March 2007

Stefan Sanderling oral history interview by Suzette Berkman, March 22, 2007

Stefan Sanderling (Interviewee)

Suzette Berkman (Interviewer)
SB: I am Suzette Berkman, I am sitting here with Stefan Sanderling who is the Music Director of the Florida Orchestra. It's March 22, 2007, and we very much appreciate Stefan's time, he is one busy man. Thank you very much, Stefan, for being here.

SS: Hello.

[Tape Paused]

SB: Stefan, could you tell us where you were born?

SS: Well I was born in, what at the time was East Berlin. Now it doesn't exist anymore... Berlin, East Berlin, East Germany. I would think at the height of the Cold War in 1964, August 2, 1964. And things have changed a lot. So I'm 43 years old now—almost 43—42. And I think I have seen quite some change in the world.

SB: What year were you born?

SS: In 1964.

SB: 1964.

SS: 1964.

SB: To—? Who were your parents?

SS: My parents, my father—

SB: Who are your parents?

SS: —well, yes. I always you know, [people say.] “Oh my gosh! Where are your parents?” I say, “Well, they're still around!”

SB: Yes, of course.
SS: My father is 95 now, almost 95. My father was a—I would say—rather famous conductor. Kurt Sanderling. Who had just four years earlier come back from the Soviet Union where he was an exile for more than 20 years.

SB: Why? Why was he in exile?

SS: Well, it's a Jewish family and my father had to flee Germany in 1935. And long, long, problems [inaudible] and it's a long story, complicated story. He ended up two years later in the Soviet Union.

SB: Is there a reason he chose the Soviet Union?

SS: He didn't choose the Soviet Union. He would have chosen, as many other people, the United States. But you always forget here in this country, the United States was not as welcoming as everybody thinks they were.

SB: Oh, OK.

SS: You had to have affidavits, you had to have people who vouched for you, you had to be, in a certain way, wealthy to come here. And millions of people couldn't get the visa, and my father was one of them who couldn't get a visa.

SB: Oh my.

SS: His girlfriend at the time was the daughter of one of the Chairmen of the Tres La Vanc who already existed at this time, still exists today. She, of course, had the connections and she got to San Francisco, but my father didn't. So they split in 1936. (I have no idea exactly when.) And she was allowed to go and he wasn't.

SB: That's tragic.

SS: Yes it is tragic, and part of the history.

SB: So he received an invitation to go to the Soviet Union?

SS: Well it was so much more complicated than that. My father lost his citizenship in a certain way. I don't know if you know one of the first things the Nazis did in 1935. They were at the so-called Nuremberg Gesetze. And Nuremberg is a city in Germany, and Gesetze its laws. And that had something to do with how to treat Jews from now on. Not everything happened on January 30th, 1933.¹

SB: Sure.

¹ Date that Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Nazi Germany
SS: It took a while until they really blossomed—bloomed, the Nazis. And one of the many, many things were that passports of Jews would not get renewed. And Jews would lose their citizenship if their passport runs out. And my father was on a tour. He was a pianist at the time. I think it was in Italy, but I forgot. He was on tour while that happened—Nuremberg Gesetze. And his mother called him and said, “Look, if you come back, your passport runs out. You know is not valid anymore. You will not be able to get out of the country anymore.” So it was a question of not being completely insane, of course, staying outside of Germany.

Now my father was—I need to calculate—23 at the time. And you can imagine that you don't have a huge life. He was the repetitor\(^2\) in Berlin, I think, at this time already with the Jüdisch kulturtruppen.\(^3\) Because he got fired from the Hauptstadtis Opern right away when the Nazis took over power. So the kulturtruppen, which was kind of an organization, a cultural organization by Jews—you know, for Jews, which was formed at the time to—for many purposes. One purpose was—“What do all the Jews that got fired, what do they do now?” So they had orchestras. They had operas. They had—and I'm only talking about music. It was, kulturtruppen\(^6\) was pretty much about everything you can imagine. And so I say this to show you that he didn't have anything in his pockets.

SB: Yes.

SS: I mean, he was not a wealthy person, he was nobody. And so he got to Switzerland. And [in] Switzerland some of the members of his family, the Graebler who were then luckier than he was, Leo Graebler was one of the publishers of the Frankfurter Zeitung.\(^7\) It exists as Frankfurter Allgemein Zeitung maybe the most important and most serious German newspapers. The New York Times of the—Wall Street Journal, New York Times of Germany. And he was one of them, he was the one responsible for the economy. And he later then got a visa for him and his wife and had not for little Kurt. And so they all gathered there—

SB: Isn't that something.

SS: —and it's kind of—

SB: The journey to come.

SS: Nobody really knew, “What will the next day bring?” You know?

SB: Yes.

\(^2\) Teacher or coach
\(^3\) Jewish Cultural Troupe
\(^4\) Metropolitan Opera
\(^5\) Cultural troupe
\(^6\) Ibid.
\(^7\) Frankfurt newspaper
SS: Everybody's trying to get visas. You've got also millions of stories that is part of the history that I didn't tell. One more, because it's just, one more, for this particular person. For my father it is the story in terms of literature, or in terms of, you know, history. It's just one more of millions.

SB: But where it's relevant, Stefan, is how it affected you.

SS: Yes, but it affected me in many ways. It affected me [pauses] — I would have probably grown up — well, if you even believe that I would have grown up — I would have grown up in a completely different environment if it would not have taken place, but —

SB: When your father went back to Germany, what was the atmosphere? You were born in Germany —

SS: Well, what was the atmosphere? My father always — I think I have the right to say this — always remained a German. Jewish was maybe not even the second thing in his life. I think the thing is, “Am I a musician? Or am I a German?” Is that the first thing? And then comes the other, and then maybe somewhere, much later on the — He was one of these millions of assimilated Jews for whom Judaism, especially because he's not a religious person, didn't play a big role. It just, it happened to him, and he became probably very much aware of it when the repercussions started. Until the repercussions started you know, he was not — he was just one of many other young guys.

SB: So he was happy to get back to Germany, to his life there.

SS: He was very, very happy to get back to Germany. You know this is, this is so much more complicated. Your question is not — I cannot answer the question with “Yes” and “No.” He was happy to get back to Germany for many reasons. One reason was, he was German. His upbringing was German. He was deeply German, you know? And in a good way German. The other reason why he was very happy to get back to Germany was, sometimes you are not so much happy where you go to, but sometimes you are very happy where you come from — then you can get away from that.

SB: Yes, of course.

SS: And I'm sure that had something to do with it.

SB: He married your mother —

SS: Yes, my mother —

SB: Your mother is German?

SS: My mother, yes. Yes, they met only after he came back from immigration. He had been married before.
SB: You have siblings.

SS: Yes, I have a younger brother, two and a half years younger. And I have a much older half brother, 65 I think he is.

SB: And your whole family is musical.

SS: [The] whole family is musical.

SB: What are the instruments? What do they do?

SS: Well at the end, everybody ended up being a conductor except my mother who is on the double-bass. My brother—my older brother—played violin but you know, became [a] conductor right away. And my younger brother who was a cellist, just recently started conducting and makes a career with that.

SB: Oh my goodness. Well, it seems an obvious question, but were you inspired to be a conductor because of your father?

SS: No. I mean I cannot say that it hurt that my father was a conductor, but that was not really the reason. In the certain way, you know, the contrary—I never wanted to become like my father.

SB: Interesting.

SS: You know, as a person, this is—but it was not based on some rationality, it was just based on—when you are 15, you know, you think that you will do it completely different because your parents are idiots. And in most of the cases they aren't, and some, they are.

SB: [Laughs] And they become smarter when they get older.

SS: Absolutely. And I'm not sure that you become smarter. I think you just do the same mistakes, you know?

SB: [Laughs] Yes.

SS: So, no, there was never, you know a dynasty idea. There was never the idea of well, you know, the next generation of little Sanderlings.

SB: [Laughs]

SS: On the contrary, it was always made clear to me that it is not as shiny as it looks like, this profession. Which it is not, by the way. But it turned out with many accidents, to be the thing for me.
SB: But seeing the inside story of a conductor's life helped you?

SS: Really helped, probably helped. Well it helped me that I had kind of a business model already, you know? If you go into real estate, it helps you if you know somebody—

SB: Sure.

SS: —who has already sold a couple of houses.

SB: Of course, sure.

SS: You know how to do it, then you don't start from zero. It doesn't mean that you are more or less talented.

SB: Sure.

SS: You know, it just tells you—

SB: An edge.

SS:—OK, you've got to—you make sure that the price for the house is right, you know? Otherwise you don't have a buyer.

SB: Well, as a young man, what were your thoughts? You had musical training. What instrument did you play?

SS: Started with piano. I was, you know, I was not a very inspiring musician when I was young. Maybe I was a better musician than an instrumentalist. My problem was that I never wanted to practice. And on instruments you have to practice.

SB: Yes, of course.

SS: And you can have the most brilliant ideas. It just doesn't help you if, in the C-major scale, you hit too many, you know, flats.

SB: What was your early training?

SS: My early training was piano. And I think everybody thought, Now we have to do it, because he's the son of the famous conductor, Kurt Sanderling. But actually he's without any talent. And I would think they’re right, [that] I was without any talent on the instruments. I'm not sure that I’m without any talent as a musician. But today I'm lucky enough that I don't have to play.

SB: Yes, of course.
SS: I was always very interested in the arts, I was always very interested in emotions, and 
I could get very moved by music, you know? It's just that I was not able to move people 
when I was sitting on the piano—

SB: [Laughs] Yes.

SS: —because I was hitting too many wrong notes, and—

SB: I see.

SS: —and very, very often, and I still have that sometimes. You know, when I cannot be 
successful with something, I give up right away. And no, it's—I cannot do it, so let me do 
something else.

SB: So you know your parameters. You know your strengths.

SS: Yes, if you want to put it that way, yes.

SB: That's a good thing.

SS: I knew right away piano is not—maybe, you know, with lots of discipline, you know, 
I could have become a decent pianist. I'm not sure that I would have enjoyed my life, but 
it would have been possible.

SB: Well, just first, I know there have been many articles written about your formal 
training, but just for the record, could you tell us where you went to school? Your formal 
training?

SS: Well, I went to school most of the time. Sometimes in the right years, where most of 
the time I did not, because there is not—there's no real English word that describes it 
correctly. We have the German word, which is schwänzen, when you just, you leave 
home in the morning, but you don't arrive at school.

SB: [Laughs] Yes, we have a phrase, "playing hooky."

SS: Yes.

SB: Is this what you're saying?

SS: Yes, and I did that a lot. And when I grew up, it was called the eleventh—I passed 
the eleventh grade you know, so I was 15 or, no, 17, you know. I probably spent more 
time outside of the school than inside. And then became dangerous, because of course I 
was supposed to be fired from the school.

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8 To cut or “play hooky”
Well, come back—I went first to a very regular school. You know, school starts when you are six or seven. And at the time the, you know, the deadline was I think first of June. And since [I] was born August 2, you know, I was always one of the oldest in the classes, you know. So I was already seven when I went to school. And then for the first two years I went to a regular school like everybody, you know? It's hard to understand for American people, you know—you have a such a wide variety of schools here—this school, that school, private funding, all this—We had schools, you know. Then we had a tiny little bit of choices. The first choice was made to—and usually choices were made for you, you didn't have a choice. Choices were made available to you. After two years I went to a school which had an emphasis on the Russian language. Not because the Russian language was something you needed so desperately, but it was regarded at the time a little bit better of a school because only the two best—or two or three best—of every class were allowed to go to the special school. So, in general, people were a little bit smarter, let's put it this way. And a little bit, you know—not all of them were nicer, but smarter.

SB: Was this your choice or your parents’ choice?

SS: It was probably my parents’ choice. I don't remember, I was nine years old, you know, or eight years old.

SB: And this was studying the language, or the whole culture?

SS: Well, the whole thing was that you would start learning the language, not from the fifth grade, but from the third grade, right away from the third grade.

SB: It was not mandatory, even though—

SS: Russian was mandatory, but from the fifth grade. In that special school, it was already form the third grade. You had two years more.

SB: I understand.

SS: And it was a little bit—no, there was an emphasis on that language. And I did that for a couple of years. School—and it has nothing to do with learning—school, any kind of discipline or any kind of force didn't fly very well with me, you know?

SB: [Laughs] I had a feeling.

SS: I was never—

SB: What is it—

SS: —thrilled when I had to do things. If I didn't want to do things, then I didn't really have the understanding that some things need to be done, you know? Today I know more retrospectively than, you know—
SB: OK.

SS: —I still act the same way—if I don't want to do it, then I don't do it!

SB: Now I know you have degrees, so you—

SS: No I don't actually, I don't know where you know that from.

SB: Now well I couldn't pronounce half of them, but I see all kinds of schools.

SS: Well you see, that's always the good thing, you know—

SB: [Laughs]

SS: I have a degree in some Serbo-Croatian language, and you never know what it is, it sounds like a doctor, but it's actually—the only doctor—

SB: So are you telling me—

SS: —or that I got prescribed a lot of medicine there!

SB: So you did not finish a formal degree? Is that what you're saying?

SS: No I don't have a degree, I never finished anything. I think the last degree—yes, to be quite honest, the last degree I have—well, if you take my driver's license and my pilot license away, the last degree I have was when I was 18 years old when I dropped out of school. That's the last thing. I never finished the university.

SB: I sense we're talking to a rebel. Perhaps.

SS: That's what you're probably doing, yes.

SB: Yes. Oh my gosh!

SS: Talk to the Board of Directors, and they will tell you the same thing!

SB: [Laughs]

SS: Yes, no, I just—

SB: Now here, look now—

SS: I well, I believe you but I think I—

SB: Look at this pile.
SS: —what is this?

SB: This is amazing. There are all kinds of credits.

SS: I know that there—

SB: —I just want the listener to know that this is an incredibly busy—

SS: Well, yes.

SB: —full life.

SS: Yes, but you know there is nothing—

SB: Well what this says though, is you've accumulated experience versus degrees.

SS: Well, yes, but it doesn't say anything about that I have a degree from this other [inaudible], you know, so it's not—

SB: OK, it's very impressive. It's very impressive.

SS: Well, I started a lot—

SB: I attempted to read this.

SS: —I mean I went to, started—went to the university, and then I went to the Hochschule in Leipzig⁹, and then I went to—but I always left before I would get a degree.

SB: OK. I see. This is interesting.

SS: Yes, well some for obvious reasons, some for less obvious reasons.

SB: You won an award—actually, you began your professional career when? It was in the '80s.

SS: You know, yes—

SB: '89?

SS: It is so difficult to say, “I started my professional career.” Because what is the first day of a profession? You know when you are a car salesman…

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⁹ College but not a university, more like a technical college
SB: Of course.

SS: —and it's very clear, you know the day you—

SB: Right.

SS: —and the boss tells you, “You know, this is—”

SB: And you get your first paycheck.

SS: “—a 20 year old car, you know? You have to sell it for twice the value, and then I will keep you.”

SB: For right or wrong professional, it sort of means you get your first paycheck.

SS: First paycheck. I got my first paycheck for a concert pretty much 20 years ago in ’87 I would think.

SB: OK. Was that in Tanglewood?

SS: No that was even before I left East Germany. It was in a tiny little orchestra in East Germany. I think it was in Stendal but it could have been in [inaudible]. It doesn’t say. It doesn’t make any difference here. But I think I just had my twentieth, kind of, anniversary in January.

SB: And you came to—what brought you to the United States?

SS: Well pretty much the same thing—it's again such a complicated—No, the question sounds so easy, and it's a typical—as a—

SB: The answer is complicated.

SS: It's a very American question, you know? Because it implies that everything [about] what you do, you can do voluntarily, and everything what you do is just, Oh, one day—

SB: No, well I'm giving you the opportunity to make it as complicated as you wish!

SS: It is so complicated. All my life, I would like to say—all my life until that moment, I was dreaming and hoping and working to get out of East Germany. Where to, was just a minor—

SB: Interesting.

SS: A minor part in that. If it would have been Istanbul, fine. If it would have been, you know—I probably would have preferred not even the U.S. I would have preferred something in West Germany because I didn't speak English at the time. Or very vague,
you know, a couple of words, not more than that. And I, you know, West Germany—I had kind of an idea how West Germany is. I have to be careful not to say “I knew how West Germany is,” because the only idea I got was from television. And we know how wrong that can be.

And as you said earlier, I was a rebel, I did many things, which made it very easy for East Germany not to like me. And they were right in their—in their not liking me. And I didn’t like them either. And so it was kind of a mutual desire to—

SB: Part ways.

SS: —part ways. Now it is not that easy, you know? Because East Germany was closed. And even if the—and I still believe that in the late ’80s East Germany had so many problems, fundamental problems. And survival problems that they couldn’t care less about tiny little Stefan Sanderling, who was just a troublemaker and gets protected unfortunately in their mind—protected by his name, his father, you know? And I knew it very well. It’s like a dog who knows exactly where it smells from. And I knew that if I abide by certain regulations and certain things that they can’t do much to me. I’m too exposed and I’m too important. Not as a person, but am important as the son of Kurt Sanderling. And shamelessly, I played with that. Like many others, by the way, and so—But still, with all the extra freedom I had, the freedom that I had, many things other people did not have. I was able, very irregularly, but still, to travel to the west with my parents, with lots of problems.

And you know, you never knew if it would be—all my life until then, I only wanted to get out. I mean, I had other things in my life as well that was not that. I thought of nothing else, all my life. And so I worked on this opportunity. It was a long range plan, you know? If I would participate in Los Angeles in this kind of summer activity, summer course—they don’t have it anymore—Los Angeles Philharmonic Institute. And then that would give me kind of a first rap, you know? And here, I would have kind of, would know, somebody, you know, would have a goal? But you know, you can’t just wake up one day and say, “Well, I want to go too.” As I said, East Germany is a closed country. So I had to go through all kinds of tests, if I was fit to do that. And that’s why I had to conduct before a commission, before you know—and all those things. And that was a political decision at the time. I was not the first one in East Germany to do that. East Germany had opened up a little bit, two years ago maybe. You know where they let out certain people. Also it used to—they used it a little bit like, as a valve, you know, because it was so steaming—

SB: It’s an interesting analogy.

SS: —and so much under pressure that they just wanted to [say], OK, let the people—And so I finally left in ’88.

SB: You went to LA?
SS: I went to LA, but you know, it was not—my dream was not LA. It's not that my
dream was not LA, you know. It would have been anything. If it would have been Cape
Town, it would have been Cape Town or—

SB: Just to get out.

SS: —or Lansing, Michigan, you know? Fine. Just—it happened to Los Angeles.

SB: To do what?

SS: Well as I said, the first thing was this Los Angeles Philharmonic Institute, which—

SB: What did you do there?

SS: Well, I conducted, you know, as a conducting student.

SB: OK.

SS: And which of course, was only possible because my father was a regular guest of
theirs. So it was kind of a Fleishman, who was the Executive Director at the time, of
course, had his fingers in it. And you know steered the whole thing, and said, “OK, if
Kurt Sanderling wants that, then we will have his son.” You know, it was not something
he or anybody would have done for me. It was, of course, something they did for my
father. My father expressed the wish that his son would come there, and so it was.

And then I decided to stay there. Met somebody who was very nice to me, a conductor, a
conducting teacher from USC, University of Southern California, Daniel Lewis, and he
said, “If you want to, you can come and study with me.”

SB: That's wonderful.

SS: Well, you know.

SB: Yes.

SS: For me that was—it was an incredible moment. It was kind of a new—somebody
gives you a new life. A new identity, a new life, you know? I didn't know what all the
problems are here in this country. For me this was a dream come true! Everything is great
here at the time. And so I was probably the most patriotic guy on earth! The most
American patriotic guy on earth, you know?

SB: Yes. You really didn't know anybody?

SS: No. I mean I knew a couple of people in Los Angeles. And that helped me you
know—This uncle I talked to you about earlier, from Switzerland, he went to UCLA and
became a professor of Economics there, and—
SB: Well that helped.

SS: That helped, well he never really—it was such an age difference you know? I think he was 90 when I arrived or something like that.

SB: And you were how old?

SS: I was 26.

SB: Oh.

SS: No, no, no—what am I saying? I was 24. I was 26 when I came back. I was 24.

SB: That's young to pick up and—

SS: Pardon me?

SB: It's very young to pick up and move your life.

SS: Yes. It's interesting. Now, looking back, I think, “Oh my gosh, I was so young!” At the time I thought I had seen already everything, you know? I had seen it because I come from behind the iron curtain. And you know, quite frankly, the people I met who were my age, I always thought, “They're totally clueless.” Because all they knew was—they knew the world until the Rocky Mountains. Whatever comes east of the Rocky Mountains—you know, if it's Greenland, Russia, or Detroit, it's the same thing. It's as far away from Los Angeles.

SB: So—

SS: And—

SB: This provided a good life, but Americans looked a little naive, I'm sure.

SS: It didn't provide a good life, because—

SB: You were struggling.

SS: —I found out that I had to struggle. You know, nobody—it's so difficult to explain. In East Germany, everything was clear. Everything had its path. Everything had its direction. You were born, and they already prepared for your funeral. And everything in between, you just played a role. And I sometimes said, “One of the things I hated so much about leaving…”

[End Tape 1, Side A]

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SB: You were talking about how in Germany it was predetermined from minute one?

SS: Well it was, yes. You know, everything—I used to say that East Germany was so boring for me, you know? Everything. So you went to school, then you went to the army, then after the army you went to the university or you know [inaudible]. And afterward you got a job, then you got promoted—You know? And everything, you know, you waited 26 years, and then you got your first car, because you were on a waiting list and it took 26 years. And you know, then after 10 years for the first time they gave you—how do you say—you know, the union, you know gave you a place where, for two weeks you could spend in the mountains or something like this. Everything was so regulated and—I just thought, well, Where is inspiration you know? Where is all this…? Of course when you come from, at the time I even didn't come from East Berlin, I came from Halle, which is just a greyer shade of the grey life. East Germany's life, in a certain way, was grey. And then you come to Los Angeles and you can imagine you know, how—what the colors did to me. That's quite a difference.

SB: Quite a shock, I'm sure.

SS: Shock, yes, shock. And in the beginning of course you are overwhelmed, you are overwhelmed with joy. And because what you never understand, or what I didn't understand—I think everybody makes the same mistake—is that every advantage has its downside. And I thought, Well, I take all the advantage which I brought from East Germany and now I have this other advantage life, you know, mazel-tov! It's great!

You know, and it didn't take me very long that to see, well, it's not that easy, you know. To survive is not that easy. And you know what? Nobody cares if you don't. And that was something completely new to me.

SB: So many choices? Is that a problem would you say?

SS: I'm not sure that choices is the problem, I would think that the lack of security is a problem. And the unforgiveness of mistakes. You make a mistake, nobody forgives. You know, there is not—

SB: Is that America?

SS: —here in this country, that's America. You get your second choice, but you have to work hard for your second choice. And it is more—it has a little bit to do with the error of the mistake you make. There are certain mistakes you cannot make a second time.

SB: What would be an example?

SS: Not to be successful for example. This is a country, you have to be successful. If you are not successful, you are worth nothing. This—
SB: And you have to define success? Is success fame?

SS: Well, let's—I don't want—

SB: Do you have to be famous?

SS: You know I have to be very careful. Well, on the other hand I don't have to be very careful because you asked me to come and speak about it.

SB: I did, yes.

SS: So why should I be careful? This country is about success. And all the success this country knows is the success in numbers. This country does not have a moral success, and this is a big problem in this country. And so you get evaluated by the numbers. By the numbers, by the rating—how for example, how successful we are with the Florida Orchestra, is not how beautiful we play music, because quite frankly, nobody knows here. It is—we are successful or not successful if we have, if we can raise our deficit or not. And that's already number two—the deficit is number one. Number two is if we have full house or if we don't have a full house. Nobody ever asked, What are you doing? And maybe to reach out to 1000 people, you know, is maybe the much more important role for an institution like an orchestra. Because that doesn't play a role in this country. That's one of the major differences between a country which did not have the Renaissance, and a country which had the Renaissance.

SB: Could very well be. Now in European countries, however, the arts can be state supported, and there is not the worry about the deficit—

SS: Yes, but you know that's not the reason. That's just the result of some. That's the result of the standing—

SB: The—

SS: —of a society. Here, this is a country of pioneers. And I say this kind of—I make a little bit fun of it, I'm not even angry of it, it's just you know because I've, you know…

SB: It's how you see it.

SS: Every choice, everybody has a choice and I'm expecting that somebody says, Well, if you don't like that, don't live in it. And then you see, this is exactly what I'm talking about. This is a country of pioneers. I come here, I open my hands, I work hard. And if I want to have a school, I build a school. And if I want to have a museum, I build a school; if I want to have an orchestra, I build a school. But it has something to do with me, I want to do this. It has nothing to do with 2000 years of history and 2000 years of tradition, and 2000 years—and that's the most important thing—necessities.
[Johann Gottlieb] Fichte who was a very important German and philosopher says, “Freedom is the acceptance of necessities.” You know? And you can be—you cannot be free if you don't accept that certain things are necessary, even if you don't like them, and even if you don't see your personal benefit of it. But for the society, it is important. And coming back to what you said is, that's of course something what was so strange to me, you know. Coming from a country where the arts were so incredibly important—much more important than they are now in Germany—because the arts of course were a means of protest. Which, by the way, I think is the best and the most important you know, reason for its existence. And I came from this and I came from this incredible important importance of the arts.

And I came to a city, a country where seven million people—and you know, there's one plus a little bit of an orchestra, you know, and nobody cares and you know I thought—In the beginning I found it great, you know? Everybody has the, can decide what he or she wants to do, and you know, if I want to support this it's great. If I want to support that, great too. But you know it doesn't take too long to—you scratch a little bit on the surface and then you see that there are major discrepancies towards what life should be and what life is. And so it didn't take me long to find out—it doesn't take anybody long to find it out if you're really interested.

SB: You mentioned the moral discrepancy. How did that affect you? How do you think it affects the arts?

SS: In so many ways that I have to—since I only can probably name three out of 500, then I have to figure out what are the three most important—

SB: OK.

SS: You know? The arts only exists because we have values. And values have something to do with tradition. You don't wake up one morning and decide, “Today I have a value,” you know? It's not—that's not how it works. And these values and these traditions are based in a certain way in society. And arts reflects those moral values, and the values, the morale. They don't create it, they reflect it. What arts creates is an interaction between people between values, you know? A dispute, a fight sometimes, an acceptance sometimes, you know? And I found sometimes that the arts here in this country have lost a little bit [of] this role. Or maybe I shouldn’t say it—that the arts have lost it. What people assume the arts are has nothing to do with what I strongly, deeply believe the arts is all about. And the arts became entertainment and actually wanted to—we have the German word, [inaudible], you know, the arts want to do exactly the opposite from what [inaudible] wanted, you know? To make you aware of it. The arts wants to sleep well, "Phantom of the Opera." And that's a phenomenon which is not an American phenomenon anymore. But 20 years ago when I came here it was much—the difference between Europe and, at least the Europe I knew at the time, which was under the Europe—let's face it, behind the iron curtain. And was tremendous in that. And I found at the time that the arts, because I still believe that we still can be corrupt. The arts is not Gone With the Wind, as nice as that is. And is not Terminator number one—that is not—
has nothing to do with arts that commerce. And I have nothing against being commercial; it's just, you cannot put the label, "artistic arts" on it.

And so that, when I meant a little bit with "moral," it has something to do with morality, because of course nobody tells you—nobody in Hollywood will tell you, Look, you know what we do… And they always will find a reason you know, how life will look in the 3000s you know? Or then they make a film which is called "Independence Day," which has nothing to do with it, you know? But people will come up and they are very smart strategically thinking marketing people—will tell you that it's all BS.

SB: As a conductor, Stefan, you do have tremendous influence in terms of the musicians—the state of the arts in this area. We've had foreign conductors before, Jahja Ling was your predecessor. And you're only, I believe, you are the third conductor of the Florida Orchestra only. Two out of three European. And you bring clearly a different slant, a different interpretation to the music. Do you—I mean, I'm not implying that you know how Jahja conducted or what his intent was, but when you began conducting the orchestra, did you find you had to make dramatic changes? Was it an easy transition?

SS: It was an easy transition. Because it doesn't work the way that, I mean—we have a clear vision. We have a clear vision, but the clear vision implies so many details, and the details you can—you can do it this way or that way. And there is not only one way to [go to] Rome here. There are many ways. As long as you define what "Rome" is. I don't know if you have this saying in the English language, you know where in German language and in French language says, "There are many ways to go to Rome." You know, because Rome at the time, you know, was the center of the world.

SB: Yes of course.

SS: And so there are many ways to go to Rome as long as you decide what Rome is. And I think both my predecessors and the quality of the orchestra is owed to them, you know? And if I contributed a little bit, so I will be very happy. But let's not exaggerate that. I think that the quality of the orchestra is something that you build in 20 years. You don't build it in four. You build it in 20 years. And I think that I had a very clear vision, that it's not an orchestra which gets together, plays a gig and you know, everybody goes home and sells shoes. It's something—you really want to make music. And we all are a little bit more lucky with one piece, and a little bit less lucky with another piece. But that's not the point. The point is that we—and I think—both my predecessors and me—we want to create an orchestra which makes a lasting impression on the public, but even more on the music. And so I didn't have to, it wasn't at all difficult for me to change something. Because I wouldn't think that there needed to be so many things to change on the podium.

I still find that there are many things which need to be changed in the organization of this. These are two different things. In a successful enterprise, if you want, a successful institution, the musicians are as successful as management, or the management is as successful as the musicians. In a not so successful enterprise institution, there are discrepancies. And when you have those discrepancies, that creates tension, and that
creates very counterproductive tension. Because then blaming starts and it—you are in a downward spiral. And this is where the Florida Orchestra needs to be very careful. That all the artistic achievements are only temporary. If there is not a base which makes that possible on a steady basis.

SB: Stability.

SS: Yes. And there I didn't have to change too much either, because my two predecessors had the same problems. So I—

SB: Is this endemic to American orchestras? Is it worldwide with orchestras being financially challenged?

SS: The challenge here in America is greater because the decision making process is so much shorter. In Germany and France, pretty much everywhere in Europe except for England, the arts are state subsidized. For good reasons. As much as the schools are state subsidized, for good reasons. It doesn't mean that you can afford to be unsuccessful for a number of years and nothing happens. But you know when you deal with bureaucracy it takes a while, it takes a while until it goes up. But also it takes a while until it goes down.

Here, we live on such a narrow survival base that we cannot afford actually to be unsuccessful with two concerts in a row, because it puts us out of business right away. If it would be the orchestra’s fault, then I would understand how much pressure it is. But unfortunately I would think 75 percent of our energy doesn't go into producing what we should produce, it goes into convincing—

SB: The music?

SS: Well, the music, the music, you know? It goes into—75 percent of our energy gets into—is put into efforts to convince people that we should exist.

SB: That's extraordinarily high. You being allowed—

SS: Well I would think, I mean you have been living here so much longer—

SB: That's just amazing.

SS: And I would think it's the same thing with all—

SB: What I'm hearing you say is the musicians feel responsible for helping the orchestra....

SS: Very much, the musicians feel very responsible.

SB: …be successful financially.
SS: Oh, very much! Musicians are very smart. They understand that they don't live in a detached, you know space from what you and I would call reality. But you know, if we want to be honest, what is reality? But they know that. On the other hand, they say the discussion is never, “What kind of you know, music”—and I'm not talking pops or classic, you know—“Should it be more Brahms, should it be more Brockman?” That's not even the question—it never gets there! We don't have energy left for it. We have to go out and tell people, Yes, classical music is something what is important. And that's something where it, there's—the circle—

SB: It's debatable.

SS: Well, the circle comes back to what I said earlier. That's not necessary in—

SB: In Europe.

SS: —in a country which had 2000 or 3000 years of history and has seen that you can win so many wars in your life, and nobody ever cares about, you know Lukulos the Great Greek, you know—how would you say—Marshall? You know, the General? Nobody knows about him anymore, except for the fact that he brought the cherry tree, you know? So this is—what's the English word for it? This is just a metaphor for it, you know? It has nothing to do with that we need more cherry—but you know, but that's what people remember, the cultural achievements. Not the—not even the economic. Who wants to know today that Greece had its, you know—ancient Greece had its ups and its downs, you know? Because that's over. What we want to know is where is Sophocles? And if you had the Renaissance in Italy, then you know that you cannot live without the arts for—with all its—if you don't have that, then it's bitter.

And here I would think at least 75 percent of my time—

SB: That's amazing.

SS: —and of all of everybody's—

SB: Just amazing.

SS: —we need to go out and need to convince people, “Yes, it's important.” And then people say, Yes or they say [no]. And one of the worst things that ever happened to me that was a very, interesting, let's put it this way couple who said, Why can't you fill a hall like the football—like Raymond James Stadium? And there is not really an answer to it other than, “That's exactly the question, that you asked this question, and that's already the answer.” Because this question is so wrong.

SB: It is wrong.

SS: And—
SB: So that's the mentality—

SS: That's the mentality of—

SB: And this is the person filling the concert hall?

SS: Well, it has something to do—it's a very philosophical question. It's a question of society. It is how a society is built, and what you want to get out of it.

SB: In one of these articles I read, that you questioned whether or not that there will always be a small segment of society enjoying classical music. And it's not so wrong. That might not be something we have to worry about—it takes care of itself. It's always been a small group.

SS: You know, see this has something to do with it—

SB: Is that American? Because I've been to operas in Italy [and] whole families are there. The stadium is full, I mean—

SS: Yes, I mean that's not the stadium either.

SB: Well—

SS: It has more to do with—

SB: It's open air for instance, and entirely full. Sold out.

SS: Oh yes. It has something to do with education and tradition. And in Italy, when it comes to Rigoletto, everybody has a feeling for it. That doesn't exist here. And it's not—I cannot say it is impossible to create. But it needs people who want to create it. And I don't see many of them around. I see, as I said very early—[in] this country, success has to do with numbers. And I give you an example—in none of the countries I've ever lived in would it have even been thought about—I'm not saying "possible," [but] "thinkable," that in a newspaper it is written, “Stefan Sanderling” then my age, then how much money I make, and how much I bought my last house for. Impossible! If you do this in Europe, people just look at you and know right away where you are from. Impossible! It's, you know—the fact that I can go online tonight if I want to—I don't want to, to be quite honest, but if I wanted—I can find out how much you paid this house for. How much tax you pay, you know—You can say, “This is a matter of openness.” I say, “This has something to do with that you don't have anything else that you—not you, you understand that—

SB: No, yes—no, I understand.
SS: But don't you have other problems? You know?

SB: This is the open society, Stefan.

SS: Well I say it is—this is not the only—this is not the open—

SB: This is the tradeoff.

SS: Yes, it's a tradeoff. But it has nothing to do—"open society" is a positive word. I don't have a positive word for it. It's a capitulation, it's a capitulation because you don't have anything else to put.

SB: This is your tenure here. Is it your first music directorship?

SS: Well I'm also—at the same time I'm music director in Toledo, Ohio.

SB: And you were in France before this?

SS: Yes.

SB: And so coming here as a music director was somewhat of a shock, based on this discussion we're having, because—

SS: No, it was not a shock because you know, I came here after having worked in this country already for ten years. So I knew—I already knew—it was not a shock.

SB: You knew what you were getting into.

SS: I mean there are certain things still shocking, but they will remain shocking everyday they happen.

SB: Is this a challenge? Is it a challenge that you feel is worthy of fighting? Is it operable? Can we overcome these problems?

SS: Well, I probably will find it all my life. That has nothing to do with Florida or Toledo or music directorship. It has something to do with what I believe in and what I don't believe in.

SB: What is your—

SS: And you've probably found out that I'm not very shy about my—I speak out. And if people are offended, I'm very sorry. As long as—because I make sure that I don't offend them personally. It gets on my nerves tremendously here and I come from a country where I think I cry at the right to say so. Everything only comes close to patriotism, and you know, makes me feel very uncomfortable. Everything where it hurts me—the
moment when somebody says, “Well if you don't like it, then go”—makes me very uncomfortable.

SB: Of course!

SS: And not because I can't go—probably by now I could afford it, but because this is this approach, you know. “If you are not for me then you are against me.”

SB: And yet it's the very thing we pride ourselves on, standing—

SS: Very much so.

[Tape paused]

SB: Stefan, I'm just—to kind of change direction a little bit, because we can see from your philosophy that you've given a lot of thought to living in this country. I know you own a home in St. Petersburg, and in Toledo, where you also are a music director. And that has made a statement to the people in the community that you—you have a presence here. And it is very much appreciated and enjoyed. I know people would want to hear from you, your thoughts about the music you're conducting, your favorite composers, and what your goals are. That's pretty broad! Maybe we'll start with the favorite composers!

SS: Well the favorite composers is the shortest thing probably in this question. I don't have a favorite composer. I have composers I feel very close to, and that changes quite often. And then I have a couple of composers where I never really have felt close to. That's easy for me to name, because they have not changed so much. Some of them have but most of them have not. For example, Liszt is one of them, Liszt. I never really felt close to it. Interesting enough, two composers, which I know played an incredible important role in musical history and in musical development—both were composers, incredibly revolutionary in their field. Both composers, by the way, French Barrios and de Guise and to both of them I don't feel such a close connection. Barrios I could probably name, de Guise I could not even name it, it just doesn't happen. And de Guise is the composer with the incredible rich colors, and his ability of creating unheard colors and affects—but still it—I remain cold. I don't know what it is.

SB: And he's the romantic period, correct?

SS: It's late nineteenth century, early twentieth century music. Very important music and I can't even say that I for, [inaudible] I lived in Britain for eight years, so I should know now and I do. But still I don't feel close, but there are a couple of composers for other conductors where they don't feel close. Interesting enough there are some composers to whom I felt very close when I was young and it gets less and less every year. Maybe I shouldn't say this composer, but a certain period of the composer—Mahler remains important to me now more—the very late Mahler. And not so much the early Mahler.

Other composers, I feel very close to and even if it has changed a little bit over the years,
certainly Shostakovich—it has changed in a certain way. What I don't need for myself so much anymore are these outspoken—

[End Tape 1, Side B]
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[Tape 2, Side A]

SB: OK.

SS: What I feel very close to is the 8th Symphony, the fifteens. I understand now much better the fourteenth symphony. I don't think this is music, this is philosophy, the fourteenth symphony—from a musical point of view, not as rewarding as it is from the understanding point of view. Same thing with the thirteenth symphony.

SB: Are you—

SS: Some composers will always remain important for me, and as funny as it—Mozart, Heim, Beethoven and Schubert, Brahms, Brockman—are the composers. This is a little bit [of] my heritage I would think. And there is something to it. C-major Schubert—the great C-major Schubert symphony is such a beautiful piece and describes so much what is impossible to describe in words, that how can you not love it?

SB: Stefan, when you conduct, for people listening to this who may not have had that pleasure, you are drenched after your conducting experience. It's obvious you're feeling every note of that music and the passion. Is your liking certain composers or certain pieces—you obviously have to like the emotion that it brings to you. Is there a relationship to the time period? Classical, Romantic, Baroque or whatever?

SS: No. It's not the decision I make, you know? It's not that I decide, oh now I'd like to get exhausted—

SB: [Laughs] Oh no, of course not.

SS: I get—I'm not sure if the word is right—I get carried away. It's not that it's—carried away means that you can't control it. You try to become one with certain music. You have to be careful—it doesn't happen to all of the music. And not even all of the music I like, you know? There's certain music which has such a strong emotional content and such a strong feeling that you can't avoid it. It just—it's not a decision you can make. At least I haven't figured it out yet. Because sometimes I would like to. When you do it five or six times in a row, and you can't die every day.

SB: Speaking of the five or six times, people usually wonder how many rehearsals it takes to produce that single performance.

SS: There are never enough rehearsals.
SS: How many does it take? It depends. It depends on here, in the Florida Orchestra with me as music director, I have a certain lecture. I have four rehearsals plus a dress rehearsal. And I insist on four rehearsals plus dress rehearsal. Not only because I believe that something is sometimes so difficult technically, [but] music is not reading notes and then just playing them. That's just a physical thing. Making music has something metaphysical, you know? You do it together, it's an experience, which you have to do together. And that's something that I try to achieve. And you only can achieve it when you do it. Mahler's 9th Symphony today with the high quality of the orchestras, with their own parts you might have, with the knowledge of the piece you have as a conductor, with the ability of conducting it, you can bring it together in two rehearsals. But that does not mean that you play Mahler's 9th Symphony because there is so much more to it than just—And that needs time. That has nothing to do with the quality of the orchestra, that has something to do with time. Certain things need time. It's like if you are a great cook or not a good cook—it takes time until the chicken is cooked, you know?

SB: That makes perfect sense.

SS: A great cook cannot do it faster. It just takes time. And so I insist on these rehearsals. It's about the average I would think.

SB: There are 80 pieces to the Florida Orchestra. I don’t know how many there are in Toledo. But I do know that there are musicians in the Florida Orchestra who have played together for many years. Some are new of course. Is that important to you? To have musicians who have played together?

SS: Look, if you have discussions of four incredibly intelligent people, it is incredibly rewarding if these people have known each other for a while, because they are already—they anticipate already what the next step of—

SB: Sure.

SS: …the other person is. And there is something to it in an orchestra as well. Orchestra playing is more than 80 individual great players. An orchestra has a soul—not the James Brown soul. It has a soul. It has a breath, you know? You breathe in a certain way together. You have gone through experiences together. And that plays a role when you make music. As I said earlier, there is more to it than just a physical creating of sound.

SB: Sure.

SS: And of course when you, when you have people who have played together for quite a bit of a time, they have—and it happens that they like to do that, which we are very lucky that our orchestra and the people in the orchestra like each other. That's not always like that.

SB: I see.
SS: Then something extraordinary can happen. New people are also very interesting because you know, it gives you a new—sometimes a little bit of a doubt, you know? Sometimes a little bit of a new influence, sometimes of just a new thought. So I think one of the great achievements of the Vienna Philharmonic, the Berlin Philharmonic, the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, all these orchestras, is that besides the fact that all of them are great musicians you know, single musicians, as an orchestra as an institution, they have a soul and they have a sound and they have a way to do certain things, a way to go, a way to create certain things. And that has something to do with spending time together.

SB: How much of that soul does the conductor shape? How much of it is the conductor?

SS: Over one week not much. Over a time as music director—that's why I still believe so much in the institution of a music directorship—I don't believe in orchestras that say, We don't need a music director. I think over time a lot. With their choice of repertoire, with a choice of looking at certain repertoire in a certain way, that it makes a huge difference. And yes, of course, an orchestra today is required. Let's not discuss if it's right or wrong, but it is required to do everything in the least amount of time. I don't think that's an achievement, I think that's a defeat. And I think that the music director, if he has personality—what he should have, because that's what he got paid for—then he should, you know, impose his personality on the orchestra. And together with the personality of the orchestra—and I said it, I think earlier, that every orchestra has a personality—together, if it works out, that's where chemistry plays a huge role. That works out something unique that can happen.

SB: You became music director in 2003. And you have signed an extension to that until 2011. How long did it take you approximately—and you've emphasized that it takes a little bit of time to become one.

SS: Yes. You know, I—when Daniel Barenboim became the music director of the Deutsche Staatskapelle Staatsoper in Berlin, that was in ’92. He insisted on a ten year contract. And at the time, you know I thought, well, we all have three or five year contracts. You know, why—now I understand because that's what it takes at least.

SB: To shape it.

SS: That's what it takes. The role of the music director is not making the next concert better. That's a great side effect, and that's good if it happens. The role of the music director is to shape the appearance and the uniqueness of an orchestra. And that's not—you don't do that overnight. And the simple fact that we speak of the Cleveland Orchestra today and of the Chicago Symphony and the Boston Symphony has something to do with some of the music directors who were not there for the three years, but for 25. Szell in Cleveland, Fritz Reiner, then Schulte, then Barenboim. All of them I think for—I don't know, but all for more than five.

SB: It's a very good point.
SS: [Serge] Koussevitzky for 27 I think—

SB: Very good point.

SS: That has something to do with—it's not that those people couldn't get another job. And it's not that the orchestras couldn't get another music director. It's just that at the time it was understood, you know. That brings something—it brings out the best on either side.

SB: Of course.

SS: And I feel very comfortable here with my orchestra, you know? And I usually don't do that, say "my orchestra." Usually I say "our orchestra." But I start to say "my orchestra" because it starts now to be—without saying something, things become obvious and evident. I'm in my fourth year and I still know that there are lots of things to do that have nothing to do with me thinking that I'm the most important person on earth—which of course I am—

SB: [Laughs]

SS: This has something to do with—there is no such thing like democracy in the arts. Whoever brought that up is stupid. The arts are not democracy. The distribution of arts, yes it is. But the arts themselves is [a] hierarchy. The arts themselves—someone, you know, has to have an idea, and he has to—he has not the right, he has the obligation to be right or wrong. And he needs to be wrong sometimes so he can be right sometimes. But it needs to be sharpened you know, and shaped for this person. And so that's the role of the music director. And a little bit of controversy you said—and controversy with the music director is not wrong. Because that means that—there is no such thing like one music director for everybody. That's impossible, you know?

SB: It does make sense that you would need time—

SS: Absolutely, absolutely.

SB: —to form. And to do what you have to do.

SS: And then you, as music director, you form specific—a specific sound in the orchestra, a specific approach to music with the orchestra. But also you do that with your audience. You know? But you have development years of course in the beginning. It's beautiful. It's [the] honeymoon you know. You move a little bit. You say, say a couple of little, nice words, everybody loves you. Great, you know? That’s not what music director is, music director is hard work. And convincing people that the way I—or the music director—thinks is the right way takes time.

SB: You so graciously do a pre-concert talk. And I would like to emphasize that that is when your personality truly comes out. Aside from the baton and aside from interpreting
that music for us. And a lot of people don't know that that exists. And that not all music directors do a pre-concert talk. And it is very much appreciated.

SS: Yes.

SB: But what is your philosophy in doing that? Because again not all conductors do that.

SS: You know, when I came here and I started doing it, I was promoting it and saying, “This needs to be done or it won't be good and we do—[mumbles]—interesting audience for it....” Sometimes I still believe that. Sometimes I believe that it is maybe not the right thing to do because sometimes music needs to speak. By itself for itself. There's only so much what anybody with a language can contribute to Bruckner [Symphony No.] 8 or to Mahler [Symphony No.] 9. Because there is music where little nice little stories can help you, you know? There's music where the nice little stories are—contradict in a certain way what the music actually tells. That's the moment where I would like to keep my mouth shut. But I know that it plays such a huge role because I have the privilege to have heard this music before.

I had an interesting conversation with a composer, a very nice person, good composer Samuel Adler, who said, “You know Stefan, the problem with new music is that people don't know it. As simple as it sounds.” Because music has so much to do with recognizing. And if I sing you one phrase of the Beethoven [Symphony No.] 5, then you'll recognize it because you've heard it greatly. You have gone to the concerts. If I sing you one phrase of Sir Berrios Third Symphony, you know, and you had never heard it before, then you don't know what to do with it. And then you need a little bit of help. So sometimes I sing in the pre-concert lecture. Not because I think that my voice needs to be heard, but because I think that certain things—I just, want to emphasize in that.

SB: Sure.

SS: There comes this moment—

SB: Right, sure. The recognition.

SS: —you know? That's when this moment comes, that's what I think. And so people for the moment know what I think which is nice. Sometimes it's true, sometimes—

SB: I think people are interested in hearing it.

SS: But sometimes you know it’s just so they can already when they hear the music for the first time complete—they actually hear it for the second time. Which helps.

SB: It does help.

SS: So I still continue doing it and hope that it is growing.
SB: I have to ask you as a conductor, and I hope this doesn't sound silly—to some extent it is. When a conductor is conducting, not just you but any conductor, people in the audience notice the musicians aren't always looking at the conductor. And I've heard people comment in the audience, “What is the conductor for?” Now, I know the answer to this question, but perhaps you would share.

SS: Well and a stand-up comedian, I would say, “Well, I don't know the answer to the question.”

SB: [Laughs]

SS: But the work of a conductor is complicated. Most of the work of the conductor is done already when the concert starts. Do the musicians look at the conductor? Yes. Pretty much all the time. It doesn't mean that they stare at the conductor. But you know, in the concert, I help. I help and I remind. And I find—and that has something to do again with what I believe this profession is all about. I think this is what the conductor is about. It's not creating unhurt and unseen things. Because that's what rehearsals are for. So there shouldn't be surprises you know, of a different tempo or a different upbeat or a different you know, turn here. I don't believe so much in those. I know that sometimes people get crazy and you know. I mean it's so fresh and so new. I think it's our role to make it look new and sound new and fresh. But it should be a very well calculated—

While they look, the musicians look at conductors, and they know exactly what is the moment when they need him and what is the moment when they don't need his help so much. And you know everybody has a little bit of a different thing. And every instrument has a different moment when that happens, so—

SB: Well that helps explain but it's funny. People do comment on it and it's kind of—

SS: I'm sure they do.

SB: —obvious however that it does happen even before that particular performance. I would very much like to ask you about your wife. When you met her, how you met her. Again, people very interested—you're not a bachelor any longer!

SS: No, I haven't been a bachelor for ten years.

SB: No—

SS: Well, only married for four, but we've been living together for ten. We met in France. I became a music director of an orchestra in France. And we had to hire a new cellist, and was behind a screen—so nobody can say, “Well, checking happens!” No, it was behind a screen, and she was number-whatever. I forgot. She still attacks me for having forgotten which number she was. And it was a very long audition over three or four days because there were so many and was for different positions. And this number, which turned out to be a Mademoiselle Besancon was always in the last round. Always one of the last three
or last two or— And so she was hired and then things happened with everybody you can imagine—

[Laughter]

SS: —and here I am, looking happy and feeling happy.

SB: Good, that's great. Well for the sake of archiving, she is a beautiful, beautiful lady.

SS: Yes.

SB: She is—

SS: In Sarasota—she's French, she lives in Sarasota in the West Coast Symphony.

SB: Now does she play with you in Toledo?

SS: She won the audition in Toledo, and then very wisely did not take the job.

SB: Oh, I see.

SS: But since she won the audition and she's very well liked in Toledo by the orchestra members. Whenever she can and I am there, then she plays as a substitute player.

SB: And she sometimes plays, of course.

SS: And she sometimes plays here. I think that the cello group here likes her very much. We make it very clear that we think the wife of the music director should not take work away from other people.

SB: Oh, I see.

SS: And so it needs to be very clear that it has nothing to do with playing well. I think there should never be a conflict of interest here. And if the group, you know, the cello group invites her [or] asks her, that's one thing. I as a music director will never impose anything. That cannot go well.

SB: Stefan, in a little bit of a turn again, in this country we like to think in terms of legacies. And to some extent, some people actually plan their lives around leaving legacies. Perhaps even naming the concert master was a legacy. What do you think—you are a young man so to speak in the music business. What would you like your legacy to be?

SS: You know, I don't think about that a lot. Legacy has something to do [with] what happens after my death. And I don't have the resources at the moment to think about it.
SB: [Laughs]

SS: Because I think of my life so much more. And it might have something to do with age. That this thought becomes more eminent than others. At the moment the thought is not there. And I—

SB: Well, let me rephrase it to help you out. What would your goal be? What are your goals?

SS: Oh my God. This is—

SB: You don't have to answer.

SS: No, this is so difficult to answer because it—it's not so difficult to answer what it is, it's so much more difficult to answer what it would—what not to include there.

SB: It's very broad, I realize.

SS: You know my goal is not to have wasted time.

SB: [Inaudible]

SS: And that includes so many things. We don't feel it but we—every second we use, we do not get it back. And for somebody like me who does not believe in God, this is all what I have. I find it's very—it's restrictive you know, to be not religious. Because the religion gives you hope of a life, of an afterlife. If you don't believe in that, you're everything you have—

SB: Is one.

SS:—have to put in that one. So wasting time, or making not the best use of the time I have—I don't really want to say "given to me,"—I have. Is probably—that's a worry. Not worried that I'm nervous about. But that's something I'd like to achieve. And then whatever that means. There are goals with music, there are goals in my private life.

SB: Of course.

SS: But you know, these goals change. What does not change is this—is the worry about time.

SB: That's very interesting. Well I can't thank you enough for taking the time, Stefan. Speaking of time!

SS: The duck is…[inaudible] out there.
SB: Oh no [laughs]. Well we wish you all the best in your tenure with the Florida Orchestra. And we're just very, very fortunate to have you here.

SS: Thank you.

SB: Thank you so much.

[End of interview]