

## ASBURY PARK AFRICAN-AMERICAN MUSIC PROJECT

### INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

**Interviewee:** Robert Watt

**Interviewers:** Jennifer Souder  
Melissa Keeling  
Charles Trott

**Date:** December 10, 2019 (phone interview)

Jennifer Souder:

Okay.

Robert Watt:

Is your daughter going to be practicing flute?

Jennifer Souder:

Sometimes she has been. We've had some background of flute, um ...

Robert Watt:

Okay, not a problem.

Jennifer Souder:

So, so, we'll get going and we're gonna get started, um, I know we all just introduced ourselves informally but we'll do it on the record, here, uh, that we're, we're calling as part of the Asbury Park African-American Music Project tonight, and, we're really, um, excited to have the opportunity to speak with you.

Jennifer Souder:

Um, I'm Jennifer Souder. I've been working with the project since we started. I live here in Asbury Park and we also have Mr. Charles Trott in the room, as well as Melissa Keeling. Um, so we'll get going and if you can please tell us your name and where and when you were born.

Robert Watt:

Bob Watt. January 15, 1948, Fitkin Hospital in Neptune, New Jersey.

Jennifer Souder:

Okay.

Robert Watt:

Do they still call it that? Is it still there?

Charles Trott:

Yep, Jersey Shore, now.

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Jennifer Souder:

Now it's called Jersey Shore.

Robert Watt:

Oh, oh, oh, [inaudible 00:01:20] that's right, that's right, okay, [laughs].

Jennifer Souder:

And can you tell us a few memories, uh, associated with music in your early childhood?

Robert Watt:

Probably watching my father come home a little bit toasted at night and lying on the floor and playing, um, a muted trumpet, and scatting until he passed out which is ... I used to peek at him from the, the stairs. And, um, the, the other musical experience is when I, I was hearing French horn and didn't realize I was hearing it. Uh, the Lone Ranger had the little excerpt from the William Tell Overture and big French horn part and the cartoons, those black and white cartoons, Farmer Gray, I think. They had a lot of it, all classical music. Um, so, I was hearing stuff and didn't realize what I was hearing and I used to ... my mother said I used to bounce up down in front of the TV to the music and rhythm.

Robert Watt:

So, but, but that, and um, the Elks, the Elks band, we had uh, oh Johnny [Gray 00:02:37] the plumber, he played sousaphone and he could play loud and Mr., Mr. [Allen 00:02:43], and then [Porterfield 00:02:43], the trumpet player, [laughing]. And they ... Porterfield was always playing the wrong tune and my father would be yelling at him. And, it, it was a, the Elks band it [inaudible 00:02:58] like something from a broken down band from the Civil War. You know, they were just very funny, uh, uh, and then we, uh ... I was in the West Side Community Center Drum and Bugle Corp, and, I think all of my brothers and sisters except for Judy, we were playing something. I was playing bugle, Ronnie was playing bugle, Ed was playing the drums, and Tony was playing, oh god, I don't remember, it was either drums or bugle, and Gayle and my ... Jack had played the, uh, xylophone. So, we were all in that drum corp.

Robert Watt:

And my father didn't want us to play any uh, any harmony, everything was straight unison. It was kind of boring but anyway, it was all interesting memories and the uniforms were kind of nice and, uh, so those were the early, early years, early musical experiences. I didn't get to go to the, uh, what's it called, the Cuba's where my father, where his group played because we, it was at night so, and probably before I was old enough to do anything, it was ... I do have photos of my father playing there, at Cuba's Nightclub, but I never, never went there to hear any music, so ...

Jennifer Souder:

And, and you had some, a photo in your book, you have a few photos in your book of that?

Robert Watt:

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Yeah I do, yeah. That, uh, came from uh, I think Madonna Carter's father may have taken those.

Jennifer Souder:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert Watt:

I know she gave me a hard time about that because ... because I didn't put any, well, the, the publisher didn't give anyone credit, any photo credit so I tried to explain that to her and she was ... [laughing] so, anyway, that's ... so yep, that, those are all memories and um, you know, music just came, I guess, kind of out of the woodwork. It was always there, there was always a horn around and that's, you know ... the one day I heard the, uh, my father and I were cleaning out, he worked at the West Side Community Center, we were cleaning up one night, and uh, I discovered an old uh, Victrola, I guess they call it vinyl, and I played a record, and it was, you know, 78 and it was the William Tell Overture and I heard the horn, heard the French horn, and I asked my father what it was, um, I said, "What's the horn that comes in after the trumpet?" And he, "That's, that's a ... it's a French horn, it's a middle instrument, it's a ... ", and he called it a pick horn which is not correct. He was thinking of a mellophone which they play in the band.

Robert Watt:

He says, "That's a ... yeah", he says, "You like that horn?" I said, "Yeah, it gives me chills. I like the sound." He says, "Well", he says, "It's for thin lipped white boys cause your lips are too thick to play, it's got a small mouthpiece," and he says, "You be better off stickin' to the trumpet like your daddy." I said, okay. So, I did play a trumpet for a while but uh, you know, the old saying that parents can't teach their children if they're too, they're too wrapped up in their kids so they're very impatient. So, if you have a kid and you want him to play an instrument, get somebody else to teach him. That's uh, kind of like a cardinal rule, [laughs].

Robert Watt:

Um, same with like training a dog, you know, you get someone else to do it because-

Jennifer Souder:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert Watt:

You're too, too close to it, [laughs]. But, um, so then, uh, after I heard the horn I went to um ... well I was in drum core for a while, the Neptune Shoreliners, and uh, it was a local drum core, and they had something called a French horn bugle which was a bugle but, but bigger than a normal bugle, it had a ... it was voice, like a French horn, and they had baritones and they had contra bass [inaudible 00:07:10] quite an array of bugles so I thought that was a great sound. That was the first, uh, ensemble I ever played in, and uh, I couldn't read a note, I did everything by ear. And, and ...

Jennifer Souder:

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About how old at that time?

Robert Watt:

12.

Jennifer Souder:

Okay.

Robert Watt:

I'm thinking, yeah, 12, 13 and when I got to high school, I uh, that's when I met a young girl and she was in the band, and I was very impressed with her. She was in the band and she played the organ for the school assembly and, and I felt kind of uh, I kind of put her on a pedestal and I thought, how can I measure up [laughing] to her. And that's when I went to the band to take up French horn, the real French horn, so I could be in the band next to her, you know, so ... and all this is in the book, right?

Jennifer Souder:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert Watt:

So, so, do you remember this part?

Jennifer Souder:

Yes, I do, [laughs].

Robert Watt:

So, that, um, and that's how I ended up in the band and uh, the uh, there was that crazy story where the band director saw me coming in with my horn from home and it was covered in snow and I was covered in snow and he thought I was crazy for carrying a horn all the way over to the West Side, as they call it, and back to school. And then he made a speech in the band, fussing at the kids about taking the horns home. He said, I gotta get a kid that lives on the West Side, he takes it home every, the kids were wondering what's his name, who is he? And so, my girlfriend, she warned me not to show up at a certain time or I'd get seriously hissed, [laughing], and I made a mistake and came at the wrong time and I got hissed and it ... [laughing], and I thought, you know, I wanna be in music. I didn't, you know, I didn't care and uh, but that ...

Jennifer Souder:

That, that was in high school, right?

Robert Watt:

Yep, yep, that, the horn he had, that he had for me was uh, was, well, actually when I came to ask for the French horn it said in the book, he, uh, he thought I was, uh, crazy to wanna play the French horn and he

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said the same thing my father said. He says, "You know, can start you on a trombone or tuba but I don't know why you wanna play the French horn there's a very small mouthpiece. Most of you colored fellas do better on, with the horns with the bigger mouthpieces." But, had the thick lips, you know. I said, "Oh really," I said, "I don't wanna play anything else."

Robert Watt:

And so he found this horn that they said I don't have a French horn now and ... but then he, you know, he looked in the ... pulled somethin' out and uh, said if you press the valve down they stay down cause they were, they were broken, springs were shot. So, I learned to play a horn by pressing a valve, pressing back up with my finger, press it down, push it back up with my finger, you know. I thought [inaudible 00:10:25] so ... I'm sorry, I know the call. It was another caller.

Jennifer Souder:

That's fine.

Robert Watt:

So, I came in, brought the horn back and played for him and he saw me pushing the valve back up and, and I got a good sound out of it. He couldn't believe how I got up a sound out of such a, a plucky instrument that was barely nothing. He said, "How you get a sound out of that, I'll never understand it." But he was very surprised and I said, uh, I said, "Aren't the valves supposed to come back up on their own?" He said, "Son, yeah, this one, the springs are shot," he says, "Holy cow, let me get you a ... ". So, he went and gave me this woman's horn who used to leave her horn in school over the weekend so I ended up getting a ... what we call a double horn, so, 'course I have six of them now (laughing).

Robert Watt:

You know, I'd take that on the weekends and I had my other one during the week [laughing]. Anyway, that was how I got started but, uh, but this is all stuff in the book, right? You have but is there stuff you wanted to ask, you got questions?

Jennifer Souder:

Uh, we do, yes, we do have questions, um, but we also like to hear you sharing it in your own voice- I realize the book is your own voice but it's nice to hear the stories the way ... not everybody has seen everything with the book so, um, [crosstalk 00:12:00] recorded to, um, and I was just thinking, if, if you don't mind, could we just take a quick break because I'm going ... I wanna just make 100% sure that everything's recording properly because this is our first time doing it on here.

Robert Watt:

Yeah.

Jennifer Souder:

Is that okay?

Robert Watt:

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So, you're gonna hang up, or not?

Jennifer Souder:

No, not gonna hang up, I'm just going to, uh, stop recording and then start again.

Robert Watt:

Okay.

Jennifer Souder:

So, we'll still be here.

Robert Watt:

All right.

Jennifer Souder:

This is, it's a test.

Jennifer Souder:

Okay, thank you, so I get nervous, I just wanna make sure it's working properly, um, so we're back.

Robert Watt:

Okay.

Jennifer Souder:

Okay, now we're going to, I have to do that again, apparently, to record it cause it's going back to the conference and it's not recording.

Melissa Keeling:

So [inaudible 00:13:38]

Jennifer Souder:

I think just ...

Robert Watt:

Hello?

Melissa Keeling:

What you wanna do is just click it.

Jennifer Souder:

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All right. We're just gonna test one more time cause I'm crazy about recording.

Robert Watt:

All right.

Jennifer Souder:

Okay, okay, so we're back on and, um, we're still in high school, and I know that we had, um, we'd been talking here about the ... when you played at the band shell, that was also, that was also in high school, right?

Robert Watt:

Yeah, that was much later, towards the end, um, when I got better as a player, and um, he thought that Frank [Bryan 00:15:36], the band director thought that if I sit in with the- with the pros that would help me learning to read and get the taste of a professional band so ... but before that, I had made all those all show, all state, all state regional, all eastern, I'd done all those things, so, and then he said, "well, you should sit in during the summer you should come down and sit in," and that's where I ran into my first real French horn teacher. He was playing in that, that band, so ... and he was a student at Julliard, and he and another friend, they came and they have two horns so I sat in to help, you know, it would help me get what the, the pace of a professional situation which was quite interesting.

Robert Watt:

Yeah, so when music goes by and you're not playing then it feels like you're being dragged along sometimes, so, amazing experience, but was very helpful, was very helpful.

Jennifer Souder:

And were you the only, um, young person from high school that was in there at that time?

Robert Watt:

Yeah, absolutely.

Jennifer Souder:

That must have been quite an experience.

Robert Watt:

Yeah, and it wasn't a big band but they were good players and uh, you know, it was one of the ... that was what was available. I thought it was great but I started taking lessons from the real horn player, and that, that was a, quite a jumpstart because it was a ... and, you know, the uh, the whole thing, the, the drama in high school, your personal stuff that you uh, forget what I call it, adolescent secrets or something I called it in the book, where you're ... I, I didn't know that when I was in the lowest curriculum, when I was a freshman and my girlfriend was in college prep, the highest, and I was a little embarrassed about that so, that's why I tried to ... I worked my way out of it.

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Robert Watt:

The guidance counselors and they all said no one has ever done that, and, and there's a guy that I really would like to talk to if he's still alive if it's his name, is Donald Smith, he was superintendent of schools then, and uh, really would like to talk to ... he was very a, very encouraging. He says, "Yeah, I heard about you," and I'm like, "What?" [Laughs]. So, but I was the only one who ever went from one curriculum from that one they had was a new added on curriculum because, uh, that time, I think Bond Street School had a ... had been condemned so my ... I spent five years at Asbury Park High. My eighth grade year was at Asbury High because we didn't have anywhere else to go so that's, um, so when I saw ... met my girlfriend was at the end of my eighth grade year, I saw her go into the auditorium and she smiled at me then, couldn't believe it. So ...

Speaker 1:

[inaudible 00:17:44] call.

Robert Watt:

And then it was the next ... the next year I was a freshman and that's when it all started but we ... I was embarrassed about ... so I covered my books so that she wouldn't see my books and hers weren't covered because she didn't have any reason to be ashamed. It's interesting. So, it was a big change, lots of stuff worrying about the horn and playing in the band, and, and so, picked a ... quite colorful moments of, you know, putting her on a pedestal and her parents would come and pick her up in this black car and it, to me it looked like a limousine, you know, in my adolescent youth and they'd whisk her away and I'm like, god, I have no ... one day I had to walk home after that and it started raining, and I thought, oh, nobody's pickin' me up, have to walk home in the rain. It was a terrible feeling and then, then I was beating myself up thinking, what, what must she be doing in the evening, maybe she has another guy and maybe it was a white guy and they would go to college together and perhaps, you know, just beating myself up worrying while I'm walking home, [laughs], things she might be doing, it isn't awful, you know, adolescence.

Jennifer Souder:

Adolescence.

Robert Watt:

Yeah, it's just a ... and it was a ... and she asked me about the ... that uh, what curriculum I was in, and I was embarrassed so I told her I was in the one that would be next up until I was deciding which way I wanted to go, but, I didn't wanna say I was in basic. That's what they called it, basic studies. A lot of black kids were in that because a lot of kids that uh, not done well in school and your ... you know, and they came in from the eighth grade so when they got to high school they ... a lot of them didn't measure up to the three curriculums, general, business administration and college prep. Those are the main three, but there's basic, that was kind of new and a, when I went in to change, the guidance counselor said, I mean just brutally says, "Well, so many of you people don't measure up to the regular curriculum so we had to come up with this other one." I was like, god.

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Robert Watt:

And uh, I said I'd like to get out of it and, he said "We'll think about it, we'll figure a way maybe you can do it", you know, and then they actually did figure a way that by the time I was a junior I'd be out of it, and that's what happened. And so, by the time I got to be a junior ... my first two years of math I was still in basic but the last two years I took the first two years of math in my junior and senior year.

Robert Watt:

And then there was that moment at the graduation where I realized that my girlfriend knew all along that I was in basic, or that I had pulled myself out and then I, I was gonna tell her once I got to college prep and I did. And it was embarrassing, you know, the silly things, and she goes, "Yeah." Oh, and we got ... when she said I could walk with her, she was student council president so I asked if I could walk with her. I always wanted to be the first couple in because, you know, I played in the band and I watched for a few years all the first couple walking in leading the class and so that's when she said, "Well of all the people who should lead this class in, it's you, pulling yourself up from basic studies like you did."

Robert Watt:

Oh god, I couldn't believe she knew about it, and she said, "You shouldn't of been ashamed." [Laughs]. But those, you know, the stuff that goes on in our mind of adolescent stuff, that you're worried about and uh, but actually saw her about two years ago. She's a sociologist and she came out here for a convention, came to Anaheim. So, Anaheim is where Disneyland is so, I took a train down and had lunch with her.

Jennifer Souder:

Oh, wow.

Robert Watt:

Yeah, she's, she's still ... she lives in Maitland, Florida, and interesting because she never married, all her siblings are gone, and her parents, so she's the last one in the family. That's, that's an ... anyhow, we've all thought of that but boy, to actually know someone who actually, who's actually living that, so, so we had a nice lunch and uh, in Anaheim, and uh, yep.

Jennifer Souder:

That must have been something to see her.

Robert Watt:

I had, I had seen her before, some years ago, and she came up in New York when we were on tour but not very much. I mean that's been a long time. So, that uh, yep, that's ... she was a big a ... a big element in encouraging me and making me wake up and whatever, jump, did I say jump start my life? I think in the book I got a lot more elegant, eloquent about it.

Jennifer Souder:

It really sounds like it, and, but even, and um, but just each of those steps that you described, those, you know, taking it upon yourself to go decide that you were going to move into the other program and just

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taking that initiative with the French horn, all along this is a lot of, um, amazing things in a, in a row there at a young age to, to have that kind of, uh, determination is pretty amazing.

Robert Watt:

Thank you, well, I guess that's uh, that part of my nature, I don't know, but she was part of ... I had, you know, I was so worried and, that ... there was one time when we were walking home and I was carrying her books, my books, and a horn, and she asked me a question and as a ... something to a diversion I dropped everything when I was on somebody's lawn and everything slipped out of my hands as a diversion because I didn't wanna answer the question.

Jennifer Souder:

Ah, right, [laughing] right.

Robert Watt:

It's so embarrassing, and I thought, oh god, don't ask me, as well, so what, uh, what course are you taking, Bob, and I gave her her books back and she would always walk with her books in front of her and, you know, her hanging down with both arms and I think, I think she knew I was lying, [laughing], she got sick of, heh, those were interesting times.

Robert Watt:

Oh, and then of course the big deal of meeting her mother and having her father laugh at me and you know, [laughs], and he was huge. He looked like one of the Harry Potter trolls, I mean, because I was ... I wasn't the size I am now, I hadn't finished with growing and he looked at me, "Ha-ha-ha-ha," he laughed like ... and walked away like it was all a joke, you know?

Jennifer Souder:

Oh.

Robert Watt:

Oh, it was ... her mother started grilling me, "And what does your mother do?" Oh, I go man, yeah uh, it was pretty, uh, pretty rough. And she ... they just worked ... she just worked me over. "Do you go to church? What church do you attend? Are you an usher, are you ... are you active in the church?" Oh god, yeah, [inaudible 00:25:24] so that's all, those things stick with you because they're so ... well the time I first called up to ask for a date, oh my god, you remember the West Side drug store? The ...

Jennifer Souder:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert Watt:

Well, it was in there. We didn't have a phone so I went over there to call and uh, to ask if I could, oh, just to go to the, the senior play. Well, I had no car, I had, you know, we would walk to the school and back, you know, I couldn't whisk her off for, for wild love-making, I had no, no ac- nothing like that, but, they

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said no. They wouldn't let ... I had called and her mother was so cold and I was, I was so nervous and [laughs], and she just took control and you know, I was, "I- I- would like to ... ", it was awful. And she said, "I see," she says, "Well young man, whomever you are, Linda doesn't go out with boys," click, and hung up on me.

Robert Watt:

I set there with the phone in my ear for 20 minutes just like, they didn't even let me talk to Linda, not even just a ... that was a real ... do you know who, who I'm talking about?

Charles Trott:

Oh yeah, I know who you talking about.

Robert Watt:

Oh jeez.

Charles Trott:

[inaudible 00:26:40] but I knew it.

Robert Watt:

Shut up, shut up. [Laughing] I hear somebody in the room knows. Oh my god, yeah, anyway, I didn't mean ... I changed her name, she asked me to, but I wasn't gonna use her own name anyway, so. Those are, I mean, in a book, if you're talking about people you get into trouble if you tell a lie and use a real name. But if you don't use the real name and tell the truth it's one thing, but it's the lie that gets you in trouble. But, to not use the name and not, and to tell the truth, you're fine. They can't, there's no legal attachment to that. So, there's no need to know these real names because most people don't know, anyway, so.

Charles Trott:

Right, right.

Robert Watt:

Those are thing one, things one learns in writing a book, you know. So, so, not an easy job, the autobiography because it's so personal and uh, sometimes you have to put it down and back away.

Jennifer Souder:

I'm sure. It's a wonderful book.

Robert Watt:

Thank you, thank you. I'd be done, or are you done, did you read the whole ...

Jennifer Souder:

I've, I've not quite finished, and I'm ... I'm in the last couple chapters.

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Robert Watt:

Oh, oh, it's a ... don't remember. The last couple of chapters, oh, did you read the My Old Favorites, one, that part?

Jennifer Souder:

I read part, yes. I don't know if everybody in the room has read it.

Charles Trott:

[inaudible 00:28:05]

Robert Watt:

You can't read Trott? What do you mean?

Charles Trott:

I didn't read the whole thing, Bob, no offense.

Robert Watt:

Sorry?

Charles Trott:

I say, no offense but I did not read the whole thing.

Robert Watt:

Oh, well you know, well you know ... weren't you in basic too? You, you know, maybe you [laughing] he's gonna kill me. [crosstalk 00:28:27] your reading skills are a ... [laughing]. No, it's okay, it's a crazy book and I always tell people I said, well, you read my book, I'll say oh, I hope you still like me. Because, I mean, they're really, I mean, an auto bio it's, it's revealing, you know.

Charles Trott:

Right.

Jennifer Souder:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert Watt:

You know, it's a ... so you still like me Charles Trott? [Laughing].

Charles Trott:

[inaudible 00:28:55] I looked and I tell people all the time, you know, he's the only one who made it out with such a, a uh, esteem

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PART 1 OF 4 ENDS [00:29:04]

Charles Trott:

Who made it out with such a.. a...um, esteemed stature. And especially in European classical music. I don't know anyone.

Robert Watt:

You don't?

Charles Trott:

No.

Robert Watt:

Well you come out here I can introduce you to some, you know. [laughs]

Charles Trott:

No, no, no. I know, but no one in [00:29:17]. As a matter of fact no one that I have ever met. Uh, has been a classical. You know, from symphonic orchestra.

Robert Watt:

Oh. Yeah, right. Well they've got to do something. You know, [crosstalk 00:29:30] it was all in my head while I was there because that's the only place it could be. Nobody, um. People thought I was crazy, so. Or they'd laugh at you. You know.

Charles Trott:

I know only the [inaudible] things that we Afro Americans go into in terms of music. Church, blues, rock, jazz, that's it.

Robert Watt:

Well, I played all that. And definitely the thing that was great about L.A. is that I was able to uh, when I got into L.A. in 1970 there was, Motown was here and I got to play with Isaac Hayes and there was a lot of pop music here. And I would be on stage playing, finish playing a concert at 10 o'clock, playing Mozart and whatever, and then go to the Capitol Records you know down to Hollywood and then from 11 till 2 with Barry White. And totally different world.

Charles Trott:

Wow.

Robert Watt:

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And all the Black players, I'd walk in with my tails on, and they'd go "Look at this Brother. Where you been brother?" Grab my tails, say, "Look this brother can fly. Look he's got wings." [laughs] they made a joke out of it.

Robert Watt:

Oh. So that guy...for... it was such a... it was so much fun, and um. So that was a very balancing situation, being able to play with...play studio stuff and, especially with Isaac Hayes.

Charles Trott:

Right on time.

Robert Watt:

It helped. It helped a lot. But, um. Anyway, the graduation. That whole thing was the whole part of the book that's sort of a... I would call it the first climax in the book where I get to lead the class and Linda finds out that I'm, I was in basic studies and I thought I was getting away with something. [laughs]

Charles Trott:

[laughs]

Robert Watt:

And she's quite bright you know, so you... [laughs] yeah. Don't get away with much and um. Now there's a thing in there that, that's um, let's see...so you're recording this well, there was, there...well of course once you write an autobiography you just write everything. Then you have to leave things out. So, there was a little more, you know complex things happening when you... at the same time I as in high school and in love with my high school sweetheart. Other things happened, uh...God. There was something that happened in one in the um... I made the all-start orchestra, all-state regional. There were women there of course. There was one little scene, and um, the woman... I was thinking of taking this white woman to the prom, or, junior prom. And do you remember the guy at McDonald? Mr. Scott. He talked, he was a manager and he talked me out of it. [laughs]

Robert Watt:

It was... it didn't happen, you know. And then, my teacher had a, his girlfriend had a sister and his girlfriend was a, I'm not going to use his name, but his girlfriend from the family of the Goodyear Rubber. She was a rich girl and played flute. They went to Julliard together and her sister, they would bring her down and she would hang out with me at the beach.

Charles Trott:

[laughs]

Robert Watt:

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And she looked like Allie McGraw. Had that dark hair. Anyway so these were all these other things. That's not in the book but there are things that were happening at the same time that I was in high school. You know, it was a kind of a, a kaleidoscopic existence at that time. And things were happening fast. Things were changing fast and when it came to getting accepted into a New England Conservatory, it was my high school girlfriend who told me, you know. She said if the envelope comes and it's small, that means you didn't get in. If you get an envelope in an eight and a half by eleven that meant you got in and there's all this other information. But, she said if it's a small envelope it doesn't take much to say no. [laughs] that was...and I lived at that time what was the new village which is gone now, is that right? The-

Jennifer Souder:

Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Robert Watt:

On Boston Way. Yeah. That's gone now, right?

Jennifer Souder:

Yes.

Robert Watt:

The mailboxes if you remember were terrible, I mean you could... they were ripped open. Some, they weren't all you know locked neatly you know where you could open it with your key. Some were smashed in. So I was worried about my stuff getting, you know, scattered or misplaced and finally it came, and it was stuck in this envelope folded up and um, I opened it up and then I remember throwing it up in the air and yelling, you know. [laughs] My mother came out to see if I had lost my mind. "What are you doing?" I said, "I got in New England!" [laughs]

Robert Watt:

Anyway, it was...and we got in and filled out the paperwork and she did it because she had this great penmanship and um. That was a great memory. So, I was... where was... I was in Asbury in August. So I don't think I went that way. So the new village is gone. Okay. Oh, well. Um-

Jennifer Souder:

Yeah there's quite a bit of change over there.

Robert Watt:

I'm sorry?

Jennifer Souder:

There's quite a bit of change along Springwood there.

Robert Watt:

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Yeah, yeah. Where did I go? I guess I just... it's so funny to drive by and see something you know? So I, I forgot... I don't recall... so it's been gone a few year now, right?

Speaker 2:

Oh yeah. Yeah.

Jennifer Souder:

Yeah. Trying to think of the year that...

Robert Watt:

No. Because I was there just this last August. But I just came for one night, um, I don't remember if I even went that way. I don't...

Jennifer Souder:

I think you're right, about 2015 or 2016 I think.

Robert Watt:

Oh. Really? Well.

Jennifer Souder:

Um.

Robert Watt:

Because I had, a recent girlfriend, we... she came home with me . You know I told her about it but then we walked by there and when she saw it she couldn't believe... she got tearful. I said "what?" She goes, "Here??" I said yeah right there. I said "building 3, apartment..." she says "what? That?" And she got... I said "what's the matter?"

Robert Watt:

"How could you live?"

Robert Watt:

I said, "Look it was roof over our heads." I said " you should have seen the other place we lived on Springwood avenue." God, no heat, no hot water. You know. So, it was... you forget some people can't handle the stuff. She said, "this place?" And then they had it, the fence was around it and it was condemned so it looked-

Jennifer Souder:

Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Robert Watt:

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Looked even worse right? [Laughs]

Jennifer Souder:

Right, right.

Robert Watt:

Anyway, it's really. So yeah she got a little tearful, couldn't believe it. I said, "yep, this is it." I mean of course it does still, does look a little rough you know after so many years.

Jennifer Souder:

Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Robert Watt:

But you know that was it. We lived in cold water flat above, what's this? I forget the name of... it was Brownies or, I think it was a liquor store that we lived above in one of those apartments. So that we before, and so the project was actually, moving out because they had hot water and heat all the time you know? [laughs]

Robert Watt:

You know it's just..., you know. You got to start somewhere. You know.

Jennifer Souder:

Absolutely.

Robert Watt:

You know. And it's where you end up that matters. But I tell my students, I have kids who, Black kids that, especially, who grew up in certain types of neighborhoods and I tell them that... I said, "Your background will pay off in way that you can't imagine throughout your life." That's experience. And I said, "so when you go to school and you go to college, don't sever and separate your background." I said, "Add to it, because that's a rich part of your life."

Robert Watt:

I have a kid here who grew up in a black community here and... student, I had him since he was 13 and now he's a junior at USC, the music school there. But he was telling me he worked at the music center as an usher and he went in the L.A. philharmonic locker room where the men's... men's restroom, locker room, and he found a piece of philharmonic music on the floor that said L.A. philharmonic music library and it was a French horn part. And he was going to take it and put it in his pocket. Then he thought, "uh... cameras." Well there are no cameras in there because it's the men's locker room, and then there's the restroom. But he... I said the fact that you thought about that. I said "That's your background." Making you think. Because there could have been a situation where there were cameras you know. So, you know I was explaining that to him and, how important your background is in... He got a job the last

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two summers in Chicago and he had never been there. And he's Ubering around Chicago. He says, "Oh, it was great!" And I said, "You see? You were fine with that." "Oh man it was a great city"

Robert Watt:

I said, "You weren't scared?"

Robert Watt:

"What?"

Robert Watt:

Didn't even think about it. And some of it was in the Chicago southside. But I said, "That's your background." I said, "If you had grown up in Brentwood you would have been scared to death to walk around Chicago and see Black people. And you'd be scared." You know?

Robert Watt:

So I tried... I tell young people that. Don't sever your background because it's very, very valuable to you. And, no matter what it is. But, especially if it's kind of rough and you get to see reality. It's very helpful. So, um. Really paid off. But, there are black people who to try tell you to forget that part. "Just say where you are now, don't worry about that. Forget that. You're here now. Don't..." You know. Like, no, no, no. I can't cut that off. "Yes you can. You can just say that you're..." and I said that I'm not ashamed of it. But a lot of... I've had arguments with many black women about that. The bourgeois L.A. black women tell me to leave that out. So I got into arguments with that, about that. And um, just say that you were... I say I wasn't born in the L.A. Philharmonic. [laughs] you know. That's a, that's an interesting thing that... but you know like some, some, some people you tell them about that, they'd be embarrassed for you.

Jennifer Souder:

Hm.

Robert Watt:

You know they would be embarrassed and I said well, you know, embarrassed? This is what it was. My mother did the best she could With seven kids? Oh my god. You know? But that's um, some of the realities here. And even dating some of the women here, because remember L.A. is where black, great of the great migration of black people leaving the south, so you have generations of those people who left the south and ended up here, and several generations of black people growing up in L.A. and becoming well to do. Any you know, I live in one of those neighborhoods right now. The famous Baldwin Hills. Famous black neighborhood where John Singleton lived up the street from here. Up, the next street above. Beautiful homes, black folks own these gorgeous homes so it's... but um, and it's um. Meghan Markle lives down the hill. So it's one of those neighborhoods, so. But, I like seeing all these black folks with these homes because where I... when... you know we had... who was it? The preachers, the doctors, right? The lawyers had the beautiful homes with the two car garages. But I didn't socialize. We didn't socialize with them. And so now I get to meet them now, and they're all up here. It's quite interesting. And some of them would go to the philharmonic. I've taken dates. And that's the part of the book I think it's called Black Los Angeles where...and you know my father had a little cleaning business and you know

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I come from a working class family so....If I see a janitor and he's Black I'm not going to ignore him if we're, I don't care where we are. If he speaks to me, we speak and you know... there was Mr. Johnson who we used to... was a custodian at the music center and I'm walking in from one of these neighborhoods and I said, "Hello Mr. Johnson." And he always wore these white shoes. He looked sharp when he was leaving. And, so, I know who he is, you know, that's...And after "Morning, Mr. Johnson" and woman would say, "You speak to them?"

Jennifer Souder:

Hm

Robert Watt:

[scoffs] I said, "excuse me? You speak to them?" I said, "them?" She said, "The help"

Robert Watt:

Oh, yeah. The help? I said, "I hate to tell you," I said, "but when I go on the stage and the people you're going to be sitting next to are going to be looking at me as the help." I said "do you still want to go?" I was, that just really... got, ugh. I had never met women like that before. I mean black women especially. Even though my high school girlfriend lived in a better house situation, she wasn't that, um, snooty. (laughs)

Robert Watt:

Yep, "the help" how quickly we forget [laughs]

Jennifer Souder:

Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Robert Watt:

Oh yeah. So it was all about you know. "well you know he's in the philharmonic." "Oh! Well we have to get him to our next church bazaar! Oh this is imperative"

Robert Watt:

These folks were so full of shit. [laughs] Oh, God. I mean and you know I'm sitting there listening to all these people, listening to them talk and how they... and they thought I was a god because I was affiliated with this high profile white organization. And they never thought to ask me what my background was like. They assumed that I was at least like them or better. And I would just listen to them talk and I would... God they actually think I'm one of them. And I thought, wow. So, just some of the things that they would say, and the airs, and um. But boy there lots of black women (laughs) it was like letting a fox into a chicken coop. For me. Beautiful. All these beautiful women around and everybody's mother wanted to introduce you to their daughter [00:44:38]. And had lots of hang-ups, just some of the stuff and um... that thing in the book where they ganged up on me and said, um... did you get to that part, uh, like chapter...

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Jennifer Souder:

No I didn't-

Robert Watt:

It's called Black. [crosstalk 00:44:55] oh, it's think it's chapter 20 I think. It's called Black Los Angeles. And it was around the first time I got in the orchestra and I started reading black people in the Black community and um... just, um. Very, you know. I'd say enlightening but surprising a lot of the time because they... they had this idea of color. They had like a, I call it a color gradient of skin color with who they would talk to and even have a conversation with. "well did you talk to..." "Oh no, I couldn't he was just too dark." What are they saying is too dark? I didn't... I didn't want to go there. Oh my god. So they said to me... they actually said, I don't consider myself light skinned, but to them they gave me a color code. I thought "what?" "Well someone of your..." what did they say? "Someone of your complexion wouldn't have to worry about that, Bob." Like, what are they talking about?

Robert Watt:

And they said something of a... oh. One day several of them ganged up on me about... they said "tell us the truth, Bob. Wouldn't you really..." oh they said "someone of your pedigree-" I though, pedigree?? "-someone of your pedigree who plays in a major orchestra- someone of your pedigree. Wouldn't you prefer..." oh they all had hang-ups about their bodies and how the clothes fit. (laughs) I thought, "what?" I said, "looks great" And they were all like, "well my butt's funny, it's shaped..." it's a whole chapter on this. It's just... and the way they talked and the airs. "Well it makes my butt...my clothes fit funny." And I said, "No, it's the clothes weren't designed for you. That's why[crosstalk 00:46:48] but it looks all the more sexy."

Robert Watt:

"Oh, really? Thank you!"

Robert Watt:

Pretty. And so they ganged up one day and said, "wouldn't you prefer someone of your pedigree prefer the shape of a white woman? With the trim waist? And then you've got to admit they have the best hair." And I said, "What? I don't have to admit anything." You know? I thought, "God!" They actually said that and they were all looking at me waiting for an answer. I wanted to scream. I was so...they all just. They actually believed that, so this was you know we're talking 1970's. So it's not long after all the stuff about pull your lips in and hide your butt and all that crazy. If you're too dark don't wear red and all those. Remember those mad, crazy things people used to believe? So. Am I still being recorded?

Jennifer Souder:

You are. You are. You are being recorded.

Robert Watt:

So that, so I see where you, you haven't reached the... so you haven't reached the part where I got in the philharmonic because that's pretty near...and the way I met these people was through a student, um.

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One of the white horn players, had a Black kid, French horn chair and he didn't know how to put his lips in a mouthpiece and he said, "will you take him off my hands?" And I said, "Sure, I'll him off..." teachers didn't know how...just, you know, the whole thing with the lips and the mouthpiece. So, that kid is the one who introduced me, invited me to one place, and one thing led to another and next thing I knew they were talking about church bazaars and, oh my god it was really. Oof! And it wasn't that they, um, it was just the way they talked and it sounded like they were- well, E. Franklin Frazier wrote a book on it called The Black Bourgeoisie. And he goes all the way back to slavery and traces the whole thing back to slavery about skin color and then adding the Great Migration and how Black people moved around and different... some got wealth and some had, you know...

Robert Watt:

And L.A. you have Hollywood also. So, you have an added, um, element of [laughs] I guess pretentious phoniness. And everyone here, like that grows up here, they have what I a mogul complex. Everyone wants to be Sid Wassermann with three phones in their ear making deals you know. Like the big movie moguls. And they all think if you're not on T.V. you're nobody and if you meet someone you'll say "Well let's have lunch." "Well I'm hard to reach, um, let me get back to you and I can work you in for the next two months." Like, get out of here.

Jennifer Souder:

[laughs]

Robert Watt:

That's, yeah. That's... yeah that was the...not so much now but that was in those days. Everybody wanted to be, appear... I call it posturing. "I'm hard to reach." When they're working at a bank. You know? Like, really? And they give you a card and, um. One woman gave me a um...gave me her card and she told me she was hard to reach and I said well then I won't call you. You know?

Jennifer Souder:

[laughs]

Robert Watt:

[inaudible 00:50:06]from Jersey we didn't have a phone to... get out of here! Said she was an actress when she gave me her card and I called her and the answering machine had this message said, "I apologize in advance for taking so long to get back to you. My busy schedule only allows me to return calls once a month-

Jennifer Souder:

What?!

Robert Watt:

Please leave your name and..." I was like, get...I left a message I said "I'll see you in Hell! I couldn't believe it actually said that. A month!

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Jennifer Souder:

Wow.

Robert Watt:

Now get...that's posturing. Yeah that's the...they play a hard game out here because everybody's... I mean Hollywood's here. Every year they have to, you know... but on the other hand, I mean, it was kind of, how would I say? In a sense a strange kind of loneliness because. How do you tell people who are looking up to Hollywood that I'm playing music for the movies? They wouldn't believe you. I mean, you know... and I'm playing at, I'm... you know. The Jackson...that film about the Jackson family, if it's a T.V. special, it's like five hours long.

Jennifer Souder:

Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Robert Watt:

Yeah I played on that. And, now who showed up? Jermaine showed up for that taping. And you know, we're talking... you know, nice people, but you can't...if I were to tell them that they wouldn't even believe it. So it was. Because you could tell by the way they were talking about it that it was so far above them that if I said, "Oh yeah, I played that show and um when, um, Joe Jackson was getting beaten up by his wife because she heard the girl on the phone and there was a big French horn solo behind that creating the drama while she beat Joe up. But you couldn't tell them this because they were so... they had it so far above them that you just had to be quiet and listen and say "well..." you know, "well actually..." you know. But, "I met such and such" or... it just wasn't worth it. Because they wouldn't believe you or... it was really interesting. So that's, uh, part of what it is to be in L.A. and um, to see how black people look at their white Hollywood world. And which white people are acting the same way but then black people have their own version of this, you know, the Hollywood, um, I guess, being a fan and whatever. Looking up to Hollywood and being impressed.

Robert Watt:

Very interesting combination of things but the thing, as I said, what I enjoyed the most is the balance of the music making. Being in a major orchestra and then to be playing sometimes three or four studio calls either playing a movie and um, or record dates. You know, um, it's... I have a picture here. I didn't even notice they were taking a picture in the studio. Or, in the booth in the recording booth in the... what they call it. The big board. I'm standing next to Paula Abdul and someone took a photo and didn't even know she was next to me, I was talking you know. But you can't, you can't tell people that. They don't believe you. They think you're, so you're just [inaudible 00:53:30] be quiet about these things or... can't. They just don't believe you. You know. So it was a little bit interesting where you had to just smile and say, "okay." Um, you know.

Robert Watt:

So it's an interesting town in that regard. Um. So you, you know. And if someone's visiting you would have to tell them. If someone's visiting from Jersey and you say we're going to lunch in Beverly Hills and

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they said, "If you see someone, just be cool because they're in their private life. Don't run up and try to get their autograph. Will you promise me that? They're in their private life." So I was in Ralph Lauren's. A friend of mine was one of the suit makers there and I was talking to him and was trying to get by and Schwarzenegger was blocking my way. And I said, "Excuse me, Governor." And he said, "Oops, so sorry. I'm not governor anymore." I said, "British Governor" and he said, "oh yes, of course." [laughs]

Jennifer Souder:

[laughs]

Robert Watt:

I mean, but that thing that..I just kept... I didn't want to you know. And you know, he's not a...he's rather on the short side, and Eddie Murphy of them. They're all, you know they're all out here or they're out her for whatever. But you just get used to it. So you have to tell people if they're visiting from out of town, "don't go over and jump on the people, because they're in their private life." But it's hard to understand because when you're on stage, like if you're in a major orchestra you're in public space all the time. So you know, most of the people who see you don't know and you may never know or they'll recognize you somewhere and it gets... can be crazy. Um, I was in line with um... at one time I lived in Belle Ire, and um, the post office for Belle Ire is L.A. it's Los Angeles. It's the same post office for that OJ has (laughs). Because OJ was in Brentwood so that's L.A. so I come out of Belle Ire and you're down, go down on the flat that's Brentwood. So an old friend of mine was visiting and I said, "Got to go to the post office, it's OJ's post office. Don't be surprised at who you see. It's right in the middle of Brentwood." And he said, "Okay." So I'm standing in line. And just to show you how people are here, if you're... you can be nice to people but that...it's really if you're not somebody. For example, there was a black woman in front of me in line and I said, "good morning." then she looked at me like, "hmpf." And just kind of... I said "Okay. That's how you want to be?" Didn't say anything. Looked like, "Hrrmph." I thought, "fine."

Robert Watt:

And then I looked over and my friend was talking to Agassi, the tennis player. I looked at him and I did one of these and I said, "I told you." You know? So this woman was in line and she goes up to the counter and then she turns around and sees me and she goes, "French horn, Los Angeles Philharmonic! How are you?" And everyone turned around, just whoosh, and looked. I thought, "Oh man." And the black woman in front of me, "Oh you're in the philharmonic?" I said, "We don't talk." She made this...

Jennifer Souder:

[laughs]

Robert Watt:

Said, "we don't talk." And it just, you know it's um...you have people like that. If she had known that then she might have spoken to me at first but since I was just some, a nobody. You know it's that kind of...if you're nobody...if you're not on T.V. you're nobody. And kids grow up, the kids here grow up with that attitude, with that idea. And it's really too bad but there is that whole spot a celebrity thing. It's, really. So my friend and I, I said "So I told you." He says, "Yeah. Well I had a good conversation with Agassi." I

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said "Well. You know like I was trying to tell you." right? You get used to it. And you get used to leaving these people alone. I said at least I do because I'm on stage all the time and people are looking at you. And people see you places and it can be, uh. Sometimes it can be nice. It can be helpful. But then sometimes it can be like an albatross around your neck.

Robert Watt:

When I was on a date with somebody I was really into years ago, and the waiter recognized me from the orchestra. Ugh. In Beverly Hills, another. And he started, "I know that face..." I said, "Whose face?" "Your face. French horn. Behind that French..." I was like "oh no. Yeah I'm trying to talk to Irene here." And he says... they ask questions that like, you know are

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Robert Watt:

They ask questions that like, you know, that are impossible to answer. Like, "On that Sunday Subscription Series C," he say, "I think he took the second movement of that Mozart. He took that development way too fast. What do you think?" I was like, "What the heck? I can't remember what." (laughing) I said, "I didn't play the piece." You know, it was like, geez, you know. So you get these kind of questions. So, you, you have this, you know, it's, it's, um, it could be a crazy place, you know? You... But after a while, honestly, you, you do get used to it.

Robert Watt:

I saw it was a really hot day and, u, in Beverly Hills. I was walking on the sidewalk, and I saw Larry King get out of his car, and he stumbled. And he looked so feeble and skinny and, and, and he was like, "Oh." I said, "Larry, you better drink some water." "Oh, oh yeah, well yeah, well yeah, I'm thirsty. Yeah, I'm thirsty." And he looked like he was like, dehydrated. I said, "Better drink some water. It's pretty hot." "Oh, really? Really?" I said, "It's 92, yep." "Oh, oh, okay, okay, oh, sure, sure, sure." He looked so bad. [laughing] He looked awful, like he was gonna pass out.

Jennifer Souder:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert Watt:

But, you know, and I just kept walking. I didn't, you know, I didn't want to meet him but ... I mean, but it becomes this part of the, the, the, that's just part of the scene here. I mean, you see these people and you get, you get used to it.

Robert Watt:

And I had that Jackson film where, um, when she was, well, what was her, what was his mother, no, the wife's name, the mother's name, uh, who was beating up Joe Jackson? Angela Bassett was playing that part. And I ran into her. And she asked if, she says, "You look familiar." I get that a lot. "You look familiar." I said, "I do?" I said, "I get that a lot."

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Robert Watt:

And she, I, she said, "Have we worked together?" I said, "Kind of." And she goes, "Where?" And I said, "Well, on the Jackson film, you, when you were beating up Joe Jackson, uh, for talking to the girl on the phone, there was a big French horn solo behind you creating the drama." "Oh." I said, "In that way, we worked together, I guess." She says, "Oh, oh." She says, "Oh, how quaint." She's very nice, you know.

Robert Watt:

Some of them are really a pain in the ass, and some are very down to earth, so. Uh, one being like, Henry Winkler. Just a super guy, you know. And Paul Winfield wouldn't even talk to me. [laughing] I'd said something to him. He just looked at me like I was crazy. And we're backstage at the Hollywood Bowl. He wouldn't even talk to me.

Robert Watt:

But you just never, you know, you never know. They're all just like everybody else. Some are okay and some are, really got a problem, you know. You just... So that's why a lot of 'em, I just leave 'em alone. They're in their private life. I'm in my private life. I don't want to, you know, I don't want any autographs. [laughing]

Robert Watt:

So, you know that, uh, Schwarzenegger, what did you think that means? You know, people made mistakes about that.

Charles Trott:

What did it mean?

Robert Watt:

That, that, the last name?

Jennifer Souder:

His name? Well, there's, there's black in there.

Charles Trott:

"Schwarz" is "black" in German. Schwarz.

Jennifer Souder:

"Schwarz" is black, right?

Charles Trott:

"Schwarz" is black in German.

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Robert Watt:

Yup.

Charles Trott:

And then "negger," what does that sound like to you? [laughing]

Robert Watt:

No, I speak German. I just wanted to clear it up 'cause people think it means black nigger, and it doesn't. In German, if the Germans wanted to call you, uh, a black person, or a nigger, they'd say "nagger," N-A-G-G-E-R. And he, you know, but it's not. It's Schwarzenegger, S-C-H-W-A-R-Z-E-N is Schwarzen, means "black cutter," like a, a farmer, a person who cuts grass.

Jennifer Souder:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert Watt:

Like a, a weed whacker. So it's "egger." Schwarzenegger, not Schwarzenagger. It just sounds, 'cause Schwarzen is the black adjective, Schwarzen.

Jennifer Souder:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert Watt:

Egger is the, the actual, the noun. So it's "black cutter," like a, like a weed cutter. But anyway, the-

Jennifer Souder:

Oh, interesting.

Robert Watt:

Yeah, it's not. So I've had so many people come up, "Well, why is his name black nigger?" I said, "It's not, that's the, how, it just looks," 'cause they don't know German, so. But yeah, it's, uh, interesting. So you see all these people and you get, you know, just part of, uh, part of the world, um, out here. And, uh, God, I don't even think about it anymore. [laughing] But, uh, yeah.

Jennifer Souder:

Mr., Mr. Watt, could we ask you a few questions? Could I ask you a question about, um, uh, Mr. Cliff? 'Cause on the call the other day, you had mentioned Mr. Cliff. I'm taking you back to Asbury Park now. Um, and, and him playing with your father?

Robert Watt:

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Yeah. I mean, he, it's just amazing that he's still here to talk to. You know, I call him occasionally. And, uh, you know, he, he's like a fixture, you know? I remember, uh, you know, hearing him practice. Uh, they lived in the village on Atkins Avenue, that part that's on across from Pop's. Is it Pop's, the store?

Jennifer Souder:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert Watt:

That little store. They lived in that first building, I remember, where, where my grandmother lived. And to hear him practicing and... But I think I asked him, I asked him about my father. To be able to ask someone about your father after he's been gone for 15 years, it's hard to, you know. And, and he said that, I said, "Did my father improvise well, or did he read music well, or both?" He says, "He was better at reading than he was at improvising."

Robert Watt:

Now who would know that, you know? It's like, to hear some kind of, to, to learn something after your father's long gone, that's quite amazing. So, it's just the fact that he's still alive and healthy from that period. And he's on that photo too, the one that's in the book.

Jennifer Souder:

Yeah.

Robert Watt:

I have that one on my wall. Yeah. I have, uh, no, maybe not. (laughs) No, that's, no. That's the one in the book. Yeah, I have a couple. I have a photo wall, you know, a whole wall covered in photos. (laughing) It's a picture of my grandfather, my oldest brother sitting on the village steps, picture of my grandfather's brothers and sister. A whole bunch of photos. And so, so it's like a huge photo collage. And I've got a-

Jennifer Souder:

That's a, that's-

Robert Watt:

Sorry?

Jennifer Souder:

Oh, I was saying, in the, when I was reading the book and I saw you mention Mr... and we had just, I had spoken to you, and you had said, "Mr. Cliff." And then I said, "I saw that part where you referred to you walking past Mr. Cliff by the, over in that neighborhood." And I said, "Oh my goodness." There's really something [crosstalk 01:04:47].

Robert Watt:

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Were you saying walk? You said walking past him?

Jennifer Souder:

I, I think you were walking past. You said you were on your way to visit your grandmother or something.

Robert Watt:

Oh, oh, that was, oh my God, that was so, uh. Oh, God. We lived on Springwood Avenue then in the cold water flat. And we had no hot water. So every Friday, we'd go and take a bath at my grandmother's in the village where they had plenty of hot water, right? Hot water, gas, and heat, they had. [laughs]

Robert Watt:

I was embarrassed to walk by them carrying my towel and clothes, right? They were all sitting out. It was a warm night, and they were all sitting out. And I tried to slide by without speaking, you know?

Jennifer Souder:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert Watt:

And boy, my grandmother just caught me, "Don't you dare walk by here and ..." So Mr. Cliff and his first wife, they're all sitting out there and boy that was so embarrassing. And, and my father overheard the whole thing and, "Just don't walk by here and not speak," and then my father pushed me over there physically in front of everybody. That was so humiliating. Then he said, "Say good evening." He was talking to me like a kid, "Good evening, Mr. Cliff. Say good evening, Miss Connie." And I had to repeat everything so I was furious, oh boy.

Robert Watt:

And in those times when I'd get angry that's when I would think about music. And then I'd have to go into her, into her place, take a batch, and she would put tide in the water, in the bath water.

Jennifer Souder:

Oh my goodness.

Robert Watt:

And I said, "That makes me itch. I don't want it." "Niggers are dirty. You need to put this in there. Don't tell me not to put." She's put the tide in and she had the water so hot I couldn't take it. She said, "You niggers are dirty. You don't bathe all week." And she was right because who would bathe in cold water and, you know, get ...? Uh, so humiliating. So that ... yeah. Still I have a bathtub, but don't take a bath very much. I just take a shower. I do shower.

Jennifer Souder:

[inaudible 01:06:51].

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Robert Watt:

But, I mean, it just, oh, it was so humiliating. And that's how people treated you, you know? It was just, uh, that they can, as they say in the military, dress you down in front of everybody, you know?

Jennifer Souder:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert Watt:

It's very embarrassing. And it seemed like my father and my grandmother were very good at that, you know? Mm.

Robert Watt:

Oh, so where are you in the book? How, how far are you?

Jennifer Souder:

Uh, I still, I have it here so look where I am. [laughs]

Robert Watt:

Do you have the paper or hardcover?

Jennifer Souder:

Uh, I have the hardcover here.

Robert Watt:

Oh, you do?

Jennifer Souder:

Um-

Robert Watt:

I'd still try to get them to drop the price. They're just too expensive. I said, "Your crazy." Even Barnes and Noble told me the price is too high. And, uh, I'm going over there tonight, the one here at the mall. They, they, uh, they have a whole section of autograph copies.

Jennifer Souder:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert Watt:

So they want me to come and sign. They, they, they ordered some of my book for me to sign and they put them up in there. And they're right next to Michelle Obama's book. I'm so happy.

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Jennifer Souder:

Oh wow.

Robert Watt:

She's up there. I was like, "Yes, right next to that." So they have all these books up, like the whole section called autographed copies. And so the last two I did they sold, so I have to come back in. They said, "We're going to bring in ... order some more. Would you come and sign?" So it's kind a, you know, especially if you're on a date with someone new and, uh, which I've just met someone, but, uh, that would be nice and go, "Yeah ..." You come in and your books on the shelf next to Michelle Obama's. It's a ... That's pretty-

Jennifer Souder:

Yeah, that is definitely nice. And you'd said-

Robert Watt:

That's very powerful, yeah.

Jennifer Souder:

... when we spoke the other day that you were going to hear the cellist from Meghan Markle's wedding and event for that.

Robert Watt:

Oh last Tuesday, yeah.

Jennifer Souder:

Yeah. Yeah.

Robert Watt:

Oh.

Jennifer Souder:

How was that?

Robert Watt:

Amazing. They played like gods. I mean, it's he and his sister, his big sister. God she's ... They both have major contracts with record companies with the London Decca. So it's just so great that. It's a whole family of seven kids. I'm thinking they had seven kids and we had seven kids, and they all play something. They all ...

Robert Watt:

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And this kid is really ... He's got a great instrument, which he's kind a breaking in still. He's not totally ... Even though he's had it for like three or four ... Instruments take a long time, but he's ... It, maybe it wasn't the greatest hall for a cello recital, but there were moments that'd been, oh, beautiful sound.

Robert Watt:

And he's just ... He gets into it. He doesn't know. His head is all up in the air. And then, when his sister's playing he, you know, has her play. He leans forward onto his knees and leans on his lap and gets down. He's ... He reminds me of that French cellist, the famous Jacqueline du Pre. And I didn't get to talk to him about that. I wanted to tell him that I played her and I met her. And she was blonde, big long legged, blonde, tomboyish, cellist. Legs flying. Hair flying all over. She was just like unladylike when she played, oh man, but she was like no filter. Just ...

Robert Watt:

So he has that when you look at him. He comes out on stage with a dashiki, black pants, and socks by some famous designer but polka dots. I said, "Go ahead." It was like watching ... It was like watching a stereotype dissolve in front of your face and all these white people there were just looking at him and I was like, just come out and play. He played.

Robert Watt:

His sister was so, so elegant. I mean, they had the stage presence. But when he gets into music he forgets himself. He's just, you know, eyes rolling, head, just everything. Oh, it just was a pleasure, a real pleasure for ...

Robert Watt:

And I asked him what cello he had because I know, well, I actually probably know the person that made it. Um, you know, the city where Stradivari lived in Cremona, Italy? I had friends there and I spent time there especially on my sabbatical. I spent four months there. And I speak Italian also. Italian and German those are my .... So I spent time there.

Robert Watt:

And just to know that I said, "I wanted to know, what instrument are you playing?" He says, "Amati." I said, "Oh, I thought so." Italian, you know? So Italian, Stradivari, Amati, these are all the big makers and the instrument is like 300 years old and worth a half a million dollars.

Jennifer Souder:

Oh.

Robert Watt:

Yeah. On loan to him, so yeah. So French horns are cheap compared to that. A bow would cost more than a French horn, you know, easy.

Jennifer Souder:

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Wow.

Robert Watt:

I mean, you know, compared to the first horn I bought for \$200 I paid.

Jennifer Souder:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert Watt:

Now, I have \$20,000 worth of French horns, you know, because they're a lot more expensive. But string instruments, oh my god, you know, tens of thousands, you know, hundreds of thousands. Depending on who makes them and how old they are, you know. So a bow could be \$30,000 easy.

Jennifer Souder:

Wow.

Robert Watt:

Yeah. Depending on-

Jennifer Souder:

Oh my goodness.

Robert Watt:

I mean it depends on the, what instrument it goes with. So it's a big ... So yeah, he was, he was ... They were amazing. Uh, and he did an on core afterwards. And, uh, they had a little reception and, you know, it was very nice. And I talked to his sister. I said, "Did you like the ... Was the piano okay?" And she goes, "Oh, it was very good." I introduced myself and I said, "I'm Bob Watt French hornist with the LA Philharmonic emeritos," which is emeritus. Meaning retired. I said, "Emeritos, right? And she goes, "Yes, that's right."

Robert Watt:

[laughter]

Robert Watt:

And they're just, just, uh, you know, they're so young. I'm like, my god, they're so young, you know. They just seem like, wow. Not much we can talk about. They just seem ... He's 20 and I think she's 22. So it's, uh, unbelievable, but great to see that, you know, some things have changed.

Robert Watt:

So any other questions from the ...

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Jennifer Souder:

Uh-

Robert Watt:

Because as you, as you read more you may want to talk more because there's a lot of crazy stuff like that.

Jennifer Souder:

Yeah, we ... As I said in the email, we have ... There's probably a million questions that we would like to ask. We want to be respectful of your time too. Um, but I did want, there's a couple that I wanted to make sure we get to. And, um, one was if you wouldn't mind telling, I know you already told me, but the, uh, the conversation that we had about when you were in Rochester playing, um, this summer.

Robert Watt:

Oh, the music festival. The Gateways Music Festival, yeah.

Jennifer Souder:

Yeah, just a little bit about that.

Robert Watt:

Well, um, you know, because, um, you know, there's, you know, the symphony orchestras in the United States at one time just they didn't care how well you played you were not going to be in there if you were black. They didn't want you, I mean, period. And, uh, you know, I, you know, after so many years of being there and being around the, those people and really what it is that they ... It has to do with their identity, their cultural identity, how they feel as cultural beings, uh, in the United States.

Robert Watt:

And the problem with, um, white Americans is many of them don't know where their roots go back. They go back to Europe, but some of them don't go back to anything except maybe they were in, uh, they were part of the system, a futile system. They were Serfs and they had no culture. They weren't listening to Mozart or writing the music or having anything to do with it. They were workers, almost like sharecroppers, and they had the futile lords and the Serfs.

Robert Watt:

So a lot of them escaped, especially some of the religious outcasts, and the what we know as the, uh ... Was it the pilgrims? First they went to Holland and then they came here. So a lot of them don't, weren't in high European society.

Robert Watt:

So consequently they looked up to Europe as a cultural touchstone because that's the only thing they can go back to because they don't have any connection to anything except Europe. But so they look up to

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the European royalty and high society, which they probably, which their ancestors probably did also, but they were like working for them.

Robert Watt:

Now some of the composers like Haydn worked for the king. Haydn wrote music as a like a servant and, wrote a thing ... You've heard of chamber music, right?

Jennifer Souder:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert Watt:

That was designed for the king's chamber. They're small pieces that, you know, quartets, string quartets, sextets, octets, nonets, different size but small, not orchestrally, but small groups in different combinations. So that's what the, a lot of the composer did for employment.

Robert Watt:

But most people who came here have no, uh ... Europe is their cultural touchstone. So they're on their knees to it because that's all they had. That's part of their identity. So if you come along, you invade that sense of cultural identify. You're coming along doing something that they think is theirs, which it really isn't. It's European. It's European white not American white. So you come along and it's disturbing to them. They ... It's just too much. They can't accept the fact that you can do that.

Robert Watt:

One of the big things is what you ... How can you depart from the jazz field or the field of, you know, black people have? How can you play this music with the right ... All that stuff that, uh, it's certainly not true.

Robert Watt:

But, um, now on the other hand, Jewish people come from a more recent connection to Europe. They have more connections with Ives and Schoenberg and people that they have a more recent connection. So they consequently aren't as, uh, insecure about their identity. And, of course, they came and they had the Yiddish Theater because that goes back to Europe and goes back to-

Speaker 3:

It's 4:00.

Robert Watt:

... different cultures. So they have a connection. So they weren't as ... So consequently they were much easier to get along with, for me anyway. Um, so they're not as threatened by black performers. So that was something I discovered. So, uh, and they were the ones that when I went in the Phil Harmonic, the ones that wanted to play chamber music you and were accepting. So it's an interesting, it was an interesting thing.

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Robert Watt:

Did I lose my train of thought? So anyway, so the orchestras didn't want to have that image. They wanted to be ... Wanted, you know, because of identity, so they wanted it to be all white, that this is European's, not your music, but it's out music. But it's not theirs. It's Europeans' music.

Robert Watt:

So in my book there's an argument with a French horn player who gives me a hard time about the fact that he didn't like my attitude and that "This is white music," and, you know, and "You should listen to me if I tell you something."

Robert Watt:

And I said, "This is not. I said it's European white not American white." So we got into this big argument. I said, "Your ancestors were not playing this music." I said, "So please don't claim it and tell me I can't ... that I don't know about it." I said, (laughs) you know, "You don't know any more than I do." Oh, we got into a big fight about this and it was [laughs] ...

Robert Watt:

I ended up in Europe with him on a tour. He came on with us on tour. And he's ... This is an extra player. He's not a member, but he was friends with the principal French horn and, oh it was awful. He wanted to talk me. And buy me a drink and talk to me.

Robert Watt:

And so, I said, "What do you want to talk about?" "Well, I don't like your attitude." I said, "I know. You told me." I said, "I don't really care about that you think." "Well, let me buy you a drink." And I said, "What do you want to drink about?" I said, "I have nothing to drink with you."

Robert Watt:

And so, I went with him begrudgingly and we ... This was in Florence, Italy, and he started telling me, "You know, you need to learn to get along with people, you know that?" And I said, uh, I said, "Will you get on with it?" I said, "I have a date." And he looked at me like, "A date?" I said, "Yes, please get on with what you want to say," you know. I was really not happy.

Robert Watt:

And he says, "You know, you learn to get along with people. And this is white music. This is none of that black stuff. This is ... You're in the top of the high echelon of music." And then that's when I said, "This is not high." And I said, "This is European music." I said, "So don't claim it for yourself." It was ... (laughs) He was awful.

Robert Watt:

It was the same. There was a black guy on ... I was the only black guy in the orchestra at that time. But there was a guy, they took a black bass player with us as an extra player, but he wasn't a member. But he

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... They all flocked to him because they would bounce off of me because the ones I didn't like, I didn't, you know, I mean, I'm from Jersey, so I, I, I, you know, I didn't, they, I wasn't impressed with them in a lot of ways and they didn't like my demeanor. They like, you know, I was ... I was too independent.

Robert Watt:

And so, he said, you know, "Why can't you act like the other colored fella. He's a nice guy." And I said, "Are you done? I said, I'm not a colored fella." And I said, "I've got a date." And I said, "If you're done, I'm outta here." "Well, listen there, so why, well maybe ... Are you a Christian then? Maybe I could reach you that way." I said, "I'm walking out now." I said, "That won't reach ..." I said, "That won't work either."

Robert Watt:

So, I'm walking out of this place and as I go out I get out and there was the rest of the, uh, horn section standing there eavesdropping on our conversation. So what had happened is that he told them, "I'm going to straighten this nigger out," you know. "I'm gonna ..." And they all wanted to see, so they all were listening. But didn't quite work out.

Jennifer Souder:

Yeah.

Robert Watt:

So it was a very uncomfortable thing, so ...

Jennifer Souder:

Oh my gosh.

Robert Watt:

Isn't that awful? [laughs] I think that's in the book. Yeah, it's in the book.

Charles Trott:

Well, what year was that Bob about?

Robert Watt:

It had to be between 1970 and '75 because Fred, the black bass player, hadn't come. So it was probably like '73.

Charles Trott:

Okay.

Robert Watt:

Something like that, yeah.

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Jennifer Souder:

Uh-

Robert Watt:

And it was an awful experience. Um, so was that the question you asked about?

Jennifer Souder:

Um, it's related because you had told me a little bit about playing up in Rochester and how it was, uh, just-

Robert Watt:

Oh, I'm sorry. So yeah, so the, these are some of the problems. You have a guy who never in his mind expected to sit next to a black French horn player who could play well or better than him. He just never expected it and it was very shocking to him because of the way he recreated. The way it started something was wrong in the music.

Robert Watt:

He was playing the wrong note and he kept looking around and I said, "What?" And he says, "Something's wrong." And I said, "Oh, really?" And then, we played again and I said, "Oh, you should have a D flat." "Really?" I said, "Yeah, now that I heard it." I said, "What?" "Well, if it is wrong, I don't want to hear it from you." I will ... and him saying, "We'll go to the principal." I said, "I'm not going anywhere." I said, "I heard." I said, "You can go ask him if you want, but I told you what I had to say." Oh, he didn't like that, you know. And it, it was just, that's how the whole thing started.

Robert Watt:

And then, ended up taking the whole piece to Europe and then he wanted to talk to me. And I guess they had discussed it. "Well, you know, I'm going to talk to him and straighten him out," you know, that whole thing. So there was a lot of that kind of thing.

Robert Watt:

So you had this. I mean, you could see that if this was the element then in 1970 back in 1940. I mean, you couldn't get ... You couldn't audition. They didn't care how well you played. You couldn't even get an audition.

Robert Watt:

So this Black woman concert pianist who taught, while teaching she was a concert pianist and started teaching at Eastman School of Music in Rochester. She started this Gateways Music Festival. So, it was well over 20 years ago and it's an all-Black orchestra. It was just, uh, very interesting. Um, first time, I did it a few times, we did really great stuff. Uh, and then it just got better and better. Now, I think they're going to do it every year. So before it was every other year.

Robert Watt:

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So, it's all, an all-Black orchestra that she started and they, um, pick. Now they have more people to pick from because there are more players. There are more black people in conservatories and black people in symphony orchestras around the country. Not necessarily major orchestras, but more black people playing orchestral instruments. So all the strings they needed, brass players, everything. And so, this it sounded like a major orchestra this year. It was so good.

Robert Watt:

And they invited me to this year to be as a keynote speaker for one of their, uh, events. And like I said, when they said, "Do you want to play in the orchestra?" And I thought, nah, I don't want to do that. And then, I thought, "Oh, wait a minute. All those black horn players who saw me growing up. I said, "If I don't show up with my horn, they would kill me." There's a lot of black horn players and I know then all in New York. I would never live that down. So I played in the orchestra too, so ...

Robert Watt:

But it was just great hearing really top players who were all black just sitting there and I thought, "Man." It was almost like if you had gone into the future, you know, and you go, "Wow, look what happened," you know, an all-Black orchestra." And I, the conductor is from the Oakland Symphony, a Black conductor.

Robert Watt:

And the string sound, the high strings, I swear it has a little different color than normal than I hear in a white orchestra. It's a little different. And I went to the conductor and I said, "Michael, am I hearing things with the high strings?" I said, "It sounds ... It's a little darker sound." He says, "Yeah, it's colored. That's it. It's just colored. It's colored." I said, "Okay. Fine." "It's colored. That's all." (laughs)

Robert Watt:

And the way you've seen a string section move, you know, it's just to watch the orchestra, it's like, "God, look at this," and I had that feeling. I said, "Well, now I can die. I've seen this and it's ... This is like something that you never thought you would see in your lifetime and here it is. I mean, and it's amazing that this woman has, uh, created this, uh, all black orchestra. And I mean, it, it was the best I'd ever heard.

Robert Watt:

Now, in Asbury before I left, um, you know how memories are? It's like it's almost it was so long ago that you, you almost doubt your memory, but-

Jennifer Souder:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert Watt:

You've seen a French horn case, right? You're carrying this things. It's a very awkward looking case.

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Jennifer Souder:

Yeah.

Robert Watt:

Funny shaped. And, uh, I'm coming home and I don't know who the person was but people say stuff, you know, "What you got in that case, brother, somebody's head? What you got in there boy? What you got? What's that funny looking ..., " you know. And, and I was telling him. I said ... He said, "You got an Uzi in there? What you got in there, brother?" And said, "I've got an Uzi. I'm going to blow your head off." I was a ....

PART 3 OF 4 ENDS [01:27:04]

Robert Watt:

[inaudible 01:27:01] in there. What you got in there, brother? I said, "I got an Uzi. I'm gonna blow your head off." I was a mouthy little- If you messed with me- I was quiet, but if you messed with me I would lash you 'cause I had this [laughs] temper. And I felt this hand on me gripping, saying- Uh, now, what she said. It was an old woman that grabbed my arm and she said, "I know what you got in that case, boy." And she said, "Don't you listen to these biscuit head Negroes. I know what you got. You do that horn, boy. You hear me? Don't you listen to these biscuit head Negroes. You know if you do that horn 'cause one day there's gone be an all colored orchestra and they gone need you. You hear me, boy?" Said, "You do that horn.

Robert Watt:

I said, "Oh, now how would she- How in the world- I'm thinking, "And all black orchestra. So, this is, like, [inaudible 01:27:49] I always thought about it then all of a sudden sure enough there it is, you know.

Jennifer Souder:

Oh, wow.

Robert Watt:

Now, can you imagine what that was like after the- It's one thing that most of the black players there in that situation were the only ones in their own particular situation. So, we'd all get together and to hang at night. We were all in the same hotel. Every night was a party. My God they- They had the table with the cognac and the cigars. They guys- It was just- Oh, every night was a party. And just black folks hanging out. It was [laughs]- So, it was a whole week long. And, oh, it was just exhausting 'cause everybody- I got this book out and everybody wanted to talk. "Oh, what's about this?" "This is awful." "Why is that-" "Come tell us about this." [inaudible 01:28:33] I was, "Oh, my God." I just- Sometimes I had to stay in the room just to lax, relax because it was so-

Jennifer Souder:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert Watt:

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And everybody- If you're in a major orchestra, because there's so few of us, everybody knows who you are. It's, it's just- I-I forgot- I always forget about that. You meet so much- Some of these kids weren't even born as I said, You know, like, "Oh, good morning. I'm Bob Watt." "Yeah, I know, in LA." I'm, like, "Oh, Jesus. [laughs]. Okay."

Robert Watt:

But that, that was the atmosphere. So, it was a lot of, um, wonderful experiences where they would take chamber groups and play in, in the community. So, they took the whole festival into the black communities. They played in, uh, yacht clubs and churches and played in, uh, you know, children facilities, um, senior citizen's facilities. Took it all into the communities. So, now they have amazing support. So, they have enough money now to have it every year. So, quite an experience. Um, something I thought I would never see in my life-, uh, lifetime. So, so any more questions?

Jennifer Souder:

Um, can you tell us a little bit about the book that you're working on now?

Robert Watt:

Oh, very beginnings. Just interviewing- It's called- It's one of the chapters in my book, "Tales from the Symphony." Because the Black- There's so many more Black people now who are playing in orchestra, not necessarily major orchestra- But enough of them in major orchestras- I have contact with all of them 'cause there's a, uh, a directory for all the major orchestras. It's called Hickson International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians. They put out a, a directory. So, I have numbers for all the people and every- all the orchestras in Chicago [inaudible 01:30:19] So, all the players I can get ahold of.

Robert Watt:

But I wanted to see what experiences the black people have in these orchestras as composed- as opposed to as when I was coming along to see if some things have changed.

Robert Watt:

And the first person I've interviewed so far is an [inaudible 01:30:37] player in ... it doesn't matter [inaudible 01:30:41] in the southern orchestra. You guys, I'm not gonna say what orchestra or who it is, just his instrument.

Jennifer Souder:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert Watt:

And he's a principle oboe of one of the major orchestras in the south. And, uh, boy- And he talked 'cause his father's a preacher. And he really go the gift of gab. He told me- But he's got- You know, he's- You know, he's another whole generation. And he had a lot to say.

Robert Watt:

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And, so the book is "Tales from the Symphony" is what black folks went through, stories and things that happened to them, um, being classical musicians playing in an orchestra or auditioning. Like, this oboe player said when, you know, now when you're auditioning they use a screen. So, they don't see you. And, he told me several times that he won auditions and then when he would step out from behind the screen people would go, "Oh, okay. Oh, what?" You know. [laughs] It was a surprise. "Oh, okay." [laughs]

Robert Watt:

So, he talks about a guy who- an old man who stopped him after a concert. And he says, boy, he says, "It must really help with those big thick lips to play the oboe." He says, "Wow." He says, "You sound good." You know. (laughs) [inaudible 01:31:48] And, so, he tells the guy, he says, "That's not funny." [inaudible 01:31:52] But, you know, it does help to have full lips." You know. He says, to play the- 'cause the oboe is a booger of a- It's a double reed and you have to blow it and so it's separate. Oh, it's, so it's a real- real hard to blow.

Robert Watt:

Um, so it- He had some interesting things. But and he claims that not much has changed. It just sounds differently now. That was his- He had some great ideas and things to say about what it's like now. And he's just about to get tenor next year.

Robert Watt:

So- And, so, it's- The book is me talking to these black players. So, the only person identified in the book is me because I'm writing it. But everyone else is, you know- Like, there's a- Okay. Philly has a bass player. Pittsburg has a black bass player. Cleveland has a black piccolo player. Chicago- Believe it or not the first player in the history of the orchestra is the black trumpet player. The cellist in Boston. Principle clarinet in New York [inaudible 01:32:55] is the only black person who was, he was principle at the Met-Metropolitan Opera Orchestra. Now he's in New York. And there's principle bassoon of the San Francisco Opera who's from South Central LA.

Robert Watt:

So, I got a group. So, you know-

Jennifer Souder:

That sounds like-

Robert Watt:

... all I need is, like, six or eight of 'em and you got another book. But they all have interesting stories and, you know, so it's all dialogue.

Robert Watt:

Like, you haven't gotten to that part in my book where I'm talking to Jerome Ashby the, uh, other black French horn player. [inaudible 01:33:26] There's a whole several chapters where he and I are talking. And in these conversations it unfolds a lot of material that people really enjoy. And, uh- So that part of the

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book is where I got the most compliments, uh, because it's, it's shop talk, stuff that actually happens what we're talking about.

Robert Watt:

Where he went from New York into the play what we call a runout concert at night where you take a bus, go up-

Jennifer Souder:

Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Robert Watt:

.. to, like, Connecticut, play a concert then come back the same night. So, he goes up to New York Philharmonic. And he's a black French horn player. He's the only black in the orchestra. So, they go in and he gets off the bus in his street clothes and goes on stage and starts warming up his horn. And then he decides, "I better go get a mute out of my case." So, he leaves the stage to get a mute out of his horn case and one of the stage people they spot him. And the guy comes over and he says, "Excuse me. What are you doing here?" He says, "What?" He says, "I'm with the New York Philharmonic." 'Cause he doesn't have his horn in his hand. He just left his horn on stage to go get a mute out of his case. So, this guy thinks he's, you know, crashed into the back stage. And, and the guys says, "Yeah, and I'm Rip van Winkle." He says, "Get the hell out of here." He tried to throw him out. [laughs]

Robert Watt:

And he calls the personnel manager and the personnel manager comes over and believe it or not doesn't get it. He says, "This guy's trying to throw me out." And the personnel manager says, "Yes. I've told you time and time again to not go on stage before you put your clothes on, before you dress, put the-" You know, he says, "I told you." [Laughs] He didn't get it. And later on-

Jennifer Souder:

Wow.

Robert Watt:

... he understand and he apologized profusely. But horrible little story. You know, 'cause you're not even- You know, it always gets you off guard. And you're thinking about warming up. Some guy's trying to throw you out. You know.

Robert Watt:

So, that was- That's in the book. That's one of the stories that he told me about. You know. But he thought that, um- He wanted- When we met, he says, "Rob, tell me everything. I've heard so much about you. And guys don't like you." And, "Wha-, what happened out there in LA?" So, he, he comes along almost, you know, 10, 20 years later and it's very different for him. Because somebody's already busted through the mountains. You know.

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Jennifer Souder:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert Watt:

The hard-head, hard-headed- Of course the hard-headed pioneer doesn't know he's a pioneer. He just wants something. So, I had already been in an orchestra for 10 years and he comes. He says, "Well, it wasn't like that here. What happened out there with you? I don't understand" I says, "Of course you don't."

Robert Watt:

But the pioneer makes the hole. And everybody else just walks through. So, naturally, they're not gonna think it was hard because they didn't have to do it. They just wal- And that's what- That's the function.

Robert Watt:

But, you know, you- All that is unfolded in our conversation with two very different men. And-

Jennifer Souder:

Um.

Robert Watt:

... you know, I'm one of seven kids and he's an only child. So, (laughs) he wanted a house full of kids and I've never married and I don't have kids. So, who's to say, you know. So, we have wonderful conversations. So, um, did I answer your question?

Jennifer Souder:

You did. You did. And I will look forward to that one (laughs) that part, too. Uh, and we-, we have a question that we ask everybody. So, you can answer it whatever way fits for you. But we ask, um, what is something that you would like someone walking down Springwood Avenue today to know about music and history of Springwood Avenue?

Robert Watt:

Whew, oh, to know about it?

Jennifer Souder:

Yes.

Robert Watt:

That in one way it was a, you know, um, I know that that- it was part of where Black people ended up, starting the Great Migration which started back after World- round World War I where there weren't enough men because of the war. And that's why Black people started coming up from the south to work

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in the north. And that started the migration. And I know that Springwood Avenue was part of that. And that's probably my grandmother and grandfather, they were part of that also.

Robert Watt:

And the history that it created those are the Black people who created those histories. You-you Madonna Carter's book, Asbury Park or Westside Story?

Jennifer Souder:

Yes.

Robert Watt:

It's a photo but yeah, I mean, all that history in there that follows those pictures. It was a great history. And those were the people that, uh, that- Those are my people. Those are my ances- Those are my- That's my background and that- I'm part of that, you know, indirectly, you know. Uh, and it's just interesting to see that the similarities between what happens on Springwood Avenue and, and other parts of the country where Black people migrated to. Like Miles Davis who grew up on the Mississippi in Il-, Illinois, you know. And, um, all that music was there because people came from the south, you know, moving westward and north out of the south. And Springwood Avenue was a great example of that.

Robert Watt:

Um, the fact that Illinois Jacquet played at Cubas. I couldn't believe- That was so interesting. I'm a huge, giant sax, jazz sax player and the fact that people came there and-and even in the film, um, um, the, um, the one with, uh- What's the name of the book? Um, the, um, the book that told you where you could stay as a Black person.

Jennifer Souder:

Oh, a green book. [clears throat] Sorry. The Green Book.

Robert Watt:

Yeah. I can't think of- I have one in my bag [inaudible 01:39:00]. Anyway, there is a couple of spots in Asbury Park.

Jennifer Souder:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert Watt:

Trying to remember places. I- There's, The Two Doors. What was it?

Jennifer Souder:

The Two Door, yes.[inaudible 01:39:12]

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Robert Watt:

Was that a- That was a hotel?

Jennifer Souder:

Two Door, um, Hotel Carver, I think.

Robert Watt:

Yeah. Those are in the Black-

Jennifer Souder:

Okay.

Robert Watt:

... in the, in the Green Book, you know.

Jennifer Souder:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert Watt:

And I have- Well, you can find it online, actually if you want. You can download it-

Jennifer Souder:

Yeah.

Robert Watt:

... off- But I mean then there's a bookstore that has a nice neat one. So, I had one of those too. But Asbury Park, you know, people- Those were places people went- And, so, people came from all over so that- It was an amazing influence in the town. Uh, now that I know and I've read as an older man, um, I can see, uh, that it was a place that was unlike a lot of American cities except that it was so small. But you had a lot of interesting stuff that reflected the country. Like, for example, my father said that the police force was pretty much segregated, that the white cops didn't come over on the west- on that side and- not normally.

Robert Watt:

But I did see a guy get beat up, um, in the front of the pool room. They threw him through- He came through the window with a cop broke out then he was in- laying in glass and they were hit- hitting him, glass was stuck in him, they was still hitting him with the sticks. And it was pretty ugly. I think that's in my book. And, um- Because this guy grabbed my arm and he said, "I'ma tell you something, boy. The Negroes a hell of a man. He's a hell of a man, you hear me?" He says, "Look at that boy with glass in him and they're still beating him with guns." And he was so angry, he was trembling. Grabbed my arm and. But, yeah, look at that. It was pretty awful. That's in- I think that's in my book.

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Robert Watt:

Just the stuff that we got to see. I saw a guy get shot and it was very colorful, uh, uh, event sitting on that- in the Goldwater flat in the front room looking down on the streets at-at night. And there's a- I don't know if you remember when the guys had heel plates and he- toe plates and heel plates and they walked real fast and sparks would come out from under their shoes. [laughs] That was kind of a thing. And they'd mov- walk real fast down Asbury scraping and you'd hear. And it was a certain kind of walk.

Robert Watt:

And I have people who pay me to show 'em that walk. [laughs] They just think it's so funny.

Jennifer Souder:

[laughs]

Robert Watt:

But I remember they- it was- Only Black people can do this. I mean, it's got such a thing to it. They would walk, drag one foot, straighten their arm out and walk and- But they're moving fast. And drag one foot and walk-

Charles Trott:

[crosstalk 01:41:41]

Robert Watt:

Huh?

Charles Trott:

You talking about [inaudible 01:41:46] the walk, the walk.

Robert Watt:

You've seen that walk, you know what I'm saying?

Charles Trott:

Yeah. We used to call it the ti- tipping.

Robert Watt:

Pipping?

Charles Trott:

Tipping. Like, like, leaving money after a meal. Tipping.

Robert Watt:

Tipping. Oh re- Okay. So, it had a name.

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Charles Trott:

[laughs] Yeah.

Robert Watt:

They- My friends all call- the Black friends and they call it the "Do the Shuffle or do the Asbury Shuffle."

Charles Trott:

[inaudible 01:42:06]

Robert Watt:

[laughs] paid me to do that. I said, "Come on. You-" But they- 'Cause it's so- It's so black. It's so James Brown-ish, you know. It's got something in it that's so- [laughs] I mean, aw, man, tipping. Okay. But they would slide the foot behind them and sparks would come out from the- But they had heel plates. Everybody had heel plates.

Charles Trott:

Right.

Robert Watt:

Of course, you go through your shoes in two days. I mean, the way they dragged that foot behind them. Aw, God, I mean, just stuff to then you'd show people and they'd go, "What?" You know. But-

Charles Trott:

[crosstalk 01:42:38] It was like a dance.

Robert Watt:

Uh, yeah, I mean it was so- They'd look at each other and walk like it then some guys would clap hands with another guy and- But they moved real fast. And I said, "This is so interesting."

Robert Watt:

And I saw a guy get shot. Uh, I just saw the gun come out of the car. And it was not like you think on TV where the guy goes, "Oh," and falls over. I mean, it was, like, "Aw, shot." You know, he was gagging and wet his pants, and fell out in the street. You know, it was ugly. You know, it was brutal. Blood spurting out. You know. Shot him in the stomach. It was not pretty.

Robert Watt:

And you know, you get to see stuff for real, you know. Like, "My God." Right in front of, uh- What was the- Across from the Westside drug store, that little red- Chuck's, was it?

Charles Trott:

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[inaudible 01:43:30]

Robert Watt:

Cross from Westside drug store and cross - catty-corner from the Turf Club, was a restaurant there. It was a soul food restaurant. Not Chuck's.

Jennifer Souder:

[inaudible 01:55:44]

Robert Watt:

What was it?

Jennifer Souder:

Uh, it was [inaudible 01:55:44] I'm not sure.

Robert Watt:

Wasn't Chet's further down? I'm- I can't remember. But I can look at Madonna Carter's book. It's all in there. [laughs] All those places. It was that- in front of that restaurant. Oh, it was on, uh, Atkins and Springwood, right on the corner, on the northeast corner of Springwood Avenue. So, where the- across from the drug store.

Robert Watt:

Anyway, it was just the stuff that happens, you know. And thing where, um, my brother and I went to the- Did you get to that part in the book, where we went to- It was really cold. We went to get more, uh, blue coal 'cause that's what we had as a- It was that kind of stove. And the, uh- It was snowing and before we made it back I dropped a bag of coal on my brother and we slipped and the bag of coal busted all in the snow. And this guy across the street started laughing. Aw, man. He said, "Yeah, the coal is really cold now. Ha. Ha. You know what I mean? The coal is really cold." And I grabbed some of the coal. I was going over to throw it at him. My brother grabbed me, tackled me. He said, "Don't go. He's bigger than you." I meant to go over and hit him with the coal. [laughs]

Robert Watt:

It was freezing. And, so, we had to go clean up that coal with a [inaudible 01:45:00]. Just awful stuff. On Springwood Avenue it's a- There's amazing memories and a lot of culture in what, three quarters of a mile. How long was that? I mean, you know-

Charles Trott:

Yeah.

Robert Watt:

... so much culture in one small little street. And when I walk down there now I'm just thinking, "My God, where did it all go?" You know, it's just, um, nothing compared to, you know, nothing compared to what

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it was. Uh, you had so many different stores. You had- What was it? I forget the names of, but, you know, it was the hardware store. You know, had all kinds of stores. So, it was everything you needed, actually. And very diverse. A mile, mile and a half or whatever it was. You had the cleaners. You had all these things and it was just fascinating street when you think about, you know.

Robert Watt:

Again, there were probably more liquor stores than necessary. But, uh- And what was the place behind the Turf, K-Kershaw's Barbecue?

Jennifer Souder:

Kershaw's.

Robert Watt:

Kershaw's?

Jennifer Souder:

Yes, Kershaw's.

Robert Watt:

Is that- Is it still there?

Jennifer Souder:

No. Unfortunately, it burned down.

Robert Watt:

It burned down. Oh, no. Then there was that big white Elk's building behind the Turf- next to the Turf Club. And-

Charles Trott:

Yeah,[inaudible 01:46:17]

Robert Watt:

Yeah. So-

Jennifer Souder:

It's also gone.

Robert Watt:

Oh.

Jennifer Souder:

The Turf Club is the only building on that block right now.

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Robert Watt:

Yeah. I just saw a picture- Who sent me a picture of that? Yeah. We got it.

Jennifer Souder:

I think it was me. [laughs]

Robert Watt:

Oh, did you? Oh, my God. Yeah, I saw that. I was there in August. It's still there. And it's-

Jennifer Souder:

Yes, it's still there.

Robert Watt:

... just amazing. So is that the last question or- What I thought of Springwood Avenue [crosstalk 01:46:42]

Jennifer Souder:

I think Charles has a question. Charles is raising his hand. So, Charles has something.

Charles Trott:

Hey, Bob-

Robert Watt:

Okay.

Charles Trott:

... so you've traveled over the years. How many Latino players did you meet? I'm talking about, you know, playing in, in orchestras not, you know, as musicians in orchestras, principle or not.

Robert Watt:

Latino?

Charles Trott:

Latino, Hispanic.

Robert Watt:

Not, no. Good question. Not many. Uh, LA Philharmonic had one, a bass player. And I remember something happened when we were- He was kind of crazy. But, yeah, Oscar. There were a few. Not many. About as many as us. But I remember there was a, a scene at rehearsal where we were rehearsing on stage and somebody was in- out in the audience cleaning-

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Voice:

It's 4:30.

Robert Watt:

There was- Someone was cleaning the hall. And everybody assumed, I don't know why, that it was a Mexican. And people started making jokes. And I looked over and I saw this Oscar laughing along making jokes and I'm, like, "God, Oscar, what are you-" People were saying, "Yeah, you wanna clean my house? I need a gardener." People were making all kinds of jokes. And I assumed that it was- And I thought, I said, "the reason he's here is probably because some white person made a mistake that he shouldn't be in here during rehearsal." And then one of the players yelled up at him. "We're rehearsing. Yeah, you can't clean now." And, you know, it was just- But people were making Mexican jokes assuming that he's Mexican. I-I couldn't see that far. I couldn't tell. But I thought, "What are the odds they know?"

Robert Watt:

But that's the kind of, you know- Because, you know, LA is wit- We are in Mexico.

Charles Trott:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert Watt:

Malibu was, Like, twenty miles in Malibu was all owned by a Mexican family at one time. They were all farms. So, this was Mexico. So, I mean, they're here.

Charles Trott:

What was Oscar's nationality or his [crosstalk 01:48:50]

Robert Watt:

Mexican. Yeah, he was Mexican.

Charles Trott:

Oh, he was Mexican.

Robert Watt:

Mexican-American. I don't think he spoke Spanish. But he was kind of a white-bred Mexican. And then I'm thinking.

Charles Trott:

[inaudible 01:48:58]

Robert Watt:

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Yeah, I'm trying to think of another that we did. Let's see. I think not that many. Now there's a- They got a Spanish principle trombone from Spain. We got a black bass trombone player. And the violinist, who was my old girlfriend, who's still there for second violins. And, um, that's it.

Charles Trott:

Was there a- Did you at least get a chance to speak to him in terms of his experience out of-

Robert Watt:

Oscar? No. He wouldn't talk. No. He wouldn't talk about that. There were certain people who would, you know, they-they wanna blend in with the whites and they wanna, you know- They- No. I never got to that with him.

Charles Trott:

That's good.

Robert Watt:

I'm trying to think. That's a good question. How come you asked that question?

Charles Trott:

Well, because, uh, my involvement in particular with Cuba here recently but also because as far as I'm concerned the vast majority of Latinos especially here in America, United States-

Robert Watt:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Charles Trott:

... their experience is the same as ours, for the most part.

Robert Watt:

Yeah. I mean, but in- Okay. There's a thing called, um- It happens in Detroit and it's a, um, com-It's- it's not a- It's a- I guess it's a, maybe it is a competition, um, where they [inaudible 01:50:30] It's Black and Latino. So but people's always getting more Latinos. Um, and it's, uh- I find it on the tip of my tongue. It takes place in Detroit in February. And it's-

Charles Trott:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert Watt:

... people playing concertos with this orchestra. Sphinx it's called. Sphinx Organization. Black people started it but it's half or even more Latino now. You know, soloist, young players.

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Robert Watt:

So now in the conservators there's lots of them, you know, in different- from different countries and, you know, not just Mexican. But, um, so you- It's a lot more presence along with Asians also. So-

Charles Trott:

Right.

Robert Watt:

... but at LA Fiddle Lab, you know, the last time I went to rehearsal- I'd been out of there almost eleven years. Um, it's, like, 30 percent different orchestras. [laughs] You know.

Charles Trott:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert Watt:

Who else? Oscar and I can't think of- Yeah. It's hard to say now. I mean, especially in the Philharmonic. And-

Charles Trott:

Yeah.

Robert Watt:

But, you know, there have been conductors. They've been, you know, um, some really good conductors. Um, then who was the guy in- Of course now they have a, uh, Venezuelan conductor, the LA Phil.

Charles Trott:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert Watt:

[inaudible 01:51:46] And if you catch some time on YouTube they're doing a Bernstein West side Story. They're playing the music from West Side Story and it's in Venezuela. And what they do- It's a youth orchestra that he created. Um, man, they are swinging. People are standing up - dancing in the audience. It's really something. So them- They've got a lot of feeling, you know. So, but I never played- I- I'm not- I played in my last year in the orchestra and when he first showed up as a guest conductor. But I never met him and I'm- you know, I've been out of the, the- the [inaudible 01:52:22] for almost eleven years.

Robert Watt:

But, uh, he was a little rough when he first started. But now he's a big name, Gustavo Dudamel. He's all over town, pictures all over town. So, anyway, that's, uh- So-

Jennifer Souder:

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Well, thank you. It's been a lot of fun. And we appreciate you sharing that much time, so much time with us. And, um, we definitely would like to have a follow-up if that's okay. 'Cause we know there's more. Um-

Robert Watt:

Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Jennifer Souder:

We also want you to be able to get to your book signing. [laughs]

Robert Watt:

Book signing. Oh, no, that's, like, at 8 or so. I mean, I'm just gonna check to see if the books came in. That's later. Um, no it's just they want me to sign the books so they can put 'em on the shelf. It's not a book signing-

Jennifer Souder:

Okay.

Robert Watt:

... per se. They-they're buying the books and they're gonna sell 'em and [laughs] that's all. But I'm gonna- They want me to sign 'em. So, they- You know, I've done it before. But I thought, "Maybe I'll run into Michelle Obama." ([laughs])

Jennifer Souder:

You never know. You never know.

Robert Watt:

She's such a, such a class act. [laughs] She and I have almost the same birthday. Almost.

Jennifer Souder:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert Watt:

Mine is the same as Martin Luther King. And she is the 17th. Mines the 15th. So-

Jennifer Souder:

(laughs)

Robert Watt:

She's a Capricorn and I understand her. [laughs]

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Jennifer Souder:

Well-

Robert Watt:

[crosstalk 01:53:43] he wouldn't be anywhere without her. I tell you. [laughs] You know.

Jennifer Souder:

[laughs] Um, in the bookstore here it's not very far-fetched to have your- your book- I think that your book may be here. But- but [inaudible 01:53:58] a copy too.

Robert Watt:

Well, they were- If you look- Go and ask 'em they'll pull it up in the computer. But they may not have it on the shelf. Is that what you mean?

Jennifer Souder:

Right. Yeah. I mean, it's a little independent bookstore. But-

Robert Watt:

Right.

Jennifer Souder:

... I know they, they really like to have, of course-

Robert Watt:

Oh, you can tell 'em. Yeah, they'll find out- Yeah, they'll-they'll send it to 'em. Not a problem. You know. The paperback. You know.

Jennifer Souder:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert Watt:

Yeah.

Jennifer Souder:

[laughs]

Robert Watt:

I just ordered a half dozen so myself. So they're- they're print-to-order, print-to-order now. So it'll be maybe a couple weeks before I get them. So-

Jennifer Souder:

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Okay.

Robert Watt:

But, yeah. All right. I'm getting cabin fever. Like I've been on the ph-[inaudible 01:54:39]

Jennifer Souder:

Definitely a long time. Well, we really appreciate your time. It's been so- Oh, my goodness. It's so much, so much fun.

Robert Watt:

Okay. Pleasure. Charles Trott, when I come here next time we'll, you know, we'll do the ole punch in the chest thing. [laughs]

Charles Trott:

[inaudible 01:54:52]

Robert Watt:

Maybe he doesn't remember that. You remember that? Hello?

Charles Trott:

Tell Tony to call me when- when you do.

Robert Watt:

Aw, sh- Okay. [laughs] You got it. All right. I was there for his birthday. So, um, you never know- Well, next time, I'll let you know.

Charles Trott:

All right. We'll talk again.

Robert Watt:

Okay.

Jennifer Souder:

Thank you so much.

Robert Watt:

Thank you. All right. Take care. Bye.

Charles Trott:

Take care, Bob.

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## ASBURY PARK AFRICAN-AMERICAN MUSIC PROJECT

### INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Jennifer Souder:

[inaudible 01:55:25]

Charles Trott:

[inaudible 01:55:25]

Jennifer Souder:

Why is it not saying that? [inaudible 01:55:43]

PART 4 OF 4 ENDS [01:55:47]

Transcribed by:	Rev.com, 6-19-20
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Reviewed by:	Robert Watt, 2-18-21
Final edit by:	Jennifer Souder, 3-5-21