

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

FRANKLIN LAREY

Interviewed by: Daniel F. Whitman
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INTERVIEW

Q: This is Dan Whitman interviewing Franklin Larey. We're in Cape Town, in the Protea Breakwater Lodge, and it is the February 11th, which happens to be the 20th anniversary of the release of Nelson Mandela from prison. It's a very historic day.

LAREY: It's a very special day, yes.

Q: I didn't tip you off about this, but because it's such a special day, do you have any comments you'd like to offer now or later about the importance of this day?

LAREY: Oh, heavens! I think it was momentous. It's probably *the* event that saved our country. I will probably never forget the day because I was actually still in the U.S. at the time. I was playing in a recital on that day at the University of Charleston in Charleston, Illinois. As events turned out, none of us knew that Nelson Mandela was going to be released until the day of – when it was announced on television and I had to play my concert in the afternoon. I, actually, at that time, dedicated my concert to Nelson Mandela. I also watched some of it on television later. It was quite amazing. It was extraordinary. Yes.

Q: That's an amazing story.

LAREY: I will never forget the works I played. I played works by Prokofiev – one of the war sonatas – interestingly. Also, I played a standard work, a very beautiful work by Schumann called “Humoresque” and a Haydn sonata in A Flat. It was a wonderful day for me.

Q: Fantastic.

LAREY: Overall, I cannot see South Africa where we are today without Nelson Mandela. It's extraordinary.

Q: Well, thanks. This is a beautiful opportunity to have something to say on this auspicious day.

Franklin, let's start by having you mention something about yourself and the career that you have had, when it started and how it's going now.

LAREY: Shall I start at the beginning?

Q: I think so.

LAREY: Ok. I was born in a very small town just outside of Cape Town, about a forty-

five minute drive. Malmesbury. I was brought up on a farm, really. It was a small farming community outside of the town, where my dad was teaching in a school for farm workers' kids. That had an enormous influence on my whole life eventually. I always loved music, but there were no resources in our schools at the time and no provision made for classical music studies for black students. As the children grew up, and more and more of us had to go to high school, my dad decided that the family should move to the town, where there was a high school. But still, there was no music program.

Q: What years was this?

LAREY: 1969-7- - about there.

Q: This would have been about the time that you moved?

LAREY: I would say 1974 we moved back to the town of Malmesbury from the farm. My parents couldn't afford to keep us in boarding schools and pay rent for us to stay with people in town. I always wanted to play piano. I think I nagged my parents for years, and years and years. There were music teachers in town, but they were all white music and they didn't provide lessons to us.

Q: Who did they teach?

LAREY: They taught the white kids.

Q: Of course.

LAREY: We had a tiny, one-room library for blacks in the town. They had virtually no music or recordings. I got to know the librarian very well. The library was only open on certain days of the week and she started ordering music for me from the main library in Cape Town. So I started listening... this was all before I started playing. So, I listened to a lot of music.

Q: Was on the initiative of that librarian?

LAREY: It was on my own initiative.

Q: Was it normal for one library to borrow materials for another library?

LAREY: Yes. She could get the materials for me.

Q: She did it because you asked her to.

LAREY: Yes. And I couldn't go to the library for whites in town, which had far more resources. She got some of it from there for me. And whatever I wanted that she couldn't find there, she got on inter-library loan from the main library in Cape Town. So, I knew a lot of the music already before I started playing.

Then, a complete stroke of luck: a new neighbor moved in next to us, and he played the piano. I started sitting outside listening to him play. He was a self-taught pianist; he had a few lessons, but no formal music studies. He could play the piano, but he was not a concert pianist as such.

Q: When you say you knew the music before playing.....

LAREY: Yes. In my mind. I knew so many works. I went through all of the Beethoven sonatas. I knew them before I could even play them. I really had a few favorite ones that I really liked. I think I continued nagging my parents for lessons. It was on my sixteenth birthday that my parents took me next door and said, “This is your birthday present; you could start lessons with my neighbor.” We didn’t have a piano at home, so I had to walk a few block to a friend of the family who had an old upright piano, and that is where I started practicing. So, I had my first lesson then. It was enormously exciting for me. I think I went through beginner books by Schaum very quickly – like one book a week and just finished it.

My neighbor – I admire him for the decisions he took, also the teacher. He realized that I had talent. Then, after only about only two or three months he suggested that I go to a trained music teacher because he couldn’t teach me. Then he arranged a meeting also – I have all of this so vividly in my memory still – with my dad there and the new teacher – his name was Gideon Slingers. He listening to me play and agreed to teach me. He was coming to teach in Malmesbury, as well. This all happened. It was almost as if everything was working out very well for me. He was an enormous influence in my life. He was a trained, qualified music teacher. He had trained at the Hewitt College of Education, which was in Athlone at the time.

I started my lessons with him, which was quite extraordinary, because he spent so much time with me, had me stay for lessons for four hours at a time sometimes.

Q: Who was Gideon Slingers?

LAREY: He has since passed away, very sadly. He was an enormously talented pianist. He trained at the Hewitt Training College for colored people in Athlone, at the time. He was also the organist at the Anglican Church in District 6, St. Mark’s. I found myself in this environment which was extraordinary for me, because he taught me so well. He made me sit at the piano while he was doing other work, and made me play all sorts of things, which was very good for me. The whole experience with St. Mark’s was extraordinary because I then started going with him to church on some Sundays, where I listened to him play the organ, sitting upstairs with him in the gallery, sometimes sitting next to him on the bench. There were a few times when he told *me* to take over. (Laughter) None of the congregation ever knew this, but it was quite amazing – nerve racking.

Q: So you suddenly found yourself playing the organ, unprepared.

LAREY: Unprepared. Completely. Sight-reading. But, that's how he prepared me. He was incredible.

I had two years left in high school when I started my piano lessons. Prior to the piano lessons I was determined that I was going to go into medicine, so I had all the science subjects. The moment I started piano lesson, I knew immediately that this was what I wanted to do. I enjoyed playing in public and this is one of the things that Gideon taught me and exposed me to step by step. He was very, very, very good about it. He was an excellent choir director, as well; so, he made me the accompanist. That's how I started playing in public, as an accompanist, first.

My school teachers were all very, very upset with me, of course, because I spent most of my time at the piano. I remember I would go practice at our family friend's house immediately school. I would get home after 6:00 only, after practicing for a very long time.

Q: So you still did not own a piano?

LAREY: No. But, after a year, my father realized that I needed my own piano, so he bought an upright piano under very difficult economic circumstances, which I have much more appreciation of now. I understand now all of the hardships. I have a big family. I have five brothers and one sister. There were many mouths to feed and I am still amazed that we all survived.

So, the piano was at home. I practiced a lot. I had two years to prepare for university auditions. I remember when I applied to the University of the Western Cape (UWC). At that time, also, my desire, really, was really to go to the University of Cape Town (UCT). But, it was still with the segregation.

Q: This would have been....

LAREY: 1978. Yes.

Q: Was UCT entirely segregated? Were there any exceptions made?

LAREY: There were exceptions made. The government made exceptions. Black students could study there if there weren't any programs at the historic black institutions. My parents could not afford tuition, so I had to go into education, music education. Most strangely, even a little bit more complicated. There were black students at UCT at that time studying the B. MUS education degree at UCT, because the program at UWC was called the B.A. Music. However, at UWC, you had two majors, and my major there was music and psychology. At UCT, they had the B. MUS, which is principally a music degree with no other major added to it.

Q: UWC had more of an educational component?

LAREY: Yes, and a broader arts/humanities combination of courses. There were quite a number of non-music subjects I had to do. It's similar to studying for a B.A. degree with two majors and then taking all the courses that lead up to the two majors in the final year, whereas the music degree was constructed with predominantly music subjects, with one non-music subject in the first year, and that's it. But, my parents – my dad, and I too, at the time, decided that, in order for me to go to UCT, we had to get special permission from the government, and that we didn't want, that we were not prepared to do. So....

Q: Not prepared because it would show cooperation with the system?

LAREY: Yes. It was a political decision. As much as I desired to go to UCT – admired the place already – it's an excellent institution with an excellent school and the music department at UWC was very small, but I think it was the right decision – I made the right decision. I was the right environment at UWC. Politically, I don't think I would not have survived at UCT. Something that's quite extraordinary now that I observed while I was at UWC was that every single year at least – this varied – there would be five, and sometimes one year even more, students who had initially registered at UCT would switch over to UWC, because they couldn't survive there.

Q: Ah, so you spared yourself the discomfort?

LAREY: Yes. I'll talk more about my discomfort later on, when I eventually enrolled there.

A lot of those students came back very bitter, angry and not very happy. As it is in South Africa, people make very serious charges about what happened to them at the time. Some became good friends and they all reported to me how much happier they were at UWC. I think a lot of it had to do for them – I am not saying this is what they related to me – it was the fact I think that at that time with us being so segregated, they almost felt that they were thrust into an environment that they didn't know for a part of the day and then had to go back to something that's entirely different for the rest of the day.

Q: Most of their energy spent adapting and less available for learning?

LAREY: Yes. And they couldn't stay close to the university. They had to stay in

Q:in their communities far away.

LAREY: Yes.

Q: So it was really a hardship to be at UCT.

LAREY: Yes, it was a hardship. Some of my friends, who eventually came to UCT, had to commute from Paarl....

Q: Which is how far?

LAREY: Driving – it is half an hour and a train ride is much longer, of course – just under an hour and a half. It was about 60 kilometers.

I was very happy at UWC and studied there with a wonderful pianist they had in the department, Bruce Gardner. He was a fantastic pianist and he loved to perform. He was also the head of the head of the Music Department. I worked with him for my entire undergraduate education. I admired his loving to play and perform so much. He did all the right things with me technically – developed that.

Then came the opportunities to perform – a lot of opportunities. We had a lot of lunch-hour concerts and evening concerts on our campus. I performed in a lot of these. I played my first solo recital – this makes me laugh. I have a photograph of this in my studio now. We had no facilities at UWC. We had no grand pianos to play on. We had upright pianos. We had our lunchtime concerts in a lecture hall. We would put an upright piano on a little dolly – what’s called here ‘wheels’ – and move it a half an hour before into the lecture hall, squeeze it in between the front row of seats and the lectern, give the concert, then wheel the piano back afterwards.

Q: Didn't that affect the tuning?

LAREY: Yes. But, that’s how we’d have concerts. I always dreamed at that time of about playing on an actual concert grand piano. I’d never touched one up to then. I played a lot. Then, I became the first student at the university to actually register for and pass the Royal Schools of Music Performance Licensure Exam. It is a UK system of music examinations that is offered internationally that is graded. It has to do with levels of playing. You go from Grade 1 to Grade 8 and then you do a Performance Licensure, and that’s a professional credential. This was extraordinary for me at the time, because I was enrolled in an education degree, even though my heart wanted me to be on a concert stage, so that is why I pursued that at the same time. So, my playing was at a much higher level than they expected for the education program.

After graduating really, really, really wanted to go to UCT to pursue a performer’s degree. I then found myself in the situation where I didn’t have funds and I couldn’t and returned to UWC to do a one-year secondary teacher’s diploma, which is a formal credential to become a qualified teacher, because then my heart was set on becoming a music teacher.

Q: This would have been in the late 70s?

LAREY: 1980.

Q: So, one year at UCT?

LAREY: No. I couldn’t afford UCT, so I went back to UWC to do a one-year’s teacher’s diploma.

Q: So, what is it that you had done before then?

LAREY: B.A. Music, which is a three-year program, then the fourth year was my teacher's diploma.

Q: This is because this was the one opportunity available to you?

LAREY: Yes. Yes. I graduated with my B.A. in Music with distinction in Music. My other major, of course, was psychology, which I found enormously helpful and fascinating and interesting.

Q: How do psychology and music work together? Does it have to do with stage fright? (Laughter).

LAREY: No, I mean for my preparedness for life in general. It was enormously helpful. I was traumatized by the subject in some ways, though. In my final year, we had to do some observation in a mental hospital, which I did not like. It was emotionally... I think being an artist and being a musician, where express our emotions so often and deal with our emotions so directly, I think I was very sensitive to the things I discovered and saw around me while doing the observations.

Those were difficult years – my undergraduate education – because we had student unrest, we had class boycotts. I remember my second year, I think I had formal instruction for six months of the year, only. There were several disruptions.

Q: UWC was a hotbed, a place where political conflict was very high.

LAREY: Exactly. Yes.

I remember – this was extraordinary. It was so difficult for me to convince my friends that I had to practice, because during the class boycotts, we were not allowed to have any, any academic time; you were not even supposed to read academic stuff. You were supposed to be at the meetings all the time.

I stayed in residence on the campus. That, too, was quite an experience because that's where all the political discussions kept going all the time, every day. I used to practice right after dinner every day from six until midnight. Once, during one of the times of unrest, I was thrown out of a practice room, because I was not supposed to play. I was told at the time, "You're playing bourgeois music; it's western music." They also trashed the piano. So, it was very difficult. It was trying. It was difficult for me. The one thing that still makes me smile today – I don't think students are meant to be logical – was that during student unrest and student upheaval times it was not ok to play the music of Chopin or Mozart, but when we were ok, when we had calmed down a bit and were back in the classrooms, it was ok. I sometimes played the piano in the lounge area of the residence. When we were in class, everyone wanted me to play Chopin, Beethoven; then

it was ok; during an upheaval it was not. (Laughter)

Q: When you say 'they,' these would have been the political activists?

LAREY: Yes. They patrolled everything and made sure that nobody deviated from the...

Q: Irrelevant to this interview, I, myself was a child of the 60s, went to Oberlin College, which, as you know, has a conservatory.

LAREY: A beautiful place.

Q: There was exactly the same problem because the campus was in great ferment having to do with the war in Viet Nam.

LAREY: Yes, of course.

Q: The students at the conservatory were in the exact same position you were. They may or may not have had opinions about politics, but they knew they had to continue practicing. I remember – I was not a musician – that there was friction between the conservatory students and the others. So, what you're saying has a certain resonance.

LAREY: It has to do with the nature of the discipline. I tried to explain it to my friends. They can pick up book, they can get notes and they can read. I cannot make up for lost time. I cannot walk into an examination room having room practiced a sonata by Beethoven for two weeks. It's not enough time. Technically you lose everything. You lose so much if you don't keep practicing.

Q: It's not intellectual; it's physical.

LAREY: Those were difficult times. I became involved in politics. I was the chair of the Music Society of the university for two years. And, as such, I was thrust into the whole situation and had to work with the SRC (Student Representative Council). Then, I had to communicate decisions from the Council to the Music School. Interestingly, the perception of the music students who did not take part in the broader political debate was always there. It was a very difficult time for all of us, I guess. Professor Richard van der Ross was the director of the time and I remember there was one year when he ordered the residences closed and wanted all of the students to leave the residences. In fact, the university sent letters to our parents about the decision. So, all of our parents arrived in droves to get us.

Q: Was this because he couldn't tolerate the political actions?

LAREY: I don't remember what the exact reasons. It was just a very difficult time. The class work has just been going on for at least a month, I think. We refused to leave the residences and they allowed us to stay. I remember there was always this tussle between two worlds.

I remember, my dad arrived with a friend of his to collect me and his friend's daughter. My dad, actually they – interestingly – he made me decide. I could go home with him or I could stay. I offered to stay, which was, I also think at the time, quite remarkable because at that time there were also conflicts within families, communities.

Q: Staying was an act of defiance, because the director had said, "Leave."

LAREY: Yes.

Q: So, this was in fact a protest – the act of staying.

LAREY: I cannot recall exactly. I never saw the notice that was sent to my parents where it said we could stay or that whether it was better for our own safety, we should leave because the army came on the campus at that time. They arrested...it was quite, quite frightening. Every morning there would be a count and some of the student leaders in the residences would be gone, arrested of the night. They would come and arrest people. So, it could have been that, I am not entirely sure.

Across from the university's old main entrance there's a railway depot with a big tower building. It used to look so big to me, but it's probably only six floors. There were always army people on the roof, probably checking us out – for our meetings. They were always in that depot, behind the walls, so they could get to the campus.

Q: They were observing who came and went.

LAREY: Yes, because we had open-air meetings as we didn't have a big hall at that time.

Q: _____

LAREY: Probably. The meetings were always held on the lawn next to the swimming pool. I think enough said about those years.

Q: You survived, you learned, you acquired Chopin, Beethoven throughout this turbulent period.

LAREY: Yes. And those were the years when sometimes I had to go home on weekends, I would take the train home to Malmesbury. One time it became really funny. The government decreed that you couldn't walk with another person as could constitute an illegal gathering or something – two or more people – so we had to walk on different sides of the road. It was crazy; it was madness.

Then, after I decided not to go to UCT to pursue performance studies because I couldn't afford it, I went back to UWC to get my teacher's diploma. Then, I went on to play more concerts that year. I started to play a lot of concerts in the community at large. I got quite a bit of press coverage. People started to know me; people started to begin to know who I

was in the arts circles.

The press issue is a fascinating thing as well. All of the local newspapers had a separate newspaper for colors in the Western Cape, the Afrikaans press, particularly. Die Burger, had a special paper called, Die Burger Extra with news about colored people added to what they would say to white people or what they thought white people would buy, I guess. It was the same with the Sunday paper, Die Rapport had an extra insert. It's absurd, isn't it?

Q: These extra inserts were intended for sale in these so-called "colored" communities?

LAREY: Yes.

Q: The main clients of Die Burger and Rapport, I take it, were not interested in the extra section?

LAREY: Apparently, yes.

Q: Who knows. Who knows.

LAREY: Apparently.

Q: So, the Afrikaner press, whose main audience....

LAREY: Afrikaan-speakingwise....

Q:....did publish extra editions, possibly because there was an economic advantage, because there was a whole other community.

LAREY: Yes and I wish they had understood the language advantage; we wouldn't be going through all these language struggles with Afrikaans now, had this not happened. Everybody seems to say that Afrikaans is a threatened language; I don't think it is. Afrikaans is actually a very diverse language at the moment and has always been.

Q: We are a little way away from your autobiography, here.

LAREY: Yes.

Q: However, this is a very interesting point. Afrikaans, if it survives, it will survive in the Cape.

LAREY: Yes, probably.

Q: When they say it is a dying language...

LAREY: I don't think it is. I think that there are a lot of people at the moment feeling aggrieved or thinking that Afrikaans is under threat. I don't think it's under threat. The

whole issue of language issue – for instance, at the University of Stellenbosch it has nothing to do with threatening the future or existence of any language; it has to do with accessibility to a government institution.

Q: Are you saying the use of English at Stellenbosch?

LAREY: Yes. You can say the use of English or the diminished use of Afrikaans or the government's plans to have.....

Q:or the permission to use either language when writing papers, for example.

LAREY: It has to do with access; it has nothing to do with threatening the language. I don't think that's the intention. The main intention is access.

Q: Afrikaans is seen by some as the language of oppression.

LAREY: Of oppression. We all thought this way. This is also one of the absurdities. We all felt this way. But, we had in the Western Cape, we had our own way of speaking Afrikaans. It sounds completely different. It was ok because we felt we had our own Afrikaans. For very many years, I felt a strange reluctance to speak Afrikaans, especially when I moved to the States. I then didn't speak Afrikaans very much very often. And, there is the association with Afrikaans with oppression. You can't ignore that. It's there. It was there for me.

Q: Isn't this the basis of when people say it's a threatened language, isn't indeed that because people....

LAREY:don't want to speak it....

Q:associate it with negative things.

LAREY: Yes, but I think that that has changed. There's an opportunity now for us to make the language belong to *everybody* and to make everyone understand that the Afrikaans that we speak on the Cape Flats is as acceptable and fine as the Afrikaans that is spoken at Stellenbosch, in a very secluded white community.

Q: Again, irrelevant, but German in the 1950s was considered evil and ugly and now people study German, I think understanding that the oppression was not the instrument of the language, but the instrument of some of the people who spoke that language.

LAREY: Exactly, exactly.

Q: Franklin, you have just referred to your study in the U.S. Is it time to move on?

LAREY: Yes. This is one of the interesting things that happened to me.

I finished my Secondary Teacher's Diploma at UWC. Towards the end of the academic year, when I was busy writing exams, there was a message left for me to go and see the head of the music department late one afternoon. I thought, "What on earth's going on?" I went to see him and he was waiting for me still, beyond his office hours; it was probably five o'clock in the late afternoon. Then, he broke the news to me, which stunned me, is that they made an offer to appoint me as a junior lecturer at the University of the Western Cape. That was incredible; I could not believe that it was happening to me. I was ecstatic.

Q: Who was "they?" Was there a committee?

LAREY: It was the department; there were four members in the department and they created a position and they wanted me to take up the position.

Q: They created the position for you?

LAREY: Yes. Yes.

Q: That was remarkable.

LAREY: Yes. I was shocked. It was quite extraordinary. I remember, I was one of three very, very young, just graduated academics – the first group of academics appointed that year. There was me, Rhoda Kadalie, a wonderful political activist at the time and still prominent and speaks on politics all the time, and Hein Willemsse, an Afrikaans writer in. All three of us were black, very young. I felt very green. I remember going to my first faculty meeting.

Q: Green and Black, simultaneously.

(Laughter)

LAREY: Yes. I wonder what color that would come out?

(Laughter)

Then, I taught at UWC and enjoyed it immensely. I then continued to have my interaction with students coming from UCT, but now at a different level. Some of them became my piano students after coming from UCT. That kind of engagement and trying to understand what on earth they were going through brought me new insights, also.

Q: These were non-whites from UCT, who had attempted to go there and had had a difficult time adapting.

LAREY: Yes. And academically did very poorly at UCT. They came to UWC and sometimes they were our best students. It was quite extraordinary.

After teaching at UWC for several year, I decided to apply for a Fulbright Scholarship. That was in 1985.

Q: How did you learn about the Fulbright Scholarship?

LAREY: It was widely advertised. We all knew about it. Of course, it is an incredible scholarship. Everybody wanted a Fulbright Scholarship. All of us, when we graduate, were all going to apply for a Fulbright Scholarship.

There was another scholarship at the time: the EOC Scholarships, Educational Opportunities Council, also to go study in the States. I think it was called the EOC scholarships. I believe that this council's scholarships and the Fulbright's scholarships sometimes negotiated with each other.

Q: I am only guessing, Fulbright was the U.S. government, of course; the EOC might have been a consortium of American universities – I'm really just guessing.

LAREY: So, those were the two things all of us wanted to do. All of us applied for these scholarships. It was always heart-breaking when you went through and other people didn't.

Q: Very small numbers were accepted.

LAREY: Yes. Absolutely.

I will never accept my interview. It was tough. I wasn't really ready for the interview; I am still shocked that they selected to me.

I must tell you just one thing, because it is important. When I was a lecturer at UWC, I started taking part-time lessons at UCT. I will never forget. I used to drive there once a week in the evening. My lesson was usually at about six in the evening. My stomach would turn every time I would take the turnoff on the M3 to get to UCT. I would first become extremely nervous.

Q: Forbidden, hostile territory.

LAREY: Yes. It was not a pleasant school to be in. It was extremely hostile. I didn't feel welcome. I was selected to play in an exchange concert in Stellenbosch University. I had registered for an Honors degree at UCT. I was selected to play to represent UCT at a concert in Stellenbosch, which was even more hostile at that time. I remember feeling quite depressed and also very angry, once, for the concert in Stellenbosch, because I was a little late – not for playing for the concert but late enough for everyone to get nervous about whether I was going to show up or not. However, the reason I was a little bit late was because I had to travel there from Bellville through so many roadblocks set up by the army. And nobody asked why, they were just annoyed and I was not going to offer to them the reasons I was late. This is the last thing you need before you actually have to

walk on stage.

Q: Yes.

LAREY: So, little things happened. The environment wasn't good, so I abruptly stopped my studies at UCT.

Q: How much of this hostility was institutional and how much do you feel was social?

LAREY: It was both. But, there was a third thing. This is where my psychology helped me. It was both an institutional atmosphere – the terrible situation where you feel completely alone; there is just no representation of who you are on the other side. Almost everybody was white at the time.

Q: Students and teachers alike – very few or none were welcoming to you?

LAREY: No. Some were very welcoming. I think some really tired. My teacher really tried very hard. The two of us had political discussions. We disagreed about some things, but, I think I made her understand some of the difficulties we were experiencing.

Q: So, you teacher maybe could not even perceive the situation you were in.

LAREY: No, she couldn't. She listened a lot when I explained to her some of what was happening in our own community.

The third thing that I think that happened to us who were trying to go to UCT at the time is that we suddenly found ourselves thrust into an unreal world. We would come out of turmoil in our own communities and come to Rondebosch, where it was tranquil, calm and everybody going on as if nothing was going on – all the turmoil. I don't think they were aware of the level of turmoil that was going on at all. That was because of government suppression of information. That was extremely difficult for me to go from UWC – sometimes after a day when we had student unrest. There was a day when the army came into our buildings and peppered us with teargas inside the buildings. It was extremely traumatizing. And then, I had to go to a piano lesson in the evening, which I did. It was unreal. It didn't feel right.

Q: Playing Chopin with the recent experience of teargas. Not a normal experience.

LAREY: (sputtering) I think it made me angry, to a certain extent, that there could be two different world.....

Q: Of course.

LAREY:....and so little understanding, or so little knowledge of what was going on on the other side or the details of what was going on on the other side.

So, I was awarded the Fulbright scholarship.....

(Laughter)

Q: Wait, wait. You said it was a tough interview. Was _____ in the room?

LAREY: I don't remember.

Q: Was Frank.....?

LAREY: I can't remember.

Q: So you applied, as many did from the outside – in other words, no particular inside track to the Fulbright. You applied as any applicant.

LAREY: I applied as any applicant. My teacher at UCT – Laura Searle – she was also an incredible person to be with. She taught me so much. She took my playing to the next wonderful level, which was where I needed to go. Without her, I don't think I would have been ready for going to the States, in terms of the technical things. But, she pushed me to audition for the Cape Town Youth Music Festival, which I did. I won the audition and was selected to play with the Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra. I think the concert was two days before my interview and the concert was reviewed; I got an excellent review. So, there were all the things I had ready for the interview.

One of the toughest questions one of the interviewers asked – looked me straight in the eye and said, “What makes you think you're good enough for the United States. I don't think you have enough experience and you will never make it in the States.”

Q: Was this a South African or an American?

LAREY: Yes. A South African. It was very provocative, a very provocative line of questioning. I then started defending my own abilities. As proof of my own abilities, I asked them, “Have you read the Cape Argus? There's a review about the level of my playing in the Argus.” Then everybody sort of nodded and then we went on. It was very tough. I was very upset after the interview.

I left the interview feeling quite depressed, quite down, and thinking that this was not going to happen. Then months passed and I got a letter in the mail. It was just a normal letter – in the mail. I was amazed. Nobody called me. I expected someone to call me and say something. I think that happens now.

So, this was just a normal letter that came in the mail, which I opened. It was quite thick, because of all of the documents you had to complete, which I didn't understand when I first got the letter. I thought it would say, “Thank you very much, but no thank you.” I was just stunned, shocked when I read the letter when I read the letter saying that I had been offered a Fulbright scholarship, and it was a full scholarship. They had partial scholarships and full scholarships.

Q: This was in....

LAREY: ...the beginning of 1986. I called my parents immediately. And that's how that happened.

Q: Now, this Fulbright scholarship obliges you to find your own placing, I think, in the U.S.

LAREY: They assisted me, at the time. I went to the old consulate and there was a library.

Q: The U.S. Information Service.

LAREY: Yes. That's right. They had a library and I remember looking at some publications about some universities. However, I had a good idea already about where I wanted to go. I applied to Manhattan in New York, Cincinnati, and to the Aaron Copland School in Queens, New York. Those were the three. Then, also UCLA. I had specific reasons why I wanted to go to these different places: because of the teachers there. The University of Cincinnati were the first ones to offer me a place. Then, eventually everybody offered me a place.

Q: A wonderful music school.

LAREY: Yes, a very good school.

I accepted Cincinnati and am very, very happy that I did. I am very happy that I have gone there. It was the right place for me to be – not New York. I would have suffocated in New York. (Laughter) Yes, I wasn't ready for New York, then, I don't think. I was ready for Cincinnati. New York is a very, very extremely competitive place.

Q: Not to mention densely populated and too full of talent.

LAREY: Yes. Too many, too many – everybody's fantastic.

Q: Not to denigrate Cincinnati. I understand that the music department.....

LAREY:is ranked as one of the best in the country. The opera program is number one in the whole country. The musical theater program is number one in the whole country. The piano program is very good - has exquisite teachers. They have a fantastic string project. Wonderful people.

Q: I'll keep pulling us backwards.

So, you got this letter in the mail. What was your subsequent contact with the U.S. Information Service, other than just going there to get the visa? Anything at all?

LAREY: Oh, they helped me through the whole application process, with information on institutions. They always advised me when a university accepted. They would contact me. They handled the placement completely.

(Telephone rings. End of this interview section.)

Q: Back to your studies in Cincinnati.

LAREY: As I said, it was the right place for me to be. More extraordinary, I then was studying with a professor called Frank Weinstock, and he truly is probably my mentor and probably the most influential person in my life when it comes to my piano playing and my career. He is an extraordinary teacher and an extraordinary pianist himself. Interestingly, he is now the Dean at the College of Music in Cincinnati. He is a fantastic, wonderful, human being.

Q: That's quite a statement: "The greatest influence on your music."

LAREY: Yes.

Q: When you decided to go to Cincinnati, did you know of Frank Weinstock?

LAREY: Yes, I did.

Q: Did you know the degree of influence he would have?

LAREY: No. I didn't expect it to be as much as it is. He was extraordinary. He was very caring. He knew a lot about South Africa. He is a very, very intelligent, sensitive man. He knew a lot about the political issues, problem, the upheavals in South Africa. Every week, during my lessons, we would have a discussion about South Africa and what was going on. He then started bring me copies of his New York Times and the stories about South Africa in there. After a while – it took me a while to realize – I could buy my own New York Times, which I then started doing. He was quite amazing. From that perspective, he was extraordinary and very important. And also, from the music, piano teaching perspective, molded me into the pianist I am today, with a kind of musical thinking, interpretation, respect for composers and their music and the role I play in bringing all of that to people.

Q: When you "respect for composers," I think every soloist has a different, independent approach to that relationship between what the composer wrote and what he interprets.

LAREY: Yes.

Q: Can you comment on that?

LAREY: I think there's a very fine line. I think, first of all, the first thing I should say is

that the composer's wishes need to be respected and understood very clearly. How we will interpret those wishes will differ between different pianists. But, their underlying basic principles of instruction that we as artists can get from the composer, we should never ignore. Those are the minute details of a work. For some composers it is far more important than for others – or “more crucial,” I should say. A good way to explain it is to take the issue of editions of music, for instance. There are some composers for whom I will insist that my students use an urtext edition, as opposed to an edition where a lot of other things have been added by somebody else.

Q: In some cases the composers add their dynamics, their crescendos, diminuendos – the further back in time, the fewer the notations, I think.

LAREY: Yes. In J.S. Bach's music, you find nothing written, which is what makes that so much fun to work with, because no one can tell you you are wrong (laughs).

Q: So, if I understand, you're not of the school of slavish obedience to the text.

LAREY: No. That's too pedantic, that can become pedantic. Even in the late Beethoven, there's the emotional expression of the music, where nobody can play in the same way. I am so happy that that's the case.

I have just done a recording of Brahms's piano pieces in New York, which will be released in March.

Q: Next month? Where may I purchase a copy?

LAREY: Apparently, it's going to be on iTunes.

(Hearty laughter)

Q: So much for the profession of music.

(Hearty laughter)

LAREY: This is also a diversion. I should decide whether I am going to do all internet-based sales, iTunes or those kinds of sites. In South Africa, the CD is still very much the thing that everybody buys.

Q: Increasingly less so in the U.S., I am afraid.

LAREY: Yes, I know.

The respect for the composer should never lead to pedantic, cold, emotionless playing. But, in our attempts to express emotion, it can never go against what the composer intended us to do.

Q: However, there are some musical notations that do leave some wiggle room for the musician.

LAREY: Yes, of course.

Q: For example, you can play a sforzando in different manners, in degrees.

LAREY: Yes. That becomes a personal decision as to how loud you want to play that *sforzando*. Some *sforzandos* are not necessarily loud; it depends on the context.

Q: Especially if they are repeated, as they are in Beethoven.

LAREY: Yes.

Q: So, you spent three years at Cincinnati?

LAREY: No, I overstayed my visit.

(Laughter)

LAREY: I completely overstayed my visit. I will be very frank and ...

Q: I will tell you that the American people forgive you.

(Laughter)

LAREY: Of course, arriving in Cincinnati was an exhilarating experience. It was the first time in my life when I could be who I was and no one questioned anything about me. In fact, people were curious about who I was. It was the first time in my life I was in an environment where so many different people from so many different cultures all working together – from all over the world.

Q: Were you quite prepared for this? Did this take you by surprise? You knew that there was a greater degree of diversity in the U.S.

LAREY: Yes.

Q: I guess there is no substitute for being there.

LAREY: Yes. I expected it to be like that. We all had this image of free society, compared to with what we came from, to have that freedom to be able to move, to be to live any way you wanted to and to be in an environment with so many other different people – I think that is one of that greatest gifts the Fulbright scholarship has given me.

Q: Being what...the diversity, the tolerance...

LAREY: ...the freedom...

Q: ...the ease...

LAREY: ...the ease, yes...

Q: ...of going from one section of society to the next.

LAREY: Yes.

Q: The mobility, I think we call it.

LAREY: Yes. It was exhilarating for me to hear so many different people from all over the world doing work that I was trying to do and everybody doing it so well, not because of any issue of ethnicity linked to it. It was absolutely fantastic.

I had such a wonderful time. This is to answer my interview panel one more time.

(Laughter)

Q: One more chance.

LAREY: After three months in the United States, I won a competition, there, at the University of Cincinnati and I played with the University of Cincinnati's orchestra as part of the prize.

I made so many friends. All of those friendships and relationships are still very much alive today. It's absolutely wonderful.

Q: Friends from the U.S., I guess, but from other....

LAREY: ...from other countries as well, yes.

Q: Was it a completely diverse group? Were there Europeans and Asians...

LAREY: Yes.

Q:and Latin Americans?

LAREY: Yes. Absolutely from everywhere.

Q: Were you the only African?

LAREY: No, there were other white South Africans. This was fascinating because we actually then started talking to each other. I was always so amazed that we had to leave South Africa to get to know each other. It was amazing.

Q: Where's the fault in this? Is it purely institutional? You were talking about the difficult environment at Stellenbosch at UCT. I am not trying to open a wound here, but how much complicity was there on an individual basis?

LAREY: That is a loaded question.

Q: Then I withdraw it.

LAREY: No, no. I think there's an answer to that. Of course, there was complicity. But, nobody can deny also the contributions to the struggle against apartheid that came from within the white community as well. I think your question is best answered by Bishop Tutu (1931-). I will never forget his words when he said that whites were also prisoners of apartheid.

Q: So, this fascinating experience of getting to know white South African music students, but only because you were outside of South Africa.

LAREY: It was strange. We were drawn to each other because of our common language. My first language was Afrikaans.

Q: Were they UCT students?

LAREY: No. They come from other parts of the country, so I had never met them before.

We had so much in common, which is what pulled us together and I think we all realized that we were not the monsters that we thought we were and that we just like everybody else.

Q: You were not the monster to them and they were not the monsters to you? You had to be in this environment to discover this.

LAREY: Yes.

Q: You say you overstayed; I don't know what that means.

LAREY: I stayed on after my Fulbright grant to complete a doctoral degree at the University of Cincinnati.

Q: You won a competition within three months. Where was there to go professionally beyond that?

LAREY: Oh, still a long way.

(Laughter)

I had so much more to learn. I was a late beginner. Sometimes I think about this when I think...

Q: Sorry, late beginner?

LAREY: I was sixteen when I started playing piano.

Q: Ah, that's very late.

LAREY: So, I had so much to learn still. The question about that keeps coming to me sometimes. What would have happened if I had started earlier, at the age of seven, when most people start piano lessons? The answer to that question that I know myself: Thank goodness I had a normal childhood, because I did. I grew up on a farm. I did all crazy things every day. And, at the time, we could do crazy things. We could go away from without worrying about our safety. Parents never worried about us, as long as we came back before it was dark. (Laughter) So, I had a normal childhood.

But, after my master's degree, I still had things to do and I wanted to do things, but my heart always yearned to come back Cape Town. I wanted to be in Cape Town. I looked at UCT from this far-away distance wanting to have some kind of something there. Still, I respected and admired the institution, as I always had.

Q: With the hostile environment, what was there to respect – just the academic standards?

LAREY: Yes.

Q: Ok.

LAREY: And the music-making, the teachers, and the artists that they had working there, teaching there. It was incredible, as it is indeed today. I am not saying it because I am there. It's still the school with the top performing artists of the country in every area all in one place.

But more, the reason that I wanted to stay on is because I realized I had the beginnings of playing and playing and getting opportunities, which I would have had to give up if I had gone back to South Africa, as at that time I still didn't have access to the concert stages, the main stages of that country. It – that opportunity to perform – would have been gone forever.

The University of Cincinnati then offered me a scholarship to do my doctoral degree, which I am very grateful for. I was extremely happy to continue in an environment where there were just extraordinary concerts, events - an extraordinary high level of artistry there. It's a fantastic school. So, I continued with that. I did several other competitions over the period of time; I won some. As I tell my students now, you will enter hundreds of these things, win two and lose the other ninety-eight. But, it's sort of the thing you do.

There's a competition circuit. You'll recognize the others at the next competition – the same faces. I had a joke with some of the regulars at the competitions. We'd see each other and then go: "Who's going to win this time?"

(Laughter)

Because, it was never the same.

Q: You were at the opposite end of a state that has one of the most remarkable orchestras in the world. Were you able to hear the Cleveland Orchestra?

LAREY: Yes, of course. And also a remarkable symphony – the Cincinnati Symphony, absolutely – with extraordinary conductors.

Q: And Pittsburg.

LAREY: Yes. I actually was in Pittsburg and heard the orchestra with Lorin Maazel and with the current conductor, Jesus Lopez-Cobos; I don't know if he is still there – it could be someone new.

Q: So, in fact, actually, in that part of the Mid-West you have Cleveland, Cincinnati, Pittsburg – Chicago, of course.

LAREY: Yes.

Q: Quite an amazing area for classical music.

LAREY: Yes. Absolutely.

Q: Do you feel that when we speak of classical music, we really mean Baroque, romantic music? How is it doing in the U.S. Many people talk about Afrikaans dying as a language; people talk about the death of classical music.

LAREY: We refer to it as "Western Classical Music," because we are so good when it comes to giving everybody the same treatment. (Laughter) We have Western Classical, Classical African, Classical Indian music. This really refers to a genre something that exists. I think all over the world Western Classical music is going through tough times. In South Africa, also.

I just came back from the United States. Orchestras are going through funding problems, fund raising problems, because of the economic problems of our time now. There will be less money coming to or going to arts organizations in general, I think. But, then, I hope we will all be able to ride the storm. I do believe that there are what I call stubborn donors who really believe in the arts and continue to fund.

Q: The audience, however.

LAREY: Yes, declining. And the age group of the audience is always a concern. Younger people, younger generations.

I think that we have to accept that popular music has changed. What we are doing today used to be popular music. It has changed. Completely different paths. Popular music took a different path and we will never, ever be able to get the people who today love and admire popular music as it is into a classical music concert on their own. We can take them in; we do this all the time. We bring them in and they say, "This is awesome; this is wonderful." But, do they go back on their own? Some of them may.

Q: In the late 1990s, when I lived in South Africa, Western Classical music was considered Euro-centric and the politics was adverse to that. And, I believe the National Symphony ceased to exist, if I remember correctly. So, I gather in many ways, you have gone against the grain in many aspects of your life. First of all, getting into this field and then having to defend it once you were in it.

(Laughter)

LAREY: Yes, I know, I know. I find myself in this situation all the time. I can only point in South Africa to our institution's – UCT – college of music. It would be wonderful if people could move that building on any given day and observe what's going on because the majority of our students are now non-white. There is extraordinary talent there. It is an extraordinary place. It represents the demographics of South Africa much better than any other department at the University of Cape Town. It speaks volumes for the practice of arts and culture in the country. I don't think there's another department that comes close to the kind of representation that we have.

Q: How do you explain this?

LAREY: I don't know.

Q: Could it be you?

LAREY: I don't know. That could be part of it. I think that we are role models and I think that we attract students. I think had the country or the institutions not changed, we would never have discovered these talents. However, it is also because we are committed to transformation and that we are committed to providing opportunities to those who have not had the good fortune to be exposed to a formal music education. We have a special program called the foundation program attached to all of our degrees, where we find extraordinary talent and that extraordinary talent, unfortunately, has not been worked with and music theory has not been dealt with. We place students like that in a special one-year program. Everything is brought up to the expected entrance level.

Q: Harmony, theory....

LAREY: Yes. These students begin their first-year study in the second year, so the whole program has an extra year attached to it.

Q: It's my fault. We have gone a little bit out of the chronology. Cincinnati...

LAREY: ...competitions...

Q: ...competitions, yes. Let's get back to the stories of your time in Cincinnati, and, if you're ready to make your comment on the importance of your U.S. experience in your career.

LAREY: It's enormous. It's enormously important. I wouldn't be here without having had that experience. It was so important because it exposed me to all of this extraordinary music making and the extraordinary people in the world that were in the music. But, also in terms of my life, psychologically, socially I think that I became a very balanced person. It's with great sadness when I see some of my friends now, still, my generation, who did not have the opportunity to leave South Africa – that bitterness that I still sense and see, is something that I am very, very grateful that I don't have. I am only in this position because of the experience I had in the States. The spirit of the American people and of the American experience I think was extraordinary for me. The openness of the people that I engaged with drew me away from the first day I arrived there.

There is another part of my extraordinary experience there. I went to a competition in Palm Springs in California. It's a very wide _____ [wild?] competition, but the family that hosted me there, sort of adopted me and took care of me. They still consider me part of the family. The lady, who passed away some years ago, established a prize in the name of University of Cape Town for young pianists (The Zook Fields Piano Prize). Her daughter, Judy Klein, is a composer and lives in New York. This lady's name was Zook Fields. She had an interesting background, also. Her husband was the famous Shep Fields of the "Rippling Rhythms." He was a big band leader.

Besides that, I think I came out of the United States experience a much better person, more understanding, much calmer, and also more tolerant of other people's ideas, whether I liked them or not. That's the important thing. A very, very, very important thing.

Q: Maybe a final note for the moment. There's more to come. Since Cincinnati – it might be hard to summarize what has happened, but perhaps you could give it a try.

LAREY: In the final year of my doctoral program, two weeks before the deadline, I saw an advertisement for a position in piano at the University of Cape Town. Well, at that time - this was 1996 – of course, this was already post-apartheid and we'd already had our first election. I voted for the first time in my entire life in 1994 – in Cleveland I think it was – which was amazing.

Well, I applied for the position, came for the interview and the rest followed. I was

offered the job. I came back in a flurry of press activity. I was coming back home. I was one of the first group of black academics appointed to that college of music – not the first one, but certainly in the piano section, the first one.

I gave a lot of concerts. This was fascinating to me. The same people who denied me access, the same managers, then contacted me toI was floored, completely floored....the *SAME* people who had told me in my face, “We will not have a concert for you.” The same person negotiated a concert with me.

It was very exciting to be back home. It was very wonderful.

I then went on to become the first black director of the college of music, where I was appointed at the place I used to admire so much in 2002. I served as the director until 2006.

Of course, my wonderful association with the United States continues. In 2004, I was appointed as a faculty member at the Adamant Music School in Vermont, where I go every year. I have since been appointed as the director of the summer program. It is just outside of Montpelier, the capital. It’s a small college, but a beautiful campus. You should look at the web site. It’s absolutely fantastic.

Q: What’s it called? The Golden Triangle?

LAREY: Yes, up in the mountains. A lot of ski resorts.

Q: I’ve been to a music camp myself, up in the golden triangle.

LAREY: It’s close to the Marlborough Festival, very close...

Q: Yes, where I once saw Pablo Casals conduct.

LAREY: So, my association continues.

Q: So, your position of the Adamant?

LAREY: I am the director of the traditional session of the summer program, which is a school for pianists.

Q: A pity. No strings.

LAREY: No, we don’t have any strings.

It’s a fantastic place. Important people go through there. The teachers include John O’Conor, a pianist from Ireland, Andre Laplante, a Canadian pianist, and Menahem Pressler. It’s a fantastic place.

Q: So, you spend North American summers there?

LAREY: Yes. For about a month and a half. I am very happy not to be a director of a college, because I now have started playing again. It took me away from playing. Administration was quite tough. I had to be very careful. I couldn't play as much as I used to. I was on sabbatical last year. I did my recording in New York. I am going to go back now to play at Carnegie Hall, which is exciting.

Q: When and where and how?

LAREY: It's on March 14th.

Q: I will be there.

LAREY: Are you going to be in New York.

Q: No, I'll be in the State. That's a Sunday.

LAREY: It's a Sunday afternoon. It's at 3 o'clock. I think the information is on the Carnegie web site.

Q: I will arrange to be there.

LAREY: I am playing three Debussy preludes, which I love. There are a whole bunch of us playing.

Q: How was this arranged?

LAREY: The school has an annual concert at Carnegie Hall.

Q: There are so many schools here. Which one?

LAREY: The Adamant Music School. This is really a concert to showcase the talent that comes to and goes through the school. The president of the school, Frank Suchomel, invites artists and performers that he would really students (Eben Wagenstroom), like to see play. It is quite an honor. With me will go one of my very talented young from Elsie's River one of the very troubled suburbs of the Western Cape. This is also what I am doing. I have a special project: I teach disadvantaged kids and the one that is going with me to Carnegie Hall is an extraordinary, extraordinary talent. I have several kids like him in the project I have.

Q: You used the word 'disadvantaged.' Before you were sixteen, you did not own a piano. You had the use of a neighbor's piano. Would you say you were disadvantaged in the same way that this young student is?

LAREY: No. It was a completely different disadvantage. The one that comes with

poverty, crime, and violence is disabling. It's a major stumbling block. I think I could find a different piano and solve that problem. I could walk to my neighbor.

Q: You had limited resources, but a positive atmosphere.

LAREY: Yes. It was a disadvantage, but it was very different. I found ways around those things. I wasn't completely disabled by it. Unfortunately, we have the situation where there are very many young kids who are or who can be disabled by this situation. I am trying to find talented young kids and offer them a way out. This kid is amazing.

Q: Well, Franklin Larey, we approach the end of this particular conversation. There may be more. Any reflections about the meaning about this extraordinary career and the place the United States have had in it?

LAREY: I will be eternally grateful to have had the opportunity.

Q: You are not required to say that.

LAREY: No, but I am.

I wouldn't be here without the United States. I wouldn't be here without the people who worked with me in the United States. I wouldn't have had the confidence. It's an enormous honor for me to be in South African at the moment and I think that the responsibility of being a role model or mentor to others is awesome. It's a huge responsibility.

The other thing that I must say, notwithstanding all of my sentiments about how awe-inspiring this all is – where I am now and how I am doing, nothing make me happier actually than to see our young students every year come to the university and for me to see them free of all the baggage and the unnecessarily complex issues that come with racial prejudice, to them free of that brings me complete joy. It is quite amazing to see that. It's a wonderful thing to be part of. Are we making progress? Yes. We have actually done very well.

Q: In the 1980s, did you think that this would be possible?

LAREY: No, never. It only became a possibility when Nelson Mandela was released.

Q: On this day, twenty years ago.

LAREY: Yes. I never wanted to come home before then, even though my heart desired to. If we'd never changed here, I don't know where I would have gone, I don't know where I would be now.

In a nutshell, it is a fantastic time to be in South Africa. It is not an easy country to live in. I used to say: In the United States you wake up in the morning and say, "Oh, another

day,” but here you wake up and say, “What is going to happen today? Oh, my God!”

(Laughter)

I don't like the fact that we live like prisoners behind locked gates. I find that extraordinarily unfortunate; it's sad that we cannot live without those things. But, then there's an excitement. There are many challenges still, but it's very good to be here and I am very happy to be here.

Q: Maestro, thank you for this conversation.

LAREY: Thank you.

End of interview