

Interview of Dr. Gary Galván
By Gina L. Bixler
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Bixler: This is Gina Bixler. I'm a student at La Salle University in the history master's program. It's the early evening on Thursday February 5, 2015. I'm here at La Salle with Dr. Gary Galván. A La Salle music instructor, Dr. Galván completed his Ph.D. in historical musicology at the University of Florida, as well as complimentary studies in art history and digital media. He is also the curator of the Fleisher Collection – the Edwin A. Fleisher Collection of Orchestral Music – at the Free Library of Philadelphia. His work with the Fleisher Collection will be the focus of this interview. Welcome, again, Dr. Galván.

Galván: Thank you very much, Gina Bixler

Bixler: So let's see here...

Galván: You have permission to record me for this interview.

Bixler: Again.

Galván: Indeed

Bixler: Good, thank you.

Galván: For real, this time.

Bixler: Yes. Well, you saw me hit the button.

Galván: Yes, for real record. Not just – I gave permission last time, but you have my permission to actually record this...

Bixler: This time.

Galván: Yes.

Bixler: Okay. All right so, first, or should I say second, please give us a little background on the statics of the collection, or attributes of collection. What does it do? What is it?

Galván: We'll start with "What is the Fleisher Collection?"

Bixler: I know I'm not supposed to be asking you all this at once, but since we messed this up.

1:18

Galván: That's okay. Let's start with "what is the Fleisher Collection?" The Fleisher Collection, the Edwin A. Fleisher Collection of Orchestral Music, is the largest circulating collection of orchestral performance scores in the world. We send full performance sets out to orchestras, any established orchestra from amateur up through full professional, anywhere around the world for performances and recordings. A performance set, if somebody doesn't know what a performance set is, a performance set is all the music that you would need to execute a given piece. For example, if I say Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, you will envision a conductor standing up in front of an orchestra and everybody playing music. Well, the conductor has a score in front of him or her and every member of the orchestra will have their individual part to play and they need the sheet music for that. Every one of our performance sets has everything that you would need to put in front of an orchestra right now in order to perform any of the given titles that we have. We have over 22,000 titles. Many are out of print, rare, nonexistent elsewhere in the world, and, again, we send these out for recording and performances all over the world. So, that's what we are.

Last year we sent out 23,342 scores and parts. It's somewhere in the order of 900 to 1,000 actual compositions, but the number of scores and parts we send out we keep track of. That was 440 different orders that we filled. Now, some of the orders are actually from the same organizations. For example, we have a small reading orchestra in Philadelphia called the Orchestral Society of Philadelphia. They are a group of amateurs, people that really love the music, and they borrow sets from us. They go and they rehearse, and they play them just really for their own edification, for their own pleasure. They return them when they're done. They don't do public performances; they don't do recordings. They just play for the love of playing. So we actually get to lend them some unusual things that we otherwise cannot legally lend to anybody that would be performing live. Just because of copyright issues. So that's what we are.

Bixler: Before you talked a little bit about how stuff goes out around the world. Can you talk a little bit more about that for the folks at home?

Galván: Absolutely. *(both laugh)* For the folks at home, driving in your car right now. We circulate to six out of seven continents. Although everybody in Antarctica is dressed very well for the performances, there's no orchestras there. *(both laugh)* I'd love to see them borrow Ralph Vaughn Williams' Antarctic Symphony. You wouldn't need a wind machine. *(makes wind blowing noise)* It would do it all itself. Actually this last year, I was looking at in order to prepare for this, I just kind of casually looked through these 440 orders, in addition to sending things all across the United States, I mean literally across

the United States, we sent things last year to several different performing organizations in Germany, organizations in Russia, France, Poland, Hungary, Belgium, and even Croatia. In South America we recently circulated things to both Brazil and Argentina. Mexico, there's an orchestra there, the Orquesta Sinfónica de San Luis Potosí, borrowed from us I think about four times last year. Actually made a recording of Woldemar Bargiel stuff that they actually sent to us. We're going to feature that in an upcoming radio show. We sent music to a high school in Israel and we sent music down under to Australia as well.

5:27

Bixler: Now before you mentioned also that a lot of the works are rare or out of print, how does the Fleisher Collection have them and not other places?

Galván: Our founder Edwin Fleisher began purchasing music for what was actually the first training orchestra in the United States. There's always been a very euro-centric slant to classical music. If you wanted to perform in an orchestra, you had to go to Europe to train. If you go back, Louis Moreau Gottschalk tried to get into the Paris Conservatory. He was an American pianist, born in Louisiana, virtuosic: the man was on the order of Franz List. The Paris Conservatory wouldn't even listen to him. They rejected him sight unseen because he was from the U.S. and that was a land of train engines, steam engines. Ten, fifteen years later, Edward MacDowell actually auditioned, got into the Paris Conservatory, which was a big leap. Most composers in the U.S. had trained in Europe. In 1900 the Philadelphia Orchestra was run by Fritz Scheel a German conductor, comprised all German musicians, and rehearsals we conducted in German.

So when Edwin started this small training orchestra, he actually had to have performance sets for them to use. So he started purchasing things and from 1909 until he died in 1959, he continued to sponsor the purchase of things. He actually sponsored a program where we wrote to composers for their manuscripts that were unpublished and produced performance sets.¹ Now between 1909 and today there have been two world wars, there have been revolutions in Central and South America, and those kind of events they don't distinguish what gets destroyed. When we dropped bombs on Germany, when we dropped bombs on Berlin, publishing houses were blown up along with everything else. If music was destroyed, it burned up; plates were destroyed, and if we had sets, we might wind up being the only place where the set exists because the rest of the music was destroyed or maybe in addition to other people not preserving it. So there are many pieces like that where we just have the only thing.

¹ WPA Music Copying Project

8:06

Bixler: So who was this Edwin Fleisher guy? Why did he just start collecting all this music? What made him want to do that?

Galván: He was a mensch (*both laugh*). The Fleisher family goes back into the early 1800s. His grandfather, Benjamin Fleisher, came to this country with his wife and with his brother in law and his brother in law's wife and they started a dry goods firm in out in Erie, PA. Which, you know, I guess you'd have to go back and look at how Erie was at the time and how it was more remote. Benjamin died. Abraham Adler, a millinery salesman, or who owned a millenary house, I guess Mrs. Fleisher liked hats. They wound up marrying. He took, really, hold of the family, embraced the family. All of them were known as great philanthropists, even back to that generation. The family eventually wound up in Philadelphia. Edwin's uncle and father started the first worsted wool factory in the U.S., up by Eakins Oval right outside, what at the time was the reservoir, which is now the Art Museum. They made a fortune and when the kids were raised, they had been raised in philanthropy. Edwin's father was involved in all kinds of philanthropies.

Edwin was the youngest of five children. He attended Harvard University for just an AB degree, essentially what we would think of as a Bachelor of Arts. Took one course in harmonization with, I think it was Spalding. Had to have some skills in piano and such. His mother actually was a pianist who was well respected for these musical soirees and for little recitals she would do. Every Sunday they'd have recitals at the house. In the early 1900s a couple of kids wound up approaching him and said look, we'd like to start an orchestra. We don't have a place to rehearse, we really don't have music, and can you help us? From what I've looked at from all the documents, it appears as if a lot of these kids were students of members of the Philadelphia Orchestra. They were getting musical lessons, but these were kids who couldn't afford to go to the conservatories.

There were no conservatories in the United States. Curtis [Institute of Music] hadn't formed. Settlement Music School wasn't formed. It just wasn't existent. There was no way to do that in the U.S. He got these 65 boys together from ages 7 to 17, took them to I think there was a building down in southeast Philadelphia supposedly that his sister owned. They got together and played some music. The instruments were awful and the kids were pretty bad and he was really moved by their enthusiasm. In 1909 he started what was known as the little Symphony Club. They'd chartered by 1914, 1915. He bought a house at 1235 Pine St., which is now a mental crisis facility: it's a five-story house. By 1915 the organization had grown to be a junior string orchestra, a senior string orchestra, and a full symphony orchestra that would perform at the end of the season. They had theory classes. They had two piano classes, meaning not two different piano classes, but piano classes

where two pianos would be played at once, where people would be learning that type of repertoire. Again, by the middle of the nineteen-teens, it was now open to males and females of every race and that's astounding. There were black members fifty years, a half a century before civil rights were instituted. We're talking about when Jim Crow laws are de facto; they're the rule of the land and things are segregated, even here in the Northeast.

12:12

So, I'm thinking, how far away from your question, "who was Edwin Fleisher?" That's who he was. So he actually retired from being the company treasurer for his father and uncle around 1915 and devoted himself to this little Symphony Club. He ran it for twenty years. He was not the conductor. In fact, he would sit in at the back of the viola section and play viola for performances. William Happich was the long-term conductor of that, but it was also conducted by a couple of other prestigious people who wound up working in conservatories here in the United States. He really ran it for twenty years. Really focused, garnered attention, made headlines all through Philadelphia newspapers.

13:00

End of first part of interview transcription.

53:08

Bixler: So obviously, these archives are another reason why the collection is special and so important?

Galván: Absolutely, it tells the story of the Pan-American symphonic coming of age. If you jump into 1920 and look at what's being performed: Beethoven. Not unlike some of the less stellar organizations today. It's a German mausoleum, it's a Russian mausoleum; you're listening to European composers, European dominated. Americans, all of sudden, start hitting the scene in the 1930s, in the 1940s, and 1950s. Serge Koussevitzky, the Boston Symphony Orchestra conductor, conducts over 70 world premieres by American composers. Who was it? Whitney, out in Louisiana, I'm sorry Louisville. Good lord, forgive me, Louisville. Louisville Orchestra, started by the mayor of all people. Robert Whitney records – well, a hundred recordings – a hundred records with American music on it. All of a sudden you see this burgeoning of American music popping up on recordings and in concerts and it coincides with Edwin Fleisher starting this drive of producing performance sets of American composers. South Americans begin appearing and, again, you look at these two incidents happening side by side. He's not the only one. There are other philanthropists, but he had the lion's share. He was the most impactful because he was actually producing the sets. One of the big important

moments in twentieth century music history is the premiere of Charles Ives' Fourth Symphony. That came from our set in Fleisher and I defy you to go back and look in any history book that attributes it, but we've got all the documentation to show it, to prove it, to show who everyone was involved.

55:12

Bixler: Over the last decade, your time at Fleisher as resident musicologist, digital projects coordinator, archival consultant...

Galván: I got to keep changing my title. It was great (*both laugh*). I just make up a new card.

Bixler: So obviously, you did have time to see what needed to happen and so you put your vision together for the Galván era of curatorship (*Galván laughs*). As we are wrapping things up here, I know you kind of started to talk a little bit about the vision for the collection, but what do you really hope to accomplish? Especially since all those projects need to be dealt with, do you plan on partnering nonprofits, maybe universities, museums? What's your vision here?

Galván: Oh God, the vision goes on and on, but let's see how much we can encapsulate it. You can't throw a rock in that collection because it would be really dangerous.

Bixler: Yes. (*both laugh*)

Galván: You can't throw a rock in that collection without hitting a dissertation topic. I want to do outreach with Temple University, with the University of Penn, with these local – with La Salle University. (*both laugh*) Okay, I'm thinking about musicological topics with them, with musicological topics. We've already done outreach with La Salle. With bringing in.. you, for example, have worked with us as an intern working on this historical piece and offered a wonderful idea about working with the American Jewish history museum². It's a huge project. It's a brilliant project that I didn't see. So inviting perspectives is important. Seeing places where we can get outreach, such as that, is one of my visions. I'm ready to listen to what people have to say. There you were as an intern who just, "Hey this would be a great idea!" You know what? You're right. You're absolutely right. Making those things happen is what's important, so the outreach there. The pope is coming this year.

² National Museum of American Jewish History

Bixler: Super pope.³

Galván: Super pope is coming this year. First South American, it's about bloody time. It's not like the South Americans, we haven't been like all of the... we're the crux of - the Latin Americans - we're the crux of who the Catholics are. *(said together)* Yes, we are the Catholics. We're looking at - I'm looking at? Yeah, "we," me and the mouse in my pocket, I guess, I don't know. I've actually talked to Janine⁴, who's been talking to Siobhan⁵, about plans for next year and I'm going to be doing outreach shortly with Curtis Institute of Music, our premiere conservatory here in Philadelphia. Trying to pick out something. I'll be researching music around religious topics. What might be appropriate for the pope's arrival and try to coordinate something where we can provide music for a Curtis ensemble to perform here in the city for the pope. That's the kind of stuff I think is important, that fits right in with Siobhan's vision of becoming a world [class], tier one research center and getting our name out there and our face out there.

58:09

So those are just a few of many, many projects. We need to, of course, prioritize. All of this isn't going to happen next year. I'm in this for the long haul. This is it for me. This is my retirement. I will not leave this institution without kicking and screaming. *(both laugh)* So I'm here for the long haul and I'm thinking about the years ahead and what we can do and the outreach to universities, to performing organizations. I'd like to take a whole thing to the Philadelphia Orchestra about Philadelphia composers. Create a focused catalog and work with them in order to get some of these things back on the stage. Give them a good focus. I mean think about it: Philadelphia orchestra presents a Philadelphia composer every month, or at every performance, or a couple every season and it becomes a vision for them too and it becomes a partnership and a way for all of us to get something out of this.

Bixler: Okay. Well great, thank you very much for your time.

Galván: Sure.

Bixler: Anything else you want to add before I cut the tape here?

Galván: *(Laughs)* Thanks for taking the time. I know that I can ramble. I get excited. I don't know how much that will come through in the tape. You know, I sound like one of the rambling homeless persons, but hopefully maybe not. I do find this collection really incredibly inspiring, really exciting. This is the career.

³ What Pope Francis is called colloquially

⁴ Janine Pollock, Rare Books Department Head, Free Library of Philadelphia

⁵ Siobhan Reardon, President and Director, Free Library of Philadelphia

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This is the dream job. I mean you talk about somebody doing what they want to do and being happy in what they do and I'm that person and that's the collection I want to be in. I want it to be so much more than it is and use every tool I have given to me by Siobhan and by the leadership in the Free Library and advance it and show what an outreach we have. We're just not an outreach to the community; we're an outreach to the world.

Bixler: Thank you, Dr. Galván.

1:00:14

End of interview.