

NPS-87

JULIUS RUDEL

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AUSTRIA, 1938

AGE 17

NASH: Today is March 7, 1975 and I am speaking with Mr. Julius Rudel, the Director of the New York City Opera. Mr. Rudel came to the United States on June 6, 1938 at the age of 17. He was born in Vienna, Austria. Mr. Rudel, tell me something about your family.

RUDEL: When you mean family, do you mean my present family or my family--

NASH: Your parents.

RUDEL: My parents. My parents were both born in Rumania in the town of Zebler. It was

part of Austria. They moved to Vienna and settled there and I was born there. My father died shortly before Austria was annexed by Germany through Hitler. But we had already plans before that to come to the United States, about two years prior to that, only because of my father's illness we could not leave and we stayed in Austria. But then Hitler and his hordes we reactivated our applications to come to this country and left soon thereafter overran the moment the Austrian country. And, of course, this country has been wonderful to me as to so many other immigrants. I was able to complete my musical education here entirely on scholarships and then was able to enter the music life of the country without any push or pull. I didn't know anybody and it is so significant that in this country that is exactly what can happen to you if you are talented. In music you can go as far as your talent takes you.

NASH: Did you come from a musical family?

RUDEL: Yes, I did, but there were no professional musicians. My grandfather was a cantor, but otherwise my parents loved music, everybody did love music, but there was no professional.

NASH: Did you have musical training before you came to the United States?

RUDEL: Yes, of course, I started very young, I started receiving instruction and they saw to it that I was taught music. I was in the Vienna Academy until I left to come here.

NASH: What was your instrument?

RUDEL: Well, I started on the violin and then took the piano, but I at one time thought I would be a singer, but that was before my voice changed. When I was a little boy I had a very nice soprano voice. And I thought I would be a composer, but I realized after studying for a while and after writing several things that I really didn't think I was going to be a very good composer so I gave that up. My desire always was to conduct so that became number one.

NASH: Would you say that your parents realized rather early that they had to leave?

RUDEL: Yes, I would say in about 1936 the climate became more and more oppressive and worrisome and those of us, I was very small then, I was only (?) and I was really not involved in it, but I know now in retrospect that many people who could see into the future began to worry and began to look for ways to leave, and my parents were among them. But, as I said, it couldn't happen because of my father's illness.

NASH: Was it hard to get a visa?

RUDEL: Well, it is hard. You know, there are certain quotas that have to be obtained. Since my parents were born in Rumania at that time, I think it has been since amended, but at that time the immigration law put you into the, your quota was

your land of birth, not the land where you resided, so that in fact I, actually, being born in Germany which had a larger quota and fewer applicants at that, I actually came here ahead of my mother who had to wait about another six or seven months because the Rumanian quota was much overdrawn.

NASH: Did you come by ship?

RUDEL: Yes. At that time there was nothing else to do but to come by ship. In fact, I did, I (?).

NASH: And I suppose you didn't have to go to Ellis Island?

RUDEL: Well, not at all. We did have a sister of my mother and, in fact, my grandfather also, who had immigrated a number of years earlier before that, were here so they waited for me to come on.

NASH: Can you tell me anything about the trip that stands out in your mind? Were there many immigrants on the ship, you know, people who left because they had to?

RUDEL: I was only aware of a few young people my own age, boys my own age who were also leaving for some reason and we became friends on board. But I was not really aware at all.

NASH: I spoke to someone else who was about your age when they arrived and they said that when they eventually formed friendships with other people who also left Europe at their age, they never spoke about their experiences in Europe. Of course, they had much worse experiences because they had been in concentration camps, and I wonder if you related to this with your friends.

RUDEL: No, we didn't really talk much about that either. It was something we just kept quietly to ourselves.

NASH: Well, what was the most surprising thing to you about the United States when you first arrived?

RUDEL: Well. I suppose in one sense the vastness of it, even the vastness of the city of New York, but when I was taken from the ship to the apartment of my aunt, it took us almost an hour to get there and at the same time since they lived not in Manhattan, but in the Bronx, I was rather surprised. I was looking for skyscrapers everywhere and I didn't see any.

NASH: Where in the Bronx did your aunt live at the time?

RUDEL: Out in the Grand Concourse. Just above (?)>

NASH: Could you just sort of outline how your musical education progressed?

RUDEL: Well, I had, as I said, studied since I was a little boy and here I applied to a number of schools and there was also an organization that was very helpful to immigrants and this is the national Refugee Service, where I not only was given help in terms of finding and making contacts with schools, but in fact for a while I even worked there while studying. I worked as a receptionist and switchboard operator and stock clerk and what have you.

NASH: The National Refugee Service was that particularly for Jews or was it for all refugees?

RUDEL: It was for all refugees from Germany. Of course, most of the members weren't really Jews. But there was no discrimination of any sort.

NASH: And I know that you have some connection with the American Council for Immigrants in the Professions. I wonder what that (?) ?

RUDEL: That I think was sort of, perhaps a later development and it is a very specific for-- the Refugee Center was more broadly based. They did have a department for professional, of course, musicians and so on, the various separations. The Council for Immigrants in the Professions is, of course, for professionals only.

NASH: At what point--say you could continue several years after you came to be able to use the various organizations that helped refugees?

RUDEL: Well, as I said, the contact was made through these organizations and I received scholarships from the Branch house Music School and from the Mamas College that I had been graduated. And this was done on the scholarship basis. It was the only way I could have continued to study music. And the one nice thing, in a sense, a sort of homecoming, one of the settlement's music schools I think had played a great part in helping the underprivileged young people to learn music. For about seven years I was, in fact, the Director of the Music School Settlement on the Eastside, which gave me a chance to (?).

NASH: Which one was that?

RUDEL: (?) Music School.

NASH: Well. Mrs. Margaret Bush of the American Council of Immigration Professionals said to me that often times people that she would work with would want to stay in New York and she would counsel them to go elsewhere because she felt there was kind of (?) market of musicians in New York and they had many more opportunities if they would leave New York, but I guess you were in New York the whole time. Is that right?

RUDEL: Yes, I stayed here. This never came up. I stayed in New York. I think it was early for me since I still had to study perfect my musicianship in that I really wasn't too

interested in the art of the city and the moment I finished already, concurrent with getting my degree I was already actively working in New York. And then, of course, the extraordinary happening of the creation of the Civic Center, and just sort of timing was perfect and I again as can only happen in America, I walked in and said I would like to work here and I was at that put to work and stayed here.

NASH: Well, we are very glad you are. Thank you very much.