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## Wiens, Frank Oral History Interview

Gary Putnam

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FACULTY EMERITI INTERVIEWS  
UNIVERSITY OF THE PACIFIC ARCHIVES



**Frank Wiens (1976-2019)**  
**Professor of Piano**

December 15, 2020

By Gary Putnam

Transcription by University of the Pacific,  
Department of Special Collections, Library

Subjects: Educational background and pre-Pacific teaching; life as, thoughts, feelings and emotions of a concert performing artist; University support for providing a career in performance ,teaching and advising; Conservatory curriculum – the performance degree, the music education degree; and recent curricular changes for music majors to include versatility of styles and technology

**Putnam:**

This is December 15, 2020 on the eve of Beethoven's 250th birthday. We are talking from our residences instead of in a recording studio, talking by Zoom because of the COVID-19 virus, which keeps us at some distance. This will be a conversation with Frank Wiens and more about him in the next hour. My name is Gary Putnam, and I served as the university chaplain at the University of the Pacific from 1983 to 1990, and I've had the privilege of personal acquaintance with Frank over the last almost, oh gosh, 30 years. Press statements about Frank... "Musical strength, commanding manner, technical brilliance, a clarity of color, richness of imagery, and sincerity of performance. Frank Wiens is a brilliant representative of the American School of piano technique." "A nobility of artistic manner." "Elegant and lucid". Those are quotes from the reviews by the London Times and in the USSR to the Des Moines Register and beyond. He has toured extensively throughout the United States and abroad, receiving professional accolades for his performances in New York's Carnegie Hall and London. He has twice toured South Korea and gave his European recital debut in Vienna in 1987. He was invited to tour the Soviet Union in 1991, and in 2006 he appeared as a soloist with the orchestra Dinu Lipatti in Romania and gave recitals devoted to the music of Chopin at the Chopin Academy and the Lazienki Palace on Water in Warsaw, Poland. Frank Wiens is a world class pianist, who's held the position of Professor of Piano at the University of the Pacific since 1976. He's been a winner of major awards and prestigious competitions, including the North American Young Artists' Competition, the Southwest Pianists Foundation Competition, and the Three Rivers Piano Competition. As a teacher, Frank is demanding, but his students revere him. His teaching career began at Drake University and spans more than 45 years. At the University of the Pacific he's a much loved professor. He received Pacific's Distinguished Faculty Award in 1997 and the Faculty Research-Lecturer Award in 2000. His musical integrity and command of stylistic traditions make him an exemplary model for his students at the university and also for all aspiring young musicians. His combination of bravura technique with a command of subtle melodic nuance, not only impresses his listeners but involves him in a deeper understanding of the music. Not all musicians can accomplish this. It's another element of Frank's talent that sets him apart and above the rest. Many pianists play notes but Frank creates music. I love that image because that is one of the distinctions I especially appreciate about you. That was part of the introduction from the 2009 Stockton Arts Commission Award for Outstanding Achievement in Music. But, Frank, you've been a person a lot longer than even when you've been playing the piano. So could you give us a sort of a biographical overview of where you were born, where you went to school, some early mentors? That sort of thing.

**Wiens:**

Sure. I was born in New Haven, Connecticut. My father was a Yale professor of geography, not of music, and my mother was an amateur musician. She was an accordionist and played some piano and a little violin, and had done some entertaining on the accordion at USO things in the United States during World War Two. And so music was very important to her. I had two older siblings who were studying piano before me. And I guess the first musical event that I can recall

in my childhood was at age four when it was discovered that I had perfect pitch. That of course was very thrilling to my mother. Sometimes people end up getting the idea that if you have perfect pitch somehow you've been touched by divinity forever. I think that's a bit of an overstatement, but it pushed me maybe in that direction a little bit. And the next three years before I started piano study I was trying to imitate the piano music I would hear from my two older siblings, playing by ear. Finally at age seven my parents decided they ought to start me in lessons and at that point I began piano study with a woman named Jean Shepler who had degrees from the Royal School of Music in England and had been through the Blitz over there before marrying an American and moving to the U.S. She was my teacher all the way through my high school years, and with only a couple of brief interruptions. Those interruptions were the couple of years when I was overseas, as my father was on Fulbright fellowships first in Hong Kong in 1960 when I was 12 and then in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, when I was just turning 16. Another important musical thing that I shouldn't omit is the fact that I became a boy soprano in my later pre-teen years and joined the Trinity Boys Choir in New Haven. I think aside from that I continued to study piano and entered a few piano competitions as I approached high school years. I only really won one and that was the New Haven Symphony competition and that gave me the opportunity to perform the first movement of a piano concerto on seven different occasions in public high schools around the city. This was my first taste of "concert touring" actually which was quite exciting. Then I guess we jump probably forward to college. I went to the University of Michigan and my principal mentor there was Benning Dexter, a native Californian who had taught there for many years and became very much a father figure to me as well as an important musical mentor. I did undergraduate and master's study at Michigan under Benning Dexter, and then began doctoral study and spent a semester of doctoral study with George Sandor, a very famous Hungarian pianist. A couple months into the second semester for a combination of reasons I dropped out of the doctoral program. (And that's why I am not Dr. Wiens. My wife is, but I am not. And so we are the doctor and Mr. Wiens when we appear together.) It was later in that same year that I was discouraged enough with my career choice to be seriously thinking about going to law school. And while I was getting ready to take the law boards, out of the clear blue a contact came through my old teacher Benning Dexter asking for a recommendation of a pianist to teach at Drake University. I got the invitation to apply on Monday and got audio and written materials to them by Wednesday, and by Friday I was on campus interviewing. Unbelievably I was hired that day. So without this unexpected good fortune I probably would have become a lawyer. And so it was really serendipitous that that happened and I've really not looked back since that point. I was there at Drake University for four years and started entering piano competitions like crazy in my last few years on the faculty there. I won a couple of prizes that you mentioned earlier with the Southwest Pianists Foundation and the Denver Symphony's North American Piano Competition. These came right on the brink of my applying for the piano position at Pacific. Another thing worthy of mention is that in about my second year at Drake, my cellist colleague invited me to join him on a tour of Michigan. And he had set up five little concerts, you know, that didn't pay a lot, but we were going to play these concerts in the period of a week. And it was so much fun doing that on a

daily basis that when I came back, I thought, why couldn't I be doing this on my own? I created a little brochure to send out all around the country basically implying that I was willing to play everywhere while trying to put it like I already had been touring like that. I did get a few invitations out of it. And that was, I guess, the beginning of my concert touring as a professional and from that developed some reviews, and by the time I came to Pacific it appeared that I had a bit of an active career going. The job description at Pacific seemed to indicate that they were looking for someone who would raise the visibility of the Conservatory by concert touring. And you know the advertising did not mention any interest in or requirement for a doctoral degree, which was very much a relief to me since I did not want to return to school and get one.. I felt like it was going to be a good fit so I applied for the job and eventually got it. And that's how I came to Pacific.

**Putnam:**

This is an aside. I think we were probably living close to one another in Iowa.

**Wiens:**

In the early 70s. Yes.

**Putnam:**

I was living there myself till I came to Pacific. I want to pick up on the idea of participating in music competitions. You know, a lot of artists have a less positive feeling about competitions, for example, questioning how one reasonably competes in the individualized world of the arts. Could you help clear that up for me?

**Wiens:**

I think even those who have been extremely successful in competitions feel that way. Often after they're finished with that phase of their career, and even if they have won some career-making event, many artists will say they're so glad they never have to go through that again. That process of participating in music competitions does tend to make you feel like you're being dissected rather than reacted to for what you're offering, and being judged simply in comparison with the person on the left and the person on the right. There's a famous Horowitz quote that he didn't like piano competitions, because they tended to be a process of elimination rather than selection. The jury would score all of the things that are negative about this person and maybe a few positives and the jury would eventually select the performer who was the least offensive or had the fewest negative reactions. I think there might have been a time when competitions generated pianists who were a little cookie cutter and not controversial. And in later years there was a major reaction to that from leading adjudicators who began to look for what were unique qualities in a performer rather than simply perfection in what they heard. They sought performers who were unusual and original, rather than those who did not offend by doing anything controversial.

**Putnam:**

I had not realized you had such international experience as a child. Can you say more about what that meant in terms of how you see the world and your own development?

**Wiens:**

I think probably the most important aspect of my youth was those years abroad. In Hong Kong I attended a British school, and while basically England and the United States were on good terms, the colonial British were less positive about Americans. Some of my colonial classmates were not especially nice. I realized many years later that it might have simply been the fact that we were eighth graders, which I think is an awkward age sometimes expressed in meanness. There was, however, a lot of open disrespect for being American among the British colonials at that time, and even some of the teachers expressed that in the classroom. However, aside from matters at school I adored Hong Kong. It was so exotic and really eye opening to be in that kind of culture. I was older, of course, when we went to Kuala Lumpur. (I was an 11<sup>th</sup> grader.) I was one of only two Caucasians I think in the school in Kuala Lumpur. At the time Malaysia itself was mostly a matter of three ethnic groups, the Malays, the Chinese, and the Indians. And all of whom were in the school that I attended as one of two Americans. This gave me a taste of what life might be like as a minority, though without any hostility such as I had experienced in the British colonial school in Hong Kong. In a sidelight, because I was tall taller than most of my fellow students, they thought I was going to be a star basketball player on their teams. I quickly disillusioned them of that fact and further demonstrated my lack of coordination in most of the sports where they thought I might be useful, including rugby.

**Putnam:**

Mark Twain says that travel is the surest cure for prejudice and I sense that you saw yourself as part of a world community and not an elite Caucasian community.

**Wiens:**

Well, I think we were raised that way at home anyway but it's certainly true that the experience of living in other cultures opens one's eyes and ideally enhances one's understanding of other cultures. I would say that, in terms of my day by day existence in school, the year in Hong Kong was really more of an experience with British colonial life than an experience of Chinese culture, except for going to Chinese restaurants and shopping and being in an environment where the Chinese were very much the majority. But most of my interactions were largely with colonials. Malaysia was very different. My friends were mostly from those three ethnic groups and it never really entered my mind that I was Caucasian and they were not. It was truly a multicultural environment, and I guess you could say I got the experience of being a minority, but it certainly didn't feel like it was a factor in how I was treated or how life went on there.

**Putnam:**

Most of your earlier years were in New Haven, it would seem likely, I assume, that you could have been a legacy admission by going to Yale there since your father was on the Yale faculty.

**Wiens:**

Yes. And, in fact, I got into Yale and my guess is it was because my father was on the faculty. I was a good student, but I was not a star student and so I don't know exactly how I got in. It was very tempting to choose Yale for my college years. The Yale Club of guys meets with prospective students and did a kind of fraternity rush- like thing on them. You know that was just for entrance into the college. Not to mention any fraternity. It's just that you end up with a big "rah, rah Yale" kind of feeling and I have to admit it was very alluring to me at the time. The three schools to which I applied were Yale, Oberlin, and Michigan and the first music school I'd ever seen was Oberlin. I didn't like the campus very much but I loved seeing the music school for the first time and a place devoted to music in its own little unit. Yale did not have an undergraduate piano performance program but if they had I probably would have gone there. When I went to visit Michigan I was pretty convinced that I was going to go to Oberlin even though I disliked that campus. because of the fact that it was a music school. And even though I was considering a double degree at that point in political science or history or something of the sort, I really felt music had to be part of it. And when I went to Michigan, the campus was gorgeous plus we had a little bit of a family history there. My sister was already in school there as a junior and my father had gotten his PhD there. So I think that might have been a factor, but I think mostly it was meeting my eventual teacher Benning Dexter, his warmth and personal interest in me, and the beauty of the campus. It was really pretty much a slam dunk once I saw Ann Arbor.

**Putnam:**

At a school like Michigan I assume the music program was smaller than some of the other programs?

**Wiens:**

No, actually. The music school was bigger, I imagine, than Oberlin. It had 900 music majors. It was a very big unit though a lot of it was graduate study and music education was a very big program. But performance had always been a major part of their activities.

**Putnam:**

Tell me a little bit about the distinction between a performance program and like a teaching program.

**Wiens:**

Well, I think the curriculum of most performance degrees is set up so that you have the ability to practice four or more hours a day on your instrument. And that requires not padding it with too much academic work where you are constantly writing papers and so busy with studying for

more academic courses that there is scant time for practice on your instrument. There is a certain portion set aside for Liberal Studies similar to the general education program at Pacific so that at least a quarter, if not a third, of the coursework is in general education. But the performance major is really designed to encourage the strongest possible commitment to one's instrument and to live performance. So there are courses in playing chamber music, accompanying, performing in large ensembles and even classes in conducting-everything is mostly focused in that direction. Whereas in music education there is much more stress on training you to be an effective teacher. There are courses for example in psychology and classroom teaching techniques, and string and woodwind methods, and student teaching and internships also are a major part of the music education degree. There is one course in pedagogy in the performance major, designed mostly for teaching young children, where you learn about the materials available and a couple of strategic things to do with kids. Then you get an advanced literature course in the hopes that you're going to be actually teaching on an advanced level and dealing with sonatas and etudes, etc. And there's no other pedagogical instruction in performance at all.

**Putnam:** You've traveled and performed so much around the world and gone to countries where you probably couldn't order a cup of coffee in their language, but music seems to transcend all our languages that may separate us. Say something about that.

**Wiens:**

I think there's no question that Western classical music as we know it has always been strong in Europe and in Russia. It was late in coming to Asia, but once it got there it took hold fiercely. The Chinese and Japanese might have been first and then the Koreans as well. Now they talk about there being a piano in virtually every apartment in Korea. I remember when I went there, you would hear about the fact that there was a tenor behind every door. Opera has been a very big thing in Korea and I came back with a couple of recordings of Korean tenors who were very good and who loved the big Italian repertoire that tenors like Pavarotti would sing. In the last fifty years Asian musicians have completely embraced the Western classical idiom. There's just so many in the field now, and pianists of Asian background outnumber all others. And they are so good and so beautifully prepared. They start at such a young age and apply themselves with incredible discipline and seek out the best training they can get. People like Yo-Yo Ma are such monumental musicians. I think the strongest hope I have that classical music will stay alive and well as we turn into the next century is in fact its stronghold in Asia and among Asians in the U.S.

**Putnam:**

So are you saying that music really does transcend culture and that classical music will make its own mark on people if they hear it?

**Wiens:**



Yes, it will if they're open to it. I think if you're listening to a lot of other kinds of music normally and you hear classical music for the first time, it may strike you as too complicated to really respond to. But if you grow up with it, especially if you are studying it yourself and actually engaging in it, I think that it begins to take root in your emotional and intellectual system and you begin to appreciate how much richness and emotional satisfaction classical music offers.

**Putnam:**

You have given some very popular recitals on campus and which we all appreciate and enjoy.

**Wiens:**

Thank you.

**Putnam:**

Is there any difference in playing in your home base rather than internationally?

**Wiens:**

It's probably more fun at home. You know that the audience at Pacific is so warm, and I feel when I come out on the stage each year like I'm having a 50th birthday celebration with a couple hundred friends. There's a pressure involved with that. Obviously, you have a standard you want to meet and you want to feel like people are going to go away thinking, well, I thought he was supposed to be good. But the experience itself for me goes even beyond the musical experience. I think when I was a kid, I probably wanted to be a comedian as much as I wanted to be anything else. I was always trying to make people laugh.

I'm sure it is evident and unfortunately I'm not a naturally particularly funny person, and I know people who are so quick-witted and can come up with things spontaneously. But some of my favorite moments on stage at Pacific are when I get a laugh at something I've said. I enjoy the interaction with the audience. I was pretty early in making speaking from the stage to the audience a part of my performances. It's now become so common that you expect that an artist is going to speak to the audience about the music. Some people do it with a lot of analysis, and suggest what to listen for, and will go to the piano and demonstrate. Sometimes it's storytelling about the origins or inspiration for the music. I am usually trying to find a humorous angle somewhere in the program, which isn't always easy, but I love it when I find something.

**Putnam:**

One of my mentors said if you can get people to open their mouths and laugh it's amazing what you can get them to swallow! But I think it shows who you are as a person and you can be trusted that you're a real human being, instead of just this elitist musician.

**Wiens:**

It does seem to be what people react to when artists talk from the stage. I think it's a lot easier for people to feel like they've gotten a glimpse of a person when I speak to them.

**Putnam:** Speaking of these recitals, I wanted to ask you about some of your disciplines prior to a recital or concert. I've read about performers who will soak their hands with water or go through some sort of mantras before a recital. But what are yours?

**Wiens:**

Well, I think performers do get into mantras and routines that you trust before coming on stage. When I was in my senior year at Michigan I won a competition that enabled me to play my senior recital five times for different music teachers' organizations and that was when my routines began to form. Those were my first real professional recitals beyond my young days, and at that time my routine was to go through the music only slowly at the piano on the day of a recital. I didn't want to test myself. I didn't want to put myself on the spot by trying to prove to myself that I was really ready. So if you start testing yourself like, gee, am I going to be able to get through it by memory or am I going to be able to play all these notes right, and then it doesn't happen for whatever reason in your rehearsal, that can throw you off in the performance. And so I would avoid the question by playing slowly with the music open and it was just a kind of reinforcement of everything, rather than actually putting myself to the test. In the last 40 years I've abandoned that particular neurosis and now I tend to do a program run through and sometimes more than one on the day of the concert. I don't worry about fatigue which has never really been a factor. So I will play through the program, maybe in the morning, maybe in the afternoon. Sometimes I'll break apart a passage that has been a little bit elusive. That is the practice routine. And when I go on the road, usually the most I get is a couple of hours on the piano that I'm going to perform on that day and I go in and just do a run through and that is it, and then come back that night to do the performance. It doesn't always work as perfectly as you would like. There was one recital years ago that I was playing in Virginia. And my plane, which was supposed to fly me to Washington and give me a lot of time to drive down the eastern shore, was delayed by a little fire of some sort and by the time I got to Washington and got in the car to drive to the concert it was obvious. I was only going to arrive in the town about a half an hour before I was supposed to go on stage. I checked into the motel, threw my tux on and ran out to the auditorium and the audience was already sitting down and waiting. I walked on stage without having tried the piano. Routines were not available to me that day. And what I realized is that it took all the pressure off mentally because I felt like I could forgive myself anything that happened. Because the circumstances were not under my control and it went extremely well in that circumstance, I'm not incredibly attached to my routines. As far as my hands are concerned and putting them in hot water, I do understand the fear of cold hands. I hate the feeling of coming on stage and having my hands be cold, which happens sometimes. In the Faye Spanos Concert Hall there have been times when the green room back there was not well-heated, or for whatever reason my hands would be cold. And I usually have played in the winter as well, which doesn't help. I'll often have gloves on backstage before I come out to try to keep my hands warm and I've been advised that putting your hands in your armpits is a

good one. This seems to work. But mostly before concerts I am moderately cautious about what I eat. You know I don't believe in having a big Mexican or spicy Italian dinner before I play, or huge steaks and things like that.

**Putnam:**

An image of how cool I think you are. What time when I was coming to a recital. I was walking up the front to Faye Spanos and you were coming from your car carrying your tuxedo. This guy is ready.

**Wiens:**

I have found that the most important pre-concert preparation stage for me is those last 10 or 15 minutes before I go on stage, and at that point I have rituals, including prayer. First of all, to express gratitude for the opportunity and also to almost ask for a blessing on the program that somehow I will be able to share what I want to share musically and emotionally. At times I am asking for more definitive things like focus and concentration, energy, things like that. And that routine is something that I've been committed to for 40 years and I think it helps me get in somewhat of a meditative state before I get on stage. It doesn't always work to get me in a meditative state. It doesn't happen that often but there are times I find myself kind of discombobulated very early in a program and then sometimes you're battling it all the way through the program. But usually if the first number seems reasonably secure it'll carry itself through the program and I will relax with it.

**Putnam:**

There's some similarity in the world of the clergy, in the sense of hoping to be used. And if you find yourself getting deeply in the spirit of your message and, you know, people hear more than I've said. Perhaps sometimes your music transcends who you are. Yeah.

**Wiens:**

Well you hope it does. I think the whole business of what people hear when you're playing is an interesting one anyway, because I think every single one of your listeners is listening in a different framework. Somebody out there may be listening from the standpoint of having heard that same Beethoven Sonata from leading professionals, you know, over and over and over again. And listening with the attitude of what is this person bringing to this work that is new. Others may have never heard a classical piano program in their life, and that is a huge spectrum of difference. You've got somebody out there who is really eager to be moved into feeling something emotionally, and you've got people who are reacting intellectually and judging. And that can be true of your students as well as colleagues. You have to trust that some of your message will get through to some of your audience and not in the same ways. There may be people who will experience it very deeply and some very shallowly. And some who won't experience anything at all. I think you have to trust that what you're trying to do is, in fact, sincere and artistically sincere, rather than built around ego and how people are going to react.

It's one of the biggest things I've had to talk to my students about over the years. Some who have tremendous troubles with nerves are helped if they can keep their focus off what people are thinking and how they're reacting and keep it on what they want to give and what they want to share in their music. Because I think the minute you start getting preoccupied with what's going on in people's minds and ears as they react to you it becomes very ego-centered and focused on "are they going to like me or are they not going to like me." And it takes you right out of your musical center and away from what should be your value system, I think.

**Putnam:**

What are your ongoing daily disciplines that keep you up at this level of excellence? Some of us have heard Benny Goodman make a quote about the need to practice every day, every day.

**Wiens:**

I guess it's probably a limitation in terms of what I am capable of doing, but I have never been quite as consistent as many people that I know, including so many of my friends for whom I have great admiration. I feel like I cannot be at the piano every day. In fact, I feel like I can be away from it for a couple of weeks at a time. I don't think it makes any difference because when I come back to it. I will just resume my normal practice habits and I've never gone for months and months at a time. And when I go on the road I am often cut off from the piano for two days in between recitals. If the program has been played in I don't worry about it very much, because if I've played it before I know I can go about two days without touching a piano. And when I get my two hours on the concert instrument I'll be fine. But if it's a first time out I'm more likely to be apprehensive. I had a little program of no particular consequence in Maine a year ago, and I had not played that particular music anywhere. I had to be away from the piano for a few days before the drive to Maine from upstate New York. While it was going to be a couple family members and a couple of friends that I was playing for, I still felt the need to stop on route from New York somewhere to practice. I found a little church in Vermont where I managed to arrange to rehearse for a couple of hours by contacting the church in advance. In an interesting aside, the minister there was a close friend of one of my colleagues at Pacific!

**Putnam:**

Can we look at what does music mean to you, is it principally aesthetics, or its social influence to inspire? The enjoyment of music is so ephemeral since it just lasts for a moment and yet its effects are so enduring.

**Wiens:**

Well, I think for me, music is largely a method of nonverbal communication. Without making it too mechanical sounding, I feel like music is a language that expresses itself emotionally through certain devices. That I think those devices include dynamics, for example. How loudly and softly you play and how one part relates to another, and how you shape lines and phrases. How you breathe in time, how you space things. I think all of those are basically devices by

which you express emotion in some form. Some teachers speak in emotional language more than I do. I'm not so comfortable saying this place should sound like you've just lost your lover, that kind of thing. I'm more likely to say, "Can you make it grow more to this particular point of intensity" and try to explain why that's the point of intensity. And to me, that's why it's emotional but for some students. I'm sure it would be better if I put it in emotional terms because not everybody hears things in the same way. And I remember one of my mentors late in life, John Perry. One of my students who encountered him as a graduate student spoke about his facility with emotional language and his ability to describe the emotion you are trying to communicate in a passage. And I certainly don't think that's my strong suit. I am just as likely to talk about digging into the piano as if you're trying to squash a raisin, or some such primitive image to produce the emotion I am hoping the student will be able to convey.

**Putnam:**

Are you trying to capture the composer's emotion or is it your emotion or you embellishing what the composer put in on the page?

**Wiens:**

You're trying to decipher the emotional message that the composer is delivering. I don't know that I always think that it has a direct relation to some event in the composer's life. For example, the fact that the composer may have lost his dog that week leads to the piece sounding particularly tragic here. Sometimes the events in a composer's life may have direct emotional connection to the music written. An example would be a militaristic march written at the time Napoleon is invading Vienna. But I think the music itself usually carries the message on its own, I think, and you can hear it if you understand the language enough. I think you can hear it in how a phrase is shaped and how harmony is used, in how climax is reached, and how it is approached and/or departed from. And I think of all those elements of music. I couldn't tangibly translate every phrase into emotional terms. What I'm trying to do is to express something and I don't know that my playing is as emotional as some artists who would think in terms of emotion alone, but that's how my process works. I think of it as an attempt to communicate to the extent that I can through the composer's music, and I hope that the composer and I are sort of acting as partners. I am no doubt the much more inadequate partner in the process, but still a partner in trying to communicate what the composer has given us to work with. I do hope that my playing brings some degree of emotional something to those receiving it, whether it's an emotion like excitement and energy, or perhaps a more spiritual or peaceful character. And sometimes it may just sounds nice to their ears.

**Putnam:**

Have you ever been caught up so in the music that it brings tears to your eyes and you bodily feel the emotion that you're playing?

**Wiens:**

There may be a few rare occasions where a place will get like that in a piece of music, but normally just like actors aren't supposed to lose themselves in the emotion that they're conveying, musicians need to be similar. I think you can't get so emotional while you're playing, that you can't control what you are doing.

**Putnam:**

I think this leads us into talking about the spaces in music, the places of silence. Help us understand a little bit about the music that has to be found in silence.

**Wiens:**

That's a complex subject, and one that at least one of my former colleagues will be better talking about than I am. Artur Schnabel, a great pianist of the last century, described himself by saying that "many pianists and artists play the notes better than I do. It's the silence between the notes that I play the best" or something to that effect. And I don't think he was saying that when he's actually playing notes they aren't so good, but just that the silence was really good. In fact, the use of silence is dramatic in music in the same way that it would be in drama. How you pace things, how you space timing between notes, and some of it probably is even in the choice of tempo. I certainly went through a large stage in my life where I played things too fast. And I played them too fast because I could, and I would choose a tempo simply because I could do it, rather than because I thought that the music should be at that tempo. And I've tried to moderate that perspective in recent years, but it was something that was a problem for me. I think a lot of my earlier playing probably did not breathe adequately. Music, I think, needs to breathe, very much like speech needs to breathe and humans need to breathe. There needs to be time to react sometimes to a phrase or to some event that either has just occurred or is about to occur. And so, for example, I remember in a competition years ago a judge commenting about the way I was playing a certain spot in a Rachmaninoff concerto, saying that one doesn't need to always rush to the climax. Sometimes it's more dramatic if you pull back in time as you approach climax. And that, again, would be an example of space and time in music. That delay of important moments can help to signal them to your audience whereas if you get there too fast for your audience, the moment is over with before the audience as a chance to react. It must be the same way with the important words that you have in a sermon that you are about to say. Pausing before delivering those important words isolates them and draws attention to their significance.

**Putnam:**

The pacing reminds me of hearing on television Richard Burton and Orson Welles reading the phone book. It is fascinating how they use pacing and space and silence. Are there pianists who had special meaning to you, either people performing or mentors of yours?

**Wiens:**

I've had many mentors. Mrs. Shepler from my earliest years of study was a fine musician and tried to guide my playing with musical principles so that I would learn to be somewhat expressive. Benning Dexter was so good at helping me to learn how to read a score, and teaching respect for composers and what they wrote on the score. Gyorgy Sandor, even though our time together was rather brief, taught me how to be much more comfortable physically than I ever had been before. And it was incredibly liberating in that regard. I'd left the doctoral program before he knew that he succeeded in doing that, but it was a really very important influence. There was a man named Harold Logan over in Berkeley with whom I coached once I came to California, who was an immense influence and changed my whole way of looking at music. Sometimes it's been colleagues with whom I work who made a great impact on me. At Drake University my department chairman George Katz, a major international competition winner, was kind of pushing me to enter these competitions. George was a major factor also in motivating me and also in affecting the way I did certain things and especially technically. In my later career John Perry was a more recent coach. It has been a while now since I played for him. But he is certainly one of the leading pedagogues of piano in the world, and I got to play for him many times over the last 30-40 years. His understanding of the Viennese literature and his influence on my conceptions of Mozart and Beethoven was profound. So those would be my principal mentors as teachers. I've also had great friends from whom I learned both here at Pacific and people who have come and gone from Pacific, but people that I've gotten to know really well. And who I've gotten to hear perform many times and I have really learned from listening to them. Among the famous people, Rachmaninoff certainly was always a mentor. When I was a teenager my aunt in Washington D.C., my mother's sister, would always send me LPs of major piano concertos for most of my birthdays and Christmases, and most of them seemed to be Russian. Pianists like Emil Gilels and Sviatoslav Richter were among the many with whom I became familiar in those early years. Nowadays we have YouTube, which has been such a tremendous resource. Now when you're learning a work if you want to hear major artists play it, a lot of it is up on YouTube, and you can access great performances by the greatest musicians of our time. Even the greatest musicians of the last hundred years will be on YouTube because many people will upload something from somebody that's been dead for 20 years and some recording they made in 1920, and they'll put it up on YouTube. You may not be able to see anybody playing but you hear the playing. And of course before that we had LPs, cassettes, compact discs, and the technology keeps changing. There's so much to learn from listening to others.

**Putnam:**

Now let's move on to the pinnacle of your career. Tell us about your lounge piano playing.

**Wiens:**

I didn't remember that you were familiar with that. Yes, I always had played by ear from the time when I was four, imitating my brother and sister, I tended to like to play by ear and to improvise, and a lot of the time in my high school years and junior high school years when I was

supposed to be practicing, I'd be sitting there making up stuff. My parents would have to come in and say, "is that what you're supposed to be working on." But I kind of stopped doing classical improvisation pretty early in college. I did find myself within the first few days I got on the Michigan campus improvising on an organ that was in what was a dormitory social room. And somebody came in and heard me and said, "I've got a jazz group that's forming. Would you like to be our pianist?" And so I said, "Sure, I'll come," and that led to the formation of a jazz group that played in some format all the way through my college years, ranging from a quartet to a quintet, to a sextet and back to a quartet.

I really had no experience with jazz and had not listened to it nor ever tried to play it. I never got especially good at it. But I think I developed into a pretty good cocktail pianist. When I was a teenager my high school piano teacher would give me occasional arrangements of popular music as "dessert" items, and I was comfortable improvising arrangements of Broadway tunes and some other popular music. Starting at about my sophomore year, I got a job at the Michigan League playing for their evening supper one or two evenings a week playing that kind of "cocktail music". And, as I got more comfortable with that repertoire, within a year I had a regular job playing at the local Hilton. In my last year in Ann Arbor I actually had two jobs playing cocktail piano in a couple of nice restaurants in town. But when I got the Drake University teaching position I left that aspect of my performing behind. The only time I've ever played that kind of music since is when there would be an occasional concert of the Conservatory faculty where they would perform something unusual that they had done earlier in their lives. A couple of times those featured Broadway musical numbers and the voice faculty would perform some show tunes and I would be the accompanist improvising the accompaniments.

**Putnam:**

Well, if things get financially difficult you can always go back to the Holiday Inn.

**Wiens:**

I guess there's always that possibility that I will be back in that world with a brandy snifter on the piano lid waiting for tips to be deposited!

**Putnam:**

Let's move on to the west coast here. Who or what drew you to Pacific? You alluded to that earlier. And then whatever prompted you to move from Iowa to California?

**Wiens:**

Well I have to say that I always thought Des Moines was a wonderful city. And I remember when I lived there saying many times that I wished they could move the city to the West Coast or to some warm climate. Because I didn't like the climate much in Iowa, even though I had grown up in Connecticut and gone to school in Michigan. While I did not have that much



experience with warm climates, I certainly was ready to get to one. When I began to have a few little successes in competitions in my fourth year on the Drake faculty, I thought that this might be a good time to try to apply for another job. I was at instructor rank at Drake for four years and wouldn't come up for promotion probably for another two years. But I thought this would probably be a good time to apply for other positions since I had some fresh credentials. My interest in moving to a warm climate is pretty evident when you consider that the only positions to which I applied were the University of Hawaii, the University of Arizona, and the University of the Pacific.

**Putnam:**

There's a theme there.

**Wiens:**

Yes. I just applied to those three places where positions came open, and I do know that the Sun Belt was a key motivator for me. And so as it turns out, the University of the Pacific was the job. I ended up with one of the three. The fact that the Conservatory seemed to be looking for someone who would be a touring artist also was appealing. At that point Preston Stedman was the dean here, and in those days he would travel around the country doing auditions, I guess, and recording auditions of various college applicants, but also interviewing faculty who were interested in any jobs open at the Conservatory. Dean Stedman he would ask any applicants if they would like to come and meet with him in a preliminary capacity. He would be happy to have them come at their own expense and meet with him. On one of these trips he came to Chicago and I got that invitation to go there to meet with him. Even though it was a five hour drive, my wife and I made a nice weekend in a nice hotel out of it. I met him and at that point he indicated that it looked like I might be a candidate or something to that effect. It was several months later that the invitation actually came to fly out to Stockton to interview. There is a funny story that I perhaps shouldn't share about how the university handled transportation in those days. Or perhaps it was just the Conservatory.

**Putnam:**

And how was one hired? Did you perform for the faculty?

**Wiens:**

Yes, you had an audition, gave a master class for the students, and interviewed with the committee and the dean. The story is pretty funny, but maybe we would have to edit it out, I suspect. I was well aware of this policy announced with the position that stated that the university would pay for your transportation expenses if you were not offered the job, or were offered the job and accepted it. However, if you were offered the position and turned down the offer, they would not pay your expenses! I imagine that someone was afraid that people would come out to interview simply to have a free vacation in California! At the time financially the \$300 or \$400 that it cost to fly out seemed like a pretty big loss if that happened. But I

didn't worry about it much. When I arrived on campus, very early on in the committee interview one of the questions that was directed to me was that promotion at Pacific was tied very strongly to the doctorate and what were my plans. I had not heard any mention of a doctorate in connection with the job before and nor did I want to go back and get one. And so it was like suddenly at the first moment in the interview I was being given a very different picture from the way the position was described in the job announcement and in that preliminary interview with Dean Stedman. Immediately I realized that this was not the job I wanted, and immediately the connection came in my mind, okay, that means that if they offered me the position, I would have to turn it down, and then they are not going to pay my expenses. And so I thought, well, there's a way around that, and you know how prize fighters used to deliberately throw a fight. I thought I could "throw" the audition. So I started plotting things that I could do in the audition that would be so obnoxious that there would be no chance I would be offered the position (but therefore would get my expenses covered!) I was going to play this Bach Partita in the audition, and decided I could make these horrible accents at any place that was supposed to be quiet, and make the playing so ugly and unmusical that there would be no way they would hire me. Fortunately, I met with Preston Steadman after that and he assured me that the requirement of the doctorate was not relevant to this position, as they were more interested in finding a touring artist than someone with that academic credential. So I abandoned my plans to deliberately sabotage the audition and went ahead and played with my normal interpretation. The audition was like a half-hour recital. I did a masterclass for some of the students that were already enrolled at Pacific. One of the students played a piece by Debussy with which I was not familiar. Rather than try to fake familiarity with it, I admitted to not knowing it. And I said, well, look, I've never heard this piece before, but I'll just give you my gut reactions as you know this piece much better than I do. Maybe that bit of honesty scored points with the students. I don't know. But anyhow, later that day I was offered the position. This was early March, and spring had arrived with beautiful, sunny 70 degree weather, while Iowa was deeply entrenched in snowy winter. My wife and I were thrilled to be moving to California and we moved out here in August of 1976.

**Putnam:**

Stockton has never been the same since.

**Wiens:**

I don't know about that!

**Putnam:**

Oh, tell me about the collegiality within the conservatory faculty. Has that been a bonus to you, or has that been a disappointment?

**Wiens:**

On the contrary, I think it's one of the things that the conservatory faculty and students have talked about forever, and it has been the case pretty much universally. I think that the example is set from the faculty relationships themselves, which are very warm and there's been very little in the way of inter-personal conflict between members of the faculty over the course of those decades. In the academic world, as I'm sure you know from your experience as a member of a variety of faculties, it seems like the environment sometimes breeds petty rivalries. There are very political environments within departments in some units, but there has not been that kind of situation in the Conservatory. I don't know to what extent there are such issues anywhere else in our university, but the Conservatory faculty treat each other with respect. There haven't been major angry things going on that I'm aware of over the years, and I think that the students also are influenced by the cordiality amongst the faculty and are very mutually supportive. The world of classical music is a very small one relatively speaking, and there are not that many people that do what we do and what the students are learning to do, and who can appreciate it because they do it themselves. One had better value those who understand why you're doing this and give them respect, people who also love this art and understand why we devote our lives to it. Rather than sit there fighting with them, and fighting in the academic world quite often over crumbs. I think that the atmosphere of mutual respect passes on to the students. In our studio classes where the students make comments about each another's playing, every once in a while a student will come in and be a little bit abrasive in the way criticism is delivered. Usually very quickly we are trying to cultivate diplomacy, and yes, encourage the students to offer advice or offer reactions but to couch them in supportive terms and say something positive before one says something negative. And don't let one's ego get in the way. And I think that atmosphere just seems to pervade the conservatory. And it's something that we treasure, perhaps above almost any other aspect of our Conservatory, that we live in harmony and enjoy each other, and don't feel like somebody is scheming behind your back to somehow undermine your status or your work.

**Putnam:**

In my seven years at Pacific Chaplain, the Conservatory students were almost an idealized community to me, and I saw how supportive they were in working together. I would often go to student recitals and write a little fan note afterwards, and mention how it seemed they were being so supportive of one another. It's sort of an exemplary demonstration, I felt, of what the university could offer to students.

**Wiens:**

One fun tradition that started in recent years at student recitals is where the musical sororities and fraternities serenade the performer at the reception afterwards. Maybe you've seen that. They sing a fraternity or sorority song in tribute to the person who just performed while the soloist stands there. The whole reception goes on hold while this occurs, and usually the parents of the student and friends from across campus are there and get to experience this. It's very endearing how incredibly supportive they are of each other, and I would be real surprised

if this goes on at many music schools. I think maybe it's partly that they're all in big ensembles together, whether it's the orchestra, the band, or the choirs, and so they have these common experiences that have led to a lot of bonding.

**Putnam:**

What have been your observations about the conservatory's faculty and its relationship with other disciplines and the University?

**Wiens:**

Well, I'm not as good an example of that as others because, aside from being having served on a few committees here and there across campus with things like academic affairs and the grant committees like CAPD and all, I haven't gotten involved otherwise in university governance beyond the conservatory. I actually have had more than my share of governance within the conservatory. I have been the faculty chair innumerable times and served on the evaluation committee many times. In more recent years I have taken on some administrative roles but I have not had a huge amount of engagement outside the conservatory with my academic colleagues in other units. Some of whom I've gotten to know, like Jim Blankenship, from playing golf with them. I don't think that's where you and I started to know each other. Some colleagues I have come to know are people who've come to my recitals and become friends. I feel like I know several people around the university, but not as many as I should. After all the years I've been here that's probably my fault rather than anybody else's or any problem of the system.

**Putnam:**

Is there, no pun intended, a special harmony between the world of music and the world of mathematics that might build a bridge for you?

**Wiens:**

They say the two have a lot in common. Because a lot of mathematical principles are involved in musical construction, but I don't think it practically finds its way into relationships, per se, where musicians and mathematicians are necessarily drawn to each other personally! Less so as disciplines, for example, than with historians, where you can tie in actual history with musical history. For example, Beethoven composing something influenced by Napoleon's besieging Vienna. My own research activities have usually been concerned with a specific composer and his compositional output. So usually I am researching the history underlying the life and work of these composers to some extent. And so I've done projects with Aaron Copland, with Grieg, with Prokofiev- I feel like I'm missing some people. Some projects were more general. One year I created a program of music from various nationalities, and brought in music from Asia, South America, and Russia for example. But with these projects I think the one place where I have

really been engaged with the university and one of the things for which I'm the most grateful to the University of the Pacific is the great support that's been there for projects of the sort that I have taken on. I don't think there's much of anything that I did professionally that was beyond the smallest level of activity that didn't have university grant support behind it. And that was all coming from either FRC or CAPD. The Rupley-Church grants for international projects helped support so many of my international activities. The first international project was probably the recording of my cd in Slovakia. That got some university support. My trip to the Soviet Union was largely underwritten by a grant of some sort, and so was my trip to Poland and the trip to Norway. In each case I was able to apply for a grant and, whether or not the funding was huge, it made possible things that would have been very hard to afford to do out of my own pocket. I remember making reference earlier to the internationally renowned pianist and teacher John Perry, who was at USC for many years. When I got grants to go and work with him on some of these projects he expressed surprise that somebody who was a senior ranking Professor could get access to grants. He said that at USC it seemed like almost all the grant money was reserved for untenured people to be able to build credentials for tenure. He did not feel like that kind of resource was available to him as a senior professor at USC. So I've been very grateful that the University of the Pacific has had that level of support available for research activity through the two grant committees, and I've gone to those particular wells probably more than my share of times.

**Putnam:**

Throughout your career, have there been changes in how piano is being taught?

**Wiens:**

Well, I think that there have been some studies that have changed the understanding of the physiology of piano playing, especially related to the approaches that can cause musicians' injury. There were long-standing practices, for example, of a traditional German approach where one raised one's fingers high off the keyboard, where you'd stretch them up and bang them down hard against the bottom of the key. Later developments encouraged more flexibility in the arm and hand, and choreographing movements to keep your hands and arms very comfortable. These developments have done a lot, I believe, to reduce injury among pianists. Injuries have been very common among pianists, particularly tendonitis and carpal tunnel syndrome. But also some even more insidious things like focal dystonia, which are nerve related shutdowns that have hit some of the most famous artists in the world, and the research on that still is fairly young. I think many of the injuries that have occurred are related not just to over-practice but often to ill-conceived practice habits. It is possible that physical endurance in some situations in piano playing may come into play, but not nearly as much as one would think, and there are so many things we can do to keep one's arms and hands comfortable. Most of that pedagogy has really developed in the last thirty to forty years, with an increased awareness of the avoidance of injury. So I think that's had a bearing on how piano is taught physically. There are always new ideas about how to teach expressiveness, how to teach

memorization, or sight-reading, or theory. We are all still influenced very heavily by what we were taught and how we were taught it, and it's very easy to just end up passing on the information you were given, and sometimes that information you got without explanation. And so you try to get somebody to do what you do without necessarily being able to justify its purpose. But I think teaching, one hopes, is an evolutionary process for each individual. I know that my teaching has changed over the years. I remember one student early on at Pacific saying when I was asking him to do something "aren't you just nitpicking" and he might have been right! And nitpicking perhaps has its place. But I think sometimes one also needs to learn when not to say things as well as when to say things, and that all becomes part of teaching strategy, and when to let things develop on their own and not to try to control every phrase and every nuance.

**Putnam:**

Have you had some students who just been sort of breathtakingly adept and have given you great pride in them or gratification, I should say in the teaching relationship?

**Wiens:**

Yes, indeed. There have been many over the years. I'm not sure that there are examples where I can say, oh, this person's having this great career as a performer, though quite a few of them have found their way into some level of college teaching. Some are teaching in four-year universities, some in part-time teaching positions in the community colleges of California. At least one has been a chair of a music department back east. Yet not everyone has ended up staying in music, no matter how gifted musically that person might be. One of my favorite examples is a young woman who came to study with me and got a double degree in piano performance and music management and then went on got a master's in performance at the Manhattan School of Music, then decided to go to Davis law school. And I might add that the dean of the law school said that her musical background was one of the things that they found most interesting. Anyhow, she was at Davis for one year and wasn't sure she was going to be able to make it. But she was so successful she transferred to Harvard Law School, got her Harvard Law degree, and is now practicing real estate law in LA. From what I understand she was heralded a few years ago by the LA Times, or one of those publications, as one of the up and coming female lawyers in Los Angeles. People can be a really fine musician and pianist and great student, but find their way into all sorts of other directions professionally while music is still a major part of one's life.

**Putnam:**

Alright, let's talk about the instruments. How important is having the right instrument and how critical is that to the final product of the music, and also I want to ask you about the story of the university getting the Steinways.

**Wiens:**

The amount of resistance there is in the piano's action and the quality of sound you get from it are very important factors in your ability to develop adequate strength in your fingers and muscular sensitivity to touch that will translate from one instrument to another. One of the things that is definitely true of pianists is that we move from instrument to instrument. When we play, we don't take our instrument with us unless we are Horowitz or Van Cliburn or somebody like that. And so you're often subjected to instruments that are very different than what you've been practicing on. And so you want to be able to move from a lighter action to a stiffer action. It's a lot easier to move from a stiffer action to a lighter action. In my first years after I came to Pacific our practice instruments were what my colleague Rex Cooper humorously called piano-shaped objects, and they were in pretty poor repair. There was hardly a good instrument among them. It was when Steven Anderson was here as Dean that he decided to try to address that issue. At that time there was a practice in vogue which I think is still going on, with the Steinway Company trying to convert schools to become all-Steinway schools. They did it by means of creative financing, but the idea was that a school would make huge purchases of inventory all at once. For several years, and for a period of time in between living with the piano-shaped objects and the purchase of the Steinways, we were renting pianos free from Yamaha dealers in town. Yamaha and Kawai, two major piano manufacturers, had a strategy where they would provide a complete fleet of new instruments to a school, and take all your old instruments out and try to sell them. But they basically took possession of them. They gave you their new instruments for a year on lease without charge, and then at the end of the year they would have a sale on your campus of these instruments, using the reputation (and site) of the Conservatory to help sell them. And they would sell them basically as almost new instruments with very modest discounting. And people would come buy them and then they would put a whole new fleet of instruments in our practice facilities for the next year. This went on for several years and many, many music schools were, and perhaps still are, a part of these programs. Unfortunately, in August of one year the Yamaha dealership in Stockton went out of business. And suddenly we had no pianos at all, though we must have still had some piano-shaped objects because we ended up with a few, but less, of those. It was in this environment that Dean Steve Anderson decided that we should try to become an all-Steinway school, and so the negotiation started. I think he negotiated with the university to underwrite a major part of this investment by loaning the capital to the conservatory, perhaps as much as a half-million dollars. Thus the Conservatory assumed that as a debt, which they have been paying back year-by-year to the university. Some of that got written into "lab fees" for the students, fees for the use of the instruments, etc. At the point of that Steinway purchase, we had always had one concert grand. Early in my years at Pacific we bought a second concert grand but it was badly flawed from the beginning. We had purchased it slightly used, and we didn't realize it had been doctored with lacquer or something like that in a very uneven way and immediately became almost unplayable. So we had two concert Steinways, one of which was the older one and one of which was this newer one which was flawed. We even brought Horowitz's technician in to try to deal with it, as he was traveling in the area, but even he could not succeed in making it a workable instrument. So it sat in the hall for a long

time basically unused. Well, when this Steinway purchase got set up, the idea was that we would buy one new concert grand and trade in the flawed one, and then we would buy six grands for the practice rooms and a fleet of Boston uprights, made by a subsidiary company that Steinway owns. We also bought for our two piano teaching studios four seven-foot Steinway, two of which ended up in my studio and two in my colleague Rex Cooper's studio. That added up to half a million dollars. We think that's made a tremendous difference in the way our students are progressing as pianists because they're actually playing on state-of-the-art instruments, with the action working the way a piano should. These instruments will respond to subtleties of nuance in a way that lesser instruments will not. And a young musician is not going to bother striving for such subtleties if the instrument doesn't respond. I think the purchase of the Steinways has strengthened our students' playing considerably over the years. We now have two concert Steinways, including the older one which has been rebuilt and the one we bought in New York. I forgot to mention that the Recital Hall Steinway was part of that purchase, which is one of the best seven-foots we bought.

**Putnam:**

That's very impressive. Thank you. Think about other things around the conservatory. You and your wife were on the same faculty. What are some of the enhancements, and are there any complications of having a couple in the same department?

**Wiens:**

Well, I think the virtues of it are that you both understand everything each other is going through in terms of how the school works, and you go to the same concerts and events and you develop the same friendships. In many cases they're built around one member of the couple or the other, but still the friendships become joint friendships, and you do all the social things together. For many years we used to perform together, which was another bonus. As far as drawbacks are concerned, I suppose it's almost the flip side of that, that when you come home your conversations are still about the same things, the same experiences, and the same issues. As opposed to somebody who has come home from working in a law firm, for example, offering some new kinds of adventures, stories, or experiences that are not the same set of interests that you both had in common. That said, working together in the same department has been wonderful. We've shared a wall at Buck Hall for the last twenty years. We were approximately eight feet apart through that wall on the second floor of Buck Hall all day long without even seeing each other. We might have waved to each other on the way to the restroom or something. But I think that it's really been a joy to be able to share that same work environment and those friendships. Now we have come into retirement, and are in the first year where we're both retired. (I retired a year earlier.) That has been complicated obviously by the pandemic, which put a damper on a lot of the things that we might have done, especially involving travel which we always have enjoyed doing together. We've been shut down for this period of time and so we're staying at home. And that's just the way it is right now. I still think it's my first piano teacher, Mrs. Shepler, who once said "don't ever marry a non-musician", and



I've heard somebody else say "don't ever marry a musician", (and that came from a musician.) I think I'd have to say I'm of the camp that favors a musician marrying a musician. A musician is much more likely to understand the demands that the profession puts on you. For example, a musician will understand the long hours you have to spend practicing and preparing for concerts by yourself, times when you're not together and doing things together. And I think musicians will also understand the emotions behind what you're doing and be able to respond themselves to whatever emotion you are trying to convey. My wife has been my sounding board before any program I ever played. She's the first one to hear it. We will set a fire in the fireplace, assuming it is not a no-burn day, and she'll sit down there and listen to me give an hour-and-a-half program for her. That is the first level of getting any nervousness out, and I will get her responses to things she really liked and any input she feels might help. Sometimes she'll come into the concert hall to hear what I sound like in there, to hear if something is not working acoustically in that environment. And so I think it's tremendously valuable to be married to a knowledgeable musician when you are a musician yourself.

**Putnam:**

And you, you're married to a very special person and-

**Wiens:**

I am indeed!

**Putnam:**

What's retirement like, how are you feeling about being retired? Do you miss your life at the Conservatory? What is it you miss about being on campus?

**Wiens:**

Well, I'm not really totally retired at this time. I promised several students when they arrived on campus that I was going to see them through their education. And when I left a couple of years early because of the retirement incentive that I took, along with a lot of other faculty members, I felt like I owed it to those students to try to see them through to graduation if I could. In fact I negotiated with Dean Witte ahead of time that when I came to such a juncture I might want to try to do what he calls a teach out, and that is what I've been doing. I have two performance majors, a music education major, and a person getting a double major including a BA in music and a speech pathology degree. I'm going to lose two of the seniors this year, so I'll be down to just the other two. But I've been teaching them on zoom like everybody else, for four hours a week and then I also have a private studio for another five to six hours a week. So I'm still working about 10 hours a week, and in that sense it doesn't feel like total retirement. And I will continue the private teaching when the tie with the university gets cut, which probably will be after another year. I will continue to teach privately, I'm sure, until I drop. But in the meantime, there's been a little more time for golf and a more relaxed lifestyle.

**Putnam:**

One of the things I've learned from Voice students was the gift of Ricola!

**Wiens:**

Yes, and there were times in my teaching when I was teaching long days, and my voice would begin cracking and be weak by the end of the day.

**Putnam:**

Well, I guess I must have learned about it when I was Chaplain, and before I have any speaking engagement Ricola is going in my mouth and now Gillian, who has some allergies, uses it as well. One of the things I so admire about you is the disciplines of your life. I know that playing the piano requires a great deal of discipline. But also when it comes to golf, you practice more than any other golfer that I know of other than a professional.

**Wiens:**

I used to practice golf more, and I was taking lessons on a weekly basis for a long time, which again the pandemic shut down. I think my own feeling is that on a scale of one to hundred, hundred being the best and one being the worst, my natural athletic prowess is somewhere around two. I used to joke that when I was in high school or junior high school and they were choosing up sides, and the students were choosing who was going to be on their team, I would be one of the last two standing waiting to be chosen and they would think very hard. I don't consider myself especially athletically coordinated. And the one thing I have taken to heart is that the only way I could be any better than hopeless at any sport was to get lots of instruction and to practice. I wish that I saw the productivity from golf practice that I feel like I get from piano practice, because I know that when I sit at the piano I'm going to get up afterward and have something accomplished, and I can say, okay, that's better than it was. And that's not what happens after any experience on the driving range. Quite often, I feel like all I've done is reinforced whatever it is I was not supposed to be doing. It has helped though. And I think that had I not taken all those lessons and probably more that in the practicing that had I not done that I would be far worse than I am. I'm still not very good, but I at least am better than I think I would have been.

**Putnam:**

I know you set a high standard for yourself and I heard some rumors about threats to your piano playing based on your athletic career. I've always been very concerned about you protecting your hands and you've shared with me a story or two that I think would merit mention.

**Wiens:**

Well, it's true that the only serious injuries that I have ever had were broken fingers. I've sprained an ankle, but I've never broken any other bones except my fingers, and I've done that three times and every one of them was involved in one of these athletic pursuits in which I had no talent and in which I probably should not have been participating. The first one was Peewee baseball. When I was about eight or nine years old I somehow found myself in the position of catcher, which I'd never done before, and I didn't even have a catcher's mitt. The runner came around third, and the ball came into my hands, I guess (I don't even know where the ball was,) but the runner ran into my glove and hit my left thumb, bending it to the point that it broke. And so I had to have a cast on my hand that covered it all the way down to my second knuckles. I had, in fact, to accompany a glee club concert in junior high school with a cast on my left hand. I arranged a few things to be smaller chords. That was the first injury, and then the second one occurred when I was at Drake University and I was playing tennis, which I was more into in those days. My opponent hit a shot that came close to my body, and as my racket came back, the fifth finger of my right hand got stuck in the pocket of my shorts! That is, of course, so completely uncoordinated, but the racket and the rest of my hand continued back after the ball, leaving the finger where it was. And the finger snapped inside the hand. That might have been the only time I had to cancel something for an injury, but it occurred before one of the piano competitions in which I ended up having some success. It was about six weeks before I was supposed to be in the Denver Symphony Competition and I was learning the Grieg Concerto, which I've played here in Stockton but this was when I first learned it. I was preparing that piece and suddenly I had no functioning right hand for three weeks. So I had three weeks in which to put the concerto together. And it was the second of two concertos I needed for the competition. I figured I wouldn't even be asked to play it, but it ended up being the only one they listened to. The last broken finger episode was when my son was maybe eight or nine, and we were over at Mabel Barron school in Stockton in the early winter playing football. It was just the two of us, and the ground was a little bit wet and some little three-year-old came along and wanted to join the game. So we had him join my son, Jeff, the two of them playing against me. They kicked off to me and I caught the ball and quickly did this juking move to get away from the three-year-old and immediately went down and landed on my second finger. This time I broke that second finger of my right hand. So that just goes to show how uncoordinated I am. As for golf, I don't think I've ever really hurt my hand, though sometimes I'll feel a little stiffness from it. I struggle to keep from hitting the ball thin most of the time. And one time, when I was particularly frustrated hitting a bucket of balls by my inability to find the ground, I slammed the club down to the ground in an attempt to find where the ground was, hit hard into the dirt about three inches behind where the ball was supposed to be, and felt like I just about broke my whole hand. I survived that tantrum, however. Fortunately that's the closest in golf. I have come to injuring myself.

**Putnam:**

I'd like to chat with you a little bit about other experiences at the university, programs, curriculum, personnel, etc.

**Wiens:**

Well, I think that is what the oral history project hopes to document. The instructions talked about changes in curriculum, what courses are innovative programs that I might have helped to develop, and challenges, whom did I report to, who reported to me. About some of this I wouldn't have any particular answers. For example, was the committee structure effective? I think it worked well enough. They asked the interviewee to talk about individuals. I think the problem with discussing individuals, such as "who was most memorable" and "who was most helpful", is that you'll probably leave somebody out that you don't want to on a permanent written archive. I certainly want to mention that I have felt very fortunate to have known particularly well the last two presidents and the last two provosts, including the current Provost. At the university I have considered every one of them to be friends. I have played golf with former president Don De Rosa, and Phil and Carol Gilbertson came to my recitals and performances all the time. And Provost Maria Pallavicini and former president Pam Eibeck have been very supportive. But if I start talking about colleagues, and say that this person was especially helpful to me but then forget to acknowledge others...I'm not sure that that's something that I want to go into. There are so many that I could name who have been helpful or supportive, including special colleagues and special, special friends. As for going into controversies and things like that, I don't think there's been any that I would want to address.

One of the curricular things that I was involved with that I might say I helped to develop, in the way piano teaching and much applied teaching at the conservatory now takes place, was the idea of studio sharing. This began as part of a piano department practice, that our upper-class performance majors would get instruction from somebody in addition to their primary teacher. A junior or senior would end up having an hour and a half with the principal mentor or private teacher, and an additional half hour with another member of the faculty. This way there was cross pollination from different mentors that had never existed before. Within a year or two this practice with performance majors had infused the entire conservatory and now everybody does that if there's an alternative teacher of the same instrument. If there's only one trombone teacher, you don't necessarily send trombone students to the French horn faculty member, but if there are multiple teachers of the same instrument one might have access to the expertise of both. First of all, I think it beefed up the amount of one-on-one instruction the students got during their time on campus, and also led to the valuable feeling that they had two mentors. I know the voice department adopted this too. This is one of the things maybe that is somewhat unique at the conservatory, and probably is only possible because of the collegiality in the Conservatory, the fact that that works. At a lot of schools there is a sense of ownership of students, so much so that faculty members do not want their students to even talk to students of other teachers. This sharing of students at our Conservatory has been very positive for the students, who end up feeling like they have two mentors seriously invested in them, whom they can ask for references and who really care about them

In addition, we've shared studio classes so that that my colleague and I would take turns running a studio class performance class, where everybody gets together to perform. We would

combine the studios for that purpose and all of the students would perform for each other, no matter which studio was their “home studio” and we would take turns mentoring that class. I'm not sure that the studio sharing is surviving some of the curricular changes that are occurring now.

I think the most recent curricular changes have been designed to free up student choice. The tradition in musical education across the country over the decades has been that everything is very formalized. You take this much theory, you take this much music history, and you take this much keyboard literature. Everything you take is spelled out and pretty rigidly required. You have the opportunity to choose two or three courses over the course of your education and the rest of it's all pre-ordained, and those courses are usually in general studies, and even those are also subject to categories that restrict your freedom of choice. There was a curricular development that was instituted several years ago to try to allow students more choice in how their education occurs and is tailored more to what they want to do career-wise. So somebody that wants to be a professional performer may take a certain group of courses, somebody that wants to be a professional composer may take another group of courses, and somebody that wants to specialize in teaching takes another group of courses. They have a menu of choices that's much broader than just the GE menu that existed in the past. And so this is in process right now.

Another curricular enhancement is the general move to include more than classical music in the required study of all young musicians these days. I think the National Association of Schools of Music, our accrediting organization, has recognized that our classical music field has some limitations in terms of its survivability and marketability, and that people going into this field often need skills beyond being able to play their part in a symphonic composition or to be able to teach a classical instrument. They need to be able to function in a recording studio playing show music and reading a chart, for example. They may need to be able to improvise, and they may need to be able to cross over into jazz a little bit. They may need to be able to function comfortably with music technology in a way that has become so much more necessary. This is especially true now in this pandemic era, where everybody's fussing with Zoom technology and having to make home recordings for their recitals and for juries. So it seems quite appropriate to modernize the music curriculum so that our students are really equipped to deal with the 21st century. This is a favorite topic of Dean Peter Witte, and he has been instrumental in bringing this to the fore and increasing our efforts to train our musicians to be more modern musicians than they would have been 20 years ago. And so I think this is where the curriculum is really evolving and we're certainly not alone in this regard. This is the wave that is hitting music schools everywhere. If you want to be current and want to be able to attract students and train them for what they're going to face, this has to be one of the ways you have to go.

**Putnam:**

I find that very exciting. Do you think there is universal support for that at the University?

**Wiens:**

I retired from my full-time responsibilities before I had a chance to be aware of any organized resistance if there has been any, so I do not know how people feel about it. I think that it's always challenging for most people to change, to break out of old patterns of behavior and old traditions of teaching. And I think learning to teach online during the pandemic has been an overwhelming challenge to change for all of us. That may, in fact, impact us in ways long after the pandemic is over. One of the things that Peter Witte arranged very early is to move practice pianos into our students' homes and apartments so our students had a place to practice where they wouldn't need to get into a public facility where they might be exposed to the virus. And every music student received a microphone that was, I believe, basically paid for by conservatory funds so that they could record on zoom with decent quality. Zoom sound without a quality microphone is pretty bad so this helped us get through the pandemic in the best manner possible. We definitely have needed to learn how to function in a very different world than we would have had to 20-30 years ago, and the pandemic has added a huge new dimension to that.

**Putnam:**

Thank you for picking up on these topics that I think will be very germane to the oral history project here.

**Wiens:**

I don't know that there's too much more of this about which I need to speak. The administrative position I had was to serve as Chairman of Performance Studies, which is half of the school, the performance side, the ensembles and the performance faculty. The other half is Music Studies, representing the academic disciplines of music. I served as Chair of Performance Studies for several years, which, in turn, put me on the Conservatory Planning and Priorities Committee, CPPC. And that committee met with the Dean on a regular weekly basis, and that started some years ago and it's gone through a process with different makeup and different names, but it's been there with several deans for a long time. And I think it's been an important advisory group of faculty working for planning and curricular change. I think the working relationships between the faculty and the administrators have been pretty good. I certainly felt like my own working relationship with faculty and administrators has always been positive.

I did serve as an academic advisor, and advising is a role that has become increasingly important in the retention of students, of course, at the university. There was an attempt to try to divide certain parts of advising recently into transactional advising and career advising. The transactional side consisted of advising students that they had to take this course, fulfill these requirements, take these prerequisites, etc. A lot of this has been turned over to administrative staff to help out with that process and the little wrinkles that come up where, for example, the registrar has this section number and you have a different section number, and the students

end up with the wrong number. We have been very fortunate to have a wonderful staff to help through those stormy seas of administrative activity and the curricular recording of things.

One of the questions for these interviews asks whether Pacific has met one's expectations, and I would say absolutely. It has what I value the most at Pacific. First of all, I would say the cordial relationship with the faculty around me and the administrators that I have known. That's been very valuable to me, and the friendships that I've formed have been intensely valuable to me. I've also appreciated the support I've received. I mentioned earlier the support from grant committees that was something you had to apply for and get, but just the moral support from the university and the Conservatory for my continuing commitment to my active career. When I was hired, there was a pledge of some support, including financial support, to keep my career going. And I think an important part of that was when I went through the tenure process without a doctorate, and it was recognized that I had the equivalent as far as the conservatory and the university was concerned. And that was, of course, very satisfying. But also just the freedom to go off on concert tours. I had certain structures I tried to follow, where I wouldn't be gone more than three weeks out of a semester, and there was one semester when I missed five weeks one semester when the Russian invitation appeared. I wasn't expecting it and I already had other tours going and when that happened, suddenly, I had to be gone another two-and-a-half weeks. The one thing that was part of that package always was that I was expected to make up the lessons I missed, and that particular semester I owed 100 hours of makeup lessons and I made them all up, but I was teaching, basically, when I was in town from morning till night. That was stressful, especially trying to practice to get ready for something else, but at times they allowed me to hire a colleague to take my place out of my own pocket. But to be able to pay somebody very competent to teach in my place was very invaluable. I've always been given that flexibility, and felt like the administrators valued my performing activities and gave me that kind of support and that meant a lot to me. So I think the University of the Pacific has been a very lovely place to work, and I think I could have been in any number of institutions where I would not have had such a wonderful 43 years.

**Putnam:**

Yeah, okay, is there anything else?

**Wiens:**

I think that'll do it.