know, the second theme of the second movement, the viola begins, and suddenly I realized, "For God's sake, I have to start this and I don't know how it goes, and if I don't play, there is nobody. And then I hear Khuner playing my part. Afterwards, I said to him, "How on earth did you know I wasn't going to play?" He said, "You idiot, you were in fourth position on the D string." I used to play it on the open A. With half an eye, he saw that I was somewhere else on the fingerboard. That quick reaction, it's just incredible. And you know, the other two were sitting right opposite and didn't notice anything. If anyone told me such a story, I would say, "Well...."



If Felix's abilities sound like those of a musical Superhero, his daily self-presentation was more like a musical Clark Kent. He was five feet, five inches tall, with a halo of white hair--thick on the sides, thin on top--and glasses. His clothing was a statement of very personal tastes in style...and economics. The yellow windbreaker he liked so much lasted for close to twenty years. His highwater pant cuffs often showed an expanse of white socks above scuffed brown shoes. (He sometimes wore those shoes into the Opera House pit for performances, a comfortable adjunct to his white-tie-and-tails formal wear--tails that he often carried rolled up in a brown paper shopping bag.) His silver-colored metal lunch box seemed to have an unlimited supply of cold dry toast--his most frequent snack. And his violin case, of the classic "Are-you-carrying-a-machine-gun-in-there?" shape, had been repaired so often with black flextape, that there were many who questioned whether any of the original material remained.

Though his appearance was unprepossessing, only a few minutes with him revealed the scope and energy of his intellectual interests: He was rereading Schiller, he was studying Japanese, he was (again) climbing Koltanowski's problem-solving ladder in the Chronicle chess column, he was listening to the Giants' game on a small transistor radio held next to his ear, he had just written an angry letter to a local newspaper, expressing his views and feelings on a matter of politics.

He expressed his views and feelings on all matters that were important to him. Whether talking about musical values or political opinions (or a recent trade by the Giants), Felix said what he had to say with a vigor that could approach aggressiveness. (Or he might just as vigorously take a position opposed to yours--to test the firmness of your conviction.) Those of us who remember his voice and movements know how animated he could become. As his gestures became larger and more intense, his gentle Viennese accent moved from calm to excited, from musical to shrill.

What Felix said was important--and how he said it was a vital part of the meaning. It would be unfair to his complexity not to mention that some people found his range of intensities abrasive; some students found him hard to take.

Felix was much more than an abstract intellect. He was a rich and complex human being--wise, contentious, musical, thoughtful, impetuous, annoying, kindly. Even those who were not completely comfortable with him acknowledged that Felix was colorful.

And for those of us who were comfortable with him, Felix was fun!

He knew it, too. He could joke about himself: On a Saturday midnight in 1970--when Felix was still a member of the San Francisco Symphony--the orchestra's charter bus returned a group of tired musicians to the Opera House after a runout concert to Cupertino. Felix was the first out of his seat near the back of the bus. Hugging his violin case, his metal lunch box, and the brown paper shopping bag with his rolled-up tailcoat, pressing purposefully down the aisle, Felix said, "Excuse me, excuse me, please. I have to get off

first. I have students waiting for lessons at my home, and afterwards we are playing chamber music."

We laughed, because we knew it wasn't true; and we laughed because we knew it could have been. Some major themes of his life--chamber music, teaching, home, and a sense of restless hurry--were all present in his joke. (It's surprising that he didn't mention gardening.) He had a tremendous capacity for work, and a way of filling the niches of his busy schedule with students.

Which leads to other stories: Felix said that he had planned to sleep late one Sunday morning, but was awakened by the doorbell at 9:00 A.M. He went to answer, and there was one of his adult students, quite surprised to find his tousle-haired teacher in pajamas and bathrobe, "Did I get the schedule wrong? I thought we had an appointment for a violin lesson this morning."

"We do," Felix said. "If you brought money, I am prepared to teach."

Felix said: "I told one of my students that she had made a mistake and that I would play the passage the way she had played it: she should listen for the mistake and tell me what it was. When I played it she said, 'You were out of tune.'"

"Yes, that's right, but that's not what I meant. Here, I'll play it again."

"Your bow bounced on the string crossing."

"Yes, yes, okay! But that's not it! Here, I'll do it once more."

"You scratched."

"ALL RIGHT! ALL RIGHT! ALL THAT IS TRUE, BUT WHAT I WANTED YOU TO NOTICE WAS THE MISTAKE IN RHYTHM!"

"What mistake in rhythm?"

With colleagues, as well as with students, associating with Felix had a learning component. Playing chamber music with him was a great experience. He saw past printed notes to the meaning of the music, the individuality of each piece, and he led with a freedom and breadth of phrasing that was enlightening.

Those sessions could also have surprising moments. His sense of impatience really showed when he said: "This is the Twentieth Century! We have all heard these motifs before. We will play the Minuet without repeats."

Each memory of what Felix said, and of who he was, leads to other memories. The things that Felix said keep their freshness. They stay in memory, verbal talismans and teaching stories that keep on doing their work.

Like what Felix said about teaching: "The teacher's work is to watch the student, and listen to the student, and then use what he has seen and heard to sense in his own body how it must feel to play and sound like the student. And then to compare that feeling with how he normally feels when he himself plays. And then to use every means in his power to convey that difference to the student."

Like what Felix said when a colleague once asked: "What is this 'musical value' that you keep talking about? We need to play the notes. We need to put on a good show. What else are you talking about?"

And Felix said: "Don't worry about it. If you aren't driven to find it, just let it go. You can live a perfectly decent life without concerning yourself about it--millions do."

"But if you really want to know what it is, if you really must find it and experience it, then you will seek it everywhere you can. You will not be able to stop. You will look for it and listen for it, and think about it. You will make up your mind about it, and then change your mind--and then change it again! But you will always seek it."

A musician's credo.

The last time I saw Felix, at the corner of University and Shattuck in Berkeley, he expressed himself with all the verve and acerbity that he ever had. Our encounter was accidental, and I was glad to see him: "Hi Felix!"

"Ah, Heimberg. Have you heard the condition of my health?"

"Why no, I...."

"Lung cancer." He nodded. "Possible metastasis to the brain." He wrinkled his nose and tapped his temple with his index finger. "I am angry with my HMO. If they had not stopped the multiphasic examination a few years ago we might have caught it earlier...but then again, maybe not." He shrugged. "Eighty-four isn't bad, huh?"

I couldn't answer. My voice was choked, my eyes were misted with tears. "Felix, I..."

"Listen, I have to go. I have some things to do. Good seeing you." And he left.

Two weeks later he left us all with our cherished memories of who he was: the man, his music, and--of course--what he said.

Tom Heimberg, Violist  
San Francisco Symphony and Opera Orchestras

August 10, 1996  
Berkeley, California



## INTERVIEW HISTORY--by Caroline Crawford

Felix Khuner was born and raised in Vienna. Trained in math and music, he had thought of becoming a mathematician, but when he was offered a place in the Kolisch Quartet at age nineteen and saw Arnold Schoenberg at one of the Quartet's rehearsals, he decided to join them instead. He played and toured with the Quartet for fifteen years, performing premieres and signal works of Schoenberg, Berg and Bartok. With the advent of Nazism he decided to settle in the United States, where he played with the San Francisco Symphony and Opera Orchestras for more than forty years.

Of his career, Khuner liked to say that he was a "useful" musician, but those who played with him marveled at his memory, his musical knowledge (he could cover nearly every orchestral part) and his outspoken opinions. Kurt Adler solicited his advice often about orchestral matters, and on one occasion a cut in a score bothered him so much he offered Adler \$200 not to make it.

Robert Commanday, former senior music critic of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, was first to suggest Felix Khuner as one of the Bay Area's top candidates for an oral history. And although Khuner often claimed that his story would not be of interest to anyone, he enjoyed telling it, with typical candid good humor.

During our five interview sessions, all of which took place in the living room of the Khuner's home just to the north of the University of California, Berkeley campus, Mr. Khuner often picked up his violin to illustrate something he was talking about--a bowing technique or a remembered performance, and just as often he brought an interview to an abrupt end with a not particularly germane story. During the sessions, Mrs. Khuner would often be playing Bach on the piano with a friend in the back room, and son Eliot Khuner, a professional photographer, occasionally listened in and supplied dates or answered questions.

Many of the subjects in the interviews were only touched upon, because Felix Khuner died before he had a chance to review and add to the transcripts. But his freshness of spirit and irreverence for all things pretentious shines through. We have indicated in the text where materials were shifted to make it read more clearly.

We could not have finished the oral history except for the dedication of one of the Khuner daughters, Margo Khuner Leslie, who transcribed the tapes (Mr. Khuner's still-German accent sometimes made understanding the tapes hard), helped with the editing, final typed and indexed the manuscript. Son Jonathan Khuner reviewed the text for accuracy, son Eliot Khuner provided photographs, and close friend and colleague Tom Heimberg wrote an insightful introduction to the volume.



Regarding donors to the oral history, all were friends of classical music, and many were devotees of the Berkeley Opera, where Felix Khuner played several seasons in the orchestra, working with this son Jonathan, who recently became the company's artistic director. We are grateful to Mrs. Arthur J. Brown, widow of the late distinguished attorney (his history is a part of our Pillsbury, Madison & Sutro oral history series), who asked his friends and colleagues to memorialize her husband with a gift to the office. A daughter and niece of two foresters interviewed in the 1960s for ROHO's History of Forestry Series, Mrs. Brown designated the gifts to Felix Khuner's oral history in appreciation of the many years that her husband enjoyed San Francisco Symphony performances.

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Caroline Crawford  
Interviewer/Editor

August 1996  
Regional Oral History Office  
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## OBITUARIES

# Symphony, Opera Violinist Felix Khuner

By Robert Commanday  
*Chronicle Music Critic*

Felix Khuner, a leading violinist with the San Francisco Symphony and Opera for 31 and 41 years, respectively, died of lung cancer Monday at his home in Berkeley. He was 84.

Mr. Khuner had been retired as a musician since 1983, but he continued to teach privately until a few weeks ago.

No musician was more distinctive and influential in the two orchestras than Mr. Khuner for his skills, musical integrity and wide knowledge. He was known among his colleagues for his outspoken and trenchant comments on issues ranging from the problems of the day's rehearsal to questions of aesthetics, style, taste and politics.

Among targets of his views were youngsters pushed by ambitious parents into becoming "fabulous violinists" at age 14 "but by the time they are 18, it turns out they shouldn't have anything to do with music."

Typically, he stormed against the publicizing of stars here because of what they did elsewhere, declaring in an interview in 1983, "Something is considered good only if it was declared good somewhere else."

Once he objected so earnestly to a cut that Opera director Kurt Herbert Adler was making in the music of Wagner's "Die Meistersinger" that he offered \$200 to the Opera if the cut music were restored.

The irony of his fatal illness was that Mr. Khuner not only never smoked but also railed against those who did. One of the countless Khuner anecdotes describes his standing up in the orchestra pit and berating the Opera's general director, Terence McEwen, for smoking in the theater during rehearsal, saying, "If we had that little discipline, we'd be fired."



**VIENNESE-BORN MUSICIAN FELIX KHUNER**  
Thirty-one years with S.F. Symphony, 41 years with the Opera

Although Mr. Khuner's principal performing and glory outside the orchestra was in chamber music, he rose to the occasion during rare solos. He proved in 1968 that he was as good as they come in a distinctive performance of Mozart's Violin Concerto No. 4, in D, that had great poise, boldness, maturity and, above all, spirit.

Two weeks later, at the age of 61, he won the symphony's assistant concertmaster's chair playing the Brahms Violin Concerto behind a screen, an audition practice to ensure anonymity. Zaven Melikian, the Opera's concertmaster and onetime stand partner of Mr. Khuner, recalled how he would suddenly hear his partner playing notes other than those in the part, then realize that Mr. Khuner was "filling in for some wind instrument that had failed to make an entrance."

Born in Vienna, Mr. Khuner was trained in the Vienna Academy, played in the Vienna Opera orchestra as a substitute while a teenager, and then, at 19, joined the celebrated Kolisch String Quartet.

He played second violin behind the leader Rudolf Kolisch, composer Arnold Schoenberg's brother-in-law, for the next 15 years, as the Kolisch quartet, always from memory, played the range of the quartet repertory as well as premieres and performances of modern composers.

Mr. Khuner and his family fled the Nazis in 1938, coming to the Bay Area in 1942.

He is survived by his wife, Gertrude; a sister, Franzl Wolf of Los Angeles; two daughters, Margo Leslie and Kathy Khuner of Berkeley; two sons, Jonathan of Oakland and Eliot of Berkeley; and four grandchildren.

The family suggests contributions in his name to Amnesty International, the American Civil Liberties Union or the Zionist Organization of America. Funeral and memorial plans are pending.





## I EARLY YEARS: 1906-1926

[Interview 1: October 25, 1989]##<sup>1</sup>Birth and Family

Crawford: Let's start our conversation today by talking about your life in Vienna, your early years, your birth, your family.

Khuner: Well, my family on both sides come from Moravia, southern Moravia, to wit, a little hamlet by the name of Bisenz [now called Bzenec, in Czechoslovakia], where the Khuners (that's my father's family) and the Frankls (my grandmother's family) come from. My mother's come from northern Moravia, from Moravksa Ostrava.

Now, the German population in Moravia were practically exclusively Jewish. The Czechs were the native population and the German-speaking were the Jews. And they tried to get to Vienna, because in Vienna you had much more chance to improve yourself, financially and culturally, in civilization; Vienna was the capital. So both the family of my father and my mother emigrated-- I think my grandfather on my father's side, and my mother on my mother's side, went to Vienna. And they both were quite musical, they liked music, they went to concerts, they learned their instruments. My mother was quite a good violinist; my father was a fair violinist, a little of a pianist, and he played the flute; and they played in amateur orchestras. And they wanted to have a son who was a musician.

At that time the Philharmonic conductor was Felix Weingartner, and my mother said I was named after him because he was so fascinating a conductor. So, I obviously was very talented. My fingers were fast, I had very good ears, a good memory; I could read music before I could read German. And when my father and mother played sonatas, and they didn't quite know what the rhythms were, and so I could help them. I was about five years old at that time.

---

<sup>1</sup>This symbol (##) indicates a change in tape or portion of tape. For a guide to the tapes, see page following transcript.

So I got violin lessons from a member of the Philharmonic who was a nice Jewish boy, just married, needed pupils, lived within walking distance of my parents house, and was a very nice, charming man; I studied with him from the age of five and a half to twelve.

Crawford: What was his name?

Khuner: Max Starkmann.

Crawford: Where did you live, and when were you born?

Khuner: I was born actually in what is now part of Vienna [1906]; at that time it was a suburb. Because I was born in August and all the people who could afford, left the city in the summer. It was a miserable city in the summer; hot, dusty. So everybody who could get a little place outside the center of the city spent the summer there; and we always did, every summer. I was born in that place there. At that time, you weren't born in the hospital, you were born at home.

Crawford: And what was the name of the place?

Khuner: Beidlingau. But it doesn't say on my birth certificate. The birth certificate says Vienna. And now it's true, because it's all part of Vienna!

Crawford: How many miles out of the center of Vienna?

Khuner: It was about, let's say, three or four miles outside of the boundary. It was just like Daly City!

Crawford: But a summer retreat. Higher up?

Khuner: It wasn't higher up, because everything [was level], was not in the hills.

Crawford: But more country.

Khuner: Ja, sure. It was a little village, ja.

Crawford: And then, where did you live in Vienna?

Khuner: Oh, in an apartment house, in Maria Hilf. My grandfather (my father's father) had a little silk weaving factory in that place, in the Maria Hilf; it's a part of Vienna, the sechste Bezirk, sixth arrondissement.

Crawford: And that was your father's profession too, then?

Khuner: Then my father took over the business, yes.

Crawford: Did you all live together?

Khuner: No, we were a few blocks away.

Crawford: Both sets of grandparents?

Khuner: No, the other grandparents were still in Moravia; my mother's family was still in Moravia.

Crawford: When did your mother and father come to Vienna?

Khuner: Well, I told you. My great grandfather immigrated from Bisenz to Vienna, but on my mother's side, only mother's generation, she and her two brothers came to Vienna.

Crawford: Yes. And they just came to better themselves, as you said.

Khuner: Ja.

Crawford: Was she schooled in Vienna, then?

### An Arranged Marriage

Khuner: No, she was schooled in Moravksa Ostrava; she came to marry my father.

Crawford: I see. And where did she meet your father?

Khuner: Oh, through a *Shadchen*. That was a marriage broker.

Crawford: Yes?

Khuner: Oh, Ja! That was the way to marry. You don't--

Crawford: How did that work out?

Khuner: It worked out that--the *Shadchen* is like a concert agency. The concert agency brings the soloist together with the orchestra! You don't know what a *Shadchen* is?

Crawford: Yes, I know the word. I think it's a perfect way to make marriages, by the way.

Khuner: That was the only way! As a matter of fact, the two brothers didn't do that. They met their wives in Vienna, much to the sorrow of my grandparents. You don't do that! You don't marry your school sweetheart, no!

Crawford: It has to be this arranged marriage. But then how did your father find your mother?

Khuner: My mother's parents wanted the daughter and the sons to go to Vienna. The sons went to the university, studied in Vienna, and the daughter was married to a Viennese.

Crawford: But that was arranged once she got to Vienna?

Khuner: No, I think it was arranged before she went. You arrange that Mr. So-and-So will play the Beethoven concerto with the San Francisco Symphony, it's arranged in New York! And then he's sent out here and plays.

Crawford: And she liked him.

Khuner: I don't know! I don't know. But that's what you do. Now, there were other quirks. The thing was this. She had a boyfriend--a courtier, do you say a courtier? No. Somebody who courts someone. An admirer who wanted to marry her. And she would have married him. But there was an older sister who did not have an admirer, so my grandfather said, "No, you don't marry her, you marry the older one." So he had to marry the older one. It was a very unhappy marriage. But he had to. He also wanted to, because my grandfather was quite affluent, he was director of a coal mine.

Crawford: This is your maternal grandfather.

Khuner: Yes, my maternal grandfather. And he was a young lawyer. And he wanted to get the dowry from the director of the coal mine. And he wanted the younger daughter, but he couldn't have her, he had to take the older daughter. So the younger daughter, my mother, was very unhappy, and they said, "We'll marry you off to Vienna, out of the way." That's the way it was done at that time.

Crawford: And was your mother schooled?

Khuner: Oh, yes, my mother was very intelligent, and my father too, they were very bright people.

Crawford: Did your mother play professionally?

Khuner: No. No, never. But she was sent to a girls' school, to Germany, to Breslau; that was the nearest German city. And she studied violin. And she was the good violinist of the provincial city. When she came to Vienna, she wasn't so good any more! But she played a lot.

Crawford: Was there a great deal of music in your home?

Khuner: Ja. Well, first of all, my father and my mother regularly played all the sonatas, and they played together. I had to help them.

Crawford: How did you help them?





Felix and Franziska Khuner with first cousins on maternal side, ca. 1911.

*Photograph courtesy of Felix Khuner*



Khuner: Well, to say that they played out of tune, they forgot the sharps, and they played the rhythm wrong.

Crawford: You could do this at age five?

Khuner: Yes, more or less, thereabouts.

Crawford: And they wanted you to be a musician.

### Music Lessons and Schooling

Khuner: I was obviously considered very talented. And Mr. Starkmann, who was asked, was delighted. I think I was his first pupil.

Crawford: And how long did you study with Mr. Starkmann?

Khuner: With Starkmann? Until I was twelve.

Crawford: And then what happened?

Khuner: By that time, everybody knew that I played miserably.

Crawford: But you were talented.

Khuner: But that's not enough! You have to get a little instruction. I didn't know that. But I knew that I was playing very badly. And I played the Mozart concerto, and the Mendelssohn concerto with this orchestra in the rehearsal. And it was atrocious. And all the friends of my mother said that I played badly. But Mr. Starkmann thought I was great.

Crawford: So your mother realized it was time--

Khuner: She didn't want to contradict him. She was always taking my side against all her friends. Because I really was talented. If you gave me something, in a few minutes I could learn the concerto by heart. The teachers were delighted.

Crawford: But it was the instruction that was lacking.

Khuner: Ja.

Crawford: So who did you go to next?

Khuner: Well, then my parents tried to find out the dope about this little boy. So I played for Sevcik when I was eleven or twelve, and I played for Carl Flesch--do you know Carl Flesch, the famous violinist? Because his brother was a doctor in Vienna, and my parents knew him. So the next time Flesch came and played in

Vienna, I was permitted to play for him. And both Sevcik and Flesch said that that boy will never be a violinist. Ja? Because they were looking at how I played. Elementary things. Sevcik asked me elementary bowing patterns, which I couldn't do. Because I never learned them. You know about violin playing? I can show you. I remember exactly what he wanted. [Felix gets out a violin.]

I could play [demonstrates a messy, chaotic bouncing string crossing bit]. Virtuoso things. He says, "Fine, would you please let the bow jump four times on the open G string? Like this." [demonstrates] I couldn't do it. I didn't know--

Crawford: You could do some of the virtuoso things, but . . .

Khuner: Yes. Miserable! Sloppy! Sloppy! Foolishness!

Crawford: Well, so then, why didn't you just pack it all in, and say, "I'm not going to be a violinist?"

Khuner: My mother said I'm going to be a violinist. I was only eleven years old! What do you want?

Crawford: Yes, so she said--

Khuner: I remember this very well.

Crawford: --We'll find a better teacher?

Khuner: So they said you have to find a better teacher. So, much to the chagrin of Mr. Starkmann, I was introduced to the director of the Music Academy. Not the Conservatory. The Music Academy was the State school. The Conservatory was the private school. I went to the State school and I played for the director, who was not a violinist. Mr. Bock. And he tested me for my ear. I had perfect pitch. I had already gotten some instruction in harmony from Camillo Horn, who was a local composer. And Mr. Bock played a chord. And I said, "Well, that's A major." And then he played the dominant seventh. And I said, "Dominant seventh chord." "How do you resolve it?" I mentioned the notes. He said, "The boy's fabulous!" He didn't know I what a bad violinist I was. He knew that I had a musical ear. And I had to be accepted because I was two years younger than the minimum age. I was only twelve; the minimum age was fourteen.

Well, I got the certification of Mr. Bock, that I am a promising musician. Not a violinist; Mr. Bock didn't care about it, I never played the violin for him. I played violin for Flesch and Sevcik, who said I shouldn't become a violinist. They didn't care whether I would be a musician or not.

Crawford: What did you play for Mr. Bock? Piano?



Khuner: I didn't play violin, he just tested my ear.

Crawford: Oh, you just did an ear test.

Khuner: Ja.

Crawford: So then he put you into the Music Academy--

Khuner: Yes, he accepted me. And then I studied in school with Mr. Arnold Rosé, of the famous Rosé Quartet. Unfortunately--or fortunately, I don't know--he was a miserable teacher too. Nothing. He couldn't--

Crawford: Wonderful player?

Khuner: A very fine player!

Crawford: But he couldn't teach.

Khuner: Sevcik left. That was 1918, when I was twelve years old, and the war was over. Sevcik returned to Czechoslovakia. He didn't want to stay in Vienna. He knew the political situation, the Czechs and the Germans. So Rosé took over Sevcik's master classes and I got another teacher, who was a very fine, grandfatherly Mr. Julius Egghardt. Professor Julius Egghardt. E, double G, who also thought that I was great, I was wonderful. Not a trace of violin instruction! And by that time, when I was thirteen, or fourteen, or fifteen years old, I told my parents it doesn't make any sense to go to classes. I tested him. I played badly, I played out of tune, I played out of rhythm, as badly as I could. Everything was all right. He didn't care.

Crawford: So here you were, fifteen--

Khuner: Ja. I graduated when I was sixteen, in 1922, from the Music Academy, in violin.

Crawford: Let's back up here for one moment, and talk about your grammar school and your *Gymnasium* and so on.

Khuner: Grammar school was from the age of six, to eleven. I was born in '06--In 1917 I started the *Gymnasium*, when I was eleven. In 1918 I started at the Academy, when I was twelve. And I was four years in the Academy. That was the *Ausbildung*. First, second, third and fourth *Ausbildung*. It was a little more advanced in education. There were three grades. *Forbildung*, *Ausbildung*, and Master Class. And for the *Ausbildung* I was supposed to be fourteen years old, but I was only twelve. But I was accepted, and spent three and a half years with Professor Egghardt. Violinistic useless. But I still played in those school recitals, and I even, when I graduated, played the first movement of the Brahms concerto with the orchestra. Badly!

Crawford: At the Music Academy.

Khuner: At the Academy, yes. At the same time--

Crawford: They thought you were fine; you didn't think you were fine.

Khuner: My teacher promoted me. Because I was such an easy pupil, I learned everything so fast. My fingers were running. And that I had no tone, and had no patterns, no, he did not know, he didn't know anything about violin. My colleagues knew. My colleagues knew more, they told me that that's really not very good playing. But what do you care when the parents and teachers are satisfied? Ja, the colleagues are jealous! The teacher said the colleagues are jealous, because I was so talented.

But there were some other teachers. Because the friends of my mother in the orchestra, they all had other teachers, they didn't go to the Academy; they were more or less amateurs, but they still took lessons. There was Mr. Christiann, who was a real stupid fellow, but he was an assistant of Sevcik, he said. He knew a little bit about the elements of technique. For instance, I came to him and he said, "Please play whole bow, and upper half [one long note, two short notes], whole bow, lower half [one long note, two short notes]," which I couldn't do; he had to show it to me. But I played all the concertos, without having any control of my right arm. It's practically unbelievable what you can get away with, with a little talent, without knowing anything.

Crawford: I'm surprised [at this] in Vienna, because you always hear that the standards are very, very high.

Khuner: Very low! Very low! In the Neue Conservatory, the New Military Conservatory, it was a little better. There were actually two good violin teachers there.

Crawford: When did you start at the Conservatory?

#### Anti-Semitism in Vienna

Khuner: Then, the thing is this, there was something else, too, which was the anti-Semitism. In the Academy, which was a state school, state supported, it was very anti-Semitic. In Neues Military Conservatory, the director was a Jew, so that is where the Jews went. Just like here, the Bohemian Club is anti-Semitic; the Family, all the Jews go. Did you know that about the Bohemian Club and the Family?

Crawford: The Family Club?

Khuner: The Family Club.

Crawford: The Family Club. I don't know the Family Club.

Khuner: It's an offshoot of the Bohemian Club, for the Jews. In Vienna, for instance, in mountaineering, in Teich, there was *Deutsche und Oesterreiche Alpenverein*, no Jews permitted. But there was a *Dohnerland*, only Jews. It was a separation.

Crawford: Yes. But the Jewish people were the most prominent cultural leaders in Vienna.

Khuner: Yes, but not for the Viennese.

Crawford: Not among the Viennese?

Khuner: Not for the *Bogenständiger*, native Viennese. The Jews were also native Viennese . . .

Crawford: But Mahler was Jewish.

Khuner: Sure, but . . . that's very complicated. There were two kinds of anti-Semitism. There was the national anti-Semitism and the religious anti-Semitism. The religious anti-Semitism you could get away from by being baptized into a Catholic or a Lutheran.

Crawford: Or a Lutheran?

Khuner: That was the religious anti-Semitism. That's why the Nazis were against the Catholics. Because the Catholics were not anti-Semitic enough for the Nazis.

Crawford: I see. So what was the national anti-Semitism?

Khuner: Those were the ones who wanted a greater Germany, that came to pass with the Nazis. But in Vienna it was mostly Catholic anti-Semitism, because ten percent of the Viennese population was Jewish.

Crawford: So what you're telling me is that a young Jewish musician would not be accepted.

Khuner: Oh, Ja, they were accepted. Of course they were accepted.

Crawford: But they wouldn't be promoted at the Music Academy?

Khuner: They had a difficult time. But it was all subterranean. All subterranean. My harmony teacher--I think he was a competent harmony teacher--I came there with the score of Schoenberg's *Transfigured Night*. And he saw me with that, and said, "You like that?" And I said, "Yes." And he said, "Don't come to my class, you'll never learn anything."

Crawford: I don't understand. Why? He didn't like Schoenberg?

Khuner: Of course, it was a red rag for him. Not only because Schoenberg was Jewish, but Schoenberg in general. If you liked Schoenberg, you were hopeless.

Crawford: Did Schoenberg have a very hard time because he was Jewish?

Khuner: Of course. Not only because he was Jewish. Because he was a revolutionary. But of course that played in there, too. Because Webern was just as revolutionary. Webern and Berg were not Jewish.

Something else interesting. When Berg was a young man, he met Schoenberg, he was fascinated--Schoenberg was a fascinating musician--and he studied with Schoenberg. And Berg's family was rather poor, and Schoenberg taught him for nothing, without any compensation. Then Berg's mother made a little [i.e., came into an] inheritance. And she said to her son, "Now you can go to the Academy and study with Holberger." With Holberger, you never heard of him? He was the great teacher at that time at the Academy. And Berg said, "Are you out of your mind? I should study with Holberger when I can study with Schoenberg?"

Crawford: How was Schoenberg regarded? *Transfigured Night* was a Romantic piece.

Khuner: Of course, Ja.

Crawford: But not accepted?

Khuner: But there were some chords that were not permitted. There's a famous chord in Schoenberg. You don't know? There is one chord that didn't exist, so how can Schoenberg--

Crawford: Couldn't exist?

Khuner: It doesn't exist! How can you use that chord!

Crawford: So people were outraged?

Khuner: Outraged, yes. As I said, my teacher, when he saw me with *Transfigured Night*, said, "You'll never amount to anything if you like that stuff."

And then my composition teacher was Mr. Springer, who was also a teacher of church music, and then later he became the director of the Academy. Austria was a Catholic country, you know. That was the Catholic anti-Semitism that pervaded that life.

Crawford: I see. Now, your family was Jewish.

Khuner: Oh, Ja.

Crawford: Were they Orthodox Jewish?

Khuner: Not any more. My grandparents were, but not my parents any more. The assimilation came in for the Jews, Ja. But we were very Zionistic. Zionism started at that time, and both the brothers of my mother were contemporaries and friends of Herzl, and Martin Buber. You know Martin Buber?

Crawford: Oh, yes.

Khuner: Martin Buber was a friend of my uncle.

Crawford: What happened with your uncles? Did they go into music at all?

Khuner: Oh, no, no, no. One was an engineer, one was a lawyer.

Crawford: [I'd like] to find out a little bit more about your parents. Your mother. You didn't say much about what her life was like, what she did. But you told some wonderful stories about her.

Khuner: She was an amateur violinist, she used to be quite good in the provincial city where she grew up, and she was not as good in Vienna, because there were better amateur violinists. But she had good talents, useful for an amateur orchestra; she always counted correctly, came in after rests, watched the conductors. But those amateur orchestras were generally pretty poor; everybody struggles to get some notes. She struggled, too, but she counted well.

Crawford: And what was her life like, otherwise?

Khuner: Otherwise, she took care of the household.

Crawford: Stayed at home.

Khuner: Stayed at home, ja. Later on, when my parents had a car, she became a member of the auto club.

Crawford: That must have been kind of adventurous.

Khuner: I really don't know. First of all, I left Vienna when I was twenty-two or twenty-three; returned rarely. So I really don't know what she did.

Crawford: What did she do as a member of the auto club?

Khuner: Go to meetings, and arrange that everything went according to the way she thought it had to go.

Crawford: And drive.

Khuner: Oh, she drove her car, sure.



Crawford: What was her car?

Khuner: Well, there were several cars. There was the very early car, there was the better car two years later, and there was a better car two years later--

Crawford: Was driving popular?

Khuner: It just began at that time. At that time in Vienna you could walk the streets for hours and not see an automobile.

Crawford: And you had a good bus and tram system?

Khuner: Streetcars, ja, electric trains.

Crawford: What happened in 1918? Were there shortages that made getting around more difficult?

Khuner: To get around? Well, it was very difficult. The streetcars came in long intervals. When I took my streetcar to school, of course you never got a seat, you had to hang out at the entrance. And you had to wait a long time--just like the bus here. You wait and wait and wait, and finally the bus is crowded to the brim. That's the way the streetcars were.

Crawford: How about the shortages?

Khuner: Shortages of everything! But that was during the war, during the blockade of Austria and Germany--The Allies blockaded and we had no food. And the Hungarians, who had plenty of food, wouldn't let any food go to Austria, although it was the same country. The rural population was very, very afraid that the Viennese would buy up everything. I remember we would go to Hungary, across the Danube to Bratislava, to get some food. They didn't want to sell it to us, because they knew we came from Vienna.

Crawford: Was there enmity, other than that?

Khuner: There was enmity with all ethnic groups--the Czechs, and the Hungarians, and the Serbs, and the Poles, there was enmity, because the government population was German-speaking. They were hated throughout. That's why the monarchy broke up in 1919.

Crawford: Your grandparents. How much did you see of your grandparents during that period?

Khuner: Well, the grandparents--my father's parents?

Crawford: Your father's parents.

Khuner: They lived in Vienna. I saw them a lot. They lived a few blocks from us.

Crawford: And your mother's parents.

Khuner: They lived in Czechoslovakia. I saw them only when some of them came to visit Vienna, which they did. It was always a treat for them to go to the capital, see a few shows, buy a few things in the stores.

Crawford: How much travel did that represent?

Khuner: About five hours by train.

Crawford: And you went in the summers sometimes?

Khuner: I visited them in the city, and two summers we spent near their domicile.

Crawford: When did you start hiking in Vienna, in the mountains?

Khuner: We hiked every Sunday in hills around Vienna. Ever since my teen age. And in the summer when we were in the surroundings, my father was an avid hiker, when he had time.

Crawford: Was there a grandparent who was a great influence?

Khuner: Of course, I am influenced by everybody. The family influence was very strong, all the time.

Crawford: But was there one grandparent who--

Khuner: No. Everybody [influenced me]. My paternal grandmother died early, she died in the middle of the war, 1916, probably. My maternal grandfather died in '14, my paternal grandmother died in '16. And then the other two died much later.

The relations were always important and our behavior had to be so that it would be accepted by the older people. That's like what they have in Japan.

Crawford: Filial piety?

Khuner: It's not piety; piety has something to do with religion. No, I'll give you an example. One says, "Well, Uncle Emile wouldn't like what you just did."

Crawford: There was always an example?

Khuner: Ja. And if some of the cousins, like I told you, that cousin didn't behave, he was a bad boy. "Don't take on example of him, you have to do better than the cousin."

Crawford: Well, was that a big extended family?



Khuner: There were a lot of people, ja.

Crawford: Did you routinely get together?

Khuner: Some more, some less, depending on where they lived, and how close the relations were. But they were always somewhere in the background, and they always existed, and we were always told, "He got a very good report card, you know. He's going to go to the University, you know! And the other one, he flunked because he didn't learn! So watch out, don't be like him!"

Crawford: So, who was the purveyor of the information?

Khuner: Oh, my parents.

Crawford: Your mother?

Khuner: Mainly my mother, ja. And then if something was not according to her liking, we were told, "I don't like that, this is the bad part of the family." Like Uncle Moritz, he couldn't keep a job, no good. That was the level of civic and moral standards that was always there.

Crawford: And that was within your family.

Khuner: Within the family, ja.

Crawford: And who was the fictitious uncle?

Khuner: Oh, the fictitious uncle! That was my--you mean Kisev! Uncle Kisev.

Crawford: Kisev, yes, I couldn't remember his name.

Khuner: [laughs] Terrible! That was when my mother had to lie for some reason. She'd get that name in so the children would know it's a lie. We met an acquaintance and my mother said, "Oh, I have to go home, something is going to happen, Uncle Kisev is coming." That means she wants to get rid of that person, also to go home. Nobody is coming. Uncle Kisev didn't exist! So we knew that it was a lie. [Younger Khuner son enters]

Eliot: Did she use that often?

Khuner: Oh, ja!

Crawford: You always knew when Uncle Kisev came into the conversation--

Khuner: Ja. Or once, some girlfriend, who was it?

Eliot: Pamela Susskind.

Khuner: Susskind, she used to do that, she knew about it, you know?

Crawford: When did you hear last of Uncle Kisev?

Khuner: I don't know. He existed to the end of my mother's life. Ja. But probably--not lately, not in the last few years. Because there was not so much lying necessary. But that I got a kick out of, when my mother wrote that Uncle Kisev was so happy and proud that I was in the army.

Crawford: So Uncle Kisev was a family member for a long time.

Khuner: Ja.

### The Gymnasium and More About Music Studies

Crawford: Talk about the *Gymnasium* for a moment.

Khuner: In *Gymnasium* there was a difference, because--*Gymnasiums* were regional. Not like here, the Berkeley high school is only one school. There was a *Gymnasium* in any part of Vienna.

Crawford: All the neighborhoods.

Khuner: Neighborhoods. They were neighborhood schools. In my class where I lived in Maria Hilf, was a second ghetto of Vienna. The real ghetto was in the Second Arrondissement, Leopoldstrasse. In Maria Hilf, where my grandfather's factory was, and we lived, was a secondary ghetto. A little higher class ghetto, where the middle class Jews lived. So we were about fifty-fifty Jews and non-Jews.

Crawford: I remember Mr. Adler said that he went right close to his own home to the *Gymnasium*.

Khuner: Ja, the *Gymnasium* was exactly 800 meters from my home. That's how I trained myself for 800 meters in track and field, running to school every day!

Crawford: And that was exacting, wasn't it, demanding?

Khuner: The school?

Crawford: Yes.

Khuner: Well, I'll tell you how it was. I started it, as I said, in 1917. And in 1918 I started the Academy. And it turned out that it was impossible time-wise, because I had to attend morning classes in the Academy: orchestra, chamber music and all that. So I couldn't go to school and to the Academy. If I would have been fourteen

years old I could have skipped school, but I couldn't skip school. So I had to have an exemption: I could study at home and make the examinations four times a year. And fortunately one of the professors lived nearby and he came twice a week, or three times a week, and helped me with my Latin and my Greek, and my history, and so forth. Not much; you can learn that all in books.

Crawford: Did you learn at home? Did your parents have tutors at home?

Khuner: No, this professor helped me with Latin and Greek.

Crawford: Did you learn Italian and French?

Khuner: No, no. The *Gymnasium* was only classical.

Crawford: The classical languages. But you could handle both, you did both fine.

Khuner: Latin and Greek? Ja, I learned it from school. It was not too difficult; the requirements were not very high. A little grammar, a little reading, a little Caesar, and Horace, and Homer, that was not so difficult.

Crawford: But everybody had that?

Khuner: In *Gymnasium* you had to have that. The *Gymnasium* was for eight years, but by the time I graduated from the Academy in 1922 I became a regular student again for the last four years in *Gymnasium*.

Crawford: Then what did you do, when you finished?

Khuner: Then I went back to *Gymnasium* and practiced a lot of piano. Now I want to tell you about that. I had good instruction in Vienna, it was the sister of my father. She was a private piano teacher, one of the most educated musicians, far above the regular teachers.

Crawford: This was your aunt.

Khuner: My aunt, yes. She is the teacher of Jonathan. She came here and was a teacher of Jonathan. He owes her very much. [Cecily Lichtenstein]

Crawford: Is she here?

Khuner: No, she's dead.

Crawford: I see. So she came from Vienna, she lived in Berkeley--

Khuner: She lived in Oakland first, and then in Berkeley.

Crawford: And she taught your son. Why was she so special as a teacher?

Khuner: Oh, she was intelligent, and educated, she went to concerts! All the vocal scores of Wagner operas, and Mahler symphonies and Bruckner I got from her, I didn't have anything. I couldn't buy anything.

Crawford: So you started piano--

Khuner: Piano with her, yes.

Crawford: How old were you then?

Khuner: Seven. Very early. And I practiced.

Crawford: How old was she?

Khuner: She was--she was I think sixteen when my mother married in '25. She was the younger sister of my father, the youngest in the family. She was probably around eighteen or nineteen.

Crawford: So she taught you piano from the age of seven--

Khuner: Not only piano, but music.

Crawford: I see. And you felt you were a better pianist?

Khuner: I was a very good pianist, Ja. And I practiced, and I played a lot of piano. In violin there is nothing to study, playing my Wienawski concerti? What? What can you-- Pagannini concerto? Who wants to play that? But I played all the Beethoven sonatas, the Schubert sonatas, the Brahms piano music, and Schumann Klaviermusik, ja, and all that.

Crawford: Did you study Schoenberg harmony?

Khuner: Yes!

Crawford: Was that what she gave you?

Khuner: That's what she gave me. Now Schoenberg I discovered exactly in 1921, when we were in a little city in Geusen. There was a hotel that had a piano downstairs in the lobby, and they had some music, songs. And that is where I first played Schoenberg songs. And I said, that's the music, not Strauss. Strauss songs were very popular at that time.

Crawford: And who else was it that affected you, that influenced you?

Khuner: Well, I would say mostly I was critical of the life. For instance there was a performance of *Fidelio*, Mr. Franz Schalk conducting, and I had the feeling that I was the only one there who knew anything about the opera.

Crawford: You didn't approve of his conducting?

Khuner: Not only the conducting; the singing, the orchestra, everything. I said, that's not the opera by Beethoven, that's not how to perform it.

Crawford: How old were you then?

Khuner: Oh, that was also when I was a teenager--about fifteen.

Crawford: What had been your exposure to opera at that point?

Khuner: Oh, I went very much, every performance that interested me; mostly Mozart and Wagner. I wouldn't go to Italian operas. No, no way!

Crawford: I knew you would have strong thoughts about that! We won't get into it. Eventually I want to have you talk about Wagner and Verdi. So you went to the Royal Opera as a young person.

Khuner: The thing is this. I was at that time already a major in what you call music theory; harmony, counterpoint, composition, conducting. Not instrumental.

Crawford: So that at the Music Academy you were--

Khuner: First at the Academy, then at the Neue Konservatorium, where I met Adler.

Crawford: Oh, that's where you met Adler, and you shared Professor Melius, right?

Khuner: Melius, that's right.

Crawford: What was the balance of your studies there?

Khuner: Well, it was useless. Somebody played. We had *Carmen*, we had *Figaro*, I don't know the operas. Somebody played the piano. I never played the piano. They were all better pianists than I. And we were sitting there, making believe that you conduct. Just conduct and follow one-two-three-four, there was no instruction.

Crawford: That was your conducting instruction?

Khuner: That was the conducting. Mr. Melius didn't know himself. [Whispering] Like here. Senturia doesn't know it either!

Crawford: Did you not conduct at the Music Academy?

Khuner: No, I was not in the conducting school in the Academy, only in Conservatory. But in the Academy I had composition. There was Franz Marx and Franz Schmidt, and Professor Springer . . .



Crawford: Franz Schmidt the composer?

Khuner: Schmidt, Ja, but I never studied with Schmidt.

Crawford: Did you study with Marx?

Khuner: Not with Marx. Occasionally when Springer was sick, Marx would come in for a class. But I had a good teacher, he was Mandyczewski, in counterpoint. Mandyczewski was the curator of the museum of the *Gesellschaft der in Musikfreunde* and a friend of Brahms. And that's also a little thing, is that the people who lived upstairs from our apartment house, there was a young fellow, he was about four years older than I. He was a bad violinist but was interested in music. And he was Karl Geiringer. Do you know Karl Geiringer? He became the curator of the instrument [collection] . . . [shows Crawford something]

Crawford: I know this name, yes.

Khuner: He lived upstairs. And he was the successor of Mandyczewski in the museum. And he became a very noted musicologist. He died last year. He was about three or four years older than I.

##

Khuner: From 1922 to 1926, that means from my graduation as a violinist from the Academy, until I graduated from *Gymnasium*, I did a lot of playing, not officially. There were quite a number of amateurs who were very interested in contemporary music. And I played quartets with them. We played the Bartok quartets, Kodaly, Toch, Korngold, and Szymanowsky, all the contemporary quartets.

Crawford: Were they well received?

Khuner: They were not played in Vienna, they were played only at home by the amateurs.

Crawford: It was about that time that Schoenberg organized that society for private listening and so on?

Khuner: That's right, ja. The Rosé quartet played the first two quartets by Schoenberg. I mean, there were performances, but not regularly. It was only an exception. Of course there were performances of Schoenberg and Berg and Webern.

Crawford: Did you have contact with Arnold Rosé?

Khuner: I was a pupil of his for four months.

Crawford: Did he help you?

Khuner: No! Not at all. As a matter of fact, I met him later. He came and saw our rehearsal and he didn't recognize me.

Crawford: But you knew the Rosé family?

Khuner: No, I didn't know the family. I went to the concerts. I attended all the Rosé Quartet concerts.

Crawford: Where did they perform?

Khuner: They had their regular six-subscription concerts every season.

### Musical Life in Vienna

Crawford: Let's talk about that. What was your musical exposure outside of your schooling?

Khuner: Very strong. I went to all sorts of concerts, and the opera; practically every evening I was out listening to something.

Crawford: And your parents went too?

Khuner: No, my parents didn't go any more. They went when I was a baby, I knew that; when I was a child, six, seven, eight, nine. At that time they were going, to the Italian things, quartets, the Triest Quartet, the Bohemian Quartet, the Rosé Quartet, the Klingsor Quartet, the Philharmonic concerts. They went to concerts all the time. They were not so much in opera, because my father liked only Donizetti. He thought it was marvelous.

Crawford: Fine for a German!

Khuner: Ja!

Crawford: What do you remember of Vienna?

Khuner: Well, I remember that I went to school, that I took violin classes, practiced for my teachers. Then on Sunday we went out hiking in the Vienna woods, in the summer we went swimming.

Crawford: Did you leave in the summer, other than to go a few miles out from Vienna?

Khuner: No. We always went outside [the city].

Crawford: In August?

Khuner: Ja. In June. In June, July, August. Until school started again.



Crawford: And your father would come and then come back into Vienna?

Khuner: If he could, ja, if we went close enough to Vienna. I know we lived in Pergstersdorf, which is just about ten miles outside the city limits, [and] Beidlingau, where I was born, and Mauer, in Rodaun--some of these things are now part of Vienna. And then later on, we were getting farther away, about one, one and a half, two hours by train. So my father could come home on weekends.

Crawford: Were there brothers and sisters?

Khuner: I have one sister, still alive. [Franzi died in 1992]

Crawford: Is she a musician too?

Khuner: No, no. She gave it up. She was supposed to get cello lessons, piano lessons, but she wasn't interested. No talent whatsoever.

Crawford: Did your parents push her to learn music?

Khuner: I guess they wanted to, ja, but she wasn't interested.

Crawford: Was your family interested in theater as well?

Khuner: Very little. I was more interested in the theater. I went to--not to the *Burgtheater*, because I had no chance to get there--but there was the Reimund Theater and *Deutsche Volks Theater*, where I saw quite a number of interesting plays.

Crawford: The *Burgtheater* was the Reinhardt theater?

Khuner: Reinhardt had his own theater.

Crawford: Did you go to the Reinhardt theater?

Khuner: Yes!

Crawford: So you liked the theater. Why was music so important in Vienna?

Khuner: It wasn't important. That is all fiction.

Crawford: Really?

Khuner: Yes, that's all a fiction, that is all public relations.

Crawford: We always hear that music was king in Vienna.

Khuner: Ja? Well, they say the waltzes--you couldn't hear a waltz in Vienna. Yes, at the time of Johann Strauss the waltzes were for the dancing at the Imperial Palace. But the popular people didn't dance waltzes.

Crawford: No, but look at all the quartet activity; that's remarkable.

Khuner: Well, the Rosé Quartet was there--they were members of the Philharmonic. Mr. Rosé was the concertmaster, Rugiska was the principal violin, Buchsbaum was the principal cellist.

Crawford: But there were many quartets?

Khuner: They came from other places, ja? Well, there was an audience for string quartets, yes.

Crawford: And two opera companies?

Khuner: More or less, ja, the Volksoper--

Crawford: And operetta?

Khuner: Well, there was operetta--oh, ja, operetta, that's a different story. Vulgar things were very popular!

Crawford: But music was a big part of life, it seems, from what you're telling me.

Khuner: No! Not more than here.

Crawford: But you went every night to music! A young man doesn't do that unless--

Khuner: Because it was the capital; it was for promotion's sake. Like you have to give a recital in New York if you want to get engagements in Kansas City. You have to have press releases.

Crawford: Well, in *The Proud Tower*, by Barbara Tuchman, she says that the politics in Vienna, the political climate, was disintegrating, and she said music was an anchor.

Khuner: Well, you mean, when the Nazis, with the annexation, or--

Crawford: No, I mean before the first war, right after the turn of the century.

Khuner: There was a congregation of writers, journalists, painters, sculptors, architects, musicians, whatever else. The greatest architect was Loos at that time, but he was a good-for-nothing, he had nothing but enemies. Schoenberg had nothing but enemies.

The writer Karl Kraus had nothing but enemies. But there was always a small group--I am honored to belong to that--who realized that; and we of course hated the official Vienna.

Crawford: So you're saying there was that friction--

Khuner: There was no actual friction; they were just--they were not in our class.

Crawford: I read that the Emperor Franz Joseph never read a book.

Khuner: The Emperor was--my mother's oldest brother was a reserve officer in the Austrian army. And he was a real Austrian, he was a real military man. Very strange for a Jew.

Crawford: How so? How was he a "real Austrian"?

Khuner: Because he was military man. Like here, if somebody is a colonel in the army, he's a military man. Now, he was not active, he was a reserve officer. There were not many Jewish reserve officers. He was just a real good soldier. Ja?

Crawford: Not interested in music?

Khuner: Not interested in anything; but he was a soldier. And even he said, our Emperor is an idiot! A *chammer*, that's the Jewish word for idiot. But he spelled it, "c-h-a-m-m-e-r," he wouldn't say *chammer*. But not only an idiot, he was a criminal. Actually, he had his wife killed, and he had his son killed.

Crawford: Are you sure?

Khuner: Sure.

Crawford: That's such a sad story, about his wife.

Khuner: Well, he had nothing but mistresses, and affairs, and he wanted to get her out of the way. She was killed in Geneva, you know that.

Crawford: I know, I remember the story.

Khuner: That was an open secret. But you don't find that in history books.

Crawford: No, you don't, you don't see that in history books. Well, what was the political climate in Vienna, before the war, as you can remember now?

Khuner: The first war? Well there were the ruling party who were the Catholic party. And there was a little opposition, the liberal party; the opposition was the Jews. And the Catholic party was anti-Semitic. There was a mayor of Vienna by the name of Luger, who was elected on the anti-Semitic platform. He said, "I will get rid of the Jews. The Jews have too much influence, they have too many jobs, they have too many businesses, they are in banking and so on; I'll get rid of the Jews." So he was elected. And then it turned out that he didn't want to get rid of the Jews. There were some complaints: "You still do business with all those Jewish

firms." So he said, "I decide who is a Jew. If I want to make business with him, he is not a Jew."

Oh, you know that?! Ja. But then, after 1918, Vienna became Social Democratic. The intellectual leader of the Social Democrats was Otto Bauer, he was a Jew. And his widow, Mrs. Bauer, lived in Berkeley after the war.

Crawford: That was Kurt Herbert Adler's uncle, you know.

Khuner: Possibly, ja.

### Playing in the Vienna Opera Orchestra

Crawford: Let's talk about Mahler and Strauss.

Khuner: Well, of course, Strauss--I played with Strauss, in the Opera, when he conducted, sure, I knew--he was the co-director with Schalk of the [Vienna] Opera.

Crawford: What do you remember of him?

Khuner: Well, I'll tell you--it's not very delicate. He was not paid very liberally, because there was no money in Austria; but he was given a palais to live in, for, let's say, twenty or thirty or forty years, in lieu of money.

Crawford: A palace?

Khuner: A palace, yes. So he lived in that palace. And he conducted very sloppily, and very disintegrated. So the musicians said, "Well, tonight he directed and conducted from the bathroom, from the scheissheisel [scheissshäusel means little shit house]. When he conducted well, he conducted from the livingroom, or from the bedroom, but tonight he conducted from the bathroom."

Crawford: And you played in the orchestra there?

Khuner: I was substituting in the Opera orchestra. When I was in the last year of *Gymnasium*, Mr. Starkmann wrote me one day, or told me that there were auditions for substitutes. That was a rule that there were accredited substitutes when the regular people didn't want to play because they had better jobs. At that time there were a lot of dance bands going around in Vienna.

Crawford: And you got more money, I suppose.

Khuner: I didn't get any money. They got more money!

Crawford: They got more money?

Khuner: Not more [from the Opera]--they got their regular salary for the Opera, plus the money they'd make. Because they didn't pay much to the substitutes. I was accepted as official substitute. I could play any time one of the violinists needed a substitute. So Mr. Weissgaber or Mr. Sedlak, or Mr. Whoever-it-is wanted to get a night off, they phoned me--can you play?--mostly Wagner operas. *Rigoletto* they liked to play themselves, but Wagner was too long. And Wagner was always on weekends, on Sundays, when they got good jobs. So I played--for two years I played every *Tristan*, every *Götterdämmerung*, every *Walküre*, every *Meistersinger*. Ja. And they lined up, already, three weeks ahead, they were asking me, "Please play for me."

Crawford: Now this was in the Twenties. Were you still in school?

Khuner: That was when I was still in school, Ja. That was '24, '25, '26. When I was eighteen or nineteen years old.

Crawford: And did you at that time think, "I will be a regular member of the--"

Khuner: I thought, in case I become a conductor, which was always somewhere in the back of my mind. But I knew all those operas. Up till now I know *Meistersinger* and *Tristan* and *Parsifal* by heart. I know even Mahler symphonies by heart. I remember once we played the Second Mahler Symphony, Steinberg conducting. Something was wrong, and I had to tell him, "The clarinetist transposes wrong, because the clarinet is in B. And Steinberg said, "Yes, yes, that's right." But he didn't know. I knew the score better than Steinberg.

Crawford: So, at that point you thought you might be a conductor?

Khuner: Listen. I knew that becoming a conductor doesn't come out of the open air, you know? I knew that I had no backing, I had no entry. It's like you say, are you interested in--what would you be interested in; geology, and you want to become a professor of geology; that doesn't come out of space.

Crawford: But still, it interested you.

Khuner: Ja, especially [since] I knew I was a better conductor than Schalk. Schalk came and--now something like Adler. When in the rehearsal, I remember when the conducting fell apart, Mr. Schalk said, "Oh, I'm not going to conduct at all; you're better without me." He said that!



Remembering Arnold Schoenberg

Crawford: How about Schoenberg? What were your impressions of him.

Khuner: Well, Schoenberg. I knew the music very well, I read the harmony [i.e. *Harmonielehre*, Schoenberg's textbook.] I didn't know anything about him, I never met him, I didn't know what he looked like. And suddenly out of the blue sky, my old professor Egghardt, whom I hadn't seen for years already--that means between 1922 and 1926, or 1925, I hadn't seen him--He told me, he says, "There is a violinist by the name of Rudolph Kolisch, who has a quartet, and he needs a second violinist, the second violinist quit."

So I went to Kolisch's apartment, talked about music, and I find out that we had a lot of things in common--musical ideas. And suddenly the door opened, and a little man came in, talked to Rudy, didn't pay any notice to me; and I said, "who is that?" He said, "That's Schoenberg." I said, "That's Schoenberg?" And he said, "Well, that's the husband of my sister." I said, "So it's your family; is he interested in the quartet?" He said, "Sure, we have rehearsals [with him]." I said, "Of course I'll play with you. If Schoenberg is there, of course I'll play with you."

Crawford: But you knew his music already.

Khuner: I knew a lot of his music. I had already known the piano pieces opus 19, I believe, Ja. Short piano pieces. I got the music from the rental library, and came to a violin class with them and played them. Oh, they laughed about it! My violin colleagues. So I said, "Well, that's the music [people will remember when all the Wieniawski concertos have been forgotten]."

Crawford: Opus 19. When would that have been written?

Khuner: I really don't know. [1911]

Crawford: I wanted to ask you about something you said, about packaging. You said that you weren't interested in packaging. What did you mean, exactly?

Khuner: About packaging. Oh, the package is not important, Ja. The sound is not important. Some time ago, a musicologist came and asked me some related questions. He said, "Is it true that in your quartet Mr. Heifetz, the cellist, has a much better sound than the first violin?" I said, "What do you mean, better sound?"

Well, everybody complained that the sound of the first violin was not as good.

Crawford: Go on.



Khuner: Well, an inoffensive sound, and a pleasant sound, is of course preferable to an offensive sound or an unpleasant sound. The unpleasant sound distracts from the performance. Like a very bad pavement distracts from your vacation trip. If you are jostled all the time by the potholes and so on, you are really distracted from the beautiful scenery. Although you shouldn't be!

Crawford: That's right. Sometimes the rougher journey is more meaningful.

Khuner: Ja, well--but really the enjoyment of the scenery is a little disturbed by a very rough road, or if your car stops all the time.

Crawford: You were such a close friend, could you talk about Schoenberg, about his life?

Khuner: Well, I know very little. Schoenberg was part of my surroundings, although I didn't see him very often. Months and months went by when I had no idea, I didn't even know where he was.

Crawford: When did you first speak to him?

Khuner: Well, I first spoke to him in the early rehearsals. Right in the first season that we had in Vienna in 1926-27, we had a Schoenberg concert with the first and second string quartets, with the singer Maria Freund from Paris singing the lead, [*The Book of the*] *Hanging Gardens*. And during these rehearsals I got closer acquainted for the first time, because we rehearsed together.

Crawford: What was he like?

Khuner: He was a very friendly, and very sympathetic, and very interested person. He was always interested in what we were doing. He was interested in every detail of our surroundings. I always say that [as] Adoras said, he doesn't want to discuss the price of milk with Schoenberg. But Schoenberg was interested in the price of milk, or the rise of the price of milk. Or how do I reach an intersection in North Hollywood.

Crawford: Did he paint at the time?

Khuner: Not at that time, any more, as far as I know. He never painted in my presence. I think his painting period was gone by then.

Crawford: His biographers make the conclusion that he painted because his music was not accepted.

Khuner: There was no indication of that. But he never spoke about his painting. The paintings were always in his home activities, you know now they are all there, but at that time not all of them were there. I saw his paintings, some of them, around there.

Crawford: He had a reputation for being very superstitious.

Khuner: Extremely so, ja. Especially with figures--not so much words, I think. Schoenberg was superstitious with letters. You know, his name was Arnold, and his son's name is Ronald--the same letters.

Crawford: How about the number thirteen?

Khuner: That was Berg. But thirteen, I don't know. Berg was twenty-three.

Crawford: And then it also said that he was very proud of the twelve-tone method.

Khuner: He was a little proud. He had the priority. He discovered it. Well, of course he discovered it, because everything in music has two sources. The material, which is the sound; and the brain of the composer. The brain of the composer determines what you can make out of the elementary sounds. The sound is the overtones and the relation of intervals.

This is our raw material, and the composer sees what he can do with it. Music has developed as more and more composers discover what can be done with the sounds. And Schoenberg discovered what can be done with the twelve tones of our chromatic scale.

Crawford: Thomas Mann apparently wrote a novel about someone [who formulated that scale].

Khuner: That, ja, well, that's *Dr. Faustus*. I haven't read that. You know, frankly, I have all the works of Thomas Mann except this novel. I have to write to the publishers to get it. I never read it.

So, there was a Matthias Hauer, a composer in Vienna, who did also a similar thing. He said, "I want to use different combinations of intervals, all the mathematically possible permutations." In other words, he approached it from the mathematical standpoint. And Schoenberg protested that. Hauer said, "I was first to discover the possibility." But Schoenberg of course discovered it from the musical side, not from the mathematical side.

Crawford: I see. So they were totally different from one another.

Khuner: Ja.

Crawford: Schoenberg was quoted as saying that "the Kolisch was the best quartet I ever heard."

Khuner: Well, it's the same thing--there were quartets who played more polished. They neglected, they were not interested in the musical approach. It had to be in tune, it had to be homogenized, it had to be together, and so on. And anything that disturbed this

polished surface they eliminated. Musical considerations were less important than the polished surface. We were not interested in the polished surface. I mean, we did the best we could, but sometimes if you really concentrate on the musical realization of the composition, the polished surface suffers.

Crawford: The packaging.

Khuner: Ja.

Crawford: When you got together and did a piece, that, say, you were going to do for the first time, the Schoenberg Third Quartet, did you just light into it? Did you talk about it?

Khuner: Well, we didn't talk about it. Now, first of all, the first movement of the Schoenberg [Third] Quartet, is rather dry, [an] unappealing kind of music. The quality of the music--is of course the combination of the twelve tones and the way that Schoenberg was using it. So we were mostly concerned that we really played the right notes. And at that time it was not easy to find the intervals correctly. In the beginning we worked, concentrated very hard on the intonation, on the intervals. And then it had to be done very precise rhythmically, or rather in rhythmic monotony, which was difficult to achieve. Because the locations of the notes were difficult; doublestops, and jumps all over the fingerboard, which had to be practiced.

Crawford: But the score was written down.

Khuner: Ja, ja, of course. So we worked very hard on that. And originally, when we started out, it sounded a little frantic, because it was difficult. But I remember a performance when it went very smooth and very beautiful, like a simple Haydn quartet. I remember especially one performance in Prague--it was on a Sunday morning!--and really, the whole quartet sounded very easy, very spontaneous, very clean, and very nice. But it was a difficult quartet to start out in 1927.

Crawford: And then you had first rights to the Fourth, too?

Khuner: Then later on we played the Fourth, that was around 1936 or 1937.

Crawford: That was the one that was commissioned by Mrs. Coolidge? In '36?

Khuner: Or so.

Crawford: So that was a later work. How was that different?

Khuner: You mean the Fourth from the Third? It's a different piece, I don't know. Well, of course, there were a lot of similarities, same composer, same medium--

Crawford: More classical than the third?

Khuner: It is less classical; more, what you would say, romantic, but I hate to use that word. Especially the slow movement. The slow movement of the Fourth is a very rhapsodic piece, very imaginative, whereas the slow movement in the Third Quartet was a little neo-classical.

Crawford: What has been the performance history?

Khuner: I don't know what you mean.

Crawford: Well, for instance, [Berg's] *Lyric Suite* is done all the time in its revised form. How often are the string quartets played?

Khuner: I don't know. How often we did it, or the other quartets? I don't know anything about other quartets.

Crawford: I just wondered. Because I never hear them performed.

Khuner: Oh, they are not performed, no. They have no entertainment value. There are a lot of quartets here recently who played, who did the Third or Fourth Quartet--I didn't hear it--I don't know. Generally on the program there are other quartets that have more entertainment value, whether they are old, or new. And the Schoenberg quartets, they have no entertainment value.

Crawford: And they are very difficult.

Khuner: They are also difficult, yes.

Crawford: Schoenberg is often compared to Bach--as being the transition between two periods. Do you see any parallel?

Khuner: Well, I have to leave that to the music historians, to find out, to arrange, like on the music bookshelves, where the periods begin, where they start, all those things.

Crawford: How about--

Khuner: No, wait, listen. Bach--Bach, the patterns, the baroque patterns, were used by dozens and by scores of composers, all the baroque composers. And I have the impression that Bach knew all those patterns, he used them, like he used compositions by Vivaldi. And maybe he [Schoenberg] did that.

It's not that he [he sings the theme from the Violin/Oboe Concerto, in different keys, to demonstrate the random abstractness of patterns] A colleague of mine made--can we shut it off? (taping stops momentarily) I am not a musicologist, and it doesn't concern me.



Crawford: Let me ask you, going back to Schoenberg. He was a very spiritual person?

Khuner: Well, of course he was seeking. He was--all sorts--he was religious, like in the opera *Moses und Aaron*, like the oratorio *Jakobsleiter*. He was also interested in political developments, in the Jewish question. But that is not special, every intelligent person does that.

Crawford: So you wouldn't say he was especially religious.

Khuner: No! He is of course accused that he left the Jewish community and was baptized and became a protestant or a Catholic. That was the rule in Vienna, you had to do it; if you want to be at least somehow in the public eye, you had to do it. It was a very strict Catholic country, with an enormous amount of anti-Semitism. And also, he said if you want to, you can believe in any religion. Schoenberg said you can believe in communism as a religion.

Crawford: Did he feel it was advisable or was it necessary to have a strong personal belief?

Khuner: I don't know. He never talked to me about it. I know that he converted [for public show], and then later he converted back to Judaism.

Crawford: That was just before he wrote *Moses und Aaron*.

Khuner: I don't think so. I think it was later. Because earlier it had nothing to do with his religious beliefs, it was just a topic that interested him.

Crawford: Anything else?

Khuner: I don't know--

Crawford: Oh, tennis! You haven't talked about tennis. I know you played tennis with him.

Khuner: Ja, well, he was a tennis and ping pong player. And in 1929 when we were on the Dutch Coast we played soccer.

Crawford: Schoenberg used to come there?

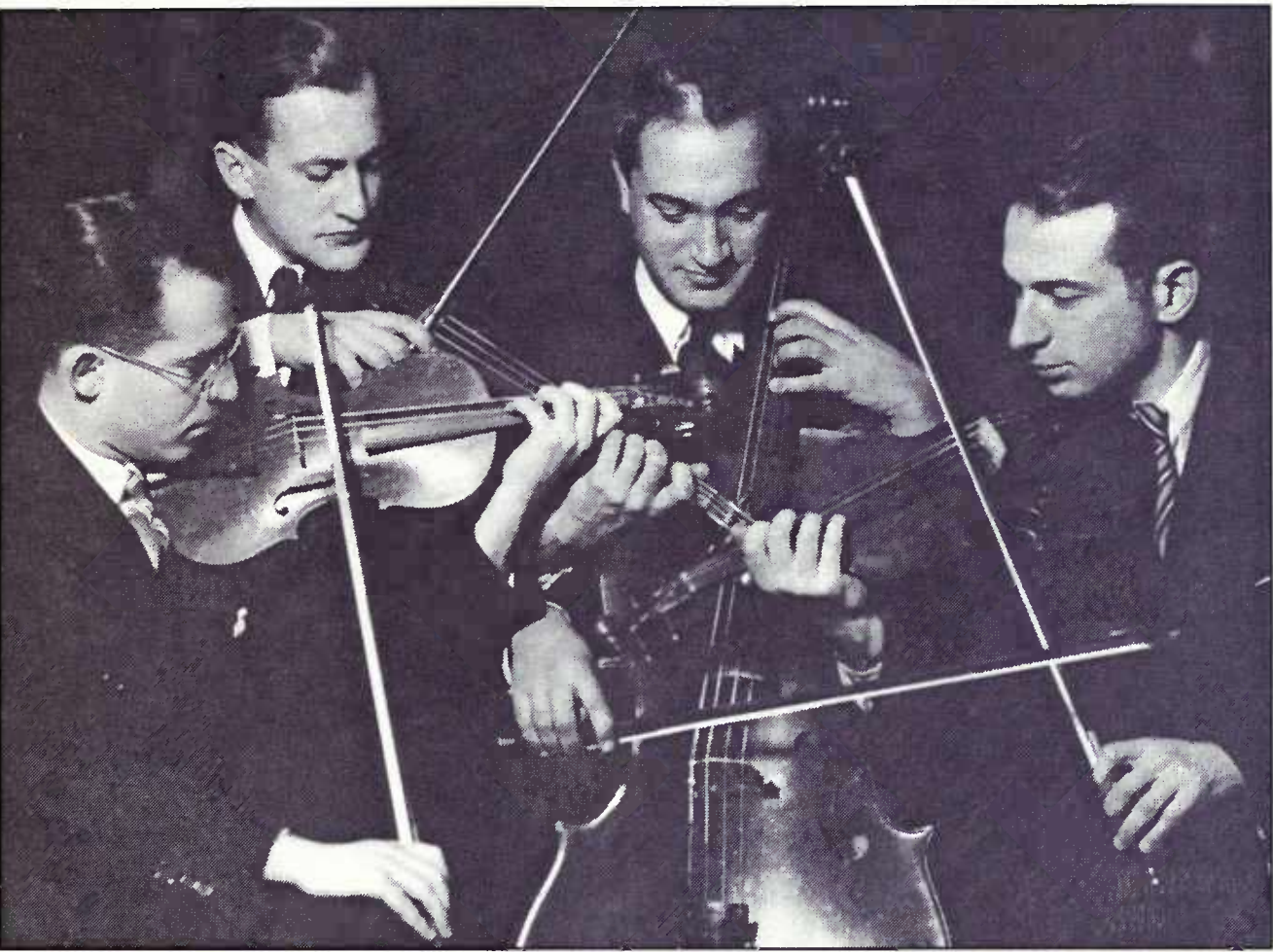
Khuner: Ja.

Crawford: What was that like?

Khuner: We were rehearsing. Schoenberg and his wife--he had no children at that time--were there. And every afternoon we went to the [beach].







The Kolisch Quartet, ca. 1929. From left: Felix Khuner, Eugen Lehner, Benar Heifetz, Rudolf Kolisch.

*Photograph by Schlosser Wenisch*



## II THE KOLISCH QUARTET: 1926-1937

[Interview 2: December 7, 1989]##

### Vienna in the Twenties

Crawford: In another interview we were talking about that group of young intellectuals in Vienna that were against the establishment, of which you were one. When did you first sense that you were going to take that anti-establishment position?

Khuner: Well, it happened in 1918, when the Austrian Republic was formed. We were, of course, very liberal, not to say communist, and we were very on the lookout for the Old Guard at that time, which we didn't like. So that was with politics; it had nothing do with music or with art. We were always on the lookout for the new things, and not to continue the old.

Crawford: Your thinking then extended to politics, too.

Khuner: That was with politics.

Crawford: And who were the people who were involved?

Khuner: Well, that was all very vague in general. We were always very suspicious, like Mr. McCarthy was suspicious of communism. We were suspicious of every conservative, old monarchists, you know? And then we were also suspicious of--the German nationalists between 1918 and 1933, [and the] ascending power of the Nazis.

Crawford: And what form did that take?

Khuner: Well, that was all very informal.

Crawford: You met in coffee houses, you talked with other students?

Khuner: Very little. As a teenager, no, I had no time for that. That was only meant for political groups; and the other Zionist groups--of course that was a little detached from Austrian politics. That was something else--No, I had no time for that; I had to go to school, I had to do my violin practicing, I had to play quartets, I had to go to concerts, I had to go to operas. On the weekend I would go

skiing, or swimming or hiking. In the evening we had the Zionist youth groups. So--

Crawford: So you didn't have time for politics per se. But you read?

Khuner: Well, of course I read a lot about music, and literature, and whatever was accessible to me. The libraries were very poor, in the Academy. We had very little worthwhile things. But I discovered [Heinrich] Schenker, and then I discovered the music of Schoenberg. And then, of course, there I was a rabid Wagnerian.

Crawford: Shaw said, "You can't love Wagner unless you are a revolutionary yourself." Is that true?

Khuner: At that time, not any more. No, that was twenty years before, around 1900. But by that time Wagner was very well established. He was still of course--people said that Wagner was too dull, and they couldn't sit through a five-hour opera. Like my German professor says, "You cannot sit through five hours of *Parsifal*," and I said, "But you can go through four volumes of the old medieval German epic!" That's what he wanted us to do, you know. He had a volume like that about *Parsifal* or *Wolfram von Eschenbach* that was standing there. That you want us to read! That takes five months to read! But five hours in the opera is too much for you!

Crawford: How about Schenker?

Khuner: Well, Schenker I discovered--I'll tell you how--I took violin lessons of a young violinist, Mr. Schiffer. Did I tell you that? Ja? Well, Schiffer was an absolute nobody! He was a young violinist, and he had a little string quartet; I played a couple of little performances with him. And it seems to me that he knew quite a lot about violin playing. I don't think that he was a very inspiring or inspired teacher, but he knew something about violin playing. And he was probably the first one who really told me how bad I was.

Crawford: He said you were bad!

Khuner: Ja. And I remember there was in one instance--I asked about holidays or vacations, and [he] said, "I'm not going to get a vacation, I have a book to study first. When I have studied that book, then my vacations will begin." That was Schenker's analysis of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, which probably you are not aware about. It's a very interesting book. That's where I heard the name of Schenker first. And then I found some of Schenker's books in the Academy library. *New Ideas and Fantasies*. Ja, *Neues Ideen und Fantasien*. And then I found the first book about harmony, and so on.

Crawford: So that was an influence for you.

Khuner: Ja.

Crawford: And was that of the Schoenberg school?

Khuner: Well, he was not an admirer of Schoenberg, because he was very conservative. Schoenberg admired him, and said he was a very fine [player]--unfortunately, he had a wall against contemporary music. And Schoenberg told me that was wrong, because all his ideas, and all his research, and all his discoveries apply just as much to new music as they apply to old music.

[tape break]

Crawford: Was Schoenberg attached to Karl Kraus' political philosophy?

Khuner: Oh, Ja, Schoenberg was an admirer--right. He told me once that he had a grudge against Kraus. Because when Schoenberg was a very young man he wrote a letter to Kraus. What it was, I don't know. And Kraus rebuffed him in some way or other. And Schoenberg was very hurt by that. And I said that's too bad because if Kraus would had been more understanding--I don't know what it was--they would have had a much better relationship, at least to the benefit of Schoenberg. But I don't know what the topic of this was.

Crawford: But you read Kraus's newsletter, his publication?

Khuner: Of course, yes. I had a complete *Fackel*, which was destroyed; my parents destroyed it before they left Vienna.

Crawford: Why?

Khuner: Oh, they were afraid. There was a whole shelf of *Fackel* there; if that could be discovered--I mean, that was just a waste of *Die Fackel*--Kraus died in 1936. It was still Austria. I had the complete, all the issues of *Die Fackel* up to his death. You know? Which I could sell now for half a million dollars.

Crawford: You surely could!

Khuner: Ja. But my parents, in 1938, before they left, they burned it.

### Joining the Kolisch Quartet

Crawford: You joined the Kolisch quartet in the twenties.

Khuner: That's correct, 1926. I was born in 1906, and I was nineteen.

Crawford: According to Mr. Lehner, it was a continuation of another quartet.



Khuner: There was a quartet that was called the Neues Wienerstreichquartett. And there was Kolisch, and Mr. Rothschild was the second violinist; Mr. Marcel Dick was the viola player, you know that. And Joachim Stutschewsky was the cellist. Now Rothschild was a local violinist in Vienna who was playing, little recitals, little jobs, I don't know--I met him later in New York. He was not much to brag about. Marcel Dick was a very intelligent, very musical viola player. He later became professor of composition at the University in Cleveland. Stutschewsky was the oldest of the group; he was also a free-lance cellist in Vienna, who later emigrated to Israel, and was also a very intelligent and musical and above-average musician, not a very good cellist. Not a very pleasant person.

Crawford: How so?

Khuner: Well, he was very self-centered, and nothing else mattered but himself. He said, "Why should I be polite to Mr. Schoenberg; I am just as good a cellist as Schoenberg is a composer!"

Crawford: Oh, I see! Ego problems!

Khuner: Ja! I don't know how that quartet was formed, I have no idea. But they had played already two or three seasons.

Crawford: When you came along.

Khuner: Ja. Then Mr. Rothschild didn't like it for some reason or other, there was some kind of personal [friction] I don't know anything about. And Kolisch went to Mr. Professor Egghardt, whose name you remember, who was my teacher and had also been Kolisch's teacher in his early years. And Kolisch went to him and says, "Can you recommend any of the young people that you have in your class who would be interested in my quartet?" And he described it. And Egghardt said, "That must be Felix Khuner--" He said, "Not an extremely good violinist, but interested in the music." And Kolisch phoned me, and I said, "Well, I don't play violin any more. I still play a little, I play in the Opera orchestra, substituting, and play a little chamber music at home with semi-professionals. But otherwise, I'm going to go to the University for mathematics and chemistry studies. I have no time to play quartets." So he said, "Come over, we'll talk it over anyhow." I told you that--and Schoenberg entered the room--

Crawford: Yes, you didn't know who it was!

Khuner: I didn't know who he was! And I said, "What has he to do with you? Who is that old man?" And he said, "Well, that's Mr. Schoenberg." I had never seen a picture of him before. Well, I said, "Has he any connection?" He said, "He's my brother-in-law, and of course, when we perform, when we rehearse, he comes and talks with us, and



so on." And I said, "Well in that case, of course I want to play with you!"

It was at the end of the school year. He said, "Can you rehearse?" and I said "No." I had arranged with my cousin to make a hiking tour through Switzerland, in the summer of '26. So, that's what we did. It was a very nice three or four weeks; we hiked through Switzerland, we went up some mountains, and swam in the lakes, and southern lakes, and so on, it was very nice. And then when we came back, Kolisch said, all right, let's practice a little. The other other two people of the quartet had already left for whatever they did during the summer. Marcel Dick played, I think, in some summer orchestra, Stutschewsky was out of town some place. So we went through the repertoire, just the two violins of us. And that was in Schoenberg's house in Mödling. And Schoenberg had a piano and a harmonium, and we there played Wagner operas, and *Tristan*, and *Walküre*, for piano and harmonium!

Crawford: Where is Mödling?

Khuner: Mödling, it's a suburb of Vienna. It's about, I would say, twenty miles south of Vienna.

Crawford: And so you spent the summer, or part of the summer--

Khuner: No, no, I went there for a day, twice a week.

Crawford: And was Schoenberg there?

Khuner: No, no. Nobody was there except Kolisch.

Crawford: And your repertoire was mixed, then?

Khuner: Ja. Well, the classical repertoire, of course, I was acquainted with; I'd played a lot of it, I'd heard a lot of it. But the other quartets I didn't know. We played the first and second Bartok quartets, and the first two Schoenberg quartets, and by Toch, and by Szymorowsky, and also the first things of Webern. But they were the string quartets they played.

Crawford: So then you began the season, the regular season--

Khuner: Ja, but before that, there was one rehearsal that we had with the other two. Of course, they wanted to know who is that young fellow, nineteen-year-old fellow, who wants to play in our quartet. So we played, and they said, "Well, he's a good sight-reader, he'll do--Kolisch, you practice with him! You, you study the repertoire, and then we can have the season."

Crawford: Now, what were the ages of the others? Rothschild, and Dick?

- Khuner: Well, Kolisch was ten years older than I, Rothschild must have been--I don't know. Dick was a little younger then. Stutschewsky was about six or seven years older than Kolisch.
- Crawford: Spell that name for me, would you?
- Khuner: Stutschewsky? (spells it) Transliteration of the Russian.
- Crawford: And then, so then you began this '26 season with the quartet.
- Khuner: Ja, well, of course, I said, "I have to go to school, so I can't play." They said, "Well, we have only a few concerts, in October, and then we have a few concerts in February. So you go." So, I registered at the University, and went to a few classes of mathematics in September and October, and did a little rehearsing to brush up the quartets we played. And then we had the tour--just a few concerts, I think--where was it? We played also in Berlin, I remember that. We played in Prague. We played a few concerts in Switzerland, that Stutschewsky arranged, because he knew people. We had some concerts in the north of Italy. But I don't know how that was arranged, because I had no idea. They just told me "We play there, we play this."
- Crawford: Had you been in those other places?
- Khuner: No. No.
- Crawford: You had been in Switzerland?
- Khuner: I had been in Czechoslovakia visiting my mother's family, but I'd never been in Germany, Berlin was quite new to me. Quite impressive, of course. Berlin! Well! And I had never been in Italy. But I had been in Switzerland, south Switzerland.
- Crawford: Did you like Berlin?
- Khuner: Well, I cannot say. I was very much impressed. First of all, the subway. We had no subway in Vienna. And the signals, the traffic lights, green and red traffic lights! There was none in Vienna! I mean, to go to the Leipzigstrasse, and see the whole street, a traffic light at every corner, every intersection! Fabulous!
- Crawford: That's interesting. Interesting that that made such an impression on you.
- Khuner: Ja, then--wait a minute--I really don't know--we had another tour in Europe. By the time I came back, and went back to the school, everything was gone, I couldn't keep up with the classes. So, I had to give it up.
- Crawford: So you gave up the University? You didn't continue?

Khuner: Well, I gave it up for the time being, see, and the first two terms, semesters, I didn't do anything. I was a drop-out! Yes!

Crawford: Well, in a way! You had once a hundred and twenty concerts. Did you usually have that many?

Khuner: That was later, ja, ja.

Crawford: In 1927, yes.

Khuner: Ja.

Crawford: But, were there a great many concerts that you did?

Khuner: In the first year? Not more than about thirty. Ja, those tours-- oh, we had some concerts in Vienna, and so on, ja.

Crawford: Also. And were you playing all classical repertoire that year?

Khuner: Oh, ja! In those concerts in Switzerland we didn't play anything that was contemporary. We played all Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert quartets.

[Portion of tape missing] We were in Mantua, and Mantua is a little, you know, a little city in Italy, and it was a delightful day. It's a wonderful little city. We were walking around, absolutely one delight after another, every street! Then we had a little hotel room, there was a little balcony out there, and Lehner and I, we took a chair out and we played chess all afternoon. And I remember that afternoon. So if you ask, what did you do, that's what we did.

Crawford: Did you notice any difference with Italian audiences?

Khuner: No. No. They liked the slow movement of the Dvorak F Major Quartet best. [sings the theme] That always brought down the house! We played once Casella, in Milano; it was a great thing. And they hissed, they didn't want it! They said, Beethoven! Beethoven! Beethoven! No Casella! [Alfred Casella, 1883-1947] No, they didn't like the Italian music, I mean the contemporary, like Malipiero and Casella, and Alfano.

I would say that the best performances were played when we knew it was totally lost. Totally unwanted. I remember once we played the *Lyric Suite* in a private concert in Paris, and we knew it would be totally lost on the audience. We just did it because the hostess for some reason wanted it. It was the best performance we ever played! It was totally lost on everybody.

Crawford: Why? Maybe because you weren't worried.

Khuner: What? No! It was a performance that would have been acclaimed by every knowledgeable listener. But not by that audience.

Crawford: How did you feel about that?

Khuner: Didn't care.

Crawford: You didn't care that you didn't record it?

Khuner: I never cared about it. No. The only thing is, are we going to get re-engaged? Because when we played in different places in Italy, we played in Mantua and Padua, and in Ascona, and in Rome, and Florence. So we would take a nice tour, two weeks. Or in Holland, or in England. Ja. We played in Scotland every year, we had to play in Aberdeen, and Edinburgh, and in Inverness. And in Glasgow [and] in Aberdeen we played--In Elgin, way up in the north. But the thing is this, we had to have all those cities. Otherwise it would be expensive to go there.

Crawford: So, you wondered--

Khuner: We wondered, are we going to be engaged again?

Crawford: And did you ever fail to be re-engaged because they said, "We don't like your approach?"

Khuner: We don't know. How could we know? For example, sometimes we asked [the representative] Mr. Bechert, "We were so successful, let's say, in Elgin last year, why couldn't we--" He said, "Well, they couldn't fit it in their time schedule." Say you could play only Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday that week, and the hall was already taken. It would happen. It happens here too. In the opera. Why do we get this singer, why don't we get a better one? It was not available for that day.

Crawford: But generally you were re-engaged, because you were kept pretty busy.

Khuner: No, we were not kept very busy. We could have played many more concerts if we would have had them.

Crawford: You could?

Khuner: Oh, ja. Not that I would have been extremely happy, because I enjoyed free days! Really.

Crawford: You liked to have the free days.

Khuner: Well, sure! Say, you are in Florence, you would like to spend two days, but you can't, you have to leave tomorrow morning to play in Spezia.

Crawford: You traveled everywhere by train, I'm sure, in those times?

Khuner: Oh, ja, no planes, except a very few times. In fact, we took a plane once from [somewhere] in Poland, and I took a plane once from Strasbourg to Czechoslovakia, because we would travel over Germany, not go through Germany. Those were the only two times I went by plane. Those were big planes at that time, twenty passengers! Ja. Most airplanes had only six, eight or ten.

Benar Heifetz and Jenő Lehnér Join the Quartet

Crawford: Yes. So when did you start with Berg and Schoenberg, and so on?

Khuner: That was part of our, of at least my interest, you know? We played that in Vienna itself. We had, I remember, one recital where Schoenberg was present; we played the first two string quartets. And the singer, Maria Freund, sang the opus fifteen.

Crawford: And he was there.

Khuner: Ja.

Crawford: Was the work well received? Was that a premiere?

Khuner: That was not a premiere, no, no. No, no. That was already played before, by the Rosé Quartet.

Crawford: Did you get large audiences?

Khuner: No, that was a very small audience, the smallest hall, yes.

Crawford: Was his Society for Private Musical Performances still going on?

Khuner: I was never participating. My aunt was there. Did I tell you that?

Crawford: No.

Khuner: That was actually my first introduction to Schoenberg. My aunt, the piano teacher, told me, when I young, I was about twelve, thirteen, fourteen, that she was a member of this thing. And she played some of the very, very avant garde music, by Debussy and Ravel, for the piano. And I was very interested in that. Because that was performed a lot at the Verein [für Musikalische Privataufführungen, 1918].

Crawford: And so she was involved, but you weren't really involved with it?

Khuner: I was not. I was too young.



Crawford: I think that was begun in 1918, as I remember. Was there also a Society for Creative Composers? [Union of Creative Musicians]

Khuner: Not that I know of.

Crawford: I think Zemlinsky was responsible for founding that--

Khuner: Well, undoubtedly they performed a lot of the music of living composers, and local composers. Naturally. But the emphasis was on performing. I don't think they in any way sponsored or encouraged composers, except by performing them.

Crawford: Well, that's one way.

Khuner: Well, that's of course a very important way. But that's not like here, where present day sponsors, they pay the composer to compose and don't care about the performance.

Crawford: So then, Jeno Lehner?

Khuner: Then, at the end of the first season, after these two short trips and a few concerts in Vienna, Berg had finished his *Lyric Suite*, and we were faced with the important thing, to rehearse it. And there were only two violins in the quartet! So we met Mr. Benar Heifetz, who was also a so-called free-lance cellist, in Vienna. Ja? He couldn't get a job in any orchestra. The only income he had was playing professionally with amateurs, who appreciated a good cellist in their quartet.

Crawford: He was a Russian, was he not?

Khuner: He was also Russian. He was an immigrant, an emigrant from Russia. So we had Heifetz, Heifetz was interested. And Kolisch played two piano trio recitals with him. I was not involved. And he thought that he was a very fine cellist. But we couldn't play quartets, we had no viola player. And all the local viola players were out of the running.

Crawford: Because you'd lost your viola player?

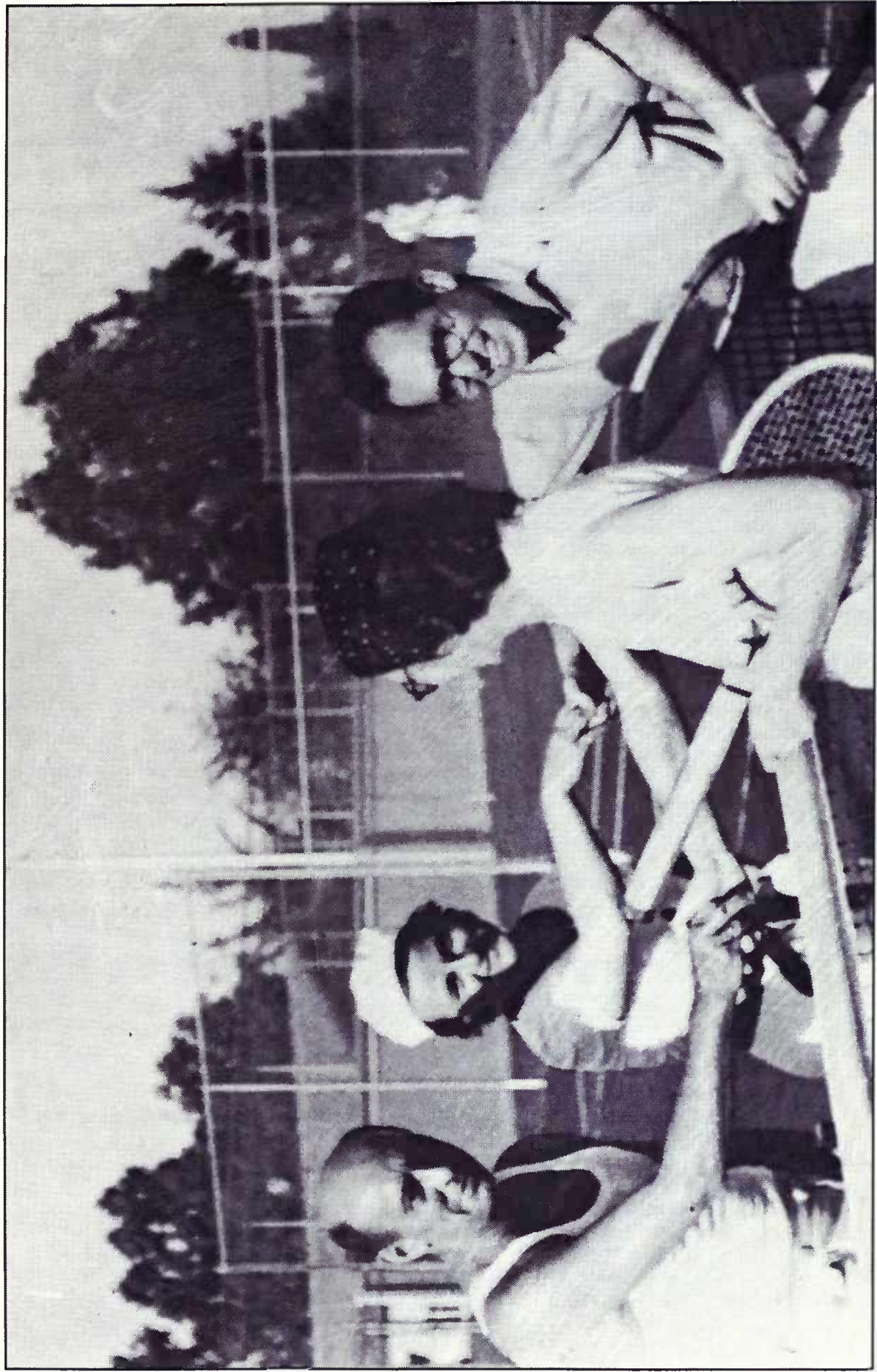
Khuner: Ja. Marcel Dick left. He said he couldn't continue because he had to stick to his orchestra job. He couldn't rehearse in the summer because he was in a spa orchestra somewhere in the Austrian countryside. Ischl.

Crawford: Very lucrative, I suppose.

Khuner: Well, not lucrative. It was very bad money, but it was a living, modestly.

Crawford: So then?





Arnold Schoenberg and Lucca Lehner shaking hands with Gertrud Schoenberg and Felix Khuner. Los Angeles, summer, 1937.  
*Photo courtesy of Schoenberg Institute*



Khuner: Well, I could play, because I was supported by my parents at that time.

Crawford: So your revenues by no means provided a living.

Khuner: Oh, no! At that time, not at all! And what I earned in these two seasons was just to buy myself a few books!

Crawford: Music books?

Khuner: Not necessarily, no! Then there was a Mr. [Sándor] Jemnitz, a composer in Budapest, whose, I think, string trios or string quartets we had performed in our first season, and who was interested. And Kolisch must have mentioned that we are on the lookout for a viola player. So he said, "Well, there's a young viola player in Budapest who is not exactly a great viola player, but he's interested in music, and very intelligent, and so on." So he sent Jenő Lehner to Vienna and we rehearsed with him a couple of times. And we saw that he was--the right material!

Crawford: So, really, you all of a sudden had a much younger group.

Khuner: So the group was much younger, ja. Heifetz was younger than Stutschewsky, Lehner was younger than Dick. And we had a very, very young quartet. The total age was less than one hundred years. And Lehner also could come to Vienna because he also had support, he had a patron, some aristocrat friend of his parents, who was very much interested in furthering his talents; and when she heard he would become a member of an uncommon, internationally renowned string quartet--hopefully!--she said, well, she would support him, until he--

Crawford: Was the Kolisch Quartet then renowned?

Khuner: No! Not at all, that was all a calculation. But Lehner was very enthusiastic, and of course Kolisch was there, and Heifetz had nothing to lose. I had nothing to lose; I said, "I'll do it."

### The Repertoire in the Twenties

Crawford: According to Lehner, the *Lyric Suite* made your fame.

Khuner: I'll tell you about that now. The *Lyric Suite* was not printed yet, it was only in the proofs. So we started working on it. It was quite difficult. Not only this; also the Third Quartet by Schoenberg, which had just been completed. Now, the question came: we were all there; nobody really had serious financial support. We had no sponsors. So how do we go on? Now, there was a Mrs.--what was her name? I forgot her name.--a singer, who was interested in



singing contemporary music. She commissioned *The Wine* by Berg. You know the aria of this opera? *The Wine*? *Der Wein*. You know? Drinking.

Crawford: No, I don't.

Khuner: You don't know? Well, it's one of the few compositions of Berg. She commissioned it. And in order to appease his wife, so she would look away from his affairs, [her husband] founded a concert and opera agency, international, I don't know, called "Ithma." It was specially funded with his money. He was a very wealthy industrialist. He wanted to please his wife, so he founded that in order to promote her career. And because she sang the Second Quartet by Schoenberg, except the fast movement, we studied it with her. To launch her career in foreign countries. She would come with us, she would sing, we had concerts, and the Ithma sponsored it. On a very modest scale.

And Schoenberg and Berg also said, "Now we have a young quartet." In contrast to the old string quartet with Rothschild and Stutschewsky, who were always, so to say, a little dragging; there were two young players, a young second violinist, a young viola player, and a cellist who was also younger than Stutschewsky. They said, "We give you the exclusive rights for one year of those two pieces." The Third Quartet by Schoenberg and the *Lyric Suite*.

Now, through the Ithma we got an engagement at the music festival in Frankfurt, that was the big German music festival; and the music festival in Baden Baden. And there we were very successful with the *Lyric Suite*. We had to repeat it at request. And so we got known through the commercial circuit of string quartets.

Crawford: Were the German audiences more open to contemporary music?

Khuner: Well, in Baden Baden, that was an audience for contemporary music. That was especially--like later on in Donaueschingen.

Crawford: That it was a festival for contemporary music, so people came because they wanted to hear it?

Khuner: Exactly.

Well, of course we tried to play Berg, Webern and Schoenberg as much as we could. But there were other composers who also hoped that we would play their quartets.

Crawford: Didn't you have exclusive rights to one of Webern's works? A string trio he wrote?

Khuner: No. Well, Webern knew that the string trio wouldn't be played a lot. Although it was performed here at the university once, with students. Miserable performance.

Crawford: His music was banned in 1933?

Khuner: I'm sure it was--I'm sure it was, yes, but I don't know--  
*Kulturbolshevism*.

Crawford: Did that take the form of a statute prohibiting performance?

Khuner: I don't think so. It was just that performers made all the efforts to toe the line. Not to perform contemporary music.

Crawford: Was Berg involved in rehearsals of the *Lyric Suite*?

Khuner: Oh, ja, Very much. Oh, yes.

Crawford: What are your impressions of him?

Khuner: I don't know! He was the composer of a very important piece of music. I was on very friendly terms with him, but I was a very young man! Berg was a towering figure of contemporary music, and I was a little fiddler who was privileged to play his music!

Crawford: So you don't really have any personal recollections?

Khuner: Oh, I have a lot of recollections of him as a person! But I cannot describe it! Do you know the story of the Jewish tailor who went to Rome to see the Pope? And he comes back, and people say, "Well, you saw the Pope?" "Yes!" "You mean, you went into the same room with the Pope?" "Yes, sure! sure!" "Well, how far away were you?" "Well, about five, six feet, he was standing right in front of me." "Well, what kind a person was he?" "Well, I would say, number five, short!" [Laughter.]

You don't know that story? Yes, you know that story!

Crawford: No. Now I do.

Khuner: Well, to the tailor, that was important, number five, short.

Crawford: What is the story about the *Lyric Suite*; it's supposed code for the name of one of Berg's amours.

Khuner: No, there was only [her] daughter. Her name was Do. And there is in the second movement a repeated C, which is Do in Italian. That is supposed to be the daughter of the girlfriend.

Crawford: Let's talk a little bit more about repertoire now. The Fourth Quartet of Schoenberg was commissioned by Mrs. Coolidge, is that right?

- Khuner: I believe so, ja. Well, I think she paid for the concert, for the first performance, which was, I think, at UCLA. I believe so, ja.
- Crawford: That was the premiere?
- Khuner: That was the first performance, ja. The way I remember it.
- Crawford: And how was that received? That was 1937.
- Khuner: I didn't pay any attention to that.
- Crawford: You never read the criticisms?
- Khuner: Occasionally, ja. I collected them and if it seemed that, maybe, some of those things you cut out and put in next year's brochure. As I always say, you get a review and it says, "A first class ensemble!" But the review says, "A first class ensemble they are not!" But the "they are not" you leave out.
- Crawford: Quote unquote!
- Khuner: Ja!
- Crawford: Well, but, on the other hand a good review, sad to say, might mean a re-engagement.
- Khuner: Not necessarily. The re-engagement is placed on the impression we make. But the review in the brochure influences the people who don't know us. They go by the lies that we put in the brochure. Like Mr. Norrington's Beethoven symphonies will be bought not because people like it but because they hear about it, they read it in the music magazines.
- Crawford: Is that true?
- Khuner: Of course. And since few people will read Mr. Lippman's review in the Sunday paper, and many will read the reviews of the great music magazines, a lot of people will buy the recordings. I don't have it. I gave it to Edgar Braun. Well, it's a scathing review. It said that the only word that really described those recordings is "scandalous." With all due respect of the knowledgeability of some of the critics, they are influenced to please the people who pay them money. If a guest conductor is very widely acclaimed somewhere else and he asks a high fee, and you go to those people and say, can we have the \$20,000 to get him, he must be good. You just cannot help it.
- Crawford: So that it's a business like any--
- Khuner: All the time.



Crawford: Did you have first, exclusive rights to any of the Bartok works?

Khuner: No.

Crawford: But you did the premiere of the Fifth Quartet?

Khuner: We did the premiere of the Third and the Fifth. The Third was in Hamburg and the Fifth was in--and the Sixth, too, the Sixth was in New York--and the Fifth was--I don't know.

Crawford: And then Webern also, you played his string works? [Five Movements for String Quartet] Everybody makes much of the fact that you memorized the music in these concerts.

Khuner: Well, I told you how it happened. We happened to be in Berlin, that was in 1927 or 1928, I don't know--and we rehearsed the last movement of Beethoven opus 59, number three, for quartet exercises. We could play it by heart, just because of repetition. We played it by heart for Schoenberg; he was very excited. He said, "That's the way to play quartets." So we did it!

Crawford: So after that, you did it. Did that tax you?

Khuner: What?

Crawford: Did it tax you to learn all the music by heart?

Khuner: No, we didn't learn all the music. We had only one quartet the first season, only that Beethoven quartet. Ja? But during that season we played a lot of the *Death and the Maiden* by Schubert. So we found out that we almost knew that by heart, by just playing it so many times. So we said, "Next time we'll play that [by memory] too."

Crawford: What are the mechanics of that?

Khuner: To learn by heart? Well, you have to know the music, that's all there is to it.

Crawford: Know the music. But does it free you, then, when in performance?

Khuner: Oh, enormously! Of course!

Crawford: So that the performance is better.

Khuner: First of all, I knew my part well. I could improvise on my own part. Could experiment with a different fingering, and so. Lots of people don't; they play what's written in the music. And I knew the whole quartet much better. I knew every nuance of every other instrument.

- Crawford: Yes. Mr. Lehner said so, he said that you could cover for the other instruments.
- Khuner: Ja, if somebody missed a note, I could play it, sure, naturally! I can do it in every opera.
- Crawford: Because you're listening to it--
- Khuner: Because I hear what's going on.
- Crawford: So if somebody loses their way, you can pick it up?
- Khuner: No. People play with the exclusion of their ear. They are taught from the beginning to play with their fingers.
- Crawford: And their eyes.
- Khuner: First comes the ear, then come the fingers. Ja? As I always say, I write down for you CAT, and say, "What is that?" They say, "Well, the C I do by putting my tongue up there, and the A I say by doing this, and T is--CAT? Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, that's it!" No, you don't speak like that. You know the sound, and how you produce it before you announce it.
- Crawford: Mr. Lehner said that you played in cold blood, no mistakes.
- Khuner: Very few mistakes. No reason to make a mistake. Did you ever go in your bathroom instead of your bedroom? I'm always asked about those things--things that you want to learn you can learn. People don't want to learn. Maybe I'm specially talented for learning, or all my colleagues couldn't learn.
- Crawford: But isn't it true of musicianship that you either have a very, very refined ear or you don't?
- Khuner: People generally become performing musicians because they have good fingers!
- Crawford: That's what I'm saying.
- Khuner: Ja.
- Crawford: Not everybody has a good ear, a great ear.
- Khuner: Well, I believe the ear can be trained. If you want to have something to do with music, train your ear. Mostly the ears of players are good enough to play the instrument. If you are completely at bay about rhythm or pitch or quality of sound, or distinguishing dynamics, you won't get any place. I mean, in a couple of years, you quit right there, like most of my pupils do!

Crawford: What was the significance of the quartet, musically, in the 1920s, say?

Khuner: Well, it was that we played differently than the run-of-the-mill quartets. At that time.

Crawford: Was anybody else specializing in the Second Viennese School?

Khuner: No, no. Well, the Rosé Quartet was interested in Schoenberg, because when the Rosé Quartet played the first Schoenberg quartets and the Sextet, Schoenberg was a very young man. And Rosé was a decent musician, a good violin player. The quartet was a good quartet, as far as I remember, and they played it. I think Rosé made them play it. It was against Mr. Fischer and Mr. Rugiska.

I have a little quotation that I found in the *Reader's Digest*. It says, "If you call on a thoroughbred he gives you all the speed, strength of heart, and sinew in him. If you call on a jackass, he kicks." I see it in my pupils. I have some pupils, a right number, who really work, and try and try. And some other ones who when you ask them to do something say, "Oh, what for? I don't think I can." Jackasses!

Now, for instance, these two members of the Rosé Quartet are the ones who kicked about everything. But Rosé was not, Rosé was a thoroughbred.

Crawford: What was the meaning of *Wozzeck* to you--to that generation?

Khuner: Well, you see, I knew *Wozzeck*, I knew Büchner, ja?

Crawford: The playwright.

Khuner: The playwright. I knew Büchner very well, because I was, so to say, specializing in German romantic literature. And Büchner was a real Communist. Büchner was one of those that we admired. So I knew the play. And then when I heard that Berg had composed an opera, I was very interested. And I heard the performance in Vienna. I think it was a bad performance.

Crawford: By the Staatsoper?

Khuner: By the Staatsoper, yes.

Crawford: And what was the reaction?

Khuner: Well, I don't--what do you mean by reaction? You think that I should say, "Oh, it's just as beautiful as *Butterfly*?" Oh, no.

Crawford: No! But more provocative!

Khuner: Well, of course! It was that thing that we looked up to, that we admired, and that we studied.

Crawford: But not by the general population.

Khuner: Of course not! No. When we played *Wozzeck* here, I remember afterwards I was walking up to my car, and a group of opera goers saw me with my violin and said, "Did you play the opera?" I said, "Yes." They said, "Do you like this stuff that you play?" And I said, "Yes I do!" They said, "[Does] all the orchestra?" I said, "No, only I!"

That was the first time we played *Wozzeck* here [1960].

Crawford: Mr. Adler had wanted to do *Wozzeck* for years, and [Robert Watt] Miller said no.

Khuner: Of course.

Crawford: Like the *Lulu*.

Khuner: Ja. Much more than *Lulu*! *Wozzeck* is much simpler than *Lulu*. It's a much simpler piece than *Lulu*. According to Jonathan, *Lulu* is a much finer work, but I prefer *Wozzeck*!

Crawford: So, really, the Kolisch was the standout in terms of a balanced repertoire, and trying the challenging new works.

Khuner: Ja. But of course we played the old repertoire also, slightly different. First of all, we played in the Beethoven quartets the real tempi. In Europe, especially in Vienna, where a lot of amateur music was going on, the amateur musicians played everything slow in the fast movement and fast in the slow movement. Everything was equalized, no character. Just play, try to get the notes! So when we played in different tempo than the amateurs, they said, "Well, that's wrong, we play it differently."

There was this incident in Paris when we played opus ninety-five of Beethoven. That the piano teacher in the balcony shouted, "Tout est trop vite!" Everything is too fast. Very loud, after the performance! There was some applause, and when the applause died down, he shouted, "Tout est trop vite!"

Crawford: C'est trop vite!

Khuner: Ja.

Crawford: How did the critics respond to what you were trying to do?

Khuner: I don't know.

Crawford: You don't--you didn't care?

Khuner: I don't care. No. Sometimes they were a little knowledgeable, sometimes stupid, sometimes non-descript--who cares? The only thing that we were interested in was, can you take an excerpt and put it in your next brochure. Like everybody else did. It doesn't make any sense. It's silly.

#### Composers and the Quartet

Crawford: Tell me now more about the participation of the composers with the Quartet in the 1920s.

Khuner: I would say, they always said, "An excellent string quartet they are not," but the "they are not" you leave out!

Crawford: What was the extent of Schoenberg, and Berg, and all the composers' involvement with you, with the quartet?

Khuner: Well, Berg and Schoenberg were, of course, friends. There was an almost continuous correspondence. Not very frequently, but every few months we would hear from them. If we didn't hear from them, Kolisch wrote letters. Sometimes months went by and we didn't know what they were doing.

Crawford: But did they come in to rehearsals?

Khuner: Whenever possible. When we were in Vienna, Schoenberg would be there wherever we were. When we, in 1931, spent the summer in Holland, Schoenberg was there, also on vacation. I told you.

Crawford: The entire summer?

Khuner: Yes.

Crawford: What was he like as a personality?

Khuner: Well, I don't know, actually. He's one of my dearest friends, so I cannot tell. I cannot tell. Everybody complained that he was, I don't know--

#### Thoughts About Audiences

Crawford: Let me go back and ask you to amplify some questions. First, what was the musical impact of the quartet.

Khuner: The influence, the impact of the Kolisch Quartet was small on a small segment of the consuming public. We never had the



engagements, continuing engagements of the big societies in whatever it was, in Mannheim, or Frankfurt, or Köln [Cologne]. Occasionally we had it. But [usually] we didn't. Because there were other quartets who specialized in Borodin and Smetana, and were much more successful.

Crawford: Because the music was more accessible.

Khuner: Ja. Ja.

Crawford: Which ones?

Khuner: Oh, the Dresdener Quartet, and the Guarneri Quartet, and maybe also the Rosé Quartet. And they played much smoother. They eliminated everything of interest in the performance in order to get the most pleasant performance, the most even performance, the most uncontroversial performance. I always give as an example the following thing: When we played in the Pops season with Mr. Fiedler, we would play a waltz or a polka, and he encouraged the people to clap. They clapped very happily. And he made a little *ritenuto*; their faces fell, they didn't know what happened. Generally all this is, as long as it goes smooth, absolutely nothing happens, it's beautiful. If something interesting musical happens, they are disturbed.

It's true generally, everywhere, with practically every audience. With few exceptions. And when I judge a performer, most of the performers emphasize the ordinary, the things that you know anyhow. The *ritenuto* at the end, the accent on the tonic. Everybody expects it in that way. Anything that is interesting is eliminated, or played down.

Crawford: But this was not true of the Kolisch Quartet?

Khuner: We did the opposite. We emphasized the interesting things, the ones that the music really is about. Not the packaging. Every music has packaging and the stuff that's inside the package. And what's inside the package is the interesting thing. The packaging is necessary, it makes the piece. But as I said before, people play the packaging and forget the contents.

Crawford: And this approach you all agreed on.

Khuner: That you have to have all the time, even in a little Haydn minuet.

Crawford: Is there a string quartet like that today?

Khuner: I don't know, I don't listen to them. They are all very good; as long as I don't listen to them, they are very good. The Guarneri, I had one experience; that was sufficient for me. One of my friends in San Francisco, with whom I play occasionally, not now, any more, because she's very sick--she says, "I would like to play



a Dvorak quartet." I say, "All right, I don't know it, but we'll play it." So I was there about half an hour before we were supposed to play, and she says, "Well, we play the Dvorak quartet, I have a recording of it with the Guarneri quartet. I also have a score." So I said, "Well, let me [go] through it. Since I don't know the quartet, I might get acquainted with it." So she gave me the score, and I listened to the recording. The same thing. Everything that was interesting was not audible. Every important change of tempo, and change of character was not there. The notes were all there.

Crawford: Is that because they don't know, or because they--

Khuner: Because they don't know. I know that Mr. Toth is a fabulous manager by himself. A very good violinist, has a beautiful tone, and a very nice right hand.

Crawford: But for that reason, you didn't attract large audiences, is what you're saying? Because your playing was controversial?

Khuner: Well, the audiences that we attracted were prefabricated; those were subscribers to a series. When we played in Frankfurt, the museum concerts had eight chamber concerts in each season. And the "Societa del quartetto" in Milano had two thousand people five times, or six times, or eight times a year. They were not our audience. The question is, are you successful so they want to re-engage you?

Crawford: But my point is, you didn't change your playing to get re-engaged.

Khuner: No, no, oh no, no, no, no, no, no (several no's!) !!! Thorough contempt for the audiences! I had thorough contempt--not individually, but for the audience in general.

Crawford: But they did re-engage you?

Khuner: Sometimes they did. For what reason I don't know, I didn't ask them. We always used [to] say, when did we play here for the last time? Today! It might be that one of the members of the board of directors of some organization got the idea of what we were playing and insisted that we might be re-engaged. Ja? Sometimes it was the other way around. They had a free date that we could manage, and they couldn't get anybody else in. That had to do with our managers.

### Performance Styles

Crawford: Yes, I'm sure that's true. What was Kolisch like, himself?

Khuner: Well, Kolisch was a very difficult person. He was completely oblivious of his surrounding. He was completely introspective, although it seemed to be that he was friendly, very well mannered, very considerate, never a harsh word to anybody under any circumstances.

Crawford: But he was detached.

Khuner: He was completely detached.

Crawford: When you rehearsed, what was the mechanics of your rehearsing?

Khuner: Well, it changed from the early [days]--we started out conventionally. We played through a piece and said, "A little faster here, a little slower here, play together, remember I have to--" like all the quartets rehearse. Later on when we played by heart, everybody had to know the piece before we started rehearsing. That was no great shakes.

But we played very much in detail. When we played with other people, quintets, sextets, for instance, the Schoenberg sextet, or Mozart quintets, with Mr. Primrose, or--what else did we play?-- piano quartets, Schumann Piano Quintet, Brahms piano quintets, [we played] with nothing but--guests! guests! That's when the jackasses came in!

Crawford: They would say, "Not like that."

Khuner: "No, no, no, no, we don't want to do that."

Crawford: What happened?

Khuner: Well, you make the best you can. Afterwards we had to play. We had to play the Schumann Quintet in Columbus, Ohio, with Mr. Hirsch, who became quite a well-known pianist. It was the same thing. We tried to do something--impossible! Impossible.

Crawford: So they didn't play up to your level.

Khuner: No. They were not interested. And the reason was mainly that it required lots of time and attention, [and] concentration to work like that. Oh, I have that with my pupils. But again, the thoroughbreds of my pupils accept that. The jackasses quit. I have the same thing all the time. I have an elderly lady. She is very much handicapped, mentally, because I think she has Alzheimer's disease, beginning Alzheimer's disease--I might be wrong, I'm not a doctor--because she has a very poor memory. Her fingers don't really work, although she has played viola. But when I come and say, "Now we play this piece by Vivaldi, or whatever," note by note and explain it to her, what to do mechanically, what to do about the sound, rhythmically, and so on, she works, and works, and works like a thoroughbred.

Crawford: That's amazing.

Khuner: Ja, but that's what you have to do if you really want to get everything out of a piece that you want to do. I remember we played once the G minor Quartet of Mozart, but with Primrose, who was a great viola player. You know, [sings the opening theme]. Which should be very a austere kind music.

Crawford: Yes.

Khuner: It is never played like that, it's played schmaltzy, and that's why it's so popular with amateurs, ja? So we rehearsed it, and Kolisch played it that way because the first violin plays it, and then the viola plays it. And Primrose was very interested, he said, "Oh, ja! oh, ja" [imitates Primrose, singing the theme], in other words, it's Mozart-Kolisch. Answered Kolisch, "No, it's Mozart! Ja?" This is the kind of thing you cannot--you have to play it--So he seemed to be very cooperative, and did it. And came the performance, [sings very schmaltzy!] and ruined everything! Jackasses!

Crawford: He seemed to understand.

Khuner: Ja.

Crawford: But he didn't translate that into his performance.

Khuner: Oh, I don't know whether he seemed--he wanted to be polite, with a little dig. But he was a businessman. So since he was engaged by the New Friends of Music in New York, we played all the Mozart quintets with him.

Crawford: And he never played in your style?

Khuner: No. Well, more or less, but this one, he couldn't resist it! Ja? Very schmaltzy, that's where he belongs. Schnabel used to say, if somebody plays music seemingly decent, and then gets totally vulgar, that's where he belongs. Because the one who belongs in the decency wouldn't play vulgar. When I hear somebody who plays quite decent, and suddenly he becomes this kind of low, low, low level musicianship, low level interpretation, that's where he belongs.

Crawford: And you found that more often than not.

Khuner: Oh, yes, yes. One very interesting thing was Mr.--what's his name, this Italian conductor who's now in Germany? Navarro. Navarro. Did I tell you that? Navarro conducted *La Bohème* for the Opera. And that was typical--everything that was lovely, you know, the real sentiment of *La Bohème*, which is very wonderful, was sentimental and schmaltzy, and totally vulgar. And everything that

was lively--there are a lot of lighter things--was hysterical and harried. Ja? That's the level of his basic music.

Crawford: And the conductor draws that from the musicians.

Khuner: Well, the musicians do what the conductor says--if you conduct with a long schmaltzy tempo, and that sort of thing, that's what they do.

Crawford: Do you approve of Mr. Blomstedt's Mozart?

Khuner: I don't know him.

Crawford: You haven't heard him.

Khuner: No, I have heard the recordings--I think I told you that--where he made quite a few musical mistakes. Small ones. But those small mistakes are very indicative. Because, as I say, you can go through a piece of music and play quite well, until that--the moment comes when you go wrong. So I say, well, I drove very well to San Francisco. Beautiful! Absolutely! Only around Emeryville, I killed somebody. [laughter]

Crawford: Did you pick up some musicians for quintets that you approved of?

Khuner: Oh, quite frequently, sure. Generally, they didn't want to rehearse. They would say, well, I have played this quintet before, just play through it, don't think about any musical ideas or have any responsibility towards the piece. As long as you play the notes, one-two-three-four, that's all you have to do.

Crawford: In the '20s, when you came to the Kolisch Quartet, did you ever have controversy about your approaches with the others?

Khuner: No! No! that was the way I wanted to play.

Crawford: The way that they wanted.

Khuner: Of course! As I said, when I listened to the musical performances, I always thought that the people didn't know what they were doing.

Crawford: Yes, you told me that. Was there any conductor that appealed to you?

Khuner: Well, conductors appealed to me because they had the--how do you call it?--the charisma. Furtwängler.

Crawford: How much of conducting is charisma?

Khuner: For Furtwängler? A lot! I cannot say percentage-wise! Something is really wrong. But it was always very interesting. His enthusiasm and his emotional--how do you say--glowing emotionalism,

that always comes through. I was always very disappointed when the performance was really dirty. It happened. The orchestra fell apart because his conducting was just not clean.

Crawford: And you said the same of Strauss, that he could conduct from the living room--

Khuner: Ja, Strauss was just sitting there--

Crawford: Did you never hear a great Strauss performance?

Khuner: Well, I played only very few, just when I was substituting.

Crawford: How about Wagner?

Khuner: Oh, when we played Wagner! No, with Strauss, I played only Strauss and Mozart. I don't think I played a Wagner with Strauss. Ja! *Tristan*, of course I played *Tristan*. Ja. Well, he was whipping it through without much interest. Very fast tempi. But again, I wasn't very critical. At that time I didn't know how critical I would be sixty years later!

### Conductors and Musical Architecture

Crawford: Who have been the great conductors you've worked with in your career?

Khuner: There is no such thing as a great conductor. There is no such thing as a great performer. A performer has to be adequate, but not great. He has to be knowledgeable. He has to be skillful. He has to be of some experience. He has to have a certain kind of skill in seeing what is in a piece.

Crawford: That's what I'm asking.

Khuner: Schnabel used to say, nobody can see in a piece more than he can see. If you don't see it, then you cannot see it.

Crawford: Well, who sees it?

Khuner: Maybe you can be told, but that is already second hand. Like I tell my students. Right now my son is conducting this horrible orchestra, the Second Brahms Symphony. Now, the Second Brahms Symphony is a wonderful piece, as far as construction is concerned, not because it sounds so pleasant. But people want to do Brahms' Second because it sounds so pleasant. It's a "sunny piece," you know?

Crawford: Of course. But you expect conductors to see something in the work.



Khuner: Ja, ja! And I have played with lots of conductors who didn't see anything. Mr., what's his name, Ozawa, didn't see anything in the piece. But he conducted it very well. Ja? This is where Schenker comes in. There is the foreground of the music, the middle ground, and the foundation of the music. You have to go to the foundation. Good music has a good, solid foundation. Bad music has very appealing, compelling foreground, but nothing else.

Crawford: You're talking about architecture?

Khuner: Ja, I'm talking about what music is about. Appealing foreground--lots of music has appealing foreground, all the musicals--light operas that you see at the Curran Theater. They all have very pleasant music, Ja? Carousel, or whatever you have, all those things? *Annie Get Your Gun*--

Crawford: *Oklahoma!*

Khuner: *Oklahoma!*

Crawford: *La Bohème!*

Khuner: No, *La Bohème* is a little more. A little more. Puccini's ok. He would be a good symphonic composer. Something that nobody really appreciates in the first scene of *Butterfly* is a very fine scherzo. A very fine scherzo.

Crawford: Yes.

Khuner: You don't even listen to the first part! That's not where the opera begins. I bet you didn't hear the scherzo! The very first scene of *Butterfly*. (sing's the scherzo theme, and CC sings with him). Well, you know that. But look at it this way--there are some other things that are well composed, for instance, *Il Tabarro*. And then of course the master craftsmen for opera composing, that should look like something--which Wagner didn't have. Sometimes in the first act of *Walküre* he had it--Occasionally he had it, but lots of times he didn't. The craftsmanship of composing for the theater was not his primary end. The whole duet in the second act of *Tristan* is nothing but accompanied philosophy.

So, now, since the primary aim of Puccini was to compose appealing music, convincing music for a certain situation on the stage, he was super. So that is something that is not like *Oklahoma!* I mean, *Oklahoma!* has something in it, but on a much lower level.

Crawford: What opera composers have architecture?

Khuner: Well, not much, because again the primary aim for opera is not the architecture of a symphony.

Now, Stravinsky is, of course, again, a very, very strange case. With an enormous imagination and skill, and originality, it is not really music. It is music about music. I always compare it to a flower arrangement. A flower arrangement is not a plant.

Crawford: Well, that's a very interesting metaphor.

Khuner: Ja? But it's not a grown plant. And I like music that's grown. Opera can be also grown with. Mozart is grown in individual parts, you know, in arias, and in ensembles. But opera cannot be grown by itself because it serves a different purpose.

Crawford: A theatrical purpose rather than a musical purpose?

Khuner: Ja. Now, Stravinsky, in *The Rake's Progress*, is of course an opera about old music. Ja? Whether it works as an opera, I don't know. So far I have had no handle to the Rake. It bores me intensely. I've played it quite a number of times now.

Now, *Wozzeck* is somewhat like it. *Wozzeck* is most musical of all these operas, and also most dramatic, it's a very, very high class of combination.

Crawford: How about *The Marriage of Figaro*?

Khuner: No, *Marriage of Figaro* you cannot compare, because *Marriage of Figaro* has individual musical pieces. An aria starts and ends. It is a grown plant all by itself, a small plant. Though the whole opera could be a collage. But not the individual pieces.

There is a very good opera by Verdi, *La Forza del Destino*, is also a collage. It's not a consistent drama either, not like *Rigoletto*, which is a consistent drama.

Crawford: Musically?

Khuner: No, because it has so many different aspects, you know? The love affair with someone, the scenes of the populace, the revolution, there are all sorts of things in it.

Crawford: That's true of *Rigoletto*, too, though, isn't it?

Khuner: No.

Crawford: No?

Khuner: *Rigoletto* goes absolutely straight into the drama. It's only the drama of the father with the innocent child, the seduction, and the killing. That is all a consistent drama from the first to the last note. That is a real opera. *La Forza del Destino* is not. That is patchwork.

Crawford: Any other Verdi--[Simon] Boccanegra, maybe?

Khuner: I don't know Boccanegra too well; although I played it, but I never listened to it!

Crawford: I'm interested in the idea of architecture.

Khuner: Now, *Otello* is also a drama. Of course it's not by Verdi or Boito; it's by Shakespeare.

### The Instruments

Crawford: Would you talk about the instruments that the quartet used?

Khuner: Well, Kolisch had trouble with his instrument, because it had to be rebuilt for his finger. So he was always on the lookout, "What can I do?"

Crawford: Oh, that's right, he had been injured, hadn't he?

Khuner: Ja, he had the injury as a youngster, and he lost this part of his left hand. The middle finger. So he could not use the left hand for fingering, he could use the left hand for bowing. Ja?

Crawford: It didn't affect his playing?

Khuner: No. I bow also, I bow like this [demonstrates bow grip]. But lots of violinists bow like this, [demonstrates another bow grip] so they don't need this part of the finger. He could hold the bow like this, because he didn't have this part. So, he was on the lookout for violins. And there was a gentleman by the name of Fissltaler. Did Lehner mention him? No? Fissltaler. Well, he--I met him only after he was already quite well-known--

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Khuner: [He]--I think, sanded off part of the inside of the violins where he thought there was a disturbance in the resonance. And I have done it frequently. It was absolutely amazing that with little sanding off (which he did in private, nobody saw him), with help of mirror and sand, and so on, that the violin was much smoother than it was before.

Crawford: The tone?

Khuner: Ja, the tone. Ja. Now the violin sound itself was nothing to brag about, because those were cheap violins. He had a fellow who made violins according to some kind of model, and he played them before they even were varnished, so the varnish had nothing to do with the

quality. It's just that those violins were very evened out, and very pleasant to play with.

Crawford: He made the violins?

Khuner: No, somebody else made them. He just modified them.

Crawford: Did I read that you had a Stradivarius? A Gasparo de Salo?

Khuner: No, that was later, that was later. The trouble with [these instruments] was that the objective sound was not very entrancing. These violins were very well balanced, it was very good to play quartets with them. Of course it was easy for Kolisch to have a violin built right the wrong way, naturally. So we did that for quite a few seasons. Then--I had a fairly good violin, I still have it. It sounded much better at that time than it sounds now, because it hasn't been played. And there was a gentleman in Frankfurt who owned a very good Stradivarius, who encouraged Kolisch to use it, have it rebuilt, and play on it. That was the Stradivarius.

Then, there was another incident. Lehner met the family of his present wife, and there was some grand-uncle who built stringed instruments. Very rough-looking instruments, sounded quite well. And the story goes that he, after he built the instruments, he attached them to some kind of a windmill so that they got played hours, hours, days and weeks and months, one note at a time. And that made them sound so good. How true that story is, I don't know.

Crawford: Would that improve them?

Khuner: It probably would, ja. I cannot believe it, because in order to play on the instrument, you have to modify the way you bow it. Just mechanically, I think, wouldn't do it. But obviously, for this instrument it did. And he got two or three of those violas, and it sounded very good. And then Heifetz, I think, he borrowed the Gasparo de Salo. Is that what it says?

Crawford: It says Lehner had the Gasparo de Salo, and Heifetz had an Amati.

Khuner: Oh, the Amati Heifetz had was much later, it was in 1936. He bought that in New York.

Crawford: I see. So you used those rather rough instruments.

Khuner: The Fissltaler instruments, we used for three, or four, or five years, I cannot remember how long.

The Sponsorship of Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge and Quartet Administration

Crawford: How did the quartet develop then?

Khuner: Well, gradually we got more concerts, by Mr. Ithma, this gentleman. And then we met Mr. Bechert, who became our representative. And he was also the representative of Brailowsky and Milstein. So we had quite good connections.

Crawford: And he got you the post at the Library of Congress?

Khuner: No, that was through Mrs. Coolidge.

Crawford: Oh, Mrs. Coolidge. Talk about her, because she was really a patroness.

Khuner: Well, Mrs. Coolidge we met right in the beginning, in 1927, after we had played the Third Schoenberg Quartet. We played it for the first time for Mrs. Coolidge. That was--the first performance was for the Coolidge Concerts in Vienna.

Crawford: Oh, she sponsored concerts in Vienna?

Khuner: All over the world, yes.

Crawford: Who was she?

Khuner: Mrs. Coolidge was originally a sponsor of the Chicago Symphony. Well, she's [from] a very wealthy [family].

Crawford: She heard about you?

Khuner: No, she didn't particularly hear about us, she heard about everybody. She was informed about every composer and every performer.

Crawford: And she liked contemporary work?

Khuner: Well, when she told Schoenberg that she wanted to have his new quartet performed, he recommended us in Vienna, in 1927.

Crawford: So she sponsored that performance?

Khuner: Yes, that's where we first played it. We were in contact with Mrs. Coolidge later on, too, very casually. And then finally, I don't know how it happened that she said, "All right, I'm going to invite you to the United States, you have never played there." That was in 1935. That was eight years later. We had the backing of the Ithma, the agent, and then we had Mr. Bechert. Mr. Bechert was very active in our behalf.



Crawford: Did you have an administrator?

Khuner: No, Mr. Bechert was our personal representative. The agent was the local agent. It was the agency in Czechoslovakia; it was Mr. Dobblauch in Germany, our agent in Frankfort; it was Ibbs and Tillet in London; it was Del Grange in Paris; it was Moltrasso and Luzatto in Milano, it was--what was his name?--in Spain. So those were the local agents.

Crawford: Mr. Bechert did your revenue, he did your billings, your budget, whatever?

Khuner: He didn't do budgets, he just contracted for the concerts. And it was like that: Mr. De Koos was in Holland, and it turned out we played, let's say, twelve concerts in the country, twelve concerts in Spain, from June 4 to June 20. So the first two concerts went for the ten percent to the agency. Is that correct?

Crawford: Yes, like always.

Khuner: Ja, of course! Then the next twenty percent were for the traveling, for the railroad. And the next twenty percent for the hotel and taxi. And then twenty percent for food, and by that time the 100 percent were gone! That means we played for a vacation.

Crawford: But you played all year around?

Khuner: Well, with some interruptions. We didn't play in the summer. And there were some interruptions. Around Christmas there were very few concerts. Don't forget, music life was much thinner at that time than it is now. All over the world.

Crawford: It had been more before the war?

Khuner: No, no. That I don't know. But I think it was nothing before the First World War. When we came to San Francisco--do you know how many string quartet concerts there were, in addition to the local? Two a season. I remember that because we played, and they said, "Well, we had another string quartet last October." And it was March already.

#### First Performances in the United States

Crawford: When did you first come to San Francisco?

Khuner: The first visit was 1936, when we didn't play. We played 1937 in Berkeley. Oh, no, we also played in San Francisco in 1937.

Crawford: Where?

Khuner: Marines Memorial. Which had a different name at that time.

Crawford: Was the 1935 concert, which Mrs. Coolidge sponsored, your U.S. debut?

Khuner: That was our very first concert, was this concert, yes. We played in New York--we played in Washington.

Crawford: And what were your impressions?

Khuner: I made a mistake right in the beginning of the fugue. Played an octave too high!

Crawford: Oh, you do make mistakes!

Khuner: Ja, I played the right notes, but an octave too high!

Crawford: Of what composition?

Khuner: Beethoven opus 130, the fugue, opus 133. Ja. We were a little apprehensive. These our very, very first notes that we played in the United States. But it was quite successful, and I can remember, I went out in the afternoon and said, "Well, those are very nice people in the United States."

Crawford: So then did you have a United States residence?

### III LIFE IN THE UNITED STATES: 1937-1942

#### Applying for a Visa

Khuner: No, that's a totally different story there. After we had come here for the first time in 1935, gradually the situation in Europe became, began to deteriorate. Hitler was already firmly in power in 1933, you know that. And the situation in Austria became very critical. Kolisch was married, or almost married, to an American citizen. Lehner had a Czechoslovakian passport. I had an Austrian passport. Heifetz had an international passport. A so-called Nansen passport, that was for emigrants, for displaced persons who had no home nationality.

Crawford: And Austria would accept him?

Khuner: You had to have a resident's permit, in any country, and you were given, it was called a United Nations, Völkebund sponsored-- Fridtjof Nansen. Nansen was this explorer of North Pole. He was a philanthrope, and he initiated that those stateless persons could get a United Nations passport so they could travel around, provided they had a country of residence. So Heifetz had a residence in Austria, and that passport. And he had to have a visa for any country, that was given only under the condition that he would not stay. It was awfully difficult to travel.

We had always lots of trouble. I remember once we had to go to Holland, and the permit to enter Holland, the visa, we could not get in time, in Paris. And finally our concert agent said, "We will arrange that it will be at the entrance of the border between Belgium and Holland. Just tell the passport agent there that, look out, we will have it there." It wasn't there. And we had to get off the train, we couldn't enter Holland. And that train had left about five minutes when a telephone call came from the Hague, giving the permission to go. We had to take the next train.

Finally we decided since we might probably be more successful, and have more concerts in the United States, and the United States would accept immigrants, we would immigrate. So we all applied for immigration. And that was in 1937. "Well," I said, "I don't have to immigrate. I have my Austrian citizenship, I have an Austrian passport, I can travel practically wherever I

want, I can get a visa easily, you know, a tourist visa, a temporary visa." But my mother insisted that I do it, and she did it because she wanted me to stay in Vienna and not go hiking in the Alps, the mountains.

Crawford: I don't understand.

Khuner: We had a vacation in the spring of 1937, and I planned to go to Italy to hike in the Dolomites, all by myself, I did it every spring. My mother was always afraid, and it was really dangerous, but I didn't know that!

Crawford: Dangerous because you were by yourself?

Khuner: All by myself, not a soul in sight, and everything full of snow! Then I went to the American Consulate and said, "[I want to] apply for immigration to the United States." He said, "Well, you have to wait four weeks, until the commission comes and examines the applications." I said, "Four weeks? I cannot wait here four weeks." I told my mother, "I can't wait four weeks, I have to go to Italy." She said, "You wait four weeks here," because she didn't want me to go to Italy.

Crawford: So you did.

Khuner: So I did, and I got my immigration visa. Lehner got the immigration visa also. But he wanted it because he was sick and tired of being a Czechoslovak--because he was a Hungarian. He was a forced Czechoslovak.

Crawford: But now, Mrs. Mann, I think it was, told me that at some point your mother wrote you a letter and said, "Don't come to Vienna."

Khuner: Well, she didn't have to write me, I knew I shouldn't come to Vienna because Hitler already had taken over. That is in 1938.

Crawford: And what did she say in that letter? There seemed to be a story about that.

Khuner: Well, no, there's no story--that we have a code, we had a code. You say something and mean the opposite. That was always, since our childhood. Ja? My mother never said a white lie that we could spot. She always told the truth to us, but the lie to somebody else. As I told you, she would say, "We have to go home, your father is waiting--Uncle Kisev is waiting." "Kisev" was the word [meaning] it's not true. We knew that she wanted to go home, but the story that she told others was a lie!

Crawford: So when she said, come to Vienna?

Khuner: That means, do not come to Vienna. I got a letter when I was in the army [too]. My mother wrote me a letter, we are so proud that you are in the United States Army, Uncle Kisev is proud too!

Crawford: You applied for your visa in what year?

Khuner: Spring of '37. And I immigrated. I had to immigrate, ja.

Crawford: What were the restrictions on musicians placed on you by the advent of Nazism?

Khuner: As soon as Hitler came, we didn't play in Austria any more, of course not. We couldn't play in Germany after 1935. We couldn't play in Austria after '38. And we couldn't play in Czechoslovakia after '39. That was our end in Europe.

Crawford: Anything. You couldn't play anything?

Khuner: Oh, we could play in France and London, of course.

Crawford: Switzerland?

Khuner: Switzerland. Ja, our last tour was in England, France, Switzerland, Italy, I think Spain, too.

Crawford: So you wanted to leave, you wanted to come to this country.

Khuner: Well, by that time we all had immigrated. Of course, Heifetz was the very first to immigrate, because he had no other passport. As soon as one had a residence in New York, all doors were open for you!

Crawford: So where did you settle?

Khuner: New York. Well, you cannot say "settle." There was some hotel in New York where I think there is still a suitcase in the basement there for me. I never picked it up! I don't know what hotel it is. Where we lived, that was always improvised according to our schedule. If we were in a place only four or five or six days, we went to a hotel. When we were in New York for two months, I got myself a little kitchenette apartment in the Seventies.

Crawford: You hadn't married.

Khuner: No, I married after I left the Quartet.

Crawford: Who handled your concerts then? Was Mrs. Coolidge still sponsoring you?

Khuner: Mrs. Coolidge worked for individual concerts. For instance, the last thing we played was in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, for a musical verein [society]. Then we had a permanent address. One



address was in Rue Malakoff in Paris. That was the brother-in-law of Kolisch, who lived there, who obliged us by having his address available.

Crawford: But you really were traveling.

Khuner: We were always away, ja. When we were in New York, Mr. Bechert had a place in New York where he was the center. But we always managed. We always would say, "In the next two months we can be reached there, and the next two months we can be reached there," and so on.

Crawford: You were about thirty by then.

Khuner: Well I was born in 1906, so by then I was thirty-one, yes.

Crawford: Thirty-one, and your living was traveling as a string quartet.

Khuner: Ja, that's all I did until 1941. After Lehner and Heifetz left, I still played with Kolisch, and we had a Mr. Veissi who played the viola, the very famous Mr. Veissi of Los Angeles and the movies. And Mr. Auber, the Viennese cellist. Did you know that? The last two seasons, when we had only a few concerts in the United States.

Crawford: Where else did you play?

Khuner: Nowhere. Nowhere.

Crawford: Just the United States?

Khuner: The United States. In the United States--I always lived very frugally. I had some money saved. See, I was in New York, I had a little kitchenette apartment. I enjoyed myself, ja? I met a lot of people, played a little quartet with some amateurs; very good friends, I still delight in their memory. And we had a few concerts in the United States, and that was all. In the summer we went to Los Angeles, and played in Los Angeles.

Crawford: Where did you play?

Khuner: We rehearsed in Los Angeles.

Crawford: And then the quartet disbanded?

Khuner: The original quartet disbanded after the 1939 season. And then we played '39-'40, and '40-'41 in the United States only.

Crawford: Had you returned to Europe since you immigrated?

Khuner: I immigrated in '37. I was back in Europe in '38, and back in Europe in '39. We played in England, in France. Then--the war broke out in '39.

Disbanding the Kolisch Quartet##

Crawford: Talk about Schoenberg in Los Angeles and the disbanding later of the quartet. First of all, why was Los Angeles the choice of so many musicians and composers?

Khuner: Well, Los Angeles at that time was a very desirable place to live. It had a good California climate, clean air. And then undoubtedly there were a lot of performing musicians who flocked there, in the hopes of getting a job at the music studios. If you were a composer of string quartets, that was the place to go, because there were a lot of excellent string players there. But I don't know whether there were more composers than other places. I'm sure there were just as many composers in New York and Chicago as in Los Angeles.

Crawford: Well, I would imagine so, but the West Coast is a distance from the musical centers of Chicago and New York.

Khuner: Ja. Well, it's true Schoenberg was here and there were others, Toch [Ernst Toch] was here. What others? Stravinsky. But that was accidental. Originally Schoenberg wanted to be on the East Coast. He would have stayed on the East Coast, if his health wouldn't have suffered from the climate. He was very sick.

Crawford: That's when he was in Boston.

Khuner: Ja, when he was in the Malkin Conservatory in Boston. It was a very harsh winter--

Crawford: He had asthma?

Khuner: Ja, he was miserable.

Crawford: Did he ever think of going back to New York?

Khuner: I don't know. I don't think so.

Crawford: And you stayed in touch?

Khuner: Well, Schoenberg left [Europe] around 1933. And we settled down here in 1937, '38 or so. So Schoenberg was here first, before we came.

Crawford: But you were in touch here?

Khuner: Well, whenever we went to Los Angeles.

Khuner: In fact, since we had concerts here on the West Coast in 1937, '38, '39, during that time I saw Schoenberg. The first time I saw him

was in 1936 in my first visit to California. He was here already for a few years and I was in Berkeley.

I knew Schoenberg only in Los Angeles, except that summer in Holland, in 1931. That was summer vacation. I told you, we spent the whole summer in [Utrecht] in Holland. [We spent] our time at the beach, swimming and playing soccer.

Crawford: Yes, that sounds like a nice life! So Schoenberg was a person with a lot of different interests.

Khuner: Oh, ja! He was interested. He played chess. He made himself his own personal chess figures. He constructed his own playing cards. Don't you know the playing cards of Schoenberg?

Crawford: No.

Khuner: Oh, there are some pictures in there too. I would have to find them now. I don't know where they are. But you can buy them from the Schoenberg Institute. They are quite expensive--as a contribution to the Institute.

Crawford: I heard from Mr. Schmerl, Dr. Schmerl, that your father was a great card player. Were you also?

Khuner: We played a lot of bridge, in the quartet we played bridge. Badly. Especially, Kolisch played too slow. He wanted to think--it has to be the right card! He was never sure he put down the right card. Also, I couldn't play chess with him; he would think for two days for a move.

Crawford: I notice that you have a book of chess openings, so you like chess.

Khuner: Oh, ja, ja, well, I play chess ever since my childhood.

Crawford: What did you do when you traveled as a quartet? What was your life like?

Khuner: Well, every day was different. Sometimes we spent the whole day in the railroad. Ja? Long distances. Sometimes I could spend it sightseeing, when I was in a worthwhile place. Sometimes we visited friends; sometimes friends weren't around. Then we had to rehearse. Or I wrote letters. Or we spent the whole afternoon writing business letters. Kolisch dictated, and I had a little typewriter.

Crawford: Was it a lonely life?

Khuner: Not really. Not really, for a young man, because there was always something interesting. But later on, by the time I was past thirty, it was a little boring. Like everything else.

Crawford: Is that why the quartet disbanded in 1941?

Khuner: No, that was financial, mostly, because the situation was too difficult. And then when Heifetz and Lehner left [in 1939], Heifetz was asked by Ormandy to join his orchestra in Philadelphia. Ja, that's again a connection that I mentioned before, in 1927 when we had no viola player, I mentioned the piano trio recital, Tremandl.

Crawford: That's right.

Khuner: That was with a lady who later became Mrs. Ormandy. A pianist. She was a friend of Heifetz at that time, just before he joined the Quartet. And then, obviously, Heifetz must have mentioned somehow that the Quartet was not in good condition because of the war, [and] Ormandy asked Heifetz if he would come to the orchestra, as the principal cellist. That's when Heifetz decided he would leave the Quartet. Then when Heifetz said he wouldn't come, then Lehner was also a little worried, and he was asked to play at Boston. One day out of the blue sky he says, "Well, I'm going to Boston tomorrow to audition with Koussevitzky." That's all right. So he went, came back, and said, "Koussevitzky offered me a job in the Boston orchestra." So Heifetz said he would go to Philadelphia, and there were again only two people left. So then I said I wouldn't play either, because I was fed up. It was 1939. My sister was already in Berkeley.

Crawford: She was teaching?

Khuner: My sister? No. She was doing nothing. You confuse my sister with my aunt. My aunt at that time was in Pittsburgh.

My parents were waiting in London to come to the United States. So I said, "I have lots of trouble with my sister there, and my parents are coming; the situation with the Quartet is practically hopeless." I didn't want to play.

So I was here, and I got a call from Schoenberg, who had met Mr. Veissi, the viola player in Los Angeles. And Veissi was very much interested to join the quartet. And Kolisch had met Mr. Auber in New York, who was a Viennese cellist who was also an immigrant in New York. And Auber was a very fine young man, a good cellist, he had played considerably. He was playing in the Metropolitan [Opera] Orchestra.

So Kolisch wrote Schoenberg whether he couldn't convince me to resume quartet playing with him, especially Mr. Veissi wants [this]. So I went to Los Angeles, and I met Mr. Veissi. Mr. Veissi was very enthusiastic, and I played with him; he was a very good viola player. I remember we played the Brahms concerto--on the viola; I had to accompany him a fifth down.

Crawford: How could you do that?

Khuner: I could do that! I improvised it, yes. If you know music by heart you can transpose it. And he played the concerto very well on the viola, too. So, I came back, and my sister says, "All right, since you have nothing here--" I was completely isolated here, I didn't know anybody. I said, "All right, I'll continue playing quartets." And that went on for two seasons. I spent the summer in Berkeley. Summer of '39. That was after the Quartet formally disbanded.

Then with Veissi and Auber we continued in New York. We had just about twenty concerts, that's all. But we still made a recording of--I don't know, we made some recording, I don't know which quartet it was. I forgot. [Recordings of the four Schoenberg quartets were made privately in Hollywood for a Mr. Newman, director of a studio.]

Crawford: Do you have tapes of the recording?

Khuner: No, I have nothing.

Crawford: Why?

Khuner: Not interested!

Crawford: I would like to have them, for the history.

Khuner: Ja, when Mr. Guittart [of the Schoenberg Quartet] was here he also wanted to know, and I have some copies of the old Schubert quartets; he wrote down the numbers--I don't know, I'm not interested.

Crawford: The name was still Kolisch?

Khuner: Oh, ja, still Kolisch. [Kolisch after 1942 led the Pro Arte Quartet]

### Getting the Family out of Vienna

Crawford: In the meanwhile, what about your parents?

Khuner: Well, my parents were in Vienna. And then I was in Holland when Hitler marched in. I remember that afternoon very vividly; I was glued to the radio.

Crawford: You hadn't anticipated that?

Khuner: Well, not in detail, but we knew that the situation was impossible.



Crawford: What do you remember?

Khuner: I remember that I heard on the Dutch radio, which was translated by my host, that Hitler had marched in. And then I heard shortly from Vienna directly, "We are so happy in Austria that our Führer, our Duce is coming back and we'll greet him." It was an awful shock to me.

Crawford: How did you react?

Khuner: I phoned to Vienna--I wanted to phone my parents the same evening. And my mother didn't want to talk to me. Because she didn't know that it was I. She said, "Your voice doesn't sound like you were Felix." I said, "I'm Felix, I want to know how you are, and so on." And she said, "Well, I'm sorry, I cannot talk to you, who are you?" I said, "Well, I'm Felix." She said, "That doesn't sound like your voice." So then she asked me about the names of our old dogs. So I told her the names of the dogs, and the race of the dogs, and things, and finally she knew.

Crawford: What was it?

Khuner: Well, that we had a dachshund by the name of "Lady," or whatever the name was.

Crawford: And then what did she tell you?

Khuner: Then she told me how the situation was in Vienna. So I said, "I'm going to London tomorrow morning, and I'll go to the American Consulate in London, and I'll get applications for your immigration to the United States." As a relative of a resident. Because I was a resident by that time. So, I was in London, and I had the morning free. I went to the American Consulate and there were again several hundred people already waiting. And they said, "Well, come back the day after tomorrow." I said, "Well, I can't." They said, "Sorry, there are people in front of you." So, I was sitting there and thinking what to do, and a door opened to a next office, and I saw a lady whom I knew walking past. Mrs. Konkle. So I said, (shouts) "Mrs. Konkle!" And she said, "Oh, hi, what do you do here? Come right in!" Isn't that amazing?

Crawford: What a coincidence. So you got their papers . . .

Khuner: Ja. She was working at the office of the American Consulate. So I made the application, that was transferred to Vienna. And even that wouldn't have helped, but one of my amateur friends in New York--ja, see, I was in London, then we returned to the United States, to New York. And my parents were still waiting in Vienna for the permission to emigrate. That is a long process. And I was of course worried about their life from day to day, because of all the stories which we heard. Kristallnacht and so on, which was at that time. So, one of my amateur friends, a viola player, Dr.

Wainhaus, he was an official in the State Department. Later he became Assistant Secretary of State to Dulles. You know Dulles? Secretary of State?

Crawford: Yes, sure. I don't know the name, though.

Khuner: Wainhaus--you wouldn't know the name. So I wrote him, I don't know from where. I said, "I'm very worried about my parents, do you think you can do something?" He says, "Well I will try." And he never told me whether he did or not. But my parents got out very fast.

Crawford: So he must have helped.

Khuner: He must have helped, ja.

Crawford: And they came to New York?

Khuner: Just after the war, in 1941. The war started in 1939. First they went to England, because once you had an assurance from the United States that you would be permitted to immigrate, you could get a temporary residence permit to England.

Crawford: And your sister left at the same time?

Khuner: My sister left much earlier. She was one of the first to go out. Because they were in Vienna. Next morning they went to the American Consulate in Vienna, and they were much ahead of me in London. Well, that's a question of life and death at that time, you know.

#### Settling in Berkeley and Joining the Union

Crawford: How did you come to buy a house in 1939?

Khuner: Well, you see, by that time my sister and my brother-in-law had arrived here. They had left Vienna in a hurry. They were here and they were living in a small apartment, near Dwight Way, I believe. And I don't quite remember--I was walking around, for what reason I don't know, and there was a "for sale" sign on a little house on 62nd Street, and the owner was watering the front lawn. And I said, "Are you the owner?" and he said, "Yes." I said, "Can I see the house?" It was empty, it was not occupied. So I looked at it, and it looked like a nice, decent house, one of those box houses, three rooms on one side, and three on the other, kitchen, a little back yard. I asked, "How much does it cost?" and he said, "Oh, about three thousand dollars." So, I thought it might be a down payment of four hundred or five hundred dollars, which I probably had. And then we had a termite inspection made, and they said that

the posts in the back porch have to be replaced, and it will cost two hundred dollars. So I phoned the owner and said, "It costs two hundred dollars," and he says, "All right, I'll pay for it, so you pay only two thousand eight hundred dollars on the house." So I bought it. For my sister. I didn't need it. I lived in New York. I mean, I was traveling around. Because I knew that my parents would eventually come. They came within a few months.

Crawford: That's right. Well, we didn't talk very much about that. What did they bring with them? That was one question I wanted to bring up again, because we talked about *Die Fackel*. What was so dangerous about that, that you had to burn it?

Khuner: Well, they didn't know, but they thought it might be their lives. You never could tell.

Crawford: I'm talking about the contents of it, I mean, was it that radical?

Khuner: Well, of course it was radical.

Crawford: So, how was Kraus allowed to publish that?

Khuner: Well, Kraus died in 1936, and Hitler came in 1938.

Crawford: Came, yes, but he was a presence much before then.

Khuner: Well, he was one of the most ostracized persons in Vienna.

Crawford: So, was that totally done underground?

Khuner: It wasn't underground. I have [some issues--goes to get copy] There, of course, it was practically criminal, that in anybody else would have been tried for treason. But they kept their hands off him. Nobody took it serious. The Austrian officialdom, for them Kraus didn't exist. It was just a handful of people who read it and thought about it. Well, you can see it was censored.

Crawford: What does it say there?

Khuner: This part was censored, couldn't be printed. But they didn't change the material, just took it out of the issue. [the censored pages]

Crawford: Who?

Khuner: The printer. And there are quite a number of [things] printed that also might be criminally indicted. But it wasn't.

Crawford: But the Austrian officials chose to overlook it, to ignore it?

- Khuner: Chose to ignore it. Not only the officials, but the people in general, readers. There was a page that was removed. That happened rarely, but there are some.
- Crawford: So you brought this with you. Or did you get it later?
- Khuner: No, that a friend of mine gave to me, who had it in his collection.
- Crawford: But it was always published hard cover--is this a whole year's collection?
- Khuner: This is all 1918's. It was for sale in newspaper kiosks, like here you buy the *Reader's Digest* or whatever it is. Until he died, '36.
- Crawford: Let's talk about your parents, then. What did they bring with them when they came?
- Khuner: Well, they sent a van full of some furniture. Unfortunately there was a big chest that looked very good, and there was some valuable stuff in it that was stolen. A lot of chess books; chess sets that I had. And a love seat that was stolen.
- Crawford: You didn't bring much over with you, did you?
- Khuner: I had nothing. I had nothing to bring.
- Crawford: You must have had a pretty good library.
- Khuner: That was all in Vienna.
- Crawford: I know, that's what I'm saying.
- Khuner: Ja. Well, lots of it was lost, yes.
- Crawford: Your music?
- Khuner: Ja.
- Crawford: What did your parents do, did they buy a house right away, did they live with your sister?
- Khuner: Here? Well, they came penniless, they couldn't take any money out, it was all confiscated.
- Crawford: What are the details of their leaving after the Anschluss?
- Khuner: They had to leave their apartment immediately. Because the apartment was already spoken for.
- Crawford: What does that mean?

Khuner: Well, all the Jewish apartments that were desirable were already distributed among the faithful.

Crawford: Who would that be?

Khuner: Members of the Nazi Party in Austria.

Crawford: And how were they informed of that?

Khuner: Let's say there was an apartment house, like our apartment. Let's say there were twelve apartments. And the Khuners and the Geiringers and the Kobers were Jewish. So they knew, as soon as the Nazis come, [they] will get these three apartments. And Mr. Teufel will get the Khuner apartment, and Mr. So-and-so will get this. And soon as the Nazis were in and the SA came, out! Mr. Teufel could move in.

Crawford: They weren't given a date to move out?

Khuner: Well, they didn't know when it would happen, but they knew it would happen eventually. The story goes, and I think it's true, that the people, the members of the patriotic Austrian party, who were supposed to be violently anti-Nazi, they had their arm things, and what was the name of the party? I forget...Vaterländische Front. Patriotic Front. Austrian! Anti-Nazi! Anti-German! We are Austrian patriots! We don't want to have anything to do with the Nazis! So they had Vaterländische Front. And it came over the radio that Hitler marched in; and they took [their arm things] off and put the swastikas on. Had it all ready in their pockets.

Crawford: Was that a Catholic party?

Khuner: The Austrian Front? More or less, yes. That was the Vaterländische Front. So the rottenest people that you can imagine were the Austrians. Now they make believe that they were the victims of the Nazis. They weren't.

Crawford: They just "turned coat," like we say.

Khuner: Ja! That's why they also selected Mr. Waldheim as president. They are delighted to have a war criminal as the president. Rotten people!

Crawford: Never changed, though?

Khuner: Ja. But now, interestingly, they have the Austrian [newsletter]; it is a thing that is freely distributed amongst old Austrians. I get it very faithfully every month, [it is published in] New York and sent free to former Austrians, most of them emigrés, emigrant Jews. And it addresses itself mainly to the old Austrian Jews, with a little publicity for all the things that Austria wants to sell, mainly educational courses in the summer for young American



students. And if you go through that (I have all that), you see a lot of essays about Jews, former Jews. An essay about Karl Kraus; about Wittgenstein, the philosopher; about Karl Geiringer, the musicologist; all Jews, and it's full of that. It's all hypocritical, it's only to sell Austria.

Crawford: What happened to Geiringer?

Khuner: He died.

Crawford: But he was a neighbor of yours?

Khuner: He lived upstairs, yes.

Crawford: And he was the curator of the museum, I think.

Khuner: Yes.

Crawford: Did he come to this country as well? Oh, I see. [looking at something] Oh, it tells everything. This newsletter is a monthly publication?

Khuner: Ja, it was, approximately. Very irregular.

#### Finding Work in San Francisco: 1941

Crawford: How did you go about finding work in 1941?

Khuner: In the summer of '41, the spring of '41 we quit [the quartet]. [Then] I came here, and I put in my union card to the San Francisco musician's union, and they said, "We'll notify you when you are eligible to get a job here." At that time it was a closed job.

Crawford: A closed union.

Khuner: You had to be a local to get a job. You could transfer, but you had to wait six months.

Crawford: So you just waited?

Khuner: Ja, ja. Then in the fall there was an opening in the [San Francisco] Symphony, and I auditioned. I was not a local member yet. Why was I not a local member yet? It turned out that the secretary of the union, Mr. Love, had stolen the money and never took care of the new applicants for membership. All the memberships in those months were not booked as applicants, so I, as if I had not applied for membership--my deposited money was gone with Mr. Love. It was a big to-do. He later paid back the money.

Crawford: So you weren't engaged?

Khuner: So I couldn't get the job. I got it a year later. [September, 1942]

Crawford: A year later. What did you do during that year?

Khuner: As I mentioned before, when I came in '39 I bought a little house in north Oakland, where my sister and my brother-in-law lived. And then my parents, [in 1940]. I got a few casual jobs that I could play. But of course nobody knew me, and, as I told you, my good friend introduced me to one of the sponsors and I antagonized him with a story about musical life and Heifetz. I told you that story. No?

Crawford: What's the story?

Khuner: I was invited to a very rich, rich sponsor in the Peninsula for a nice dinner to introduce me to the rich people there. I was the guest of honor, I was sitting next to the hostess, and they were talking about musical life in San Francisco. Because I had just arrived from New York. She says, "Musical life has been going down because Mr. Heifetz used to give as many sold-out recitals in the opera house as he pleased. And now when he comes every other year, his houses are empty." So I said, "That is very sad for Mr. Heifetz, but I thought we were talking about the musical life of San Francisco." She said, "Well, is Mr. Heifetz' recital part of the musical life?" I said, "No, because the people who want to go to Mr. Heifetz, they sit there and they sleep through the Brahms and Beethoven sonatas in the hope to hear the *Hora Staccato* as an encore. That is not what I consider part of the musical life."

And then we went on. She says, "Well, why isn't it?" And I say, "Because the people who go to these recitals are totally uneducated musically, and should have no say in musical life, not even by buying tickets." She said, "Well, how can you get knowledge about it?" So I took the very expensive crystal wine glass and said, "You see, this is a very expensive glass, is it not?" She said, "Yes." I said, "For me it's just as good as a tumbler from Woolworth's. Because I don't know anything about it." You see, that's the illustration. If you don't know anything about it, the tumbler from Woolworth's and the very expensive crystal is the same thing. You put water in it.

Crawford: It serves the same purpose.

Khuner: Ja!

Crawford: So there you were, iconoclastic at the beginning!

Khuner: Eliminated! Ja. Eliminated from the start.

First Musical Impressions

[Interview 3: February 4, 1990]##

Crawford: Let's talk for a moment about the cultural differences between the United States and Europe. Your first impressions of the United States when you came, how it affected your performing and your touring.

Khuner: Well, we were told, I don't know by whom, that if you play the United States, the polish of the performance is more important than the musical content. So we used to say, "Let's rehearse for the American sound." That means less scratches, better together, more homogeneity, better in sound, better in intonation. And in Europe, especially in Germany, the liveliness, the musical intensity of the performance, counted for much more than the polish. We would say a German performer can get away with lots of deficiencies in polish, provided he plays musically. We would say in the United States, no, the music doesn't count, only the polished performance.

Crawford: Did you find that to be true?

Khuner: I don't know. I didn't poll the audience.

Crawford: But you must feel something from the audience.

Khuner: I didn't care what the audience did! I listened when I played the performance, I listened to it. If I thought something should be improved in any way, we talked about it, and made another rehearsal. Even if you play the same piece the next evening, we would say, "Let's go over it tomorrow afternoon, there were some things that we didn't like." But that the audience liked it or not didn't concern us.

Crawford: But the supposition is that the audiences in Europe would have been better educated.

Khuner: Oh, of course! No comparison. I don't know how it is now, but at that time, especially for string quartets, orchestras probably had to be very good. The New York Philharmonic had to play very well, had to compare with any European orchestra. Boston, probably, too. Boston, Philadelphia and New York. But on the other hand, there were mostly European musicians in them. I think, especially, in Boston. I don't think there was a single American-trained orchestra player in Boston, they were all European.

You know, at that time Boston was not unionized. The Boston orchestra was not unionized, they could import European musicians at will, from one day to the other. New York and Philadelphia couldn't, there were certain restrictions. Also, here, when I came

here, you had to be a member for six months or longer before you could [join the union].

Crawford: And the unions were very small and very weak here, weren't they?

Khuner: Well, they were strong enough to keep outsiders out.

Crawford: How was touring different in the United States?

Khuner: Less comfortable. There were no airplanes.

Crawford: But you traveled by train in Europe mostly.

Khuner: Ja. Occasionally we would rent a car. The cities were very close to each other, especially in Holland. In Holland we always rented a car because the cities were about half an hour apart. Utrecht, Arnhem, Leiden, Amsterdam, Den Haag, Rotterdam, they are practically within walking distance!

So we stayed in one hotel, we stayed in Amsterdam and--as a matter of fact, for a whole month I had a little apartment in Amsterdam. And we rented a car, and said, "We [need] the car tomorrow at four o'clock, we have the concert at six o'clock in Arnhem." The driver was there, drove us there, drove us back. And we had dinner at home.

Here, the distances were bigger. But in Germany, also, we would live in Frankfurt, and would play in Wiesbaden, and Mainz, and Mannheim, and sometimes friends would drive us. And we stayed in Hamburg, and friends drove us to Bremen for a concert.

Crawford: Do you have any clear year-by-year listings of concerts that I can put in the history?

Khuner: Jonathan has it. There was a member of the Dutch Schoenberg Quartet and he wanted to have this. Did Jonathan return it?

Eliot: I don't know.

Khuner: Ja, he has it. Except one season is missing.

Crawford: Then I don't really need to go into that with you.

Khuner: I wouldn't know it by heart anyhow.

Crawford: What did you do in your free time, when you were touring Europe?

Khuner: You mean, from day to day?

Crawford: Um hm.

Khuner: Well, whatever there was to be done. If there was nothing to do, if it was raining, I couldn't even take a walk, I would write letters to my parents or read. And if there was nothing to do, I might even have practiced the violin for ten minutes!

Marriage and Family##

Crawford: You were married in--?

Eliot: Wasn't it in 1942?

Khuner: 1942.

Eliot: Margo was born in '43.

Khuner: That's right.

Crawford: All right. Let's talk about that. About how you met your wife.

Khuner: Oh, I met my wife in New York. Accidentally. The real "Ziss" was in the little rooming house where I had a room. There was a piano teacher, and I met the piano teacher, and he said, "Why don't you come next Sunday. I'll have a little party with friends." So I said, "All right, I'll go [to the party]," and that's where I met my wife.

Crawford: Austrian as well?

Khuner: No, no. She is of Russian Jewish descent. Born in New York.

Crawford: So, she came here to be married?

Khuner: We got married here, yes.

Crawford: And do you remember how you asked her, how you courted her?

Khuner: No.

Crawford: Or when you decided to get married?

Khuner: I make a joke, but that's not true. I said, "All right, how many children are we going to have?" "Oh, about six." But I made it up, that's not true.

Crawford: Is that an Uncle Kisev story?

Khuner: It's not a true story, no.

Crawford: You had four children?



Khuner: We had four, yes.

Crawford: When you married, where were you living?

Khuner: I was living in--ja, I was living in the house where my sister lived, with my parents.

Crawford: All together.

Khuner: It was a fairly big house, it had six rooms. Ja.

Crawford: And then you had your first child--

Khuner: One, two three, four, five, six rooms, yes.

Crawford: And you had your first child a year later?

Khuner: No, but we didn't live there when we got married. After we got married we took a little apartment around the corner.

Crawford: In the same neighborhood?

Khuner: Ja. Practically the same block, if not two blocks away.

[Tape break]

### Music in San Francisco

Crawford: So you started working with the San Francisco Symphony. Would you talk about Monteux?

Khuner: About Koussevitzky, I think I told you the story. He asked, "What do the people in New York say about me?" He asked the visitors, you know. They said, "Oh, Mr. Koussevitzky, they say in New York that you are the only honest conductor." He says, "Oh, no, how can they say that, it's not true, no, no, I'm not the only honest conductor. Olga! What's the name of that other honest conductor?" Or, they say after he resigned, they said, "Oh, Mr. Koussevitzky, we are so unhappy that you go because, you know, there is no other conductor who really conducts the classics the way you do." And he says, "Oh, how can you say that, there are many other conductors, there is--there is--there is--Olga! who is there?"

Crawford: Well, let's talk about honest conductors.

Khuner: Well, Monteux was an honest conductor. Ja.

Crawford: Did he favor the French repertoire?

Khuner: Very much, yes.

Crawford: What was the quality of the orchestra?

Khuner: Poor. Not much better than now. [laughs]

Crawford: You told me that you had no opinion about Maestro Blomstedt, that you had--

Khuner: I don't know anything of him, no.

Crawford: What were your impressions of music in San Francisco?

Khuner: I had no impressions. The way it was, it was. Ja. I'll tell you the other story of Mrs. Hertz--you know, Mr. Alfred Hertz was the conductor here.

Crawford: Lili.

Khuner: Lili Hertz. What, do you know about her?

Crawford: Yes, I know something about her.

Khuner: Well, I met her in Europe. I was in Molveno before the season, before my colleagues had arrived for practicing, and I was all by myself. It was in the early season, there were very few people there. And I was hiking in the surrounding woods and mountains, studying my scores. I was sitting and studying, I don't remember what--and I heard people coming up behind on this trail. So, I couldn't hide. Two ladies came, and greeted me, and found out that we were both Austrians, and that I'm a musician, because I had the score. And she said, "Oh, you are musician?" "Yes." She said, "I'm a musician too, and I live in that hotel; I'm a singer. Can you accompany, can you play the piano?" "Yes, I can." "Why don't you come one afternoon and there will be a little singing." So I went down there, and she started singing the repertoire and I accompanied her. And she said, "Oh, you accompany very well." I said, "Thank you." She said, "You accompany very well, you really follow wonderfully." I said, "Thank you." Then she said, "I make so many compliments for your accompanying; you don't say anything about my singing! Are you just surprised how well I sing?" I said, "How can I be surprised? I had no expectations particularly. The way you sing, you sing." You know? Some things are good, some things are bad, but that's the way it is. I cannot evaluate it in open air, and that's all you ask me. I have no expectation of what San Francisco was. What San Francisco was, it was.

Crawford: Well, you must have missed something from the cultural environment that you came from.

Khuner: No, no, I had no--there were fewer concerts than in New York. But since I didn't go to concerts, that didn't make any impression. It was certainly nicer to hike in Tilden Park than in Central Park in New York.

Crawford: So you liked Tilden Park.

Khuner: I liked Tilden Park better than Central Park in New York. Also the streets in Berkeley were better than Sixth Avenue.

Crawford: Okay. How was the Monteux repertoire?

Khuner: Well, he liked to have the French music, and he hated to have the Russian music. But he had to play the Russian music. Also, he was not permitted to play Saint-Saens. He wanted to perform Saint-Saens symphonies; they said, "No, you have to play Tchaikovsky symphonies."

Crawford: Who said so?

Khuner: The board of directors. They said, we have to have a lot of Russian music, because it's very popular, people want to hear Tchaikovsky symphonies. They don't want to hear Saint-Saens symphonies.

Crawford: But they used to do the Organ Symphony.

Khuner: Well, occasionally, but they had probably four or five Tchaikovsky performances for one Saint-Saens performance. Monteux would have liked it the other way around.

Crawford: So the board of directors actually--

Khuner: Well, I don't know the behind-the-door, but Monteux wasn't free to play what he wanted all the time. He complained. When we played the Tchaikovsky symphony, he made fun of it and said, "We have to play this, but Saint-Saens we can't."

Crawford: How was he as conductor?

Khuner: Very good. One of the best. He really, he really was an expert conductor.

Crawford: And did you know him personally?

Khuner: Very little. As a matter of fact, I met him once, I was introduced to him, very superficially, in Amsterdam. So when I auditioned for him, he remembered. He said, "I know you, I have met you before." He remembered. A marvelous memory. He said, "Yes, we lived in the same hotel in Amsterdam."

Crawford: Who do you remember among the players then?

Khuner: Who I remember?

Crawford: Yes.

Khuner: All of them!

Crawford: Anybody outstanding or any special--?

Khuner: Well, somewhat--some players I knew better, and some I knew very superficially, but I knew them all. I remember them.

Crawford: What were the union benefits?

Khuner: Well, you couldn't play professionally without being a member of the union.

Crawford: Yes, I know that, but what were the benefits for the musicians?

Khuner: That they could play a job.

Crawford: Yes. But did you have health insurance, that sort of thing?

Khuner: No, health insurance came later through the orchestra. The union never had health insurance. The union had only a death benefit. Part of your membership fee was put into a life insurance. So I have the union life insurance. I think when I die my family will get--two thousand dollars, I believe.

Crawford: How about the schedules?

Khuner: Schedules? I don't remember. We had only three services a week when I joined. And then two or three years later it was extended to four services, because they started to make the student concerts on Thursday nights. It was always two evening performances and Friday afternoon. And then there was one added on Thursday night. And so we got a little more money.

Crawford: Could you make a living as an orchestra musician?

Khuner: Not at all, no.

Crawford: So what else did you do?

Khuner: Either teaching, or other jobs. The older members got more jobs than the newer members.

Crawford: Solo jobs.

Khuner: No. Playing jobs. Summer jobs, Stern Grove, visiting conductors needing an orchestra, those sorts of things came. But there was of course always a great competition. The personnel manager of the orchestra was, of course, frequently asked to get the orchestra together for those jobs. So out of the hundred members of the symphony, he would get twenty or thirty for the extra jobs. It was difficult to get them.

Crawford: Did you teach?

Khuner: Ja, I got pupils, yes.

Crawford: Did you enjoy teaching?

Khuner: Ja!

Crawford: You had once said about Arnold Rosé, that he was not a good teacher.

Khuner: A miserable teacher!

Crawford: Why?

Khuner: Because he was just a bad teacher. He had nothing to say to the students. He was a fair musician, he was a fair musician and a fair violinist, and a good quartet player. I think he was a good concertmaster.

Crawford: But couldn't teach.

Khuner: Not in my experience.

Crawford: Was there a teacher that influenced you?

Khuner: There were teachers at that time--probably, I don't know them--who somehow were considered, by rumor, that they could teach. But I never met them. There were no violin teachers. There was a young viola player by name of Moravec, who was supposed to become a good teacher. There was another youngster by name of Feist, who was also a performer at the Schoenberg Society, who also became a good teacher. But they were not good teachers at my time, they were too young at that time.

Crawford: In other words, when you started teaching, you really didn't have a model, somebody that you could [follow]?

Khuner: As a teacher? No. Never. I started teaching here. All the groundwork of knowing about instruments and what to do I learned in the quartet. Don't forget, that was fifteen, sixteen, seventeen years later, almost twenty years later. The last formal lessons I had when I was sixteen. When I started teaching here I was thirty-six.

Crawford: And did you teach at the Conservatory?

Khuner: Here? No. No, that's not quite true. I, after the war in 1945, when I came back from the army, that was, of course, a few years



later, I was affiliated, connected with the San Francisco Conservatory. And they had some pupils through the GI Bill of Rights. You know what the GI Bill is?

Crawford: I didn't realize that that applied to music.

Khuner: That applied to music too, yes.

Crawford: Any memorable students?

Khuner: I remember them, yes. One of them almost got a job in the Symphony.

Crawford: What happened?

Khuner: Monteux didn't like him; he was not a good sight-reader. He was a good violinist, but he wasn't a good sight-reader.

#### Serving in the U.S. Army

Crawford: Okay. Let's talk, then, about your years in the army. What was that like?

Khuner: Oh, it was a very unique experience, which was--let's say, I'm glad I was in the army. It was very unpleasant while I was there. But in retrospect it was very interesting.

Crawford: Where did you have your basic training?

Khuner: Basic training in Biloxi, Kiesler Field.

Crawford: Oh, in Mississippi.

Khuner: Mississippi, yes.

Crawford: What was that like?

Khuner: Unpleasant, the climate was miserable.

Crawford: Were you drafted?

Khuner: Ja.

Crawford: You were drafted. You did not join up voluntarily.

Khuner: No. I was just a few months too young to be outside of the draft, draftable age.

Crawford: When were you drafted, what month and year?

Khuner: Well, I was--when was I drafted?--Olga!

Eliot: Well, it must have been before August of '42. Or even May of '42.

Khuner: Ja. I was drafted in June '43. Sure. Margo was born in March--

Crawford: So you went to Biloxi--

Khuner: Because forty-seven was the cut-off point, and it was two months before I was forty-seven.

Eliot: Thirty-seven.

Khuner: Thirty-seven, ja. I would have been thirty-seven August eighth, and I was drafted in June.

Crawford: Oh, they were waiting for you!

Khuner: Ja!

Crawford: So, did you play in an ensemble, in a band? Did you use your music in the Service?

Khuner: No!

Crawford: What did they do with you?

Khuner: I always told them, I said, "Discharge me and I'll come back as a fiddler with USO." You know, USO was the entertainment group. The civilian entertainment group for soldiers. I said "I'll gladly play for the soldiers, for the USO, voluntarily. But if you draft me, I'm not going to play."

Crawford: Why?

Khuner: Because I was a soldier, I was not an entertainer!

Crawford: You didn't want to play in a military group?

Khuner: Well, as a matter of fact, I did for a few weeks. Down when I was in basic training. They had a show every Wednesday night over the radio, where they had a little band. And when it so happened that I was supposed to be at KP next morning, I played in the band and was excused from KP!

Crawford: How long were you in the Service?

Khuner: Olga! Well, I came back in '45, wasn't it? Ja.

Crawford: Did you stay in Mississippi?

Khuner: No, I was sent overseas, to New Guinea.

Crawford: Where were you?

Khuner: In Finschhafen, Lae, Baik, different places.

Crawford: And what was that like? What was your responsibility?

Khuner: My responsibility? Doing nothing. I was sent there, and I came to the office, and they said--well, I was sent there as an entertainer. Special services, it's called. And they said, "What can you do?" And I said, "Well, I can play all the second violin parts of the Beethoven quartets by heart!" "What else can you do, can you play the flute?" I said no. "Piccolo? Oboe? Trumpet?" "No." "Trombone?" "No." "So, what shall we do with you?" I said, "That's not my job!" So they said, "Well you go to the special service officer and talk to him." So then I did all sorts of different things. For instance, I helped putting out the newspaper. Finschhafen. That was a little army newspaper.

Crawford: Finschhafen?

Khuner: Ja, it's a major port, it's on the north coast, and Port Moresby is on the south coast. And I drove the jeep to distribute the newspaper every morning to the different places. I distributed ukeleles and banyos (banjos), and ping pong [tables]. And the army edition of magazines. People came and said, "Can I have *Life*, can I have the *Saturday Evening Post*?" They had army editions, you know, without advertising.

Crawford: Were you separated there from the population, I mean, did you live in a military compound?

Khuner: Oh, ja, well, that was a big army base, the air force base, army, everything. Also the Australian, the New Zealand [military]--it was a big base. Oh yes.

Crawford: And you never played the piano for the troops?

Khuner: No.

Crawford: You could have volunteered to do that.

Khuner: I could have, ja. I just said, "I do what you want me to do."

Crawford: Did you have a violin with you?

Khuner: I had a violin with me. It was a violin I bought for a hundred dollars in Salt Lake City. I played a little. I played a little. Once they had a show for the men, and I played a little. I also formed a chess club. I also helped a little quiz show, enlisted men against officers. I volunteered in the mail room around Christmas when a lot of parcels came and they needed a little assistance. Ja. But my real useful job was, that all the men had

a little pornographic material that was going from hand to hand and was in very bad shape. So I collected that and made nice prints on the typewriter!

Crawford: I don't suppose you have any of that.

Khuner: No. And that [went] very quickly like hotcakes. Everybody was just waiting to get a copy.

Crawford: Did the army provide any entertainment, any music?

Khuner: Well, no, the USO troops came.

Crawford: The USO shows.

Khuner: Shows, ja. A girl came and played the *Symphonie Espagnole* quite well on the violin. Not as well as I would have played it, but she played all right.

Crawford: That had to be considered a fairly remote outpost of the military.

Khuner: No, they went through all the South Pacific Theater. Ja? And through Australia and New Guinea, and the other islands. Just like Bob Hope, don't you know? Hope traveled around.

Crawford: Yes, of course. Did Bob Hope come to your post?

Khuner: He probably did, but not when I was there.

Crawford: And you stayed there until you were discharged?

Khuner: Ja, there, in Finschhafen, in Lae, and then later mostly in Biak. Now Biak is not part of New Guinea, it's an island north of New Guinea. And by far not as nice and scenic as New Guinea itself.

Eliot: Tell the story about how you helped someone select records.

Khuner: I lived in a tent with four other fellows. One was a professional thief, and one was an owner of a bordello near St. Louis, and--I don't know what the others were--oh, yes, one was an undertaker who always dreamt he'd get some corpses to embalm. So that was their civilian [life]. And they were hoping to get back to that as soon as possible. But meanwhile the thief was very effectively stealing big steaks from the officers' dining hall, which we broiled at night outside of our tent.

Crawford: So he didn't give up his professional activities while he was in the service?

Khuner: Oh, no, he was very good at that, yes. He was very good. Ja. And one day he came and stole a whole bunch of records from the Red Cross tent. Phonograph records. And one Sunday morning they

played through to see whether they liked it. So they played those recordings, popular recordings, jazz and so on. And they asked, "Felix, you know about it, is that good?" I said, "That's lousy, miserable." "All right, we'll keep that." Whatever I said was good for nothing, they kept!

And then there was a recording, I remember very vividly, it was a Benny Goodman recording. It was very, very interesting, well played, and good arrangements. So I said, "Oh, that's much better, that's very good stuff." They said, "Well, put it over there." Then came a Mozart overture. They said, "That sounds funny, what is that?" I said, "Oh, that's great music, a masterwork." "Throw it in the ashcan!" They said, "If Felix likes it, it's not for us!"

Crawford: You should have said Mozart's lousy.

Khuner: Then they would have kept it.

Crawford: Well, it sounds like you had a good experience in the Service.

Khuner: Ja.

Crawford: You enjoyed it.

Eliot: Is it true your ulcer went away?

Khuner: What?

Eliot: Is it true your ulcer went away while you were in the army?

Khuner: I didn't have an ulcer then. Ja! ja! I always had a little peptic ulcer, but not during that army time, because I had nothing to worry about. Nothing to think about.

The ulcer was just stress. Stress, circulation. When stress sets in, circulation is inhibited. And if the circulation in this intestinal lining is inhibited, the linings get weak and are easily attacked by gastric juices. This has been found out. I had an ulcer in childhood.

Crawford: They say it's very dangerous [in parts of New Guinea]. You're not supposed to explore, or go to the beaches by yourself or--

Khuner: Well, I wouldn't know that, because we were--of course, we got in contact with the natives.

Crawford: You did.

Khuner: Ja. Didn't I tell you the story of the natives? You didn't know this? Everybody knows that story! Well, the natives were employed, part of them, by the military. Some natives were always



sticking around, I don't know what they did, but they were there. A few, just a few men. So I was up in an old dispensary and practicing the violin, because I couldn't practice in my tent because the fellows were sleeping during the day; they worked at night. Our few tents, they were all working at night, repairing airplanes. So I couldn't practice during the day, it kept them awake.

So I went up there near the jungle, as far away as possible, and found an old dispensary and practiced the violin. I had nothing else to do. And it was raining and raining and raining. And suddenly one of the natives came out from the jungle. And he heard me play, and he stopped and looked at me. And I kept playing, playing, playing, playing.

And finally I had to stop because I was tired. So, I looked at him, and he looked at me, and I said, "Do you know what this is?--hold the violin." He didn't understand it. And finally he got the idea, and said, "Yeah, guitar." I said, "No, it's not a guitar, it's a violin, violin, practice the violin." I said, "Do I play well? Do you like it? Does it give you enjoyment?" I asked several questions. And finally I said, "Do you think it's good?" And he said, "Yeah, yeah, good, good, fucking good!" Then I knew that he was already in touch with American civilization!

Crawford: Did you have pretty good access to reading materials?

Khuner: I was the librarian.

Crawford: No, no, I don't mean you specifically; did they maintain a good library on the post?

Khuner: An excellent library! The army edition of practically the complete American library. Everything was there.

Crawford: And periodicals?

Khuner: And periodicals, *Life*, and so, without ads. I was unhappy when I came back and couldn't get those. I had to read through *Life* with three-fourths was advertising.

Well, I read everything that was there. I read Melville and Hawthorne and Thoreau, the whole American literature in army editions. Ja. Very good.

Crawford: Were the books widely read?

Khuner: I don't know. I gave out quite a lot of books, yes.

Crawford: Very interesting. How about American radio?

Khuner: There was no radio as far as I remember. No, we had no radio. But of course there was the army radio. But I don't remember any of it. Those little hand radios were not invented at that time.

Crawford: Portable radios.

Khuner: Those little transistor radios were not invented. I also worked a little for the movies. In the evenings there were movies; I helped a little the movie crew.

Crawford: What did you have? Routine showings of American films?

Khuner: Ja, American.

Eliot: You never went to the movies after that.

#### IV THE SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY: 1942-1973

[Interview 4: April 4, 1990]##

##### The Monteux Years

Crawford: Let's return to the San Francisco Symphony and Monteux. Was the first cross-country tour with the San Francisco Symphony in 1947?

Khuner: Oh, the cross-country, that was 1947, yes.

Crawford: Did you play fifty-six concerts in fifty-six days, fifty-three cities?

Khuner: It was exactly eight weeks, I don't know--it was eight weeks. That is eight times seven, fifty-six days, yes, that's right.

Crawford: That must have been wearing--

Khuner: And we got a thousand dollars for it. At that date, the scale at that time was a hundred twenty five dollars a week, yes.

Crawford: Was it tiring? To travel like that?

Khuner: Why? I traveled by the train, I didn't have to run!

Crawford: I know, but every day, every day, another concert!

Khuner: Well, that was very simple. Every day, take the violin out and play for an hour, two hours, that's not strenuous.

Crawford: And get back on the train.

Khuner: Ja. And the instruments were separate, we didn't have to carry them. There were big boxes. A big box for six violins; we stuffed the violin in. Next day you take it out, play the concert, stuff it back. No. Sometimes the trips were longer, several hours; and sometimes the trips were short. Some I think we did even by bus, if I remember correctly.

I generally went to the performance hall rather early--I had nothing else to do, it was very boring--took my violin out and

played a little. My colleagues were very angry. They said, "Don't practice, don't practice, don't practice." I said, "Well, I know you never practice; once you have a tenured job you never practice any more, I know that." Once a fiddler has a tenured job, he doesn't practice any more. He gets worse and worse and worse, and by the time he is forty or fifty years, he cannot play any more. But he's tenured.

Crawford: So you're not in favor of tenure.

Khuner: No! No! I mean, financially and socially, yes. A family father should have some kind of job security. But he should work for it, he should not count on it.

Crawford: Even the best musicians don't practice, don't grow?

Khuner: No. Again, there are different things. There are some people who know that they cannot sight-read, and they really practice. And they know that music is so strange to them, generally, that even if they practiced some things a month ago, they have to practice again because they forgot all about it. Even if they play a Beethoven symphony that they've seen many times, they practice it again because they have forgotten. Because they would play completely mechanically, just what the music says. You have to regain the mechanical skill to go from one note to the other, and from one measure to the other, and count the rhythms.

Crawford: But you find that most musicians relax, slack off, if they have security?

Khuner: Except the wind solo players, because you hear them, they play solo. But a string player who plays in the section is completely anonymous, you don't know what he's doing. And Jorda, for instance, knew that, and he wanted to hear the people individually, ja? Like he hears the substitute fourth trombone. He hears them individually. But the people balked, they wouldn't play for him.

Crawford: I wanted to ask you about Monteux's contribution to new music.

Khuner: Well, he was conductor of that ballet, that Diaghilev Ballet [Russes], that played the first performances of Stravinsky. He was interested in contemporary music, yes.

Crawford: And it seems that he encouraged orchestra members here to compose and played some of their works. I'm thinking of [David] Sheinfeld, for instance.

Khuner: Well, Sheinfeld was a special case, because Sheinfeld was a conducting pupil of his. Sheinfeld went to Hancock, to Maine several times, several seasons, to study conducting with him. So Monteux had a little weakness for Sheinfeld. As a matter of fact, Sheinfeld told me that when he wanted to go to Hancock again one

summer, Monteux said, "You don't have to, you are a competent conductor." Which he wasn't; Monteux just didn't want to have him any more. He knew it was hopeless, as a conductor.

Crawford: Summers he would take some students?

Khuner: Well, if you see somebody is in the class two or three summers, you know, there's no improvement, the pupil doesn't show any progress, he was not interested. But of course, he wanted to have conducting students who played orchestra instruments, so he had this little orchestra there, for his conducting students. If you have a conducting class, you need an orchestra! Ja? So he would take conducting students even less talented if they played in the orchestra. He wouldn't like a pianist, though, because he has no use for him in the orchestra. That is all--those little things, you know?

Crawford: Did you record quite a bit under Monteux?

Khuner: Not quite a bit, no we didn't record much. No, compared to the eastern orchestras, we did very little. The Philadelphia conductor, Boston, New York symphonies, they made recordings.

Crawford: You remember recording at midnight?

Khuner: Well, we generally recorded in the evening, because there was a chance that there was some noise. I don't know why. We wanted to minimize the street noise coming in to the opera house. But one thing in the recording, I remember--I think I told you that--the first recordings were made on wax disk, not on magnetic tape. And if there was something wrong, if there was a mistake, you couldn't just play those few measures and then fit it in the tape, but we had to play the whole three and a half minutes again. And sometimes it happened that one of the members, especially in a wind player, made a little mistake. So they said, "Can you play it again? All right, play it again!" Someone else made a mistake. "Play it again!" Some other mistake. So I went to one of them, and I said, "Listen, you play so sloppy all the time, in the rehearsal, and in [performance], you never take care of it. You cannot expect to be good when we make the recording. You are not habituated to play well. You are sloppy."

Crawford: Even under Monteux?

Khuner: That was under Monteux, yes.

Crawford: Was Monteux happy with the orchestra?

Khuner: I don't know. He was very gentle, everybody was his friend. Papa Monteux. Everybody loved him.

Crawford: Did you see him socially? Was he with the orchestra members?



- Khuner: No. Except after he occasionally--yes, after he left, after he resigned, we gave him a party.
- Crawford: And Mrs. Monteux, she was apparently something of a character?
- Khuner: She was very much aware that the music is of second importance. The way people look, that the pants are pressed, no bald-headed men permitted, they had to have hair pieces. You have to sit there and show that you are enthusiastic, ja? You have to get up for a bow properly, don't cross your legs when we play, hold the violin like this, don't hold it under your arm, and all that.
- Crawford: Was she involved?
- Khuner: Well, she had ideas that we shouldn't do or should do. We knew we didn't care what Mrs. Monteux said.
- Crawford: Now, the wife of a conductor couldn't do that, today.
- Khuner: Well, she didn't do it personally, it was through her husband. And if Monteux didn't want to say it, it was done through the--how do you call that?--the personnel manager. Julius Haug would come and tell us what to do. So Mrs. Monteux devised the criticism and the remedy, and told her husband, and the husband, oh yes--Besides, Mrs. Monteux was good friends with Julius Haug, and especially Julius Haug's wife, they were good friends. So that was the channel of authority. And then Haug said, "You do it, the horse's mouth said you do it."
- Crawford: That's interesting. What was your routine like during--
- Khuner: Did you read David Schneider's book about the orchestra?
- Crawford: No.
- Khuner: Well then, I can tell you what he said. I didn't read the book, by the way. Because everything that I remember I don't have to read. Everything I don't remember, I don't care!
- Crawford: That's right. Well, I wanted to get it from the horse's mouth.
- Khuner: Ja!
- Crawford: Anyway. What was your life like during those years? Your routine and so on.
- Khuner: Well, I had my schedule, rehearsals at a certain time, concerts at a certain time, meet my carpool at a [certain] time.
- Crawford: How many services did you have in the '40s?

Khuner: It was generally four rehearsals and four services--four performances. But there were exceptions. There were some weeks when there was some extra thing. There was not a subscription concert every week.

Crawford: Did you have special friends within the orchestra that you saw other than--

Khuner: Everybody was my friend!

Crawford: Everybody was your friend.

Khuner: Ja. Of course.

Crawford: Did you read in the pit?

Khuner: Well, the people who have long, long, long rests, which was not the case for me, of course tried to amuse themselves. But in the pit, Mr. Adler didn't like it. There was a flutist, Lloyd Gowan, who played piccolo, and the piccolo was not very busy, so he had a book there. And it was visible from the upper ranks. And he said, "Why? What do the audience care what we do while we have nothing to do?" "No, you can't do that."

But there was a curious incident. We played *Ariadne auf Naxos* by Strauss. There are only six violins. And most of the time only the first stand plays, only solo strings. So the second and third stands have long, long rests. In the main opera there are four scenes where we don't play a single note. So [Zaven] Melikian and I were sitting on the second stand, and in San Diego, at the performance, we were totally invisible from the [audience]. Nobody could see us. We used to play chess, so, I had a little pocket chess set, did I tell you that?

We had a little pocket chess and played chess. And my colleague in the back--I don't mention his name--who is a--not even borderline moron, a real moron--very good violinist, ja?--objected to that, and he went to the personnel manager and said, "You cannot play chess in the pit, you can't do that." So we said, "But we have about twenty-five minutes not one note to play." He said, "Well you have to count the measures." He counted the measures! For twenty-five minutes!

Crawford: So, what happened?

Khuner: Well! I couldn't do it. They told me not to. We couldn't play chess any more.

Crawford: Well, anything more about the Monteux era that stands out?

Khuner: Occasionally he made a remark to the effect that he was a better musician than his colleagues. For instance, we played something

that was originally commissioned and performed in Boston. And we played it; I was happy to be there when Monteux looked at it and said, "You know what Koussevitzky does?" And he described what Koussevitzky does with this score. And he says, "How can you do that? He obviously has no idea how the piece should go." Now, Koussevitzky was a close friend of his!

Crawford: Was it true?

About Schlamperei

Khuner: Well, I'm sure--I don't know what Koussevitzky did, but I'm sure that Monteux was right, that Koussevitzky didn't know how the piece [should go]. I always have the impression that the conductors don't know how a piece should go. They know it by remembering how it's generally performed. They have heard it in their youth, in their student's time, they go to other concerts, and they continue with that. And then, of course, it comes that it's routine *Schlamperei*--do you know what *Schlamperei* is? As Mahler used to say--

Crawford: Sugary, no?

Khuner: No, *Schlamperei* is slovenliness. Ja. *Schlamperei* is if you don't care, if you cannot do a good job, it's completely unprecise, you could do better, but you are too stupid, too lazy, too indifferent. That's *Schlamperei*. And the Viennese are famous for their *Schlamperei*.

Crawford: It doesn't have to do with romantic sounds?

Khuner: No, no, no, no, no, no, no.

Crawford: Just plain slovenly.

Khuner: You don't wash your windows, you don't sweep the floor, you don't wash your dishes, everything is dirty, but you are happy and go on about your life, and everything is wrong, that's *Schlamperei*.

Crawford: And that's the Viennese?

Khuner: Ja. You know? You are a file clerk, but you can never find the letters because God knows where they are. You are too schlampy to put them at the right place. *Schlamperei* can occur any time. So, you know what Mahler said? Tradition is *Schlamperei*. You are just too lazy to look [into it]--And that's how most conductors conduct. It's just *schlampy*, ja? Now, I have had quite some experiences with young conductors, especially in the Opera, when I finally got so angry and said, "Listen, that's what the composer wants; it's so

clear, why don't you do it?" And he says, "I can't afford to, because everybody else does it wrong, so I have to do it too. I'm young, I want to make a career, so I have to play it the way everybody does."

That was a very, very interesting thing. A young conductor came, from Los Angeles--a student, associated with [Myung-Whun Chung]. He came, we had the first rehearsal for *Madame Butterfly*. And I was absolutely amazed that he did what the composer wanted. You know? It was right. And I'll tell you about Puccini in a while. And in the intermission I went to him and said, "Listen, I'm very happy that you do it so well. What is your background, where did you study?" So he says, "I am associated with this conductor in Los Angeles, and I owe him very much," he said. I said, "It's wonderful, you know? I'm very happy about it." Melikian came and said--saw him talking with me--and said, "Oh, don't listen to him, he is always wrong."--about me. Now this was an impudence.

Crawford: No, he was joking!

Khuner: He said he was joking.

Crawford: Because he's a great fan of yours.

Khuner: But you don't do that, when the new conductor is [speaking with] a member of the orchestra players. You don't tell him --

Crawford: I agree, I agree.

Khuner: However, what happened, that our great General Director, Mr. Adler, criticized him, and said, "You cannot do it, you have to do it the way I do *Butterfly*"--wrong! But, you see, that is, of course, just water on my mills. When a young conductor wants to do a good job, knows the score, and--and the way he rehearsed it showed that he knew it, whatever he said was right on the button. That's the way the piece had to be played. And he couldn't do it. Adler said, "You can't do it." And then, also, in rehearsal, Melikian always says, "Well, that's very difficult for us, we always play it differently." Wrong!

Now, *La Bohème*. Of course I've played it millions of times and I can tell you lots of stories about that. And it's also--what they do to the score shouldn't happen to a dog, you know? Now, there are eleven performances coming up for the Berkeley Opera, and my son conducts. And he does it just right, everything is exactly the composer's [intention], ja? And now, I've found out, it's a great piece! It is wonderfully composed! It is so disgusting how it's always played.

Crawford: How does your son know?



Khuner: Reads the score. He is not indoctrinated, he was not assistant conductor with a great opera conductor who does everything wrong. He looks at the score, it's right there!

### San Francisco Opera Conductors

Khuner: But! We had lots of conductors in the Opera at that time. Monteux was in the Symphony, with very few guest conductors at that time. But there were lots of conductors in the pit for the operas. And I used to say--I remember that--all those gentlemen should stand in line waiting for conducting lessons from Monteux. They didn't know how to conduct.

Crawford: That's interesting. So nobody from the opera stands out, in the early years?

Khuner: Those conductors--Steinberg, Leinsdorf--there were some Italian conductors.

Crawford: How about Gavazzeni, that was later?

Khuner: Ah, a very good conductor. I told you that, a very good conductor. The Italians generally were good. Cleve was a good conductor.

Crawford: How about Patanè?

Khuner: I didn't like him. No. His conducting was very stiff and so on.

Crawford: How about Ludwig? He did so much for the company.

Khuner: Well--Ludwig was a miserable conductor, but a very good musician! It was so difficult to play with him, because you couldn't understand his beat. And I made the following jokes. We played *Pique Dame* by Tchaikovsky. And in that hallucination scene, when the hero--do you know the opera?--he's all, all upset. He sits there, sitting on the bunk, with his head hanging down towards the pit. It's quite good, he's completely out of his mind, you know? That is a very good thing. And then I said, "You know why he hangs, why he sits there upside down? He hopes to understand the beat a little better!"

Crawford: But how did it help you that he was a good musician then?

Khuner: Well, you could see that he knew the score, and knew what the composer wanted, and tried to realize what the score tells you. Sometimes the conductor is quite good, but I don't know: is he good because he knows it, and he does it, or because he had a good example? Now, Jorda was a good musician. No doubt about it. Excellent musician.



Crawford: And conductor?

Khuner: Miserable conductor. No beat at all. He didn't know what to do. [But] I could see how he sees the piece, how he sees the music. When he conducted the Prelude of *Tristan*, it was trying the piece. Ja. You have to see what the conductor sees. The tempi, and the dynamic, and the increasing the intensity--it's all there in the score. But you have to be able to read the score, to understand it.

Crawford: But you also have to be able to tell the orchestra?

Khuner: Well, the orchestra fell apart. Those are the two things, ja? When Menuhin conducted the Mozart symphony, it didn't make any sense, but the orchestra was great.

There are two things. Sometimes the acoustical experience is wonderful--with Pavarotti. The musical experience is absent. Ja? Now, for instance, I coach some quartets, amateur quartets. They all play badly, of course, so I cannot give them violin lessons. If they want violin lessons, they have to come individually. But if they are people, four amateurs, some are better, some are worse; they want to play a Beethoven quartet. So, I have to tell them: you see, you have to do it this way. You have to do, for instance, there are *sforzati* (sings from Beethoven op. 13, first movement), but you have to see that it's a crescendo from the piano to--So the *sforzati* are gradually getting louder. It begins piano, and the first *sforzato* isn't loud, it's a *sforzato* in piano. I give you just an example. That you have to understand, what Beethoven wanted. You cannot routinely play it wrong, because [it was done] somewhere else. And then I say, but it doesn't make any difference to the listener.

Or you play the whole violin literature, also chamber music the violin plays--[you] play it so badly. You play the slow movement of the A minor Beethoven Quartet. It's the song of thanks after a sickness. You know it? "*Dankgesang eines Genesenen*." You know that?

Now, there is a chorale (sings)--it's a slow chorale. And between those stanzas of the chorale are little interludes, that are a little contrapuntal. The chorale is very homophonic, and the interludes are a little more--polyphonic. This is dynamic and this is static. The dynamic is the counterpoint and the chorale is static. You have to make a difference. No quartet does it. For them, it's just notes. They play very homogeneous, with sound, and nice vibrato, and all that.

Enrique Jorda and Programming

Khuner: So, let's go back. Jorda was a good musician. I want to stress that, ja. But the orchestra was totally demoralized.

Crawford: Why?

Khuner: Because he conducted so badly. And I tried. I told you that, too. I tried. I went to the wind players and said, "Please, when he starts doing this, play with him. Ja? You know it's wrong, but just do it. Then he will wake up and say, what did I do? Hopefully!" And they said, "We cannot do that, because we would never get through it in the rehearsal, and it would ruin the performance. So we have to play, no matter what the conductor does, we play ourself." And it worked quite well, we played without conductor.

Crawford: Yes, but that led to his not being re-engaged.

Khuner: Well, that happened when Szell came. Now, Szell was a good conductor. Szell knew right away when he conducted that the orchestra was not ready to play with his beat. Because we hadn't done it for months! So he said, what kind of an orchestra is this? And then he came to a rehearsal, and was standing in the back. And he saw what was happening. And then he told the critics. "The orchestra goes to pot."

When Szell rehearsed and performed for two concerts, after the first concert he noticed that the orchestra doesn't respond to a conductor. Because we were not used to do that. Ja? He came to a major orchestra with professionals--"How come I cannot give them instructions how to play with the beat?" So, obviously, somebody told him we are not used to do that with Mr. Jorda. So he came to a rehearsal and he saw that when Jorda was doing this, then the orchestra played differently, weren't quite well together. Then he said, "That is not a conductor for a major orchestra. That's a shame."

Now, I had a friend, a friend of mine who was quite friendly with Mrs. Jorda. How that was, I don't know. An elderly gentleman. Somehow he met Mrs. Jorda, and he talked about music. And I asked him, my friend, to tell Mrs. Jorda to tell her husband to take conducting lessons. Because there are conductors that really could conduct. And now, Mr. Jorda has disappeared, I don't know what he does. We met him somewhere in Belgium, I believe, when we were on a tour. Ja. Where did we meet him? We met him in England, in London. When we made the European tour, ja. No, I think it was in Belgium, ja. All right.

Crawford: Alfred Frankenstein was involved in that, the whole problem with Szell?

Khuner: Well, Alfred Frankenstein liked Jorda very much. Rightly so, for his musicianship. And if you like a certain aspect of a performer, you overlook the weaknesses. And vice versa. If you have it in for a performance, you hear only the bad things and forget about the good. Ja? And there were certainly some good things in the performance of Jorda. Not because of him, in spite of him. And sometimes--for instance, when we did some French things, he did wonderful.

Crawford: Was the programming better under him than Monteux?

Khuner: It was somewhat different, ja. But the programming is something that I don't want to discuss at all, because it doesn't make any sense. Ja? It doesn't make any sense to discuss a program. You hear one program--you would have to say, how does it fit in the course of a century? Not even in the course of a season. Because you have specks of music that you can perform.

Crawford: Well, they do the same things so much.

Khuner: Repeat performances?

Crawford: Yes.

Khuner: I don't remember that.

Crawford: I mean, the same works, the same Brahms, the same Beethoven.

Khuner: There are only a few pieces. Well, there are more, but for the box office you have to play what we call the "war horses." Of course there is nothing wrong in the war horses, because there are lots of young people who have never heard the Fifth Beethoven Symphony. Why shouldn't the people have a chance to hear the Fifth Beethoven Symphony in a live performance? But you cannot do that, because you have only twelve subscription series and you cannot take the time for the Fifth. Now, especially, everybody hears [these] on the tape, on the radio. I mean, it's an impossible situation, the programming. It's an absolutely impossible situation. It's not like a museum, you can have a big hall, and hang all the pictures, and anybody can come and look at them whenever he wants to see. But not everybody can hear what he wants to hear.

Crawford: But there are always new works.

Khuner: Well, there should be, of course there should be new works. But if you have avant garde new works, nobody comes to the concerts, nobody buys tickets. It's an impossible situation! I cannot discuss it, it's an impossible situation.

Crawford: [Don't] the people come to hear Berg, and--?

Khuner: No, they don't. Well, maybe a little more, ja. But still not. Music performance for enjoying the literature cannot be done unless you have three concerts a day. Ja? If you have an arrangement that in the afternoon you hear all the music composed now, not once, but ten times in the season; if you have fifty-two afternoon performances--I mean more, every day!--three hundred sixty five!--then you can play really all the music composed now. In the morning, you have the concerts where you play all the beloved pops music. Fine. And in the evening, you play all the classical music, the whole literature. Then it's like a museum where anybody at any time comes and can hear it. You can see, you can hear, the *Eroica* every two weeks.

Just like you take the cassette out of your library and play it. If you feel like the *Eroica*, go, you take, and then play it. So you should have the opportunity to hear it live. But not once in five years. But you cannot program the *Eroica* more than once in five years.

Crawford: Well, are you saying that not one conductor was better than another in terms of programming?

Khuner: Well, certain conductors have idiosyncracies. Monteux loved to conduct French music, that's what he was steeped in when he was a student. And he also knew the composers, Ravel, and Roussel, and Debussy, and Franck. He knew those French composers, ja? Krips never heard, or rather, heard very little French music when he was a student. So when he conducted once *La Mer* by Debussy, he says, "Well, that's not my kind of music." And since he was a very stupid fellow, too, although he tried very hard to learn new scores. Contemporary scores, he learned quite well, very assiduously he learned. But French music he didn't care for.

#### Josef Krips

Crawford: What would you say of his term in San Francisco?

Khuner: Well, he followed Jorda, and Jorda's rehearsing technique was to give lectures on the piece. He would go and say, "Well, in the second measure, the second horn has to be a little louder. Ja? Now, three measures later I want to hear the bassoon with a *sforzato* on the second beat. Now count from there, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven--eleven measures later, the celli," losing people. "Now, two measures later--"--by that time, nobody knew what he was talking about. You know? Ja? And then, after he had given a long lecture, he said, "Now this measure we want to play. Nobody had any, the least inkling what measure he was talking about. Ja? He would talk and talk and talk."



I made an experiment once. I came to the rehearsal at ten o'clock and wanted to see how much I had to play the first hour. So I was sitting there waiting. Mr. Jorda was telling things about it. Then he said, "Let's play." So everybody started playing, but I had to arrange my chair a little. By the time my chair was in a good position, he had stopped. Then there was a little lecture. Sit there waiting. Now, let's play a little. Again, I had to arrange my shoulder pad. Ja? Then I had to get ready. I didn't play a single note for the whole first hour. Because as soon as I was ready to play, he had stopped.

So, when Krips came, it was the opposite. Play and play and play and play and play. Occasionally a little remark. "It doesn't sound good enough, it's not quite together. Play." With Krips, it was the following story. He said, "Now we have to do a little studying. Ahhhh --Letter B, right at the beginning, I want this and this." So we started. And we played to the end of the movement, without stopping. Ja? That was his rehearsing, just play through, play through, play through. The musicians were very happy; we didn't have to listen to the lectures, we could sit there and play. Everybody likes to play, why not?

Crawford: Was he a good conductor?

Khuner: No.

Crawford: But a good musician?

Khuner: No.

Crawford: Neither!

Khuner: We were all perplexed. How did that man get the position he was in?

Crawford: During his time there was a mandatory retirement age of sixty-five.

Khuner: Sixty-five was, ja.

Crawford: And were you in favor of that?

Khuner: There are two sides. Once you played in an orchestra and you were competent, you were an asset to the orchestra. Even after the age of sixty-five. Lots of people are not an asset to the orchestra at the age of twenty-five. So it's very arbitrary. There was a music lover, Dr. Eloesser, who was quite well known, an amateur, and had some kind of influence with some people. He wrote a letter that was posted in the musicians' room; he says, as a medical doctor, "I can assert that nobody is useful and competent enough, and has the capability of concentration, of alertness, after the age of sixty-five." Well, as a medical doctor, you know, in his experience, a patient that was sixty-five generally was over the hill.



He, in his observation, he found out that the people, the particular people that he played with, in chamber music and so on, were not as alert and concentrated after the age of sixty-five. But it varies. I certainly, when I played in the orchestra, operas that I didn't like, with an incompetent conductor, I wasn't very concentrated at the age of forty!

Crawford: Well, you see? Age is irrelevant!

Khuner: It's very irrelevant! If I have to play *Meistersinger* with a competent conductor, I'm more alert than anybody in the orchestra! You know? Because they are all bored and hate Wagner.

Crawford: And you love Wagner.

Khuner: Ja.

### The Musicians Union

Crawford: Also, there was a strike in '66.

Khuner: Ja. Well, that was, ja, I don't quite know what it was. Our negotiating committee found that the association was not cooperative, and we had some minor things. Of course, it was money, the weekly base pay, and the chairs had to be better, and the lighting wasn't good, and the intermissions should be longer. And the procedure of hiring new members, and how the seating should go--there were all sorts of things.

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Crawford: Were you sympathetic?

Khuner: I am interested in music, but I was interested in feeding my family. So I said, that's all justified. Of course, we want to earn a little more money, we want to have another five minutes of intermissions, all right, we want to have comfortable chairs, ja?

Crawford: You felt the demands were justified?

Khuner: Well, the demands were not so outrageous. I cannot really remember any, and I don't remember whether I voted for the strike or not. Maybe I abstained, I don't remember. But once the strike was going and we had picketed the opera house, I went there and picketed too. Ja.

Crawford: And supported it.

Khuner: Ja.

Crawford: Were you on the negotiating committee?

Khuner: No, I had never an official capacity in the orchestra.

Crawford: Do you remember the strike at the opera when it was opening night and the contract had not been signed?

Khuner: The contract wasn't signed, and there were lots of meetings, and I wanted to go camping in Washington, I believe--no, in Oregon, in the mountains--and I had my car loaded with all my camping gear on top and went through San Francisco to the coast--I wanted to camp on the coast in Mendocino, you know, all those campgrounds in Northern California--and next to me, suddenly, there was a colleague in the orchestra. He says, "Are you coming to the meeting?" I said, "No, I'm going camping." He said, "Well, we have a very important meeting"--that was just when we stopped at Franklin Street--"You have to be there." I said, "Well, you can do without me, ja? Whatever the orchestra says, I accept."

So, we went camping, and we were on Crater Lake in Oregon. We camped outside, not in a tent. And it started to rain at two o'clock in the morning. And we were about to gradually go back home. So, I said, "Let's load the car and head back south." So we drove about one or two hours south of Crater Lake, turned on the radio, and the radio said--ja, the first rehearsal was about to come, the next day or the day afterwards--and the radio said that the orchestra was on strike and the season will not begin. And I said, "Oh, let's go back north camping!" So my wife said, "Well, that's the radio's thing, we'd better go home, because there will be a rehearsal tomorrow or the day after tomorrow." And sure enough, there was!

Crawford: So, you felt the union supported the musicians well.

Khuner: Well, when I was given the life membership--everybody gets it after a certain amount of years, like thirty years. If you are thirty years a member you get the life membership. That means your union dues are reduced. Instead of--I don't know--a hundred-twenty dollars a year, I pay only forty-three dollars a year. So I wrote the union a letter and said thanks to the union, I could bring up my family. Without the union it would be very difficult. Look at the musicians in Paris and so on, they are miserable, in a miserable situation.

Crawford: Why?

Khuner: Because they don't have a strong union. But the union is very harmful for music. The union is very good for popular music, for entertainment music, for playing in the coffee houses and all that.

Crawford: Why?

Khuner: Because the musicians can make a living. And musically it's unimportant.

Crawford: Oh, unimportant, yes. It doesn't affect the music.

Khuner: It doesn't affect the music. As I said, tenure is very desirable, but it's not good for the quality of an orchestra.

Crawford: When did you get tenure? When did the orchestra get tenure?

Khuner: I really don't know. That was also a contract dispute, about tenure. About auditioning, hiring, tenure, that is all now specified in the contract. When I got the first contract, it was two pages. It just said, "You get one hundred twenty dollars"--or, at that time, it was sixty dollars--"a week, so and so many rehearsals, and attend all the rehearsals; wear the clothing that's specified, and do what the conductor tells you." That was all the contract.

Crawford: Not many benefits in those days!

Khuner: No. There was a little extra thing, that the rehearsal will be two and a half or three hours, and anything above two and a half hours concert will be overtime at pro rata, so a little regulation. Now a contract is sixty pages long.

Crawford: But you had to fight for adequate time off, as I remember.

Khuner: Well, there were always those little things. It didn't make much difference. For instance, the conductor has to stop the rehearsal on the minute. I said, I don't care. If the first part of the rehearsal goes overtime, then the second part is shorter, right?

### Seiji Ozawa

Crawford: Okay. So, anything more about Krips?

Khuner: I was on very friendly terms with Mr. Krips. He always came to me and asked me whether I liked the performance, and I was always very friendly and said--Krachmalnick and Melikian were there; they said, "very fine!"--"You liked it?" and I said, "Very good." I didn't like it all, but I am not going to discuss it with him, ja? Only once I irked him; he came and said, "You know what I did last summer? I conducted in Salzburg, I conducted in Köln, I conducted here, I conducted there." So I said, "Maestro, you conduct too much!" He looked at me. I said, "Take care of your health, don't conduct so much!" Ja. But other things. For instance, we had auditions, first, preliminary auditions for just the audition committee; and then for the finals, Krips came. So Krips came and

said, "How many are in the finals?" So I said, "There are only two." And he said, "Are they good?" And I said, "You are going to hear them." "No, no, are they good, should we engage them?" I said, "Maestro, you have your say, listen to them!" I wouldn't commit myself. "Is he a good man?" I said, "I don't know."

Crawford: Was it Krips who didn't approve of women in orchestras?

Khuner: In Vienna there were no women. Karajan wanted to have a woman in, and he couldn't do it, ja.

Crawford: Well, so, then Ozawa followed. And, you told me before, you said he didn't hear much but he conducted it very well.

Khuner: I felt that he didn't know quality in music. My simile was: "We want to climb Mount Everest"; and he says, "Well, let's go to Tamalpais, they're about the same."

Crawford: Was he a very flamboyant conductor?

Khuner: Ja, he looked very--he had this good choreography, ja. It's just like Bernstein.

Crawford: Yes. How important is that?

Khuner: For the audience? Oh, they have to have something to see! They don't hear anything, they might as well see something! No, he had a good beat. The very first performance that he gave here was the second symphony of Brahms, and it was very well conducted. A little unorthodox, but thoroughly clear, he was very clean. Instead of a downbeat like that, he would give a downbeat like this, the stick behind ear, then go down. I remember I came home after the first rehearsal and demonstrated to my children, they were very young, and they loved my imitation of [Ozawa], because I was good!

Crawford: Now, he liked Berlioz, he did quite a bit of Berlioz with the San Francisco Symphony.

Khuner: Well, that's okay.

Crawford: Maybe that was his particular interest?

Khuner: No, he liked showy pieces. That's what he was criticized [for]. He liked showy, orchestra virtuoso pieces, *The Pines of Rome*, and *Symphonie Fantastique*, and all those things that show the orchestra to the best. Subtlety wasn't, that was not--

Crawford: But he was a good conductor?

Khuner: His beat was very good, and a fabulous memory. That is a great advantage, if the conductor really knows the score inside out and



remembers what everyone in the orchestra does; it's a great advantage. Otherwise we have the feeling the conductor conducts for himself, he really doesn't know the score, he doesn't know the orchestra, he just goes through the motions. And sometimes [if] he does what he has heard before, and it's quite acceptable, then he's a conductor.

Crawford: What was Ozawa's rapport like with the musicians?

Khuner: Very friendly, he was very deferential. He never talked to me without bowing. A Japanese custom. If you talk to an elder person, you have to bow.

Crawford: Did he consult with you?

Khuner: There was only one thing, when we played *Verklaerte Nacht* by Schoenberg, and there were some disputes about notes, and about dynamics, and so on; there are some mistakes in the score. So I told Ozawa that. So one of the members said, "Well, it says in the score, why do we have to play it [like that]? So Ozawa said, "He told me to!" and pointed to me. That was very funny.

I told you those little anecdotes; when Ozawa came, he was asked--before he got the contract--the newspapers, Mr. whoever-it-was, said that he might go to New York and not come to here, and we want him, but he might go to New York, and finally we are happy he does not go to New York, he comes to San Francisco. So he was asked, "Why did you choose San Francisco in preference to New York?" So he says, "New York? They didn't offer me a contract." You know? He was very honest about it. That was just rumors. "I chose San Francisco because it was the only contract."

Crawford: But then he took Boston. In 1972.

Khuner: Ja, then he got the Boston job, ja.

Crawford: Is that good for a conductor to be traveling [between posts]?

Khuner: But nowadays it doesn't make any difference, because the so-called permanent conductors are not permanent.

Crawford: Would you rather have a conductor here, in the house?

Khuner: I don't care, as long as the conductor is good, whether he conducts sixteen or twelve, or four--I don't care. You get used to a certain beat, certain idiosyncracies in conducting, certain idiosyncracies in the music, looking at the music. But that shouldn't be. The conductor is supposed to be competent and believable--the credibility--and have the skill, and knows how to rehearse and behave properly--that's all we want. Ja?



The only thing is that in the old times the conductor was really the master of who plays, because he was hiring and firing. Like with Toscanini. And for that matter, you had to play well for a conductor, because he could fire you. Now, since a conductor cannot fire you, it doesn't make any difference whether he's the permanent conductor who can fire you or a guest conductor who cannot fire you. No conductor can fire you!

Crawford: You mean to say that if he tried to fire a player and they had arbitration, the player would win?

Khuner: Ja, the player would win. It's such a cumbersome process. To prove that a player is incompetent is practically impossible.

Crawford: But it happened with Elayne Jones.

Khuner: No, no, she wasn't fired, she didn't get tenure. For tenure, the orchestra members are asked. After you have your two probationary years, there must be a consensus of people who have some kind of knowledge. And with Elayne Jones, the question is that people complained that her tympanies were not in tune.

Crawford: Was it true?

Khuner: No, the people have no sense of pitch. Everybody criticizes everybody else.

Crawford: That's what Adler said. All the players would criticize, but if ever it was you against a player, then the players would say, "I didn't say that!"

Khuner: Ja, well--I always say, if you would take the personnel list and give it to every member, and say, make a sign to every name that you think we'd be better off without him, then you would collect them and you wouldn't find anybody without a sign! That means somebody always wants to get rid of you!

Crawford: Well, that's not very good!

Khuner: No, but that's a fact of life!

Crawford: Well, wasn't there a feeling of camaraderie in the ensemble?

Khuner: Well, when the chips were down and Elayne Jones was supposed to become tenured, there were sufficient people who said no, she shouldn't get it.

Crawford: So they actually polled the Symphony.

Khuner: I don't know how it was done. I guess only the people who are closely connected with tympani; that means her colleagues in the percussion department or the people who played in her neighborhood,

you know, near where the tympanies were. I wasn't asked about Elayne Jones, but why I wasn't asked, I don't know.

Crawford: Did you tour quite a bit with Ozawa to Europe and then to Japan?

Touring and Recording with the Orchestra

Khuner: Only to Europe. No, Japan I went with Krips. That was, I think, in '63. The European tour was in '73. That was the first European tour with the Symphony orchestra.

Crawford: And how was the Symphony received?

Khuner: Panned most of the time.

Crawford: Panned?

Khuner: Ja.

Crawford: For what?

Khuner: Bad orchestra. There were all sorts of reasons. The sound wasn't good, etc.

Crawford: It wouldn't be considered good by European standards?

Khuner: Listen, I don't know. That's one thing that doesn't concern me at all. Look, as far as I'm concerned, who cares?

Crawford: How were the touring conditions?

Khuner: Well, I was very unhappy to see Paris and London again, it was such a dirty, disreputable--London was awful, of course, after the war. Since I used to live in London, for two years, I loved the city--I knew Paris very well; it was changed. Vienna was horrible! Berlin was horrible!

Crawford: What had happened to Vienna?

Khuner: Oh! Unfortunately it was a very bad climate, it was very hot. Dirty, unpleasant--but I always hated Vienna. The only thing that was surprising, I strolled around with some of my friends, through the inner city, you know, those old baroque palaces. And they said, "Oh, isn't that beautiful! Schönbrunn, isn't that gorgeous!" And I looked, and said, "It is!" I was never aware of it! It was somehow quite interesting to go through. I wanted to visit my old high school, it was torn down, a new high school. Because my high school was an old Esterhazy palace.

Crawford: Oh! But no longer there.

Khuner: It was torn down, and a new building.

Crawford: Had you been back?

Khuner: No, I hadn't been back. First time after 1938.

Crawford: So, thirty years, forty years--

Khuner: Thirty-eight to '73. That is how much? Thirty-six years.

Crawford: You recorded quite a bit [with the Symphony] at the Flint Center. Why did they choose that hall for recording?

Khuner: Recording where?

Crawford: Flint Center.

Khuner: I don't remember that. I remember recording with Ozawa at Stanford. We recorded those horrible pieces with that rock harmonica player. That's what I held most against Jorda, that he did that. We had no business recording those rock things. I think those are the only recordings that still sell!

Crawford: Are there any recordings that you liked particularly?

Khuner: I don't know them, I never listened to them!

Crawford: You didn't care about them. Well, let's talk about the halls [here]. The opera house--the War Memorial--and the Davies.

Khuner: I never played in Davies, so I don't know. That was after my time. I played some casual jobs in Davies. You know that I don't care about sound and acoustics doesn't mean anything, because the acoustics are different in any part of any place where you play!

Crawford: Oh, I know, but the environment in the War Memorial House is so nice, you know? For me it's a much better place to hear music.

Khuner: Well, I was never in the audience--I mean, only once. I don't know the audience. Ja? Backstage at the opera house I like better because Davies is always much too comfortable. The Davies Hall--when I go backstage in a theater I want it to look like an old theater in Napoli!



## V THE SAN FRANCISCO OPERA ORCHESTRA: 1948-1983

### Remembering Gaetano Merola and Kurt Herbert Adler

Crawford: Well, that's a good place to break and talk about the Opera. You had played under Merola and--

Khuner: Well, the Opera was part of the yearly activity. And then it turned out--the plan was, the Opera play longer and the Symphony start earlier, so they had to have two different orchestras.

Crawford: Yes, and you chose the Opera.

Khuner: Yes, I chose the Opera, because--was I already retired from the Symphony? No, I wasn't. I really don't know. I think I was retired from the Symphony already, I only played the Opera. Do you know the year when the split occurred? I did not play the Symphony after '73. When was the split?

Crawford: It was later than that, because we didn't have the new facility. But Adler formed that new orchestra for the 1980-81 season.

Khuner: Ja, but I don't remember whether I voluntarily [quit]--no, I didn't. No, it was after I was retired from the Symphony, I continued playing at the Opera.

I remember there were some people who left the Symphony voluntarily for the Opera because they got a better situation. For instance, the second player in the Symphony became first player in the Opera. Then some people were urged to leave the Symphony. And I remember there were those three reasons: and some people just wanted to work less.

Crawford: Is that why you retired from the Symphony?

Khuner: I had to retire because there was compulsory retirement. I was supposed to retire in '71. I was sixty-five years old in '71. I got my notification, and my handshake, "Goodbye, we were happy to have you!" And a lady from Boston was hired in audition to take my place in the Symphony. And the conductor in Boston, whoever it was at the time, wouldn't release her, said she still had a year in the



contract. They didn't let her break the contract. So she wrote a letter to the symphony at the last moment: "I'm sorry, although I am accepted in the San Francisco Symphony, I cannot play it because I cannot leave Boston." So they came to me and said, "Can you play another season?" I said, "Why not?!" So I played another season when I was past sixty-five, to the age sixty-six. Then, in sixty-six, there were vacancies, temporary vacancies, sicknesses; one violinist's wife was dying of cancer and he wanted to take a leave of absence. So I substituted. And then came the European tour, and I played second piano in the Fourth Ives Symphony. So they needed somebody who could play this one piece, second piano, just a few notes to play. So I played this season too. So I played two seasons after my legal retirement. But I did not quit the Symphony for the Opera, because I was out of the Symphony already.

Crawford: Was that a good orchestra that Mr. Adler assembled? I know he had auditions all over the country.

Khuner: Ja, there were auditions, yes, that's right. And the orchestra was assembled, and then we had some preliminary rehearsals, for two weeks, I believe, to get the orchestra [better]; it didn't do any good.

Crawford: Why?

Khuner: Because a player is just as good as he is--

[pause, doorbell rings]

Khuner: --if you have a pair of oboe players, first oboe, second oboe, they cooperate and play together; so you get a new fellow, play half an hour with him, you know him, you don't need particular rehearsals. For a string section it doesn't make any difference. So we went through these preliminary rehearsals with rather incompetent conductors--Mr. Bradshaw, Mr. Agler, Mr. Waters, Mr. Behr. Complete waste of time, waste of money, didn't do any good.

Crawford: But it was a good orchestra?

Khuner: It was just as good as it was, ja. Not a bad orchestra.

Crawford: Let's go back a little bit. You played under Merola, of course, worked under Merola.

Khuner: Yes, not much, because just the first few years when I played the Opera.

Crawford: Mr. Adler said that he never did certain Puccini works, because Merola could do them perfectly. And he said *Bohème* was one.

Khuner: I don't think [so]. Now, Merola was again not a very good conductor. His beat--he got lost, and there were certain things

that he just couldn't do. I remember once we had a rehearsal of the *Rigoletto*, and he came afterwards and asked me, "How was the rehearsal?" And there were two things: Leonard Warren had a little run-in with the conductor. He wanted to have a different tempo, and then Leonard Warren says, "Well, I'm singing here, my tempo goes;" and the conductor says, "But I'm conducting here, my tempo goes." So Merola asked me whether that was true; it was reported. I said, "That's exactly what happened." He said, "Well, we are not to engage Mr. Warren any more." And he never sang here again. And he was a top baritone [in those days.]

But the conductor had a tempo set, and he expected the singers to take the tempo. And Warren suddenly took a totally different tempo, and the conductor [didn't expect it]. That was *Rigoletto*. And then also, in that aria, you know, that's so difficult with the cello solo, they were not together. So Merola asked me, "Is it true that"--that was after a performance--"that it fell apart?" I said, "Yes, Mr. Warren took so many liberties you couldn't play with him." So Merola said, "Yes, that's why I am never going to conduct *Rigoletto*."

Crawford: Never going to conduct *Rigoletto*?

Khuner: Just *Rigoletto*, because he couldn't handle the difficulty, the rubato of the singers with the cello.

Crawford: What did he conduct specially well?

Khuner: I don't remember. He conducted *Butterfly*. I remember *Butterfly* was good. Otherwise I don't remember much. He was a very good musician. I remember--I was much impressed--also a performance in Stern Grove. We played the chorus, the procession to the church in *Lohengrin*, second act. And that was a very good performance of it. It's a very unassuming piece, it's just a march. But what he did out of that little piece with the singers was very good.

Crawford: What about Adler as a conductor?

Khuner: Well, Adler was a miserable conductor, he had no beat at all. However, he had a very good, exact concept how he wanted the music to go. I didn't say that he was right, but he knew how it should go, and he conveyed it, for my understanding, very well. But conventionally, his beat was impossible.

Crawford: How did he show you?

Khuner: Well, he did what is important in conducting. The loop before the beat, the loop between the beats--and his conducting had only loops, and no beats. But the loops indicate what he wants. This is not conducting, you might as well play with a metronome, you don't know when the next beat comes. You know the next beat only when you see the loop. Now the beat is here. And so on. Now,

Adler conducted without beats, it was only loops. But I knew that he wanted the beat, now--now comes the beat. And his loop was not very--how shall I say--anatomically sound, it was very clumsy, the whole arm from the shoulder. But I knew what he wanted! But if you are a conventional musician, if you want to see the beat really clear, then he had no beat. Now, Leinsdorf has the same thing. He has no beat, he conducts like that--no conducting!

Crawford: Was Adler difficult to work with?

Khuner: Well, I remember once he conducted *Traviata*, and it was really bad conducting, and Zaven Melikian was sitting next to me and he said, "It's amazing how good music he makes out of this shitty opera!"

Crawford: He didn't like the opera!

Khuner: *Traviata*, it's a very unpleasant opera.

Crawford: But you don't like Verdi much, anyway.

Khuner: Much overrated. Puccini was a much better composer than Verdi.

#### Thoughts about Opera

Crawford: Talk about the composers a little bit.

Khuner: Well, Puccini had already studied Wagner and Brahms, you know? He knew how to handle motives and how to handle the orchestra, and how to develop themes, which Verdi couldn't do. Verdi is such a shallow, unsophisticated kind of music!

Crawford: Even the later ones?

Khuner: Also. They are very, very overrated.

##

Khuner: One of my colleagues criticized me for saying that [Verdi's] music is worthless. I should understand how much better, how much more developed Verdi is, compared to Bellini or Donizetti. Maybe, maybe. But Donizetti is unassuming; the comedies of Donizetti are delightful. *Don Pasquale* I like, it's also--very little music, that much music. [gesturing] Puccini was a good composer. As I told you, my experience with *La Bohème* was really a revelation. If it's done right, you see the musician's mind. But Puccini was a great master. Not only does he have the mind of a composer, the skill of a composer, the intention of composing music, and success in composing music; he also has what is for me necessary in a piece

of music: it really hits the nail on the head for the situation on the stage. It is just right. He is very interesting.

Crawford: It's theatrical?

Khuner: Well, it is that--as theater music it is grand. If it were only theater music, it would again be valueless, but he is also a good composer.

Crawford: What did Verdi do? What was Verdi doing in all those lines?

Khuner: To tell you the truth, I don't know! No, Verdi is also--he had the gist, the general emotion of the thing. Radames coming out and singing "Celeste Aida", I don't--

Crawford: Well, take a piece like *Trovatore*, which is a strong drama--

Khuner: *Trovatore* has some very popular tunes that are very catchy. The story of *Trovatore* is so involved, and so--but there are those moods, the jealousy of Count Luna, and the desperation of the mother in the last act, and so--these are all emotionally very [strong]. But Puccini is so much more sophisticated, so in detail, every little thing counts.

Crawford: How about Wagner? I know Wagner is a favorite.

Khuner: Well, Wagner is of course a different case. He is not only a musician, he is a--first of all the Wagner text, the German, is a very important part of German literature. That is just so. There are some lines that are absolutely masterful. And then the other, the manifold aspects, for instance, *Die Meistersinger* is totally different than *Tristan*, and *Tristan* is totally different from *Walküre*, again totally different than *Parsifal*. The multi-faceted aspect of the music. And then the music itself. Why the people are so taken by the *Ring of the Nibelung* I don't know. I don't know. The drama is more or less--as a drama, it's not very interesting. As a commentary on the human existence it's fabulous.

Crawford: Let's talk about some of the new pieces that were done while you were there. For instance, *Blood Moon* was something that I heard.

Khuner: I don't remember that. I didn't think it was so outrageous, it was very mediocre. Ja. People said it was a waste of money to do that. But then we played *Troilus and Cressida* by Walton. But to tell you the truth, when I play in an orchestra, I try to do a professional job and not to think too much about it. Walton was--it was difficult, it had a very difficult first violin part, and I remember I had to practice that a little. And then I didn't play too well.

Crawford: This is the *Troilus and Cressida*.



Khuner: *Troilus and Cressida*, ja. There was very little new music. Later we played *Lear*.

Crawford: You had *The Angle of Repose*, that was the Imbrie piece.

Khuner: Ja. I was not very much impressed with that either, although Imbrie is a good friend of mine. I don't know. Now, more interesting is *The Rake's Progress*. It is like everything by Stravinsky, very, very interesting, and I cannot get warm to it. The interesting experiment, to use music of old times and translate it to--but that's not what Stravinsky does. He takes old music and distorts it, and then it becomes Stravinsky. Now, in the last concert of my son's orchestra we played two pieces, *Petrouchka* by Stravinsky and a cello concerto by Prokofiev. Now the cello concerto by Prokofiev is very well composed, and an ugly piece, I really didn't like it. And *Petrouchka* is not composed at all, it's gibberish, but I love it!

#### On Opera Production

Crawford: Are there any particular opera productions, performances, that you remember because of a singer or because of a conductor?

Khuner: Oh, there are some striking things, oh, yes, there are quite a number of them. First of all, some of the Ponnelle productions are just absolutely striking. He was not too faithful to the music, but he was never against it like some people are. He was respectful to the music, I would say. Not slavishly, but respectful. But he added considerable to it.

Crawford: Did you like his Mozart, his *Marriage of Figaro*?

Khuner: The movie, you mean?

Crawford: Oh, that's right, it was a movie, it wasn't here.

Khuner: No, no. No, that I think was completely off the mark. I didn't hear the complete thing. But it was--I think it was offensive, I didn't like it, it was against Mozart. There were other things I didn't like. *Otello* I didn't like. *Turandot* was nondescript, but *Pagliacci* and *Cavalleria Rusticana*, *Così fan tutte*, *Cenerentola*--

Crawford: Yes, that was a delightful one. *Idomeneo*, do you remember that?

Khuner: That I didn't--I don't know it well enough. I can only evaluate something that I have very clear ideas about myself. Otherwise I don't know.



Crawford: Now, Adler was very proud of that 1970 *Tristan*, when he got Windgassen to sing.

Khuner: Ja. I remember that, ja. Well, Windgassen was an old gentleman, and that was a really routine job. He sang everything that was in the score and it didn't make much difference.

Crawford: How about Jon Vickers?

Khuner: Vickers was very good in *Walküre*, that was the only thing he sang [in the *Ring*]. He didn't sing anything else but *Walküre*.

Crawford: Would Vickers be that musical counterpart to Pavarotti?

Khuner: Oh, he's much more intelligent.

Crawford: Well, that's what I'm saying.

Khuner: Ja, well sure, he's more intelligent, ja. He has certain mannerisms that are not always pretty. Every singer has a certain mannerism. He sang much too much falsetto in the *Walküre*, but nobody's perfect!

Crawford: What about the [McEwen] *Ring*? Did those impress you?

Khuner: Well, very objectionable.

Crawford: Objectionable?

Khuner: Oh, ja! The one with the two towers at the end of the stage? I mean, you go, you see *Rheingold*, and the water, whatever it is, with the two towers that are always there? You don't remember that. There were two very elaborate buildings on both sides of the stage, that--

Crawford: Yes, this was staged by Lehnhoff.

Khuner: Lehnhoff, ja, that's right. That's the son-in-law of Boehm, isn't it? Ja. So I said, if he can do that to the stage, then we can play a Sousa march before and at the end of every act! Why not!

Crawford: They go too far now--

Khuner: That has nothing to do with it. But if people like a Sousa march, we'll play one. Or a prelude by Gershwin.

Crawford: Yes, I agree. How about Boehm, speaking of Boehm?

Khuner: Well, he was only here for *Die Frau ohne Schatten*.

Crawford: Yes.

Khuner: Well, it's remarkable. After we rehearsed it with him and performed it several times, I knew exactly what he was doing. Then I heard the recording, and the recording is like a carbon copy of our performances. And it's very remarkable: the conductor is so strong in his concept of a piece that no matter under what circumstances, and where and when it is, it's always the same piece. Ja.

Crawford: Was he very authoritarian? I heard he was.

Khuner: Oh, ja! Ja, he is. If somebody smiled, he said, "Well, what's so funny about it, why do you smile?"

Crawford: Was he unkind to the musicians?

Khuner: Well, he was not kind. He was not insulting, but he wanted to have discipline.

Crawford: And it went well?

Khuner: He was not a German, he was an Austrian. That was remarkable. He behaved like a German. You know, there was a German conductor by the name of Rosenstock. And we used to say that he combined the precision and discipline of an Austrian with the easy-going loveable manner of a Prussian! His conducting is--we knew that he has a very small beat, but he did everything that was necessary. He was immobile. Occasionally--he would sit there and conduct, but then he'd suddenly do this, now everybody--that's loud. Now do this--and collapse again. That worked very well. No, he was a good craftsman in conducting.

Crawford: [Remember] Calvin Simmons?

Khuner: Well, Calvin Simmons was a very promising conductor. He was one of the few conductors where you really felt that he had the concept in his mind, and it went into his arm for conducting. The interval--it's called the "inner beat"--that he feels the beat, he lives the beat, it is set. There are conductors who seem to conduct, and you say, well, he doesn't even count in his mind. He doesn't know what his arm is doing. Now, again, Adler knew exactly what the arm was going to do, And I understood it because he conducted the loops and not the beats.

Crawford: But it was okay.

Khuner: For me it was, ja, I had no complaints about Adler. And I told him so; I said, "I always know what you're doing."

Crawford: Yes. James Levine. Remember him?

Khuner: Excellent performance! One performance, Tosca. Very impressive!

Crawford: Even very young.

Khuner: He was young at that time, ja. Levine was very impressive. But of course I only [know] it from the one performance. Not only he liked the opera; he said, "I love opera, I always live this opera, opera is my atmosphere, where I want [to be]"--and it was a very good performance. It was the last performance where Dorothy Kirsten sang. That was her farewell performance of *Tosca*. That was remarkable.

Crawford: She was a great artist, wasn't she.

Khuner: She was very intelligent, yes. Above the intelligence of singers generally. She was not a professional singer, she was a businesswoman before she became a singer.

Crawford: Who are the singers who have this intelligence, this great intelligence?

Khuner: Well, there were some, some--[Jan] Peerce had it. Peerce was a real musician. He was a good violinist. Before he became a singer. He played a little in the orchestra. He said, "I would like to play a little--give me your seat"--and he played a little. He was a good violinist. And--oh, there were others. For instance, Paolo Montarsolo. This Italian. And--Capecchi?

Crawford: Oh, Capecchi, Renato Capecchi. Still singing at the Met!

Khuner: Ja. Well there are--I would have to go through the list; I can find out--lots of singers are intelligent.

Crawford: Elisabeth Söderstrom I thought was very good--

Khuner: Who?

Crawford: Söderstrom.

Khuner: Supposed to be, but I couldn't tell.

Crawford: Leonie Rysenek. Viennese.

Khuner: No Viennese is intelligent! [laughs]

Crawford: Now, you had the pit enlarged in 1976. Did it make a big difference?

Khuner: Well, we had more room for the enlarged orchestra, sure.

Crawford: But for the string players it was especially important?

Khuner: Well, that doesn't make any difference. As long as I have room to bow. As long as I can adjust my seat so I can see the conductor.

If I cannot bow because a fellow sits here, and if I want to go a little to the left or the right to see the conductor and I cannot do it, it's uncomfortable. Sometimes it's only a little, a couple of inches this way or that way; it always can be arranged.

Crawford: But you also had a much-enlarged string section then?

Khuner: If you need a bigger orchestra, you need more room for it, ja.

Crawford: Yes. But I mean, doesn't it make a difference in Wagner? In Strauss?

Khuner: It would be good, desirable, to have a bigger string section. But what happened? So they add another stand of first violins, two players who cannot play anyhow. So what difference does it make? They just warm their seats and sit there, ja.

Crawford: So it didn't bother you before?

Khuner: Well, I cannot tell. If I would be so fussy about the sound, I would have to sit in the audience and say, now I hear fourteen players, and now I hear sixteen players. They don't hear it the difference. They added probably eight or ten players in the string section.

Crawford: Is that all?

Khuner: One stand in each section, ja. Two first, two second, two violas, maybe one cello.

Crawford: So that wasn't any big matter.

Khuner: No, maybe [to] some people who really are listening to the sound all the time--I don't listen to the sound. You know what I always say? It's very nice to have good weather and a good pavement for your vacation trip. You want to make a trip to the Rockies, see all those beautiful lakes, and the woods and the things. And come back and say, "Well, the weather was marvelous, wonderful! And the roads were exquisite! Much improvement! The Rockies I didn't see." Ja? But I like good roads, under any circumstances, and if I have a good road when I make a vacation trip, it makes it more pleasant. I don't have to have broken axles all the time because there are nothing but chuck-holes in the road, I can go on. And if the weather is good, I see the mountains, it's not foggy and rainy.

Crawford: That's what it represents to you.

Khuner: Ja. But that is not why I go. Because people don't care what they hear as long as the weather is good. They love the good weather because they sit on their couch and see the sun shine. The weather is good!

Crawford: Yes. I get the [simile].

Khuner: Those are the similes I always use.

So, a good conductor is present to have a good performance. Now, other singers, intelligent--I don't know. Good performance, good productions--There was a gorgeous production of *The Merry Widow*. What for? Did you see that? Mr. Mansouri?

Crawford: Yes, Mr. Bonyng? Wasn't that for Mr. Bonyng?

Khuner: Ja, ja, but the production was Mr. Mansouri, when he took the Toronto production here. Ja?

Crawford: It's just one way more not to see the Rockies, isn't it.

Khuner: Ja. Ja.

Crawford: You left the opera in 1983. That was after Mr. Adler already left?

Khuner: I played several seasons under McEwen. I think I played--of that complete *Ring*, which was given--*Rheingold* and *Walküre* in the fall, and *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung* in the spring. And that spring I didn't play any more. But what year it was, I don't know. [1983] I played all the summer seasons except that first one that I didn't play was the season when they had *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*. You know, that was supposed to be the complete *Ring* in that year. With Edo deWaart conducting. *Rheingold* and *Walküre* was in the regular fall season, which I practiced a little while; and then I was fired, and--

Crawford: You weren't fired, were you?

Khuner: I was fired.

Crawford: You told me they urged you to resign.

Khuner: Well, they urged me so intensively, and it was so important that I resign so--

Crawford: Why?

Khuner: I don't know. I said, "Why do you want me to resign?" I never got an explanation.

Crawford: Was it the management?

Khuner: I don't know! It was McEwen, I guess.

Crawford: Well, how was Edo deWaart as an opera conductor?



Khuner: He was very good. Ja. He did all the right things, you know. Although people complained it was too tame, it was too uninspired, it was not fiery enough, it wasn't dramatic enough. All not true.

Crawford: The critics.

Khuner: Ja.

### Music Criticism

Crawford: What do you think of the critics?

Khuner: Well, to criticize music is very, very difficult. I'm glad I'm not a critic. First, you should have a complete knowledge of every going-on, which you cannot possibly have, you know? You cannot. Even if you go to three concerts every night, you still don't hear everything, ja? And if you want to criticize, well, you have to have a musical education. But what is musical education? You should know everything about Mozart, Brahms, Schubert, Debussy, Ravel, Berlioz, and the whole--nobody knows everything. Every knowledge is sketchy.

Crawford: So you think it's kind of a silly exercise?

Khuner: It's just a casual [thing]--to say your momentary opinion.

Crawford: Does it help with audiences? Does it help to inform an audience to have a good critic?

Khuner: What information can you get? You can get only gossip!

Crawford: Are any of the critics better than the others?

Khuner: Well, some are more educated than others. Some write better than others. There are some critics who are very benevolent, everything that is produced publicly has to be good because it has to have some good things. There are no public performances that are absolutely miserable throughout. I can say even the worst performance of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony can sound very good if it has a good oboe player. Ja? So you forget about the bad performance and say the orchestra played very well, the soloists, the oboe and the first horn were very good. That's what you get when a guest orchestra comes. Ja? Because there's an oboe player who is a little better than the one that you heard in our local orchestra. So he says, "Well, the winds are very good." The Chicago orchestra is very good, they have very good winds--

Crawford: Do you read the critics?

Khuner: No, no, no. Except for some special reason. Then there are some people who are generally, habitually mean. Because they--there is a German saying, "Kritik is wenn jemand an jemand eine Mut hat." You are a critic, and you write a "Kritik" [critical review, not the reviewer] if you have it in for somebody.

Crawford: It has to be negative.

Khuner: Ja, ja. For what reason, I don't know. Either they really don't like performances or they have good reasons to criticize the performances. Or they have--are naturally overcritical, like I am. If I were a critic, I would probably would be very mean, too! Although I am very good-natured!

Crawford: You would be very exacting, I would think.

Khuner: Ja, ja. Sometimes you are beholden to the higher powers. If you know that somebody is engaged and gets a lot of financial support, certain people, you don't want to antagonize them. They spent so much money for a production or for a conductor, so it must be good. They have to get their money's worth. And how do they know they get their money's worth? Because the review is good.

Crawford: But that doesn't affect the reviewer.

Khuner: It does. It can. If Mr. Commanday knows that a very important person gave a lot of money for a certain thing, he's not going to criticize too severely. Ja? They gave two million dollars for the production.

Now, there was the case of Mr. Getty's opera in Marin County. Did you read Mr. Kosman's follow-up? He said, "Obviously only money talked for that performance." And he said, "As long as a Santa Rosa orchestra plays the performance, it's okay. Because what Santa Rosa does is not so very important for music." But if that performance is done in an important place--you know?--where it takes the place of something worthwhile to perform, then it's objectionable.

But like always, no public performance is all bad. Except a very casual performance. I remember some chamber music performances that were improvised by some of my orchestra colleagues who were really so bad there was nothing good in it.

Crawford: Nothing you could say!

Khuner: Nothing!

Crawford: Okay. Well--now, we didn't talk about your work at UCB. Your teaching. You want to do that today or do you want to do that next time?

Khuner: Well, we can do it today. Now, my tenure--my guest appearance--at UCB came about like that: There was Michael Mann, who was a viola player in the Symphony, he is an amateur. And because he is the son of Thomas Mann--did I tell you this story? No?

Crawford: No.

Khuner: He is the son of Thomas Mann. And when Monteux met him casually, I don't know how, he found out that he plays viola, and at that time the viola section was very weak because there were some people drafted, it was the beginning of the war. And Monteux thought it would be good publicity for the orchestra, and also a viola player would fill up the section, so he asked him if he wanted to play in the orchestra. And Mann said, "Yes, of course [I'll play]."

So, now, I got acquainted with Michael Mann, we played friendly chamber music a lot. And Michael Mann thought very highly of me as a chamber music player, because I was probably the only one he ever played serious chamber music with, ja? Now, he was a friend of Professor Heartz. Michael Mann was now in the German Department at the University, and Heartz was in the French Department. No, Heartz was in the Music Department.

So when I retired from the Symphony in 1973, Mann came to me and said, "What are you going to do? You are out of a job." So I was very tongue-in-cheek, I said, "Well, either I go on welfare, or investing, or something in between. And Mann said, "You have to have something." So he went to Heartz, who was chairman of the Music Department, and said, "Felix Khuner should be teaching chamber music in the department."

There were a lot of objections. Because I was supposed to teach chamber music many years before, before the Griller Quartet came. When the Griller Quartet came, I was cut off before I even started. When the Griller Quartet left, there were some of the professors teaching chamber music who have no idea about anything. But that is par of the course in our Music Department. But Heartz came over and said, "Do you want to teach chamber music for UCB?" I was very surprised, extremely surprised. Then I found out that was Michael Mann who was behind it. So I said, "Okay, I am willing, if you want me, I will." And I told my wife, "Don't hold your breath, it will not happen!" To my greatest surprise, Mr. Heartz came one day, and we sat down here, and I said I would like to teach.

## VI TEACHING VIOLIN

### The Music Industry

[Interview 5: May 24, 1990]##

Crawford: Digressing a bit, we're discussing publicity, and you mentioned the Chamber Orchestra of San Francisco.

Khuner: First of all, it's not an orchestra, it's a pick-up orchestra of the people; it's not a chamber orchestra. They will give five "unforgettable performances." They know already that it's going to be unforgettable!

Crawford: Everything gets inflated, including language.

Khuner: Ja, that's why I say that all that talking about this is just--of course we have a certain talent that we can read the music, understand the music, have a little skill to perform it--which is not easy to get, it takes years and years of [training], just like a gymnast or a baseball player, or whatever--it's a skill.

Crawford: Now we call it the "music industry."

Khuner: Ja, it's an industry, ja. The word "industry" used to be in manufacturing: steel, and wood, and so on. Now the--what name do they call it now?--the insurance industry! Just like the steel industry, the insurance industry!

Crawford: Has music become an industry?

Khuner: Well, the same way like the insurance industry. They advertise it, and pull the wool over the eyes of the people.

Crawford: But that implies that you are gearing the product for the client.

Khuner: Of course, you always play down to the lowest level. And Schnabel used to say, and I believe that, the performer who plays junk gladly, with abandon, and with joy, that's where he belongs. And if he tries to play better music it's an arrogation.

Crawford: How about the listener, then? Does that apply to the listener? He should go hear what he enjoys?

Khuner: Well, the listener is the consumer, he can buy whatever he wants to. But the performer who plays junk and is successful with a part of the listeners, that's where he belongs, they belong together.

Crawford: But do you see it as your job to inform?

Khuner: No, my job is only to realize the score of the composer for a potential consumer who cannot read. Like a lecturer has to say it, because the people are illiterate, they cannot read so they have to go to lectures. I wouldn't be caught dead in a lecture; why?! Ja?

Crawford: Good point. Because you can read.

Khuner: Ja. Now, if the lecturer has nothing to say of interest and it's printed, I can skip a column. If something [is] interesting I can read it again and mull it over, and think it again. I cannot do that in a lecture. So if you go to a lecture, you assume that there is nothing worthwhile listening to. It goes just by your ear.

Crawford: Unless you take notes.

Khuner: No, who can take notes, unless you have shorthand. Nobody takes notes at lectures, except the professional stenographers. What's that club in San Francisco? That exalted club, they get lecturers from all over the place? Oh, come on, every Wednesday afternoon or whenever it is--

Crawford: Oh, yes, Commonwealth Club.

Khuner: Commonwealth Club, yes.

Crawford: But then, let's apply that to university. How do we educate our children? They can read--.

Khuner: Oh, education is a different story! You have somebody who is an expert about a certain topic and the students want to learn about it. You tell them. There are textbooks, and the textbook has to be elaborated and explained and interpreted, and repeated. And then you make a test whether it's understood. That's education, it's a totally different thing. I can take a group of pupils and educate them about a Haydn quartet, of course I can do that. Uh huh? I would like to do that much more. We did it occasionally, about two or three times we did it.

Crawford: Where?

Khuner: One was in Mannheim, and one was, I believe, in Köln. That was especially to introduce people to contemporary music, and we showed them how a Third Schoenberg Quartet can sound, and how it sounds if



we play it right, and how completely nonsensical it is if we play it wrong. And you can do the same with the Haydn quartet, you can play it so that nobody can understand it, because the player doesn't understand it.

The California String Quartet: 1946

Crawford: That's actually where I wanted to start today. Because we had talked about the two times you worked at the University here at Berkeley.

Khuner: Ja.

Crawford: Now, it was the California String Quartet--

Khuner: That was not education, that was just--that was Mrs. Coolidge donated chamber music performances to different colleges all over the country.

Crawford: No, but weren't you going to be the quartet in residence?

Khuner: No, no, that didn't exist at that time.

Crawford: Oh. Well, what happened with the Griller Quartet?

Khuner: Oh, they were in residence, that was later. Ja. But the University actually didn't engage them--there was the Friends of the Griller Quartet, a private group who collected money to keep them here. But they were also teaching at the University.

Crawford: What were the dates of the California String Quartet? Was that about 1946?

Khuner: We started around--ja, after the war, '46.

Crawford: And you performed about sixteen years.

Khuner: I really don't know. Must be ten, eleven, twelve years; I don't know. We had a friend, Mr. Johannes Floch, a friend of Vienna, who was an amateur, a retired cellist--a cellist amateur and retired businessman--who was very much interested, and he was, so to say, the office manager. In other words, he sent out the flyers, and sold the tickets, and rented the hall. He was the manager. But this was very, very small. We played three programs a year.

Crawford: You did a lot of new works, a lot of contemporary works?

Khuner: Yes, ja, we tried to get some interesting music, ja. Things that are not too frequently played.

Crawford: Did you do Imbrie quartets?

Khuner: We did Imbrie quartets, yes. But at that time there was the so-called Composers Forum, and we played for that also, a few times. That was an independent group of young composers. Imbrie and Kim and Erickson, and--.

Crawford: Sessions?

Khuner: No. Sessions, no. Sessions wasn't here at that time any more. And then we played some new contemporary music. We played Sessions there, we played Elliott. Elliott Carter, I mean. And other young composers, I've forgotten the names.

Crawford: Who are the outstanding California composers, in your opinion?

Khuner: What do you mean? Born in California? Resident of California? I don't know.

Crawford: Berkeley composers.

Khuner: Well, Sessions spent a lot of his time here, because he was a professor at UC. And of course Imbrie is there now. Leon Kirchner was there for a few terms, a few years.

Crawford: Nixon?

Khuner: Nixon is still at the state college, yes. But he is definitely a minor composer.

Crawford: Wayne Peterson is another one.

Khuner: Peterson, ja. We played something by Peterson, ja.

Crawford: And then, later--in '73, in my memory--I think you were hired by Berkeley. That's where we ended last time. You said, through Michael Mann--.

#### A Post at UC Berkeley: 1971

Khuner: Oh, ja. When I was sixty-five--that was 1971. In '71, when I had retired from the Symphony, Michael Mann was very much concerned whether I would starve now, and his friend, Professor Hertz, was the chairman at that time. So somehow he arranged it that I could get a job as a chamber music tutor.

Crawford: Tutor?

Khuner: Well, so-called a "lecturer"!

Crawford: And what happened?

Khuner: Which I enjoyed. I went there twice a week; we had thirty sessions a year. And when I had to skip one or two or three because of my opera engagements, I tried to make them up on the weekends, and the pupils were horrified that we would do that--because their great joy is if one session is canceled, ja? Silver lining!

Crawford: Oh, that's what you said, that the music students were not as interested as the geologists.

Khuner: Ja. And besides, they were all very low-skilled as instrumentalists.

Crawford: What were they studying for?

Khuner: Well, there were some music majors, ja.

Crawford: But you didn't find any outstanding talent.

Khuner: No, no.

Crawford: How long did you teach there?

Khuner: I don't know. And then finally, when I was told I was over age, I should be retired, I had to give it up.

Crawford: Who was that, Professor Heartz?

Khuner: At that time, it was Professor Curtis, I believe. They change chairmanships; every few years there is a different professor taking over the chairmanship. But they couldn't care less what was going on.

Crawford: You don't have a high estimation of the department, do you.

Khuner: I think those people don't care at all what's going on. They only think that they have enough money for the budget, and can hire anybody they want. And there is a little administrative on the lower levels. And then there are a few--Swackhamer, and what's the lady's name? [Elizabeth Davidson] They teach general musicianship. That means they show them that there are four lines to the staff, and there are treble clefs and bass clefs, and there are sharps and flats. You know? General musicianship, so the people [have] some kind of inkling. They could learn that all in those handbooks!

Crawford: But you don't think it's a creative--

Khuner: No.

Crawford: Is there a creative place, musically, in the Bay Area?

Khuner: Musically? No, it's a desert.

Crawford: The conservatory? No standards?

Khuner: It's a desert.

Crawford: What would be something that you consider--

Khuner: Well, of course there are--Kerman is a very, very good musicologist. Joe Kerman. But he is doing mostly research. He doesn't do any teaching. He has a course on--I think--what does he have now? From Schubert to Brahms.

Crawford: Sort of a general appreciation.

Khuner: Ja. That you can read in books. You read the book. And then the baroque--who is this Curtis fellow?

Crawford: Allan Curtis.

Khuner: Ja, that's Bach and Handel. It's all written in books.

Crawford: How about Richard Felciano?

Khuner: Well, Felciano is a composer.

Crawford: He teaches, though.

Khuner: He teaches, ja. Well, he has a little more things to do with music. And then they have Olly Wilson, he teaches American African music; what he teaches there, I don't know.

Crawford: He composes too.

Khuner: Well, he probably thinks that most African American music is jazz, so--Well, that's all right, nice. You get some kind of idea that music is happening. I mean, the students, ja? They know that there are instruments, they know there are composers, they know there is a history, they listen to recordings. Like, I, taking a course of architecture, say, well, this is a church; from here you see the front, if you go around, you see the back; it's that tall, it's that wide--you know? So now I've seen a church.

Crawford: But you don't call it a musical education. Would Juilliard be a good example?

Khuner: No, Juilliard is mostly a performance school. And of course, it's a preparation for making a living. And, as far as I have heard, there is enormous jealousy, competition, intrigues--there are, let's say, three or four violin teachers; everyone wants to have the best violin teacher. In the final concert he plays the Brahms

concerto better than he, he plays faster, and he has a better vibrato. You know? He plays with more schmaltz--

Crawford: Politics!

Khuner: Ja. But they have--of course, since they are very selective in the admission of students, they have very talented youngsters.

Crawford: How would that differ from education in Vienna and Germany?

Khuner: Well, I really don't know how it's done there any more. It probably is very similar--very small style, because not so much was involved. Actually, you couldn't make that great living that a very successful performer has in America. All those people who come now from Europe, they couldn't do anything in Europe right now! They come here to get the money. That was that time, too, when I was--the great hope was to go to America and make big money.

Crawford: For singers, I know, it's always been, go to Germany and make your name; then you can get hired here.

Khuner: Well, that is--that's the other way around. You get the name in Germany and get the money here! But the greatest master of that was Ormandy. He played it--

Crawford: Both ways!

Khuner: Several times! First he got a little honorary title here, and then he got a performance there, then he got [good reviews] here, finally he got the Philadelphia Symphony.

Crawford: What about [Albert] Elkus? You knew Elkus.

Khuner: Ja. Elkus was a very lovable old gentleman.

Crawford: Was the department better in those days?

Khuner: It was much smaller, it was like a family affair.

### Thoughts About Teaching

Crawford: Let's talk about teaching. You have had hundreds of students.

Khuner: Ja. I taught them elementary violin playing.

Crawford: What do you look for?

Khuner: What I am looking for? I am looking for students who want to play the violin.



Crawford: Professionally?

Khuner: Any way. I don't care. I try to help the people to play the violin better. If they want to. There are two kinds of pupils--rather, three kinds. One kind says: "I don't want to play better, I'm not that good, I'm happy the way I play." Forget about it. They don't--If I correct something, he says, "I don't like it." Then they don't show up again for the next lesson, they don't want it. Ja? There are some people who are totally untalented, and they want to play, and they don't make any progress at all. And there are some others who get a little better, they learn in two years what they should have learned in two weeks.

Crawford: That's it?

Khuner: Ja!

Crawford: Nobody who zooms along?

Khuner: No. Well, at present, I have about three pupils who are potentially good players. One will come tonight, this afternoon. She is very talented, rather ambitious; she has a good brain, and is emotionally very fragile. And has some very bad, old habits in violin playing that I try to remedy. And that's difficult.

Crawford: The emotional fragility you can't do anything about?

Khuner: No, no, that I cannot change. That might not be a hinderance, it might not be an obstacle. Because anybody who wants to play the violin is emotionally imbalanced already! And then there is another girl, a young lady. She is a professional, she gets professional jobs. And she has--the talent is too small to really get good. There are certain things that she doesn't grasp.

Crawford: What?

Khuner: In violin playing. Whether it is a pitch sensitivity, a rhythmic sensitivity, or finding the places on the violin, or having some kind of plan what you want to do with your hands when you have some music in front of you. She is just not talented enough. But she is an average professional. And then there is another quite talented also. She does not want to be a professional. So those three are--they actually play the violin quite well. The others are just--nothing.

Crawford: But they enjoy playing.

Khuner: Well, otherwise they wouldn't come, obviously they enjoy it, ja.

Crawford: So it's valid in that way because it gives them joy.

- Khuner: Ja. And they play in amateur orchestras, they play a little quartet with amateurs. They come: "How should I play this passage in the Beethoven quartet, and what shall I do?" I give them fingerings and bowings, I show them how to get into fifth position, make a little better sound, keep the bow on the string.
- Crawford: Is there quite a bit of amateur chamber activity?
- Khuner: I wouldn't know. I know the ones my pupils play in, but I'm not interested in what they do. If they ask me whether I can help them form an amateur quartet, I say no, I don't want to be involved. There is nothing but quarrels.
- Crawford: Well, I talked to one of your students who is an amateur, and she told me that she could always call you, she could call you at midnight, if she was practicing.
- Khuner: Who was that?
- Crawford: Was it Mrs. Strauss?
- Khuner: Oh, Helen Stross, she's a cellist.
- Crawford: Yes, a cellist.
- Khuner: Ja. Oh, she's not--she's a professional, she plays in the Opera Orchestra.
- Crawford: She does?
- Khuner: Ja.
- Crawford: Whomever I spoke to said she was an amateur.
- Khuner: Well, she is an amateur--But she has played professionally for many years.
- Crawford: All right. Anything more about teaching? Is it rewarding?
- Khuner: Well, I like to teach, no matter what it is. I have quite a few pupils [in New York] that I taught how to drive a car. I taught people how to play chess. Now I'm looking for a student of Japanese, because I want to learn Japanese better, and the best way to learn it is to teach it.
- Crawford: Is that so you can play Go?
- Khuner: Yes!
- Crawford: That's what Jonathan told me.

Khuner: For Go I don't need Japanese. I had a neighbor whom I taught how to plant a garden; I didn't know anything about it! But I like to teach them. Some people resent if they are told how to do something.

Crawford: Yes. And so many people, musicians, don't like to teach.

Khuner: Well, those are the talented players who have no idea what they are doing. That's all by affinity, you know, everything was learned by imitation.

Crawford: By imitation?

Khuner: Ja. Well, I told you the story about Naoum Blinder, the great educator, who says, "I cannot teach anybody to play the violin; I can play it for them and say, do the same as I do, imitate me; but I cannot teach them to do it." And the other concertmaster, Krachmalnik, also said, "I cannot teach--."

Crawford: You have to know what you are doing and how to tell it?

Khuner: Ja. Not only that, you have to observe what the pupil does, you have to guess what the pupil feels while he does something. I have to find out why does he, what does he feel in his hands, what is going on in his mind, in his ears, when he plays that. Now, there is Professor [Isadore] Tinkleman--you know Tinkleman, who is the violin teacher at the Conservatory? I have never met him. But he is a great admirer of mine. If he has a pupil with whom he can't do anything, he says, "Go to that old man in Berkeley, he can help you." Now, he's a violin teacher, why can't he?--he cannot help him.

Crawford: Why?

Khuner: Because he doesn't know enough about it.

Crawford: But, do you ask the students, what are you feeling here, what are you thinking?

Khuner: No, I have to find it--no, no, I cannot ask. I have to see what they are doing. Because they cannot express what they feel. It's my job to find out.

Crawford: You watch them, you see, this is what you're thinking.

Khuner: Cause and effect. I have to--see the effect and I have to guess the cause. You know? But it's not so complicated. Once you have had sixty years of experience, violin teaching is not so difficult!

Crawford: That's wonderful, that you like it.

Khuner: Ja. Now, actually, I do not enjoy teaching, so to say, accomplished, talented students. Because most of the time you cannot do anything with them.

Crawford: Because they have bad habits?

Khuner: Not bad habits; but because they know that they play quite well, they are unwilling to do anything to adjust, change--you know?--research, experiment. They don't want to do that. They say, "I play anyhow, why should I be worried about it?" Now, Dounis told me--you know, I told you about Dounis. D.C. Dounis, the violin teacher.

Crawford: I don't know him.

Khuner: Well, he is my, so to say, teacher. I owe practically everything I know about violin playing to him. He told me that Menuhin played for him and asked him for help. And Dounis says, "Yes, I can help you, but you must not play in public for at least two years." That means that Menuhin would have to only study, play violin, from scratch with Dounis. Then he would have probably become a good violinist.

Crawford: But he of course didn't.

Khuner: He didn't.

Crawford: He didn't take the two years.

Khuner: No, he cannot do it. [He had too many] jobs lined up.

Crawford: But he's a very popular artist.

Khuner: Menuhin? He's not an artist. He's a businessman. I told you the ad: the prodigy of yesterday, genius of today, immortal of tomorrow!

Crawford: That was what?

Khuner: Menuhin!

Crawford: An ad?

Khuner: Ja.

Crawford: For a concert?

Khuner: For Menuhin to play. How immortal can a fiddler become? [laughter]

Crawford: Did any of your students go on to have major careers?

Khuner: Well, some of them play in orchestras, yes.

Family, Pastimes, Friends

Crawford: Okay, well, let's talk about your family life now, and--we mentioned that your parents came here, of course. What was their life like when they came to this country.

Khuner: Well, first of all, it was a great relief that they really got out alive. You know? And then it was a great experience in a nice place like Berkeley. After they had spent their lifetime in the inner city, which was rather dismal, whether it was Moravska Ostrava, or Vienna. A dismal place to live, compared to a nice one-family house with a backyard and beautiful surroundings, and the hills around--beautiful. My father was delighted when he came here, and then they started right out to become independent. My mother had a lot of pupils, violin and piano pupils. She had never taught in her life. She only remembered it from her own childhood and practicing with me. She was a very successful teacher. Especially, she knew how to handle kids.

Crawford: Did she teach privately?

Khuner: Only, ja, in her house. Ja.

Crawford: And what did your father do?

Khuner: My father--first he studied English; very, very seriously, until he became proficient in English, which was quite remarkable, at the age of sixty-five.

Crawford: That is remarkable.

Khuner: And then he scouted around, and he got a job as an engineering contractor, a pipe-laying contractor.

Crawford: And that had been what he had done in Austria?

Khuner: No! That had nothing to do with it. He just was a businessman in Vienna, but nothing to do with pipe-laying.

Crawford: Somebody mentioned to me that he was a wonderful baker.

Khuner: Oh, he loved to bake, yes!

Crawford: A real Viennese!

Khuner: He loved to cook, yes. My sister, she was married to an interior decorator who also had a hard time, but finally he got a job with the--what's the name?--Kaufman, here on University Avenue. It's a big drapery store. Anyhow. So, he got the job and he did that for the rest of his life.





Khuner Family, 1977. From left: Jonathan Khuner, Kathy Khuner, Margo Leslie, Eliot Khuner, Gertrude and Felix Khuner.

Photograph by Eliot Khuner



Crawford: Did your aunt continue to teach?

Khuner: Oh, she was teaching all along, but she was married to an architect.

Crawford: She is no longer living.

Khuner: Oh, no, no.

Crawford: Well, let's talk about your own children. I know you have four children.

Khuner: Four children, ja.

Crawford: What was your approach to raising them? Were you strict?

Khuner: Well, I don't know--that is the natural inclination. If you wouldn't have the genes that makes us want children, the human race would have been already extinct. Everybody has more or less some genes that want them not only to feed themselves, preserve their own life, and preserve the race. So everybody wants to have children.

Crawford: What was your idea of raising them?

Khuner: I have no idea. You get a little information from newspaper articles, from observation, from past experiences, from the experiences of your friends, as part of the family. I know how my cousins grew up. You read some books about child-raising of Mr. Bettelheim, or Spock.

Crawford: You read Spock?

Khuner: Well, we have a whole library of how to bring up children! Ja. Child from one to three, child from four to six, ja! The adolescent kids, ja? There are yards of literature about bringing up children. They are all wrong, maybe. I don't know.

Crawford: Did it work?

Khuner: I don't know!

Crawford: Well, how did they turn out?

Khuner: They turned out all right. Ja.

Crawford: You had one musician.

Khuner: Well, of course, since music was something that I was interested in. I was not interested in figure skating, or birdwatching. Every parent has some kind of part of spending his time that he likes. If a boy has a father who goes fishing all over the



weekend, he takes the boy fishing. Ja? If the parents always go swimming, the kid learns how to swim. That's how it is.

Crawford: Did you want to have a professional musician?

Khuner: I had no particular desire.

Crawford: I understand that you didn't want to have music in the house. That is, recorded music.

Khuner: No, no TV, that's all.

Crawford: No TV? How about the radio?

Khuner: Oh, we had radio, ja. The other day my daughter said they felt badly when they went to school and the kids always talked about the TV programs, and they hadn't seen it, and didn't know what they were talking about. So they felt a little left out. That is of course a disadvantage. But the advantage is that you are not addicted to TV.

Crawford: You read, or play music.

Khuner: Well, TV is a horrible waste of time.

Crawford: I agree. Do they have TVs now?

Khuner: No.

Crawford: None of them?

Khuner: Oh, it might be. Maybe they have, but it's not part of their daily lives. It stands in the corner, and occasionally they look at it. Ja. Jonathan doesn't have a TV, as far as I know. Margo doesn't have a TV. Eliot has a--no, he doesn't have one.

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Khuner: Kathy takes care of two babies that she adopted. And Margo has a job with the ophthalmological society in San Francisco. They all keep busy one way or other.

Crawford: Are there grandchildren?

Khuner: Ja. There are three grandchildren.

Crawford: Are you teaching them?

Khuner: No. As far as I know, they are totally unmusical. As far as I can tell.

Crawford: You've observed that?

Khuner: Ja.

Crawford: How old?

Khuner: They are twelve and less. Twelve, seven, four, something like that.

Crawford: How about vacations?

Khuner: Vacation? What do you mean by vacation?

Crawford: Whatever you like to do with the family.

Khuner: Well, I used to go camping in the summer. Just for two weeks. It was very enjoyable. We spent some time outdoors in a tent; we went to a campground, hiked around in the redwoods or up on Mount Rainier, or in--what's the name of the national park?--

Crawford: Yosemite?

Khuner: No, no. Yosemite, too, of course, yes. Opposite Seattle.

Crawford: Olympia?

Khuner: Olympia, Ja, Olympia National Park. Or there are Mount Lassen, Sequoia--

Crawford: But Jonathan said he thought you didn't like to leave your students too long.

Khuner: Well, it was always like that. I said, "I can take a vacation if I give enough lessons to get the money for the vacation. But if I go on vacation, I cannot give the lessons; then I cannot go on vacation!"

Crawford: A dilemma!

Khuner: That's the dilemma.

Crawford: What about other things that interested you?

Khuner: Besides, we don't need a vacation. People go on vacation because they are so bored at home, they want to get a stimulation or something--I don't need that.

Crawford: That's good. Although it's good to get away and--

Khuner: Not true, not with us. If you are, or feel that you are, that your personality, your life, is too narrow at home, it will be too narrow somewhere else, too. I get bored on vacation. Not, of course, not if I hike. If I go on Mount Rainier and make a day's hike, it's wonderful. And then, of course, to cook the meals on a



little cooker and wash in the brook, that's nice. It's uncomfortable, but it's a change.

Crawford: Yes.

Khuner: It's not really necessary. I have so many things to do right here, why should I go away and waste all that time?

Crawford: What do you have to do? What do you like to do here?

Khuner: What do I have to do?

Crawford: I mean, apart from your teaching. Do you read a great deal?

Khuner: Well, ja, I read a lot. I have to study my chess, study my Go, learn my Japanese, read the newspapers, read the magazines, pick out a few books, you know? I have a good collection of old German classics that I always neglected, that I read now with great delight.

Crawford: Who are you reading?

Khuner: Because you asked about Thomas Mann, I have the complete works of Thomas Mann here. You know that, though.

Crawford: You read it?

Khuner: I try a little bit, yes. I don't have a high opinion of him as a novelist, though. I have a high opinion of him as a critic and essayist. But those are things that nobody reads--his speeches. He made a lot of money giving speeches. They are very good.

Crawford: I know he spoke in San Francisco for the United Nations ceremonies.

Khuner: He spoke everywhere, everywhere! There's hardly a point on the surface of the earth where he didn't give a speech! He must have been a very impressive speaker.

Crawford: I like some of his stories. I like his novellas.

Khuner: Which ones, for instance?

Crawford: *Death in Venice*.

Khuner: That's overrated!

Crawford: It's a good story!

Khuner: Ah, it's overrated!

Crawford: And *Buddenbrooks*.

Khuner: Ja, well--I have read--they are right here. You know, I think he's a blabberer, a schwätzer.

Crawford: A schwätzer! No, I think he could tell a good story.

Khuner: But, see, you haven't read *Joseph and his Brothers*, I suppose.

Crawford: No.

Khuner: It's unreadable! It's very beautiful--it's like a collection of poems in four volumes. But it's not readable. There is a German word, as usual, "deigitzing." *Deigitzing* is to make yourself thoughts about everything under the sun. You look at something and have thoughts about it. That's what the Jewish scholars used to do. You take a little Sandkorn [grain of sand] and have thoughts about it. That's called deigitzing. That's what Thomas Mann does. He deigitzes about everything!

No, there are some other German novelists who really are story-tellers. The stories are constructed, and they are dramatic, and they are compelling. The way Thomas Mann writes doesn't have that. *Buddenbrooks*, and maybe *Tonio Krüger* are better. But it's uninteresting.

Crawford: How about your friends? Are they mostly here?

Khuner: My friends?

Khuner: I have no close friends. Everybody is my friend.

Crawford: You're more of a private person.

Khuner: No, not at all, but everybody is my friend. But I have no personal ties, except to my family.

Crawford: How about religion? Did the children receive any religious instruction?

Khuner: Oh, yes, that--very superficial. And some of them are more and some are less. The one most religious is Kathy, my second child. She is very close to being an Orthodox Jew, not quite. Jonathan was very much interested in Jews, when he was younger, and I think he has lost interest. Eliot was never religious, and Margo was never religious.

Crawford: What is their order?

Khuner: Well, I don't know. I haven't asked them, I haven't polled them.

Crawford: No, no, I mean, their order, in age.

Khuner: Oh, in age! Well, Jonathan--no, Margo is the oldest, Kathy, Jonathan, and Eliot. They were born in '43, '45, '48' and '54.

Crawford: You were going to be a mathematician, right?

Khuner: Ja. Well, I was talented enough to. I learned to play the violin while I was working, when I was playing quartets. But, you see, these finer points of bowing, and articulation and character are actually not necessary when you play in an orchestra, because the level is so low that nobody can do it. And conductors generally are not--they are pianists, and they don't know anything about string players. So, their concept, their imagination about the different shadings of articulation is very, very vague, very cloudy. All they want is that everybody plays downbow and upbow at the same time, which is the least important thing.

Crawford: The visual, not the musical.

Khuner: Ja.

Crawford: What would life have been like if you'd been a mathematician?

Khuner: I would be dead!

Crawford: Why?

Khuner: Because I would have stayed in Vienna, and would be killed.

Crawford: No, you wouldn't have stayed!

Khuner: Where else would I live? Of course I would stay in Vienna. I don't see any way that I would have got out of Vienna.

Crawford: Only by music. Only because you were out already?

Khuner: Only because I was out. I wasn't in Vienna any more. I was already a resident of New York.

Crawford: So you don't think you would have made a career as a mathematician?

Khuner: Well, I probably would have been a mathematician, and would have stayed in Vienna, got a job as a mathematician, and then get killed in 1938.

Crawford: Well, what else shall we talk about? What have we missed?

Khuner: We haven't missed anything. It's--the whole thing is of no interest whatsoever.

Crawford: I know you're a very good chess player.

Khuner: No, I'm a very bad chess player.

Crawford: I don't believe it.

Khuner: Ja. Well, chess playing--as long as you play somebody who is not as good as you, you win. If better, you lose.

Crawford: Yes, but your children say you're very good, and a very good teacher, too!

Khuner: I can teach chess, ja. Not in the elevated level but in the intermediate and beginner level.

Crawford: Did you ever compete?

Khuner: No, I had no time.

Crawford: No? Do you play now?

Khuner: Very little, hardly ever.

Crawford: No? Because you don't have anybody to play with?

Khuner: No, I don't play.

Crawford: Do you play Go?

Khuner: I have no opponents. I went to Go Club, but it was not--there was too much smoking, and it was late at night.

Crawford: Where is the Go Club?

Khuner: The Berkeley Go Club, at the University.

Crawford: Oh, really?

Khuner: Ja.

Crawford: Who played?

Khuner: Some good players. Local players.

Crawford: Is there a chess club that you used to go to?

Khuner: There are several chess clubs. In San Francisco there is a Chess Center. The Mechanics Club. Then there's is a club at the Y down here. There's a good club in Burlingame. Mr. Koltanowski is one of the great chess [masters]--lives in San Francisco. There is also a very good Go Club in San Francisco, and one of the biggest.

Crawford: Are you studying Japanese, now?

Khuner: I'm still learning, yes. I'm still a beginner.

Crawford: But you take lessons?

Khuner: No.

Crawford: No? You're learning in books? Books and tapes?

Khuner: No tapes. Tapes are--I try to learn the language, not to blabber around.

Crawford: How much are you working on the Japanese?

Khuner: Well, whenever I feel like it, I study.

Crawford: You have somebody to talk to? Or are you not interested in talking?

Khuner: No. That has nothing to do with it. I would have to practice to talk, and practice to listen and understand, which I don't know at all.

Crawford: You want to know how it's put together.

Khuner: Ja.

Crawford: I don't know the game of Go.

Khuner: In order to play the game, to study in books, you have to be able to read Japanese, because the books are all printed in Japanese. There are very few books in English. And those Japanese books about Go are, of course, very helpful to play better, but I cannot read them.

[tape break]

Crawford: One question about chess: What kind of chess player are you?

Khuner: Well, I don't know. I never played against decent people, I just played in the musicians' room, down in the orchestra, against those people who cannot play. Except there were two players who played better. There was Lloyd Gowan and the personnel manager of the opera orchestra, [Tom] Heimberg, ja. Very good chess player. Lloyd Gowan is also a very good Go player.

Crawford: Are they related?

Khuner: Who?

Crawford: Chess and Go.

Khuner: No.

Crawford: No. Well, do you consider yourself an aggressive player?



Khuner: No.

Crawford: Did you ever play with your wife?

Khuner: No, she doesn't know how to play--I play against the computer. The computer chess game. It's a nice pastime. Go is a more interesting game than chess.

Crawford: How about bridge?

Khuner: Well, bridge is social--it's also interesting. I used to play a lot of bridge.

Crawford: Have you and your wife played music together?

Khuner: No.

Crawford: You don't play music together. Bridge?

Khuner: No.

Crawford: Are there games that you do like to play together?

Khuner: No.

Crawford: No. No tennis?

Khuner: No.

Crawford: Probably a very happy marriage!

Khuner: Ja!

Crawford: All right. Any other thoughts?

Khuner: On vacations sometimes we play gin rummy!

Crawford: Okay! Anything else?

Khuner: What?

Crawford: I know, you have to go.

### Thoughts on Musicianship

Crawford: Well, then--how about summing up? I read that you said "I was a useful orchestra player." What would you have to say about that?

Khuner: Well, I was a very useful orchestra player. I could play the violin sufficiently well--there are some people who are probably more flexible in fingers, or can play faster, or have a better vibrato, and so on. I don't know. When I look at them and listen to them I find a lot of faults. But who doesn't have faults? Ja? And some practice very much, they practice their parts, and play quite efficiently. Some are more concentrated when they play in the orchestra and make fewer mistakes, are less distracted. But I definitely know that I hear more what's going on in the orchestra than they do. Some of the good players, they don't hear what's going on, they just play their own parts. Most of them are musically totally uneducated. They never learned anything about music, they learned their instruments.

Crawford: You said that about Toscanini.

Khuner: Toscanini was a very good conductor, and he was very precise, and he was--musically, he had no standard of musicianship. That was all by routine.

Crawford: By routine? But why did he become so well known?

Khuner: Very skillful public relations.

Crawford: Is that all?

Khuner: Ja. Just now I read that they are publishing all the recordings available. Did you read about that? Of Toscanini. About a few weeks ago. A great project. All available Toscanini will be put on CDs--how do you say? Ja. You will have to buy them together, cannot buy them singly. A great big project, a money-making project. And in this announcement was a little blurb, we will now find out whether Toscanini was a musician or just an Italian bandmaster. And I think you'll find out that he was just an Italian bandmaster! However, the orchestra plays very well. See, that is a conductor--is, the orchestra plays very well. Because they are awed by the public relations.

"Toscanini is the greatest musician of his time!" That was the slogan, you know. Which is a priori nonsense. Because the conductor cannot be the greatest musician. And once that is sold, and you play with the greatest condition that is very efficient, and is very strict, and is very disciplinarian, you have to be on your toes and you have to play well. And the orchestra play well.

Crawford: And how much of that is personality? Just charisma?

Khuner: Charisma was that he was very difficult to please, and he was an old son-of-a-bitch. The same thing with Karajan. Karajan had a different line. Karajan was the godsend. Bruno Walter, Walter was a godsend. They were all great musicians by the grace of God.

Well, it's the same thing. Like the religious leader, whether it's Mr. Moon. They're a godsend. People believe it.

Crawford: It's more personality, then.

Khuner: Well, you call it charisma--sure, it's personality. But they have it. Mr. Clark was the manager of the music department of BBC. I knew him very well. He was a very good--how do you say?--manager. Toscanini was conducting a summer festival, and he said he would not do it next year because there were certain things that he didn't like. So Mr. Clark went to Italy--he told me that in detail, Mr. Clark did--and he went to Toscanini to talk about next year, to get him back, which he didn't want to do. And finally he signed a new contract. And he said, "You know, when Toscanini looks at you with his eyes, you can see the great man through his eyes." So, Toscanini hypnotized Mr. Clark to agree to all the things.

I said, "Well, what were the changes?" "Well, the program would be slightly different. And the number of concerts would be increased. And the honorarium would be tripled." Mr. Clark told me that very innocently. Ja? He didn't understand that the whole thing was for the triple money! Toscanini had no--didn't care what it was, he wanted just three times as much. But the hypnotization of Mr. Clark that he didn't understand that, that he didn't see that. There were no changes. All right, more concerts, simple, every conductor wants--instead of five, there will be seven concerts, ja? Instead of only Beethoven, we'll have Beethoven and Brahms. Those are simple things. But the triple money was the important thing.

Crawford: But he never understood that.

Khuner: Mr. Clark never saw that.

Crawford: And you didn't tell him.

Khuner: No. But the eyes, you know, the eyes! He was so hypnotized by the eyes of Toscanini. That you have to have the eyes to get three times as much money!

[tape interruption]

Khuner: You know, the word *Unfug* is such a good word in German. It's something that one shouldn't do, that's inappropriate. *Unfug*. It's, for instance, if it says don't step on the lawn, and you do something, you drive a tractor over it, it's an *Unfug*. It's not a great crime, it's an *Unfug*--it's a very good word. Something that a knowledgeable person wouldn't do, and protests if somebody else does it.

So all this kind of interviewing people who do an honorable job in performing music, is an *Unfug*. We do not do anything else that a bank teller or a bus driver doesn't do. The bank teller has to be correct in his figures, and a bus driver has to drive the bus safely. And we are supposed to perform the music decently. We should have a little knowledge about it, and do a good job, being the intermediary between the composition work and the listener. That's all we have to do. Everything else is *Unfug*.

The enterprise AC Transit, and BART, should advertise so that they get enough ridership to cover expenses. And the San Francisco Symphony should get enough tickets sold, or support from the private sector, to hire the orchestra and the conductor to perform. And that's all. BART should get enough ridership, and the San Francisco Symphony should get enough audience. Everything else is unnecessary. You say, BART goes from Daly City to Concord. And you can say that the trains will be comfortable, and they will be on time, and the stations will be clean.

You should say that the people who play the music you are going to hear will be competent to do that. We will get a conductor who knows his stuff and knows the music, who can keep the orchestra together, and we'll get good musicians who play in tune, and on time, and together, and in the right dynamic. And we will get a reasonable facsimile of the composition. The composition is written down, the conductor will understand it, the people in the orchestra will be educated enough to do it, and you will hear the symphony well played.

Crawford: So, this inflated language is what you're talking about.

Khuner: Yes, yes. It should be exactly the same as BART does. When BART says, "You also can get out at the interesting places, you can get out in downtown Oakland, Jack London Square; [you can get out in] downtown Berkeley, the University of California, [you can] get out in Richmond, you can see the highlights." They should say, "You can see hear a Brahms Symphony, good composer, and so on." You can advertise it and say it's worthwhile to listen to. And if you want to listen to it, if you are interested in music, and so on. The prerequisites for the listener should be that he knows a little bit about music; that he is come for musical purposes, not to see the great man fumbling around in the air. Ja?

Crawford: Yes, it's gotten to be too much about personalities.

Khuner: No, well it was always like that, you know. Liszt was one of the [examples]. Liszt was, by the way, a much better composer than he gets credit for. A real talented man. One of the biggest talents. I would say that there is a lot of junk that Liszt composed, too, especially the pianistic fireworks. But some of his compositions are--I think the piano concertos are good pieces, and certainly the Faust Symphony is a good piece.



Crawford: How about Bruckner? The Symphony played the Bruckner Fifth last night.

Khuner: Bruckner was a genius in the way that he really had a picture of the music; and the picture is very limited. As they used to say, he actually composed only one symphony nine times. Do you know that? Ja. It was very limited. But in this limited thing it's absolutely unique, nothing [like it] has ever been composed before or after.

Crawford: I thought I heard some Wagner in there.

Khuner: Well, of course, the harmonic events, during the whole music literature, are progressive, and every composer uses the discoveries of the earlier [ones].

Crawford: Sometimes they even use their own again, like Handel?

Khuner: You mean they steal from themselves.

Crawford: Yes.

Khuner: Well, of course! Naturally! Because a composer composes something and then he finds it should be a little different, so he changes it a little. But some of the old stuff is still there, naturally. You can see that especially in Beethoven. He had some musical idea, even if it's very simple [sings little bits], those simple things, they occur in Mozart--in Beethoven--[sings again, the first measures of *Ode to Joy* theme] he really changes it in the same movement, in the Finale of the Ninth Symphony. It's sometimes [sings one way] and sometimes [sings another way]. Very subtle change. It's an enormous change in his mind, you know, whether you repeat the first note or the last note. If you analyze Beethoven, it's very interesting. [sings] Or [sings again]. The finale of the *Fidelio*. Ja. Those permutations and combinations, that's what Beethoven was interested in. But nobody cares about it nowadays.

Crawford: You had talked about that first major triad in *Rheingold*.

Khuner: Well, that is my guess, that *Rheingold* starts in the water and the first words are just unarticulated sounds, and I got the idea that is the beginning. The major triad is the beginning of music, just a natural sound, the overtones of the sound. And I said, life started in the water, therefore the thing has to be in the water. Not the way they do it on dry land. It doesn't go. It's a falsification. It has to start in the water. For Wagner, but not when they do it in San Francisco. That is--the towers, it's just awful, you cannot see that first scene on dry land, it doesn't go!

Crawford: So, if you're preparing to play the *Ring*, how will you approach it? Your first time, how will you approach it?



Khuner: Well, performing, of course, you have to play the foreground, you have to play the notes. It can't be helped. You have to play the notes in the right pitch, with the right things, together, ja? And if you observe the execution marks: short notes, and long notes, and loud and soft, and fast and slow; you already have done ninety percent of what you're supposed to do. But in the ten percent that are left, you have to know why. The old story of the mechanic who is supposed to repair a car. The car doesn't run. The mechanic takes the hammer and hits the engine, and it runs. And he is asked, "How much does it cost?" He says, "Ten dollars." "That's ten dollars for one thing?" "Yes, fifty cents for the hammer, and nine dollars fifty for knowing where." You know? Ninety percent to do what you have to do according to the thing and the ten percent is to know why. And that the people don't.

Crawford: The musicians.

Khuner: The musicians and conductor. Why? All right, there is, of course a whole passage [looking at the score]--especially here--the beginning of the second act. Which is difficult for the violins--here is the beginning. There. No, wait a minute. Ja. This rhythm: [sings with the score--a triplet rhythm]--You see this?

Crawford: Yes.

Khuner: Ja. It's always played [sings with duple rhythm] instead of triple, its [sings both ways]. That is also in the Ninth Symphony of Beethoven, and in the Seventh Symphony of Beethoven. And that rhythm is always played badly because the string players don't have enough bow technique to play it. So Jonathan asked me--the orchestra played badly, and Jonathan asked the conductor whether he shouldn't ask the people to play that correct rhythm. So the conductor says, "Well, I'm not a string player, I cannot help them." Ja? So I told Jonathan the best bowing is [sings and demonstrates]--nobody can do that. They haven't studied the elementary skill of bow technique.

I told you the story when I heard the Ninth Symphony in New York at the room of the concertmaster in Carnegie Hall. And they played the rhythms all wrong. And I said, "Well, they play the rhythms wrong too." So I was ostracized. Nobody would talk to me because I dared to say that the New York Philharmonic, with Toscanini conducting, played wrong rhythms. You cannot do that.

Crawford: Whom did you say it to?

Khuner: To the wife of the concertmaster of the New York Philharmonic. [laughs]

Crawford: Got yourself into trouble all over the place!

Khuner: Ja, but that in itself is not--it's just a mechanical blemish. That wouldn't interfere if the rest of the performance is all right. But in the opera there are so many things. The singers don't know what they are doing, the conductor doesn't know, and the orchestra cannot play. And the stage director does nothing but nonsense.

Crawford: They often don't know music, do they?

Khuner: They wouldn't have to read music, they can learn the music by heart. They don't have to read. They can be told what's necessary. The Hunding Blockhaus, the house in the forest, ja? cannot be like a--Commanday called it the Villa Hunding--a nice country house.

#### Advice to a Young Musician

Crawford: Well, what do you say to a person who comes up to you and says, "I want to have a life of a musician." What do you advise?

Khuner: Well, I say you have to be able to play your instrument to get a job where instrumental skill is required. It would be advisable that you know a little bit about music, but that's not essential, to land a job. And then you should have some kind of performance poise, so that you will do a little performing on your own without being coaxed too much by a conductor. You should also look as if you really meant it, as if you enjoy playing. And for a wind player, you have to have good embouchure and good lips.

You have to be able to play loud and soft, know your elementary rhythms fairly right; not like this, nobody can play it right, but there are some elementary rhythms that you have to be able to--play duplets and triplets, and long notes, and staccato notes. And for violinists you have to be able to play a little spiccato--in the Schumann symphony, [sings passage], or for the Mendelssohn Scherzo [sings passage]--if you cannot play spiccato, you're no good in the orchestra. So everybody has to be able to play spiccato. Some very good violinists might not get a job because they are asked to play spiccato, their spiccato is not good. So they are out of a job--There's nothing to it. It's purely mechanical.

We have three articulations on the violin. [goes to get his violin] There is the legato [now he demonstrates, playing continuously as he describes the different articulations] where you have continuous sound. Then you have staccato where you stop the bow. And then you have to take the bow off and put it on again. That is off-the-string, and that can be done faster, with the bow jumping, and then you have spiccato. [stops playing] You have to

have a good spiccato--you have to have a staccato too, because, in case you have to do this [demonstrates], you have to be able to stop the bow and to resume. And you have to know when the note is long and when it is staccato--the bow has to go a little faster, because you need a little time to stop. Now--that's what I tell my students. I play now legato [demonstrates]; staccato [demonstrates]; they sound just the same but it's stopped. You see that the sound is the same? And now the same sound stopped. And now I play it off the string, like this. See how I take the bow off? Now, is that difficult to understand?

Crawford: No.

Khuner: Ja. Shall I do it once more? Because I'll tell you what my colleagues know about it. [demonstrates] Legato--staccato--off the string. Now, I ask my colleagues (I did it with several) play legato. They do very well. Now play staccato [demonstrates a tight, scratchy, jerky sound]. I said, "No, play the same sound." They can't do that. They cannot play a good sounding sound with an abrupt stop. When they stop abruptly they have to make an accent. You wouldn't believe it, but that's a fact. They think staccato means that you have to [word drowned out by the violin], ja? Now, I say, take it off the string, and they play like this. [demonstrates] This kind of sound, that off-the-string [they don't know]--

See? That's how that girl plays, she can play only with that kind of flickering sound. She cannot do that. And she has had three quite well-known teachers in the Bay Area, and nobody noticed it, and nobody tried to correct it. She is coming for a lesson right after this.

Crawford: Can she change it?

Khuner: I don't know. She has had only three lessons. Now, something else. We have a beginning of a stroke [demonstrates], a duration, and an end of the stroke. Right? The stroke begins, it lasts, and it ends. Ja? Just like a sausage! Now, the beginning can be very gentle. It can be very precise. It can be accentuated. There's a whole scale how a stroke can begin. The duration can be either steady, loud, a different dynamic; it can make a diminuendo, it can make a crescendo. Right? The end can be petering out, it can be stopped abruptly, and it can be like this [off the string]. And you have to choose what kind of stroke you want. And you should know exactly what you do in any moment.

We had a conductor who was an eminent string player, who had an exact idea how the strokes--what strokes he wanted. That was Rostropovitch. He conducted the opera. And he gave instructions to the violins what he wanted. And nobody could do it. And he was practically in tears. He said, "You are string players, you should

be able to do it." If you pass an audition and get a job and after two years you get tenure, you are set.

Crawford: Yes, but do you think the standards are worse now?

Khuner: I don't know, I don't know.

Crawford: But in any case, you would say to a young person, "This is what you need, go do it."

Khuner: Ja.





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# The Original Felix Khuner

By JOHN SCHAUER



Felix Khuner has been a fixture of major Bay Area musical organizations for over 40 years.

Eliot Khuner

*In a certain opera house of Northern Europe, it is the custom among the members of the orchestra, several of whom are cultivated men, to spend their time reading books—or even discussing matters literary and musical—whenever they perform any second-rate operas. This is to say that they read and talk a good deal.\**

With these words Hector Berlioz began his famous satire, *Evenings with the Orchestra*, in which he recounts the fictitious conversations of a mythical opera orchestra as a forum for his own outspoken criticisms of the musical establishment of his day.

It is difficult not to recall Berlioz's opinions while listening to Felix Khuner speak about his long musical career. Born in 1906, he went to school in Vienna (he was, for a while, a schoolmate of Kurt Herbert Adler's) and first worked as a professional musician when he earned pocket money as a substitute violinist at the Vienna Opera in the '20s. At age 19 he became a member of the celebrated Kolisch quartet, with which he played for 15 years, until he decided to settle in the Bay Area. He joined the San Francisco Symphony in 1942 and started playing in the San Francisco Opera

orchestra in 1948. Since 1973 he has played primarily with the Opera and, after the 1983 Summer Festival, will retire as an orchestral musician.

Felix Khuner and his wife live in the East Bay. They have four children. One of them, Eliot Khuner, is a photographer who took the portraits reproduced in this article. Another son, Jonathan, is a conductor of his own orchestral ensemble and is on the musical staff of the San Francisco Opera.

To say Khuner is outspoken is putting it mildly; yet his frequently startling pronouncements are not delivered with any bitterness or sense of frustration. He speaks freely as one who, having toiled for many years in the vineyards of music, feels entitled to call the shots as he has seen them.

*The prima donna has shrieked so fearful a high D that we thought she was in the middle of her confinement. The public stamps with joy; two huge bouquets alight on the stage...*

Like Berlioz, Khuner has little regard for the musical taste of the general public. His disdain—and many of his musical judg-

ments—are based to a great extent on his almost mystical regard for music as an art, particularly as propounded by the composer Arnold Schönberg and the Viennese musical theorist Heinrich Schenker (1868-1935), whom Khuner credits as being of great influence upon him. Schenker taught that the true basis of a musical composition is the *Ursatz*, a fundamental contrapuntal structure that is implied by the actual sounds we hear, which he considered merely the ornamental foreground of a multi-leveled edifice. Schenkerians like Khuner, tend to admire the German and Austrian repertoire to the general exclusion of the French, Italian and Russian.

"The audience is totally ignorant about any musical matter," Khuner maintains. "Music is such an esoteric business, and for the life of me cannot understand why people go to concerts, which are purely musical. [People going to] opera I understand, because lots of things are going on—lighting, costumes, historical background and what-not. But it is impossible for anybody who isn't thoroughly trained in musical analysis to get anything out of a piece of music except the superficial sound."

"If you manufacture cars or refrigerators or electronic equipment, you can say whether it works or not. Who knows whether it works or not in music? They look at the wrong thing—they look at the chromium trim, like all the other consumers, and the styling—'Look, isn't it a beautiful car?' Only the engineer knows whether it's properly constructed or not, and if it's not properly constructed, then the car is worth nothing. But the consumer doesn't know that until he has to pay for repairs, and nobody pays for repairs in an opera performance. Anything can go wrong; nobody cares, nobody notices. Except if the curtain doesn't come down because something is snagged, that they know. That is the talk of the intermission. 'The curtain didn't come down.'

"When I came here in 1939, I was invited to a talk by some music teacher who went to New York, and she said, 'Oh, it was wonderful! I saw *The Valkyrie*; it was the greatest I've ever seen—they had real horses!' Did you read about the *Traviata* film? Finally we have an opera about furniture. The trim, the lights, the fixtures, the draperies—who cares about anything else? The furniture counts.

"Another thing: Something is considered good only if it was declared good somewhere else. And that is the opposite of what I grew up with in Vienna. A singer was good if he stayed in Vienna and sang

\*This and other passages from Berlioz's *Les Soirées de l'Orchestre* are taken from the translation by Jacques Barzun published by the University of Chicago Press.



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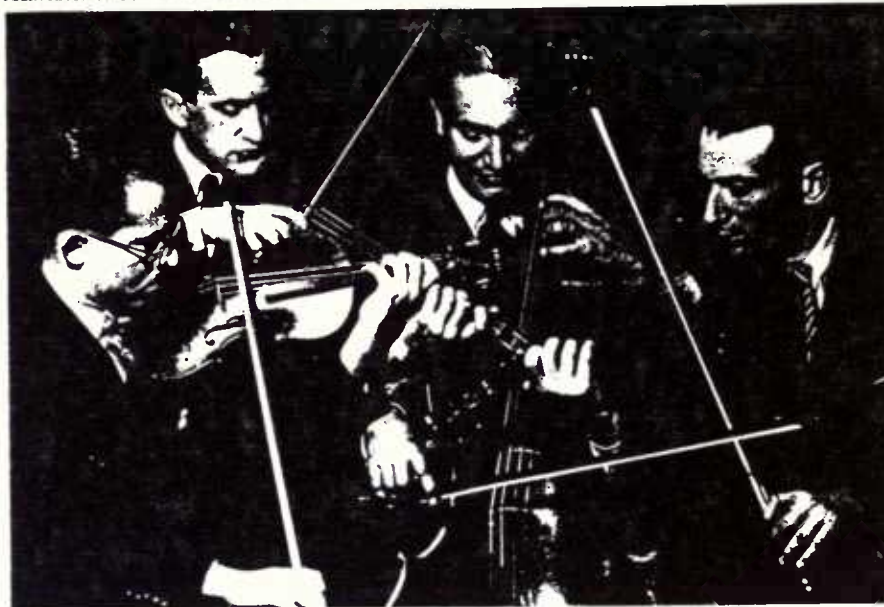


Photo ca. 1929 by Schlosser Weislich

The Kolisch Quartet was renowned for championing the atonal compositions of such composers as Schönberg, Berg and Webern, and for astonishing their audiences by playing from memory. From left: Felix Khuner, 2nd violin; Eugen Lehner, viola; Benar Heifetz, cello; Rudolf Kolisch, 1st violin.

12, 15, 20 roles a year to the satisfaction of the local audience. But if you look today, you read that he sang this in Milan and this in Vienna and this in Lyons, and next year he'll sing that in Amsterdam or in Melbourne—who cares? Is that good? I remember years ago they had a German concertmaster [in an American orchestra], and in the first program they had a whole list of the orchestras he has played with. I said, 'Those are not orchestras where he played; they're orchestras that kicked him out!'

*I am seated next to one of the violas, who manages to hold his own during the first hour. But a few minutes later his bow begins to sweep the strings listlessly; then it drops from his hand, and I feel an unusual weight on my left shoulder. It is the martyr's head resting there all unconscious...*

'I was teaching chamber music at U.C. Berkeley for several years, and I had music majors, majors in other disciplines, and auditors. The music majors couldn't have been less interested in what was going on. The geologists or physicists, they were much more interested in music, and the auditors were the ones who were really interested.

'The music majors are the ones who have a certain skill playing an instrument—as if the instrument had anything to do with music. Playing the instrument is just like digging a ditch, or any other physical activity—sewing, embroidering; you have

to have good fingers, coordination; you have to adjust what you do to what you hear—especially violinists. Violin is a very difficult instrument. You have to start it very early if you want the fingers flexible.

'If a kid has very good ears, sensitive ears, or a sense of rhythm, it has nothing to do with music; it's a purely sensuous thing. The pitch and rhythm are very important elements of music, but you can be sensitive to them without having any affinity to music itself, to what's going on with the pitch and rhythm. But if you have nagging parents who have the means of sending you to a teacher, and you are practicing and are obedient and ambitious—well, they become violinists. By the time they are 14 or 15, they are fabulous violinists, but by the time they are 18, it turns out they shouldn't have anything to do with music.

'I have to tell my students that the sound they make on the violin is of paramount importance. The sound is not part of a performance, but is an absolute necessity. The television and radio receiver are not part of the program, but if they're not good, you won't hear the program. You have to have a good receiver to hear the program. But the hi-fi enthusiasts are only interested in the receiver, and they couldn't care less about the program.'

*A very dull modern French opera is being given. The musicians take their seats with obvious disgust and ill-temper. They do not condescend to tune up, a detail to which the conductor seems not to pay any attention.*

'A conductor, number one, has to know the piece very well; he has to have a decent concept of how it should go. Most of them

don't. And what the conductors really don't have is the elementary stick technique. If we would handle our bows the way the conductors generally handle their baton, we couldn't get a job.

'Those people who can't accompany don't want to become opera conductors. An exception is Toscanini, who couldn't accompany, but he had the power to say, 'I'm not going to accompany; you sing the way I conduct.' He was a very good conductor, but a very mediocre musician, an uneducated musician. A friend of mine played cello in the NBC orchestra and he was carrying a recording of Bach's *Art of the Fugue*. Toscanini said, 'What do you have there?' So my friend showed him and Toscanini said, '*Art of the Fugue*—what is that?' My friend said, 'Would you like to listen to it? Take it home and I'll pick it up day after tomorrow.' He said to me, 'Isn't it wonderful that Toscanini is interested in *Art of the Fugue*?' And I said, 'Isn't it absolutely outrageous that a man of Toscanini's stature has never heard of the *Art of the Fugue*?'

'It is very unpleasant to be harassed by a conductor. They have to have a kind of leadership. Some are nice and friendly, like Bruno Walter, who did it like syrup. 'My friends, we will...' or, 'My friends, let us...' I was furious—I hadn't given him permission to call me his friend. I didn't even know him. How dare he call me his friend! Although he was a knowledgeable musician. As a matter of fact, he was quite good. I can think of more failures of conductors than high points.' Khuner proceeded to offer a number of colorful anecdotes, none of which could be printed in a publication of this nature.

Who was the greatest conductor Khuner played under? 'You can't answer that; it's like department stores. Like violin playing, a conductor is a department store. One is good in children's shoes and in power tools, and god-knows-what; any department can have deficiencies.

'We played sometimes better with a poor conductor than with a good conductor because we were left to our own devices; we had to listen to each other and think, because the conductor was no help.'

*...there is not a single score, however flat and empty, null and void, that does not gather a few votes of approval or that fails to number sincere admirers, as if to justify the proverb that says there is no pot without a lid.*

'I played the first performance of *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* with Weill.

when it was a chamber opera before he enlarged it into a big, grand opera. It was 1927, Baden-Baden in Germany. Didn't do anything for me, I must say. Weill has a certain flavor that is appealing, but if he hadn't been collaborating with Brecht, who has a bigger reputation as a dramatist of the revolutionary persuasion, Weill would be forgotten.

"When people look down their noses at Puccini and say, 'Oh, he's just an entertainer,' to them I say no, he was a good composer. But to people who say there is nothing else but Puccini, I tell them it's worthless. He is both—he is an enormous craftsman, but actually as music it's worthless.

"I don't like Verdi. I admire some things in Verdi; he does very striking, very convincing things with very simple means, but that is not great music. It's purely entertainment.

"Wagner was one of the greatest minds we ever had. Compared to Wagner, the rest are pygmies. Of course, Brahms was a more skillful craftsman in music, but Wagner had a much bigger imagination than Brahms. Wagner would have been a magnificent symphony composer if he had wanted to, which you can see in the *Siegfried Idyll*, which is a very good symphonic piece. If I play a Wagner opera, with a bad conductor, excruciatingly lousy singing and very sloppy orchestra playing, still it's a tonic for me. I'm looking forward to playing *Rheingold* again. It's a wonderful piece."

*... the cause of great art, of pure and true art, is compromised by the theater; but it will triumph in the theater itself if we artists defend it and fight for it with unrelenting strength and constancy.*

"I advise an intelligent young man going into music, 'Don't. Do something else.' Unless it's for your own pleasure, if you don't have to make a living with it. You are not playing music for your own glory—that's why a violinist wants to play first violin instead of second violin, because he thinks it's more glorious to play first violin. Or he has to sit at the second stand and not the fifth. Maybe there's some financial advantages, but I don't play for the glory of Mr. Felix Khuner. I play to feed my family."

Zaven Melikian, concertmaster of the San Francisco Opera Orchestra, says of Mr. Khuner, "For a number of years, Felix and I were stand-partners in the San Francisco Symphony. Thanks to him, those were rather pleasant years for me, void of musical boredom that can sometimes set in as a result of routine playing of the music put in front of you. [The only difficulty is

to stay awake," is the way Khuner puts it.] His thorough knowledge of every score we played would keep me on my toes—particularly when he would suddenly start playing notes different than the ones I was looking at. It would always take me a minute to realize that he was filling in for some wind instrument that had failed to make an entrance!"

Robert Commanday, music critic of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, maintains, "Felix Khuner is one of the few originals in the Bay Area's musical scene. The keen mind, lively curiosity and wit of this skilled musician have kept all of us, his colleagues, on our toes, for anyway three decades. The Khunerisms may not reach the public directly—more's the pity—but his effect musically has gotten around. Whether in a new music/chamber music scene, where he was a leading force in the '50s and '60s, or in the San Francisco Symphony and Opera Orchestras or other ensembles, musicians always look to Felix. His point of view counts."

"Music is generally something that is very close to me," Khuner says, "because I think that I know a lot about it. When I look at a Haydn quartet or a Schumann symphony or a Wagner score, it tells me a lot that it seems not to tell other people. So I feel I have a personal relationship.

"When I recently looked, for instance, at the beginning of *Rheingold*, I came to think, 'Now, what is this E-flat triad? Why is it there?' And I came to see Wagner had the idea that the major triad is the seed of music; the water is the first environment of life; and what the Rhinemaidens sing is the beginning of language—inarticulated language. Now I don't know whether Wagner thought about that, but somehow I feel he told me that."

San Francisco Opera general director emeritus Kurt Herbert Adler has kind words for his colleague and countryman: "Felix Khuner is one of the most experienced and knowledgeable orchestra musicians I have known. In addition to having a sharp sense of humor, he has a great talent for discussing musical matters and has indeed been a most distinguished and likeable colleague throughout all the years. He is a real connoisseur of opera and knows not only the part of the orchestra, but also a lot about the singers and what was happening on stage. He has great musical integrity and suffered, for instance, when we sometimes made cuts he didn't like." Khuner, needless to say, did not suffer in silence. San Francisco Opera musical supervisor David Agler recalls a rehearsal for *Die Meistersinger*, with Adler on the pod-

ium, in which Khuner so strenuously objected to a cut that he offered to contribute \$200 to help cover the Company's deficit if Adler would restore the cut passage.

"The joy of my music is that I tell myself I communicate with the composers—and have a lot of contempt for all the other people," Khuner laughs heartily. "But still I'm friendly. The best human beings are totally unmusical, so I don't consider musical education or musical affinity a required part of a good human being."

Tom Heimberg, manager of the San Francisco Opera Orchestra, played for years in the San Francisco Symphony with Khuner. Heimberg recalls a conversation in their car pool in which Khuner was discoursing on the essence of music. "If you are really interested in music," Khuner asserted, "in its true value, then you will search and search for importance and quality, and will not be afraid to have opinions about it, to make new opinions or to change your mind when more experience and thought and wisdom show you that you were wrong." A third member of the car pool was somewhat mystified by Khuner's remarks. "What value?" he questioned. "What importance? There are rehearsals and performances—what else is there?" Heimberg gives a masterful imitation of Felix's shrug and knowing smile as he delivers Khuner's reassuring response: "If you don't know or care, don't worry about it. You can have a fine life without thinking about such things."

Khuner's memory is legendary; he is known to have performed the most difficult pieces, both orchestral and chamber, without music. Heimberg tells of a time someone asked Khuner how he managed to memorize the second violin part of a Beethoven quartet. Khuner replied that he didn't memorize the second violin part; he memorized the entire quartet and played "what was missing." But surely, the inquirer persevered, if he waited to hear what the others were playing, wouldn't he be late? "No," Khuner explained, "—very fast reflexes."

"My contribution to the Opera," Khuner summarizes, "is mainly that I was never late to a rehearsal or a performance, except once when I forgot that the student performances in the afternoon start at one instead of two. I'm very skillful as a violinist, an excellent ensemble player. I have a very good ear, better than most, equal to anybody; I'm really very versatile and very agile, and I see what's going on. I'm a very useful orchestra player; I've made a very good living with it." □







## *The California String Quartet*

Felix Khuner . First Violin

Detlev Olshausen . Viola

David Schneider . Second Violin

George Barati . Violoncello

*The California String Quartet* was organized in the Summer of 1946 by four members of the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, with the encouragement of the University of California.

One of the aims of the quartet, besides performing the master-works of the past, is to present the best of contemporary chamber music. Thus, the quartet was called upon to perform all of the works requiring string instruments on the programs of the Composers' Forum of the San Francisco Bay area.

Besides having given concerts in California, the quartet, invited by Mrs. Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, played in Washington, D. C., and at Harvard University in the Spring of 1947. These programs included a work written by George Barati, 'cellist of the quartet.

The musical background of the members of the quartet is widely varied. David Schneider and Detlev Olshausen studied in the Department of Music of the University of California, whereas Felix Khuner received his education at the Musik Akademie in Vienna, and George Barati graduated from the Franz Liszt Conservatory in Budapest. Mr. Khuner was a member of the Kolisch String Quartet for fifteen years, and Mr. Barati came to this country with the Pro Ideale Quartet. Mr. Schneider and Mr. Olshausen both played with the University String Quartet and other chamber music groups of the San Francisco Bay area.

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### PRESS COMMENTS

Alfred Frankenstein in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 20, 1947

The magnificent Quintet in C major by Schubert was given a superbly well-rounded performance by the California String Quartet, which has both a definite place and at least a promise of a future.

Marjory M. Fisher in the *San Francisco News*, March 6, 1947

If the Composers' Forum's concert last night had done nothing more than demonstrated how excellent is the California String Quartet, it would have been worth while . . . . . The California String Quartet introduced Mr. Barati's quartet; they played so well and so accurately, the music came off uncommonly well and seemed to be quite impressive . . . . .

Alice Eversman in the *Evening Star*, Washington, D. C., April 6, 1947

The California String Quartet is a well integrated ensemble with a remarkable pure and well-blended tone. Some of their delicate playing in Schubert's G major Quartet was particularly fine, and they have many subtle shadings at their command.

J. W. R. in the *Boston Daily Globe*, April 14, 1947

It would be a pleasure indeed to hear the California String Quartet in further programs. Their technical accomplishments are masterful, their styles clearly defined, and their command of tone colors complete . . . . . The quartets of Schubert, Beethoven, and Barati were given excellent performances.

Winthrop P. Tryon in the *Christian Science Monitor*, April 14, 1947

The concert of the California String Quartet proved a successful event . . . . . They pleased their house and can so send word home . . . . . They played with admirable blend of tone and agreeable rhythm; with unanimity of phrasing too.



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