

**Potsdam Revisited:  
Overture to the Cold War**

**STUART CANIN**

interviewed by

SAM BALL

October 6, 2014  
Berkeley, California

Citizen Film  
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**Stuart Canin [00:00]** I was living in New York and as a matter of fact in the Bronx across the street from Yankee Stadium where I used to watch the Yankees win and win and win so I got used to that. And Roosevelt had been my president every four years for...for more years than I could count anyway. I was 18 years old at the time and living in New York and I received a letter which all young men of 18 worried that they would receive one day and it was from Franklin Roosevelt and my neighbors who were the draft board and they said that I had been selected by them to join the Army and so I was drafted and in October of 1944 – the war was very much on – I was drafted and was sent as a GI to Camp Blanding in Florida and I did my training. **[01:12]** I was supposed to have 17 weeks of training to become a rifleman and I remember that they also included some training that might have included the islands in the Pacific because I remember shooting up at trees where enemy soldiers were hiding and then the sergeant would pull a lanyard and these soldiers would fall down out of the tree. I mean they were dummies of course and we had to respond to that and wheel and fire our M1s at them anyway. That's what the training was like besides 25-mile hikes and all that sort of thing. I had my violin with me because I didn't want to leave it any... I wanted to have it with me so whenever I had a minute which wasn't very often I practiced a little bit but. That was my training. Then I was drafted in October and November passed and December came and that was the time the Bulge had just...was just happening in... in Belgium and suddenly we got...they announced...It was announced that our training had been cut from 17 weeks to 13 weeks and that we were going to be shipped out much faster than we thought because the casualty rate was terrible in the Battle of the Bulge. **[02:47]** So in December...in January I guess, the end of January we were shipped home back to New York on leave since we were all from the New York area because it...and fortunately or unfortunately I got the flu when I got back to the Bronx and I was really quite sick and I was sent to an Army hospital and once you do that you lose your...your unit that you were assigned to and the Army, god bless it, because they lost, not lost but they didn't know where to put me, and so they waited, waited and waited and finally I got my orders to ship out of Camp Shanks which was the port of importation of New York and that led me to a troop ship and up the gangplank and we loaded at night and then the next morning I vividly recall looking out going up on deck and looking out and there must have been 50-75 ships. I'm talking about troop ships and Navy vessels, you know destroyers and whatever they had out there. It was an unbelievable sight just to see all of these and this was the convoy that was going to take us across the Europe.

**Sam Ball [4:13]** Tell me more about where you were looking out at the scene and what you were feeling

**Canin [04:22]** Well we went up the gangplank and we piled into the lower decks where they had bunks set up, just hundreds and hundreds of bunks. I mean there wasn't a spot that didn't have a bunk on it you know. I mean we're talking about three levels of bunks for the guys to sleep on and we loaded at night and at night don't forget that it was wartime, there were no lights and so we didn't...couldn't see anything and the next morning of course the sun rose. **[04:52]** It was February, I guess. The sun rose and we all went up on deck to see what it looked like and there was this array of ships, mostly transport ships, plus we could

see some gray whatever they were. I wasn't...not a Navy person so I couldn't tell but they were troop ships and then there were destroyers and it was just a...as far as the eye could see there are these ships, all black hulls sitting in the water and then we...That was it and we took off and the whole convoy went to Europe.

**Ball [05:34]** What do you remember feeling at that time?

**Canin [05:38]** Well it was okay, it was exciting. I was very grateful to see all of those other ships thinking if a submarine would like to choose a target they would choose another ship than the one I was on. So that's uh...yeah that's...that's what you think of at those moments. Self-preservation.

**Ball [06:01]** Where was the scene, was it in New York Park?

**Canin [06:07]** Well, you know I don't really remember, it was somewhere on the water, somewhere...We may have moved at night out because we weren't really moving when I saw. We had maybe pushed out. Maybe the other ships were already out there and our ship was just moved out beyond...beyond the shore. So that's really all I can remember now honestly... honestly I don't uh know.

**Ball [06:42]** Take me back in time a moment, to when you were 18 and you must have known this letter was coming

**Canin [06:52]** I was waiting and waiting, and waiting. Actually my birthday is in April and I waited through May, June, July, August, I said gee maybe...maybe they missed me or somehow but August it...in October it came and actually I had um...I had gone to CCNY, City College of New York, I was just whiling away the time because you all knew that one...knew that one was going to get that letter from the president and inviting me to join the Army. He and my neighbors, that's the way they put it nicely. So I was studying I think economics or something and found it very dull, after the fiddle, and that's...that brought me up to the moment when I received the letter from the president or the Selective Service Board I should say.

**Ball [07:48]** Was there a part of you that was excited to go?

**Canin [07:56]** Well, yeah, I would have been more excited if the war were over I think but...and had a trip to Europe but the war was on and although right after the Bulge everything cheered up you know we crossed the Rhine and all that but until then it was very tough and I was a rifleman, a replacement for in other words for someone who was a casualty. They would stick another guy in. We were just like widgets. You just plug up a company that needed some men and that sort of thing. So you know it was very, very exciting but not always in the best way.

**Ball [08:38]** Did you have a choice in what you were going to do or did you wait for your notice to come?

**Canin [08:46]** No I had...no they needed riflemen at that time and that was pretty obvious and then when the Bulge came they certainly needed riflemen, just guys with an M1 rifle to shoot and...and put them up in the front lines. But to move ahead a little bit luckily when I got over there we had really broken the back of the Germans. We and the Russians coming from the east and we from the west, that was really...And the Bulge was really the turning point because once we got through that then we crossed the Rhine and historically I'm not actually accurate about whether we crossed the Rhine or not but I think we crossed the Rhine somewhere around that time and moved very rapidly eastward. Yeah.

**Ball [09:37]** What were you told about what a rifleman does?

**Canin [09:41]** Oh a rifleman learns how to shoot a rifle. I spent hours, hours on a firing line and shooting at targets. As a matter of fact every rifleman had to spend some time in the pit with the...with the target and then we'd have to check out the accuracy of the....So I was on both ends, shooting the...you know lying on your stomach and aiming the rifle and trying to hit and actually I got a marksman medal which is, you know, reasonable, although a lot of people got marksman medals and when I sent home a note to my family that I had...I was very proud I had gotten a marksman my father wrote me a letter that says please don't mention that, your mother gets very sad when she thinks of what might be, so kindly keep those kind of triumphs to yourself.

**Ball [10:38]** What do you remember feeling getting that note from your father, you got this in a letter from your father?

**Canin [10:47]** Yes of course that's the way we...We didn't phone or anything, I'm not sure we had a phone. I think....I guess we did have a phone in those days but it was all letters yeah you...you always were anxious for mail call, that's what they used to call it. The sergeant would say oh this guy, Smith, Jones, fling the letters out to them, that's the way it went. Yeah.

**Ball [11:09]** What do you remember feeling reading those words from your father?

**Canin [11:14]** Well...well I understood very well why my mother was not too happy that I had become a marksman because she felt that that would...that meant that I would be one of the first to be pushed up to the front, someone who could shoot straight because the end result would...should be an enemy corpse.

**Ball [11:37]** And you didn't have a choice in the matter?

**Canin [11:39]** No...no there was no choice. My gosh it was....well I was just happy that I was going to Europe anyway not to Japan, although when we started to train at the end of

our training session in these palm trees down in Florida and we'd have enemy mannequins being pulled out of the tree by a sergeant who pulled a lanyard and we would have to find them and turn it and shoot them. Then I began to wonder where I was going, but no we eventually it was...it was Europe.

**Ball [12:11]** And do you remember the voyage? How long was it...

**Canin [12:16]** The voyage was about 10 days and I don't really remember although it's funny I had...I had a letter from a friend of mine who went...who I met on a concert tour way, way afterwards. He said you know you and I were on the same ship, the same troop ship, he lives up in the state of Washington, and he said I used to hear you practice off in some closet or something when we were traveling. I was.... I was young and I didn't want to lose my skills what I had developed over 10, 15 years of playing the violin so that's how I spent the time or being seasick, I don't know maybe.

**Ball [13:01]** And you were at CCNY studying economics

**Canin [13:06]** Economics which I just found so boring unlike today which I...when I find it interesting but that's...I think I had a very bad teacher at the time. He was dry as dust and I just wasn't interested in it.

**Ball [13:20]** And you had been playing the violin for...

**Canin [13:25]** Well I...I had been playing the violin, I started at age five and I had had some success already, I had been on the Fred Allen show playing The Bee in 19... December 30<sup>th</sup> 1940 when I was 10 years old and then when I was 12 I won a national...the National Federation of Music Club's nationwide contest for violinists. I was one of four nationwide winners. So I was getting along and playing a little concert for the local community groups and that sort of thing.

**Ball [14:13]** Did you have an inkling at 18 that this is what you would do for your career?

**Canin [14:18]** Oh I knew nothing else yeah and my wife says I can't do anything else but play the fiddle which I take as a compliment. So yeah I never doubted for a moment that...or maybe I never thought of it what I would...what else I would do. When I went to my, the teacher, Ivan Galamian when I was 17 and it was time to make decisions about college and all that my father said will he become a violinist? And Mr. Galamian said, I so remember he said, it depends on how much he practices. So there was no sure road to that but I had a pretty good start.

**Ball [15:02]** So had you applied to colleges already? Before you were drafted

**Canin [15:08]** No, I hadn't applied to college, I was just....You know in those days we had a one track mind. You were going to play the violin and you just wanted a good teacher and

then of course when I came back from the Army my teacher Mr. Galamian was at Julliard so he said...I came back in August of 46' and he said get in touch with Julliard, sign up and I'll accept you as a student so that's how that worked.

**Ball [15:37]** And so you're on the ship and you land

**Canin [15:46]** We went across with the transports and all the other ships involved. We landed at Le Havre in France and we were....found the gangplank and into railway cars. They called them 40 and 8s and we found out why because they were either for eight horses could fit in that or 40 men and we were the 40 men were fit in these. They were just railway cars where they....rolling stock I guess and we got on the train and I still remember passing through a town. You know you remember these things my god they...you were 18 years old and very exciting to be there and we passed through the town of Charleroi in Belgium and...and we stopped at the railway station, this whole string of cars with thousands of troops on them and the natives of the...of the town Charleroi came down with buckets of Belgium beer and I don't think I had ever had a beer in my life but I had one and that was fine yeah and we always...I always remember Charleroi and that means King Charles I guess Charleroi yeah Charleroi **[17:06]** and um so I... Then of course we moved on just in time to get the beer and then moved out and we landed in Aachen, Germany and that's where we got off the train and Aachen had been the scene of a humungous battle between the Germans and the Allied forces but when we got there it was all calm and the town was I mean obliterated because of this enormous amount of fighting there. That where we stayed for a few days and I remember these same 40 and 8s were coming the other direction with thousands of German prisoners and they were a pretty docile group of prisoners. **[17:46]** They were just jammed into these cars and rolling past and of course the German people would go down to the railway station to see if they knew anybody on there going. But they were going from the Russian front back to prisoner of war camps, maybe in the United States I...I don't know that.

**Ball [18:07]** When you were loading on to these 40 and 8's did they tell you where you were going?

**Canin [18:14]** No when we got on the 40 and 8s it was...Our fate was in the hands of the generals and we didn't have any idea where we were going, that was all secret stuff I mean where are they going to unload these 40,000 troops and I mean if the Germans knew that they...they would have step up. No, so we just went and we got off at Aachen and we stayed at Aachen for I don't know a week or two weeks and they kept us marching and as a matter of fact in Aachen I had another, what turned out to be a very lucky break. I was now with a unit because I had...they had found me a company that I would be with. But we went for a 25-mile hike with full field pack just to keep us trim and when I got back from one of these hikes or marches they would say I found out that my Achilles heel had blistered and blown up and I couldn't get my shoe back on. **[19:18]** Well that sent me right away to the hospital to...I had to get off my foot and my legs because otherwise I would have...I couldn't put shoes on. That would be not reasonable to expect a soldier to fight without

shoes and so I was in a hospital there with hundreds of other guys who were really badly wounded and at that time before I had left the States I was told that there was some magic place in the Army called the Special Service, Special Services, and I thought that meant entertainment you know so I always kept that in mind [20:01] and then I was sitting next to a guy who was just in the most awful condition. I said, you know you make small talk, I said what...what outfit are you in and he said something, something special services. I said really? I said what instrument do you play? And it turns out he was a sapper who attached dynamite to bridge structures and would blow them at the proper time. So

**Canin [20:32]** Yes so I...my dream was always to get into Special Service which I always thought meant an entertainer but then this fellow sitting in the bed next to me, I said what outfit are you in and he said Special Service and I said oh I said, what instrument do you play? And he said, what do you mean what instrument do I play? And then I realized that he was so banged up and battered and bruised that he...So it turned out he was a sapper and all his job was to attach dynamite sticks to what held bridges up so that they could blow them at the right time and prevent their use. Well anyway I...I found out there was others...there were other special services besides the one that I was interested in.

**Ball [21:22]** I'm curious about the violin that's accompanying you

**Canin [21:27]** I you know I...I'm having difficulty remembering now whether I had it in the case. I must have had it in a case because it wouldn't fit in my barracks bag too well with everything else so I...I just dragged it around with me. It was a cheap, I mean a \$2.00 box, a cigar box we used to call it in those days when they had cigar boxes so I carried this with me and got on...I had a bow with maybe two hairs on it to play, but all I needed was something to...to put under my chin and move my fingers so that I wouldn't completely lose my dexterity, or what was left of it. So that's...that's...but I just carried it around.

**Ball [22:14]** The army let you ship out with an extra case

**Canin [22:19]** Well when I...well yeah you could, well you carried your rifle on the shoulder and you carried your...and I...and a duffel bag on the other shoulder and I had two arms free so I had one for the violin case and that's when...when I was walking up the gangplank the...my commanding officer said what are you going to do with that? And I said to him, well you know never know – which turned out to be quite prophetic.

**Ball [22:49]** What did you know about what was going on, were you getting word from people, how were you getting information

**Canin [23:15]** Well we were in Aachen at the time and...and we certainly had heard about that and then we saw the German prisoners and I have never seen so many people stuffed into these cattle cars we used to call them as they were rolling the other way from the direction we were going. So I said something good must be...you know, you only got it from rumor. They had a newspaper called Stars and Stripes, that was the famous paper that

Malden, Bill Malden did the cartoons of GI Joe. So we used to get that occasionally and...But that was it. I mean we had no direct knowledge of who was fighting where and what successes or failures we were having so that's...that was a situation at Aachen we just trained, [24:03] we just...They kept us you know three meals a day with our mess kits and the way you clean your mess kit was you'd dip it in this...in this barrel of soapy water and then in fresh water and you ate from it again, I mean it was fairly primitive and I don't remember where we slept, I think probably wherever you could find a house with a roof on it or...Because it was cool in those days, it was...We're talking about February in Germany, it's not exactly the tropics, so.

**Ball [24:43]** And then from Aachen, what's next?

**Canin [24:44]** Well uh we...we departed Aachen at some point, got on again, on a troop ship...on a train as we called them, cattle cars and I know I had my fiddle on there because I remember, I'm not sure at what point this was, but I played for the guys a little bit you know on the...on the... in the car that we were on and we kept rolling, rolling, and I remember seeing my first casualties lying out in the field, just corpses and they looked like...I still remember because they looked like dolls. They were sort of in the distance but I said what's that? And they said oh, that's a soldier, and probably an enemy soldier because we were passing through Germany then. We came to a town called Kassel, Germany, it had a big Castle in it which I guess maybe that was...well no, it's probably not but anyway, that's where we stayed and by that time the...the...the American Army and the Russians were putting the finishing touches to the Germans, [26:00] probably the Germans were...the Russians were entering Berlin at the time and we're talking about March, in the middle of March now, those weeks had just rolled by. You know we were in training and then moving and we got to Kassel, Germany and it was I'd say May of 45' and one day all hell broke loose and guys were firing rifles into the air. There were more bullets coming down on our heads. I decided to stay indoors, I didn't want one tapping me on the top of my head and we found out the war in Europe was over. Now that was wonderful too but nobody knew what was next and there were a lot of guys there who were probably slotted or slated to go to Japan so you...You sit out the waiting game and a couple of days went by and suddenly I get orders from the...from our sergeant that I'm being shipped back to Paris. [27:14] I said wow, what's that about? Had no idea. Then, now, with years later, I really think I figured it out. Before I went into the Army I had given some concerts and some very nice woman by the name of Mrs. Stewart Godfrey. Stewart Godfrey if you'll Google him he was a general in the Army and I met her for some reason, I don't know how, that's all gone now but I met her and she liked my playing and she said I'll try to do something for you. But when I was in training at Camp Blanding she said I can't do anything for you now, they need GIs, they need rifleman but after the... if the war is...when the war is over I will certainly do something for you and she knew...[28:13] She called him Johnny Lee, now it's John C. H. Lee. He was the head of transportation facilities in Europe. As a matter of fact I was just...I just looked up some of his... his name and I found out that he had developed a one-way transportation system where roads in France and Germany were only used in one direction so they could move the equipment faster. That was kind of a genius move not to



have equipment going both directions and one side would have to go off into the forest on one side and while the other passed. So it made for a much more....a better flow of equipment. **[29:02]** Anyway and she used to refer to Patton as Georgey, you know Georgey Patton, dear man, he says he loves music you know so ....This was all inside information which I didn't really know and anyway then I said...I didn't really know this at the time but I got these orders and the next day I was on a little truck that was going back to Paris and rode back to Paris and I was delivered to a street called Rou de Berri, Rou de Berri in Paris, dumped off the truck and got my orders to go to the 6817<sup>th</sup> Special Service Company and I didn't know why but I had a fiddle, so I thought maybe some music would be playing some part. Anyway we were stationed in a little town just outside of Paris called Chatou not Chateau but Chatou and we happened to be billeted in a house that one of the Napoleons built for one of the Josephine's, which was pretty nice. **[30:16]** It was a very spectacular grounds and we had...we had real civilization. We were living in rooms with bathrooms and it was very nice and we were there for a while and eventually the Army got its act together, it was trying to form. I found...we found out then that they were trying to form a show company made up of GIs who were not going to go to Japan and who were in the show...show biz people. Like there was a famous Broadway director, Joshua Logan, and he was going to be...he was in the army and he was going to um...he was going to produce theatricals using GIs and then there were other. Oh Mickey Rooney was part of that show he was going to do, what he did for the GIs and this was all being put together at that moment. I still remember that they had taken over a French theatre after the Germans had left and they found thousands of costumes in it and I remember my...

**Canin [31:28]** So anyway we were...I was beginning to catalog costumes, that was my first job. The powers that be, the administration of the soldier show company was getting organized and they were getting all these people coming in like Mickey Rooney and ...

**Canin [31:45]** When I got these orders they were cut and I got them and they were handed to me and it said private for... no I wasn't even a first-class, I was just a private. Private Stuart Canin is transferred to 68<sup>th</sup> 17<sup>th</sup> soldier show company in Paris, France. That was big stuff and the next day they got me on a truck with my baggage and my fiddle and we rolled on and to Paris and we got to Paris, they dropped us off at the...There was some kind of headquarters at Rou de Berri which still exists today. I think the Herald Tribune used to have headquarters on Rou de Berri and they sent me over to Chatou which is a town, not Chateau but Chatou, a town well known in French history because it was one of the hangouts of one of the Napoleons and one of the Josephine's but I can't remember which right now. My first job there at...at the soldier show company, they didn't quite know what to do with me. They had requisitioned thousands of costumes from the French theatres that they... that were now back safely in the hands of the French **[33:05]** and my first job I still remember was going into a room full of costumes, like 18<sup>th</sup> century French women costumes with large hoops and I have to sort of determine what years these things...I had to sort of categorize them as to whether this was the 1700s or the 1800s or the 1900s and I really was not an expert in that field but I used my...what common sense or little common sense I had

and cataloged these things so that if they ever wanted to do a show they would....they had women soldiers and men soldiers so that they could just use whatever costumes they needed.

**Canin [33:50]** So they sent me to work cataloging costumes and the idea was to separate the 17<sup>th</sup> century costumes, the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the 20<sup>th</sup> century costumes so when the Special Service company needed to put on produc...theatrical productions directed by none other than Joshua Logan they...they would have some of this ready but how accurate I was I don't know. But anyway the war ended, the world moved on and that was that so **[34:26]**...But eventually they...they got enough musicians together and actors and dancers and what not. Mickey Rooney was there and other people and then Eugene List, the well-known American pianist came overseas and he was a sergeant and I was a private but when you play music, you're equal, so there we were.

**Ball [34:53]** So did you and Eugene List start playing together right away or how did that relationship come to be?

**Canin [35:01]**

Well when Gene came over of course he was a well-known American pianist who had been...had a nice career going already and he was a number of years older than I was...

**Canin [35:13]** Anyway the days went on and I was busy cataloging costumes and one day I met up with Eugene List, he was a very well-known American pianist and whose career would soon get a big boost from international events but anyway we got together. I was a classically trained violinist, he was of course a classically trained pianist and we just out of desperation for something to do we decided to make some music together. So we found an old upright piano and we used to play sonatas and it came to the attention of our commanding officer there that this is something, we were easily transportable, we were just two people, we could go into the hospitals, this is what we basically were doing at that time. We would go into the hospitals and play for these wounded soldiers and we did that, went from every hospital in the...in the neighborhood and after a while they were thinking of bigger game, they were thinking of a GI orchestra and so they sent Eugene and myself, now that the war was over, they sent...They gave us a jeep and Gene drove, I didn't know how to drive because I had never had a license, I was too young. **[36:36]** But he drove and we used to drive...we drove all the way up to Pilsen in Czechoslovakia, what was then Czechoslovakia, looking at administrative offices of these...of the GI...of the Army to find out who played what and we needed violinists, violists, cellists, oboes, the whole...the whole roster of orchestral musicians and we found a great number of them and we brought them back to headquarters in Paris and they made the appropriate calls and pretty soon we began to get a nucleus of a GI symphony. **[37:22]** It didn't occur at that moment because it takes...you have to get a conductor, you have to...you get music and all that stuff. In the Army you had nothing but time and of course we had plenty of time, they weren't doing anything really of importance and meanwhile Gene and I had been going out and playing these little concerts for the wounded GIs in hospitals.

**Ball [37:53]** And what were these concerts like for the wounded GIs?

**Canin [37:57]** We basically played light, short pieces, lots of Kreisler music, just any kind of what we would call in those days they called them encore pieces that three, four minutes. I remember one favorite was a piece called La Vida Breve by Manuel De Falla and it was arranged by Kreisler for him and I used to get kind of a laugh out of the wounded GIs because I said it was the infantrymen's theme song, it means a short life in Spanish. La Vida Brev. Anyway I used that...I used that quite a bit and guys appreciated that, that that was their theme song. But that was the sort of music we played always on a battered upright piano that was leftover from something.

**Ball [38:57]** And who would tell you where to go

**Canin [39:01]** The hospitals were known where they were, we travel in a jeep and up...that I can't really remember where we went but we went to plenty of them and there were plenty of wounded guys who were just lying there with nothing to do. So we brought a little, hopefully a...a breath of fresh air to them. Oh yeah one time we had a very interesting call from our commanding person and he said Jascha Heifetz the famous American violinist was doing a whole circuit for the USO, the United Service Organization which was a private civilian-oriented entertainment unit and he had been...they said...he said there's a story, the official story came out that he has complained that they were working him to death making him play so many concerts and he decided not to play at two different cities one in Rheims, that's Rheims, Rheims where the famous cathedral is, and the other one Rheims [40:13]...and Verdun and he was not going to play those two concerts so our commanding officer had a call from some desperate GI entertainment unit out in Rheims and Verdun if they had anything to replace Heifetz, and they sent Gene and myself out. I don't know if you know what it is to stand in front of say 20,000 GIs on a big field with a built up stage and the GIs are ex...in those days a lot of them expected Heifetz and when we walked out, we weren't Heifetz and it... [40:54] But we played and they were very appreciative and as a matter of fact I have somewhere, I have a review from the Stars and Stripes, the magazine, that said that they did away with Heifetz and they brought in Canin and List and Mr. Heifetz will be sad to know that these guys were a big hit, that sort of thing. So we did those two concerts and then Heifetz got back and in uniform and continued his tour. But I guess he needed a couple of days off.

**Ball [41:25]** Do you know the dates?

**Canin [41:28]** I...well the dates were somewhere in May, sometime in May I...if I can find that...

**Canin [41:35]** I have had, I would really have to look for that because it's not the sort of thing that...that one keeps when you're traveling through life. A review from Stars and Stripes.

**Ball [41:48]** Well it's quite a moment

**Canin [41:51]** Yeah, well anyway it was an excellent review and it kind of gave us encouragement to go on with that and...

**Canin [42:01]** Well we had been used to playing for 30 guys in a hospital room and this was thousands of GIs and it's quite amazing when you think of the...the way classical music was treated in those days and a fellow like Heifetz of course was a giant in his field and these GIs were all sitting there waiting expectedly for him to play.

**Ball [42:30]** Fast forward us to June

**Canin [42:36]** Well our...you know our life just moved on. We were playing these little concerts in hospitals and big ones for Heifetz in Verdun and Rheims and we just...I don't know, we were not really assigned anything, not by the Army anyway and then came June. We moved...moving on and I think at the beginning of July our commanding officer came to us with the announcement that president Truman who had been president for three months upon the death of Franklin Roosevelt in April, April 12<sup>th</sup>, and he had been president for three months now, so April, May, June yeah and July. He was going to come to Europe and he might like some entertainment and our smart commanding officer said well, I have Canin and List ready to go, would that do? And I guess he got the okay but he added Mickey Rooney and there was a young tenor who used to be on all of the radio shows, his name was Bobby Breen and the middle of July, that's I...I guess that's when they found out when he was really coming. **[43:58]** They came...the officer came to us and said that we're flying you up to Berlin because you're going to play for president Truman which was quite exciting so we...the bundles... They bundled us up into a C54, one of those big cargo planes and I think there must have been four of...just four of us. Bobby, Mickey, Gene, and myself in this big cargo plane and I remember that too because there were no seats as you get on a plane today. **[44:31]** They were just along the side with the middle being for tanks and whatever and they flew us up and we landed in Tempelhof Airport which was right in the center of Berlin. I mean it's amazing. It's sort of like LaGuardia airport in New York I guess. This was right in the middle of Berlin and we landed and they drove us out to Potsdam and of course we were in the Russian zone and the Russians, they had partitioned Berlin into...into four segments – American, British, French, and uh...uh Russian, British, French and American yeah. So they had a tent set up for us in Potsdam and we were across from this house, a nice good old bourgeois German home, very lovely and we were put in this tent and this was probably three or four days before the president was to arrive, **[45:34]** I'm not quite sure of the dates but it was in middle of July and one day our commanding officer came to us and said get your shoes pressed or your shoes shined and your clothes pressed and your hair cut and we're going across the street to play for the president. It was his little White House they called it and so it happened that one evening, this was July 19<sup>th</sup> of 1945, we went across the street and waited in the house, sort of outside on a porch, it was about 6:30 in the evening, sort of getting to be dusk and we looked out from the porch and down the street came and I'm telling you I will never forget this how many black limousines

came because when they drove up to the front door of the house we looked out and good lord out of one stepped Harry Truman which was exciting enough, and then out of the next car was Prime Minister Winston Churchill of Great Britain and premier or Generalissimo Joseph Stalin, the commander in chief of the Russian armies, and these gentleman got out of the car with their aids and their whole entourage. **[47:03]** Like I said it was like a New York Times front page coming to life in front of you and they came into the house and Truman came into the garden and chatted with us while we were there and the occasion was that he was giving, since he had just become president and actually he was more important in the terms of United States history than Stalin who was never elected, or Churchill who was only a prime minister and was not any...there for any designated length of time but could be removed at any time, and Truman was president of the United States, elected by the people so they...This was the first state dinner and Truman gave it for Stalin and Churchill. **[47:53]** They finished dinner and they came out onto the porch where we were standing, there was a little upright piano off to one side and I had put my violin, so-called violin, that \$2.00 dollar thing that I played, I put it behind the piano and each individual... Truman had Harry Vaughn was standing there, his aid, was standing next to him too to accommodate his wishes and Churchill had someone and Stalin also had a Russian aid, and then Truman said, they were sitting on the sofa, the three of them, Truman in the center, Churchill on his right. **[48:37]** I always say befitting his political affiliation but I'm not sure of that but I know Stalin would be on the left because I know his affiliation but...but I thought it was probably correct and I went behind the piano to get my violin and this Russian aid to Stalin, he leaped across. I'll tell you he just in one bound he leaped that entire floor and stood there watching me to see what I was getting out of the case and when I took out a violin and a bow he smiled and he went back to standing behind Stalin. So I took my violin out and Truman said gentlemen, play something for us, and whipped out our repertoire and...and this crappy old upright piano, I hope all the keys were there, I don't remember now, but anyway we played our...and don't forget we had rehearsed these things. **[49:42]** We had been playing these for GIs and all of that and these were perfectly played a whole bunch of short numbers. I...the only piece that I remember Gene List playing was the theme from the *Tchaikovsky* piano concerto, da-da-da-da-dee-da-dee-do-da-dee-do, okay that was...and when I found out later that that theme never occurs in the piano, it only occurs in the orchestra so what he...he just made it up at that moment and just banged out the, da-da-da-da-dee, and this was after a couple of pieces that we had played, and Stalin jumped up and said "A toast to the musicians!" **[50:28]** Because he recognized that Tchaikovsky piano concerto which I...I thought was a very nice, nice touch. So that was...then we played...I don't remember what Gene played, I'm sure there was some Chopin in there and this Tchaikovsky thing, I'm not really sure but I know what I played because I will never forget what I played. I started with the Praeludium and Allegro of Fritz Kreisler and then I played the Slow Movement of the Wieniawski, Polish composer Wieniawski, violin concerto which was just a piece that was played everywhere by all violinists and then I played Tambourin Chinois, a Kreisler short piece which supposedly mimics Chinese music and then I played the Liebesleid of Fritz Kreisler and then I finished with my favorite, the infantryman's theme song, La Vida Breve of Manuel De Falla which ends very excitedly you know. **[51:36]** So that was that and Truman thanked us and we went back to the tent but then his aid told us he would like us to

play the next three nights for other generals who hadn't made it to the dinner and so we played for them and then at one point when we...The next nights Truman was sitting at the piano playing and he said and this is true, I remember it, I wonder how much better off the country would have been if I had become a concert pianist. But we didn't smile or anything, I don't know what you were supposed to...how you were supposed to react to that but anyway that...That was his remark and then he promised to have us play at the White House when the war was over and all that sort of thing. A very nice man and I reference him in my letters what a good fellow he was and there was one point in one of my letters I say that his aides say that you would imagine that he was [52:53]...this was his first meeting with Stalin and Churchill and these fellows had been in politics for 40 to 50 years, they were giants obviously in their field and here was this little haberdasher from Missouri and he inherited the mantle of...of Roosevelt who had certainly met up with Stalin and Churchill a number of times prior to this but this was his first meeting. So in my letter I say that his aides say that suddenly the next day he seemed to be so fully in charge and so upbeat, they had no idea what was going on and then way long after...oh by the way as entertainment Mickey Rooney and Bobby Breen did not pass muster because somebody widely thought that...that Mickey Rooney's kind of humor would not go for Stalin but that classical music was the best and Bobby Breen never got a chance to sing his pop tunes either because Truman really liked classical music and he was determined. [54:08] As a matter of fact I found out later on in David McCullough's book he says that Stalin sent for two female violinists and two pianists and they came and played when he gave the next...the dinner the next day or two. But Churchill hated classical music and he brought the Royal Navy Band to play the loudest stuff they could play, all kinds of marches, patriotic songs which I thought was kind of amusing and that's...that's how that Potsdam thing came about.

**Ball [54:44]** Do you remember seeing these limos pull up, where were you

**Canin [54:55]** Well, we were...you know to this day I have trouble. I've seen pictures in David McCullough's book of two Kaiser Stasse in Potsdam and it's evidently a two-story house, just a good old German house, well built, solid, concrete, all that, and I thought that we were on the second floor where the dining room was and we were looking down at...to the street so we were a little bit above. It wasn't that high but we were above and looking down and seeing, coming around the corner was one limousine after another pulling in up to the house and parking and then these gentleman getting out and from the porch you went right into the dining room and it seemed logical now that it would be on the [55:48]...on the second floor but you know I'd have to...I don't know, I'm never sure because I know we chatted with Truman in the garden which is obviously on the ground level, but then I think we went up somewhere, a flight of stairs and looked down from that porch where the grand...where the upright piano was and they were having dinner through French doors, we could see them and they were having dinner and then they came out onto the porch where we were and that's when we played for them.

**Ball [56:21]** So it may have been you were on the second floor, you were on the dining room level when you saw them arrive, then you spoke to Truman later

**Canin [56:27]** Yeah in the garden yes, yes, yes exactly. Or we may have...we may have just chatted with him when he came in because although it doesn't seem but...I...I'm not really sure and I can't rewind or anything like that so I...I'll never know, unless I went to that house on Kaiser Stasse. But anyway....

**Ball [56:53]** Stalin really like music, what were your impressions of him

**Canin [57:03]** Well Stalin was a master of the poker face. He showed no emotion. His skin was kind of pock-marked. He had a big moustache and he was wearing a tan...his khaki uniform and I can't remember whether he had shoulder boards or not but I remember the khaki uniform and the face, a good Russian face, and it was not the healthiest face because he may have had smallpox, who knows. I mean this is something that historians can tell me but I don't...I don't know but he was interested in music and Truman we knew first hand was interested in music but Churchill was smoking a cigar as I said in one my letters and it looked like two or three feet long, this thing. It was just and one of those puffing...the days before smoking was banned in all kinds of places so.

**Ball [58:07]** And what were your thoughts about Stalin at the time

**Canin [58:22]** Well you have to remember history in those days that the Russian Army was doing a great bit of the fight but they had been at it much longer and they were...they were given permission I think by Eisenhower, they agreed that they would take Berlin and that was the Russian zone then. So one...Listen, the enemy...or what is the old joke. I don't know the enemy is your friend. **[58:50]** So the...the Russian in my letter, I refer to him as Generalissimo Stalin. I don't know what part he had, he played in the actual maneuverings of the Russian armies but they certainly were doing a number on the Germans and thanks to them in those days that war came to an end pretty much. So we were in the Russian zone and I thought very kindly of him. He was...I mean he was...I don't know what to say he was like a god and Churchill too because their careers as leaders of big countries, I mean Great Britain in those days was a giant of a country and Russian was a giant nation you know.

**Ball [59:40]** Do you remember being nervous?

**Canin [59:45]** I have been nervous on occasion but I was never more nervous than...I still remember having to get control of my right arm so that the bow wouldn't bounce while I was playing. Yeah, I was nervous. I mean to see those three guys sitting on a...on a sofa at age, let's see I was...I guess I was 19 at the time and that was the biggest audience I had ever played for.

**Ball [01:00:23]** Do you remember what was going through your mind as you were playing?

**Canin [01:00:32]** No, uh, when you play a concert, no matter who it's for...

**Canin [1:00:38]** Oh when...when I play I don't...I only think of playing as beautifully and as accurately and playing the music, I never think of who is there or anything like that, except seeing these gentleman sitting in front of you did make me somewhat nervous but once you get into the batter's box with your fiddle up and your bow in your right hand, your fiddle in your left hand, you tend to feel okay about music in general and what you're doing.

**Ball [01:01:11]** And before and after, do you remember looking at them and...

**Canin [01:01:22]** You know I...I don't remember what my reaction was afterwards but the president thanked us and then I think we went down the stairs and back to our tents where Mickey and Bobby were still sitting wondering what was going on, and then of course the next night we played. But that of course....the pressure was already off, we were only playing for Americans then. Admiral...Admiral Land and General Clay, who was the military governor of Germany and lord only knows who else were there, but that was it.

**Ball [01:02:00]** Do you remember telling Mickey and Bobby what happened?

**Canin [01:02:06]** First of all one didn't tell Mickey Rooney anything. You know he was...no, when we did...we didn't want to make him feel that he should have been up there but it was obviously that Stalin was not the kind of person that Mickey's antics would...But I'll tell you something, the couple of three days that we spent in a tent with Mickey Rooney were indelibly imprinted on my mind how funny a man he was. He was a master of dialects. He could imitate Italian, French, English, Jewish, any language that you wanted he was a master at it and of course he had....I mean at that point I don't know what he had...he had become a big star I guess with Judy Garland and Mid-Summer Night's Dream and all of those wonderful movies that he made. So he was no...nobody you...You paid homage to Mickey because he was a great performer and I can attest to that because he had us rolling in the aisles, whatever aisles there were in that tent. Yeah.

**Ball [01:03:19]** So for the rest of the conference you would occasionally play for the president or at dinner

**Canin [01:03:27]** Well evidently Truman liked our playing and so he asked us to come back and I think we played two or three more nights for him and these were just dinners for just the...your normal run of famous generals and that sort of thing and his staff and whatnot. So then got on and oh, we did go around, we did walk around Berlin. That's right. I remember I have a photo of Gene and myself on a pile of rubble in front of Hitler's balcony that occurred at the time we were in Berlin and that was at the Chancellery which was Hitler's headquarters, that was the balcony from which he made all of those speeches that we used to hear in the United States, his ugly, shrieking and this maniac, you know.

**Ball [01:04:22]** So you made it a point to visit?



**Canin [1:04:26]** Well we thought we're in Berlin and my lord we didn't have anything to do in those days so it was a...it's only what 20, 30 minutes and there was not much traffic in those days so we would go into Berlin and somebody took us to the Chancellery and there was this bombed-out building and this was where his...his...down some stairs was his...where he died you know, that's where he committed suicide I guess and uh we'd...There was a mound of rubble reaching up to the balcony which was on the first floor and Gene and I thought it would be fun to climb up on that and there was a...someone I guess had already done it because there was an EZ chair on top of this pile of rubble – and we sat in it and took this photo. So....

**Canin [01:05:22]** I'm not sure, you know at age 18 or 19 the events are just so overwhelming that you're not really thinking of history, you're just saying wow, what I'm going through now. And as...I was so naïve when I wrote a letter to my folks saying you'll never believe who I played for last night, I wrote the next morning, I wrote a letter to them I...I have to think this...why did I... why did I. Oh damn it, see that's the senior moments that come.

**Canin [01:06:32]** I remember writing to my parents, I was so naïve of what this actually meant. I said I hope this makes the newspapers. I wrote to them well, it made every newspaper and every radio in captivity had the news about that and I was so naïve I said I hope this makes...I said I hope this makes the newspapers because I...it would be nice for my career too to get my name bandied about like that and that's why I said I was so naïve about the import of this kind of event. I mean I played for these three gentlemen, it was a concert but never...never realizing that my god first of all, they were starved for news out of Potsdam. The newspapers and all around the world and so when this came about and of course my parents wrote to me right away they said my lord we saw you...we saw your name, it's in...every newspaper we bought had this story of the three...two GIs playing for the big three.

**Ball [01:07:46]** Do you have some of those stories in your archives

**Canin [01:08:00]** You can do that. You go on ...I think the New York Times...

**Canin [01:08:08]** No I didn't. That was all stuff you threw away I mean, I don't know you know...I mean I was still...I was still in...hoping to become a good violinist and...

**Ball [01:08:22]** You don't think your mother would have collected these

**Canin [01:08:30]** No I don't think so I...When I won the Paganini International Violin Competition I saved the Italian newspapers and I saved the American newspapers but that was when...that was part of my career. This in my own feeble thinking I didn't realize that this was a career move although Gene List, it was kind of interesting he had a manager in New York and he had already been pretty much a young American success story as a pianist, he was the American pianist. He played at the White House because he was able to go back.

He was in the Army long enough and had enough points to go home. I didn't. I was...I stayed until August of 46' which was another 12, 13 months and so I could do nothing about career, my goodness and...and so that's...that's where...that's where we were you know.

**Ball [01:09:39]** From the conference, tell me what you did with your days, I mean you were waiting...

**Canin [01:09:51]** After the week or whatever we spent in Potsdam we were flown back to Paris and the...they were very seriously getting...serious about getting an orchestra together and finally we got an orchestra together but then they moved us, the whole 68<sup>th</sup> 17<sup>th</sup> Soldier's Show Company moved to Frankfurt, Germany. So we got into trucks and moved and then that's where the orchestra took shape and we found a conductor and the orchestra started to give concerts at...at the Eagay Farben (?) building as we used to call it, the IG Farben, which of course they had not bombed because some thoughtful general said that would be a great headquarters for the American forces in Europe and so they didn't bomb it even though IG Farben was a big chemical manufacturer and all of that. **[01:10:58]** But anyway that's...and so we were based there in Frankfurt and we started to give concerts for...We played for the British and the French and the Russian troops who were always invited to our concerts and we played in all the different zones of friendly...three of the zones and then they started to...We traveled, they put together about 10 ambulances and there were seven or eight of us into an ambulance with the equipment, timpani's and all that, big stuff, double basses, and we would travel around and this was beginning. **[1:11:41]** This was the beginning of the winter season so I have a lot of pictures of a lot of snow and us traveling in these ambulances in snow and I still remember playing...going to Vienna, we played at Salzburg and then traveled to Vienna and something called the Mozart Express and that train had no windows, no doors, no nothing. It was completely exposed to the elements and I remember freezing...freezing to death on that little train ride to Salzburg to Vienna. Then we played at the...at the Wagner House by Roit (?). We played on stage for...for the troops and I still remember seeing all of those paper mache dragons from the Wagner opera's backstage that were stored. They had not been destroyed and then we just began to play...we played concerts. We had a...we had pro...I have some programs of those concerts and I...They asked me, I was probably one of the better violinists in the orchestra and I played the Wieniawski violin concerto of which I had played the slow movement for Stalin and Churchill and Truman, and I played that as a solo. **[1:13:07]** I would be sitting in the back of the first violin section and they would ask me to get up and play that, so it was kind of you know...It was just show biz and we did a lot of those concerts which was of course marvelous to play a concerto with an orchestra and it was a very good orchestra because there were a lot of people in that orchestra that went on to very good careers in the classical music field.

**Ball [01:13:29]** So it was a fantastic education.

**Canin [01:13:34]** Absolutely. We...we traveled to let's see well...Salzburg and Vienna and Bayreuth, you know the Wagner House, and every concert hall in between we played. Of

course many of them were damaged but those that were undamaged we played, and we had very good crowds and very appreciative crowds to see this Army of GIs get up and make good music you know?

**Ball [01:14:03]** Take me back to Potsdam, you were on call but was there a pre set schedule. Did you go out or did you stay in the tent

**Canin [01:14:27]** Well no, we did go out to Berlin because Berlin was like I said a half hour away and that's when we found the Chancellery and went up on that pile of rubble in front of the balcony.

**Ball [01:14:39]** What were your impressions of Berlin

**Canin [01:14:42]** Well it's kind of interesting. This is...I don't know if you've heard of the conductor Sergiu Celibidache, he's a Romanian conductor who was the conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic and one day when we were in Berlin while we were in Potsdam, we traveled over to Berlin and they gave us a Jeep I guess and since I was too young to drive Gene drove and we got to Berlin and there was no other side of the street parking or anything like that, we just parked. There was a movie theatre called the Titania Palast Theater and that's a very well-known, was a very well known, big movie house like the Roxy or the Paramount in New York and there was a sign up Berlin Philharmonic, conducted by Sergiu Celibidache, and Gene and I both being....We went to the concert and I never forgot it because there were these emaciated fellows, musicians in the Berlin Philharmonic. **[01:15:43]** They...they had made it through as an orchestra but certainly there was not much food of course considering the...their circumstances. We heard the concert and then let's see that was...

### **T003**

1945 in July at the Titania Palast and about 20 years ago, Sergiu Celibidache came to Los Angeles to conduct the Munich Philharmonic which was his orchestra at the time and they went back to see him and told him when I had last seen him conduct, I said it was at the Titania Palast movie theater. Oh yes he said, I remember that. He said now let me tell you something, he said we shouldn't wait so long to meet again he said. He was a funny guy, a great conductor.

**Ball [01:16:41]** What else did you do there

**Canin [01:16:47]** Well, you know we were in Berlin twice. Once with the GI symphony which was what it was called and once when we were at Potsdam playing for the president. So it's a little mixed up in my mind. I remember the city was devastated, I mean the Reichstag was just bombed and they just completely...you could see through everything you know and there were...I still remember the Russians had put up on a pedestal, they had put a tank which was the first tank into Berlin. They put a Russian tank up there and as a matter

of fact, just the other day I spoke to a historian at Stanford and he said you know it's still there. He was only there a short while ago.

**Ball [01:17:45]** What shape was the audience in?

**Canin [01:17:37]** Well, I...you know I don't remember. But just looking at them and they were in a privileged position. I'm sure they got extra rations or something. The Berlin Philharmonic was Germany, you know? But I...I don't remember what...but it was...you know. I mean the Germans invented music for heaven's sake so they, they had a good crowd and the Berlin Philharmonic always was a premiere attraction. But the fact that they got them together and put them in this movie house, that was a sign of the way things were.

**Ball [01:18:11]** Did you have contact with the Russian soldiers?

**Canin [01:18:14]** Yeah I got a couple of...I didn't...None of us spoke Russian and the Russians didn't speak much English so it was just a question of shaking hands. Yeah. At the...when they came to our concerts it was just a handshake. That was...that was about it. But you know...I don't know, from their point of view they said what are these American interlopers doing? We beat the Germans, you know? And we thought we did it. So you know, there was always a little bit of that. But they were happy to see us and we were happy to see them. As I think there was a meeting on the Elbe River, the famous photo of the Americans and the Russians meeting up. So you can imagine the...the happiness there.

**Ball [01:19:00]** What were your impressions of the Russian troops?

**Canin [01:19:04]** All I know is that they had...they had big fur caps on and heavy overcoats and that's all I...We didn't...we only met them as individuals either at a concert, you know never...I mean the war was over so it was not a question of them being soldiers, they were people now.

**Ball [01:19:25]** And Berlin was in ruins at the time.

**Canin [01:19:27]** Absolute ruins. Complete ruins, yes. Yes absolutely. I mean all...every city. Munich was destroyed and you know...I do remember when we were traveling with the GI Symphony, that we were in Nuremburg where the trials were being held and we did visit the trials and I did see those...those human beings sitting there on the dock you know. Goebbels and Göring and whoever. I can't remember who they were but I...I remember seeing, we were sitting way out on the dock and the...the trials were going on.

**Ball [01:20:02]** Why did you go to the trials?

**Canin [01:20:05]** Well, we all knew that...that they were being tried and this...we're talking about let's see...probably '46 maybe? Something like that and there we were and this building was still standing, not having been hit and I think Chief Justice Jackson, wasn't he

was presiding at the American...So it was very interesting. Maybe somebody older than...said let's go and of course we went along.

**Ball [01:20:43]** Do you remember the content, being interested in the content?

**Canin [01:20:47]** Well I was just...we didn't stay very long. I was just interested in seeing what those people looked like you know? And they just looked like normal human beings and then...I still remember a little bit of that.

**Ball [01:21:04]** So looking back on it now, how did that experience in Potsdam effect the course of your life

**Canin [01:21:18]** It was very important in my life because it gave me a little bit of a pedestal to stand on. I mean when you get an event like that is a once in...one in a million and once in a lifetime event and people say you played at Potsdam? You know, everybody knows about the conference and not everybody knew but once you...and when you came back that was kind of a feather in your cap and it gave you a little distinction and all those little things help and when you're trying and when you're young you think only of your career, how you build these things. I never realized how many steps it takes to build a career but it takes many, many Potsdam conferences and the fame that accrues with that kind of a meeting too, to help your career. **[01:22:10]** Gene List was very...As I said, he had a management and he was very...his management was very capable and he became the Potsdam pianist and that was the tagline on all his programs, the Potsdam pianist, and people just flocked to hear him. He was a wonderful pianist but you don't get that...with that kind of hashtag as they say now, it's really...it's a ticket seller you know.

**Ball [01:22:38]** Do you remember being... jealous...?

**Canin [01:22:49]** Well. He...he went back. I...I had to stay and he was already a concertizing artist. He had already played with the Philadelphia Orchestra. He played solo. I hadn't done that and I was just going back to Julliard, you know? And there were a million other of us trying to make a...a career so. What can I say? I was a long way off from that...he was already in the swing of being an established concert artist you know, touring and all that kind of thing. I was just going back to study, to learn my craft and by that time six, seven years later the conference was dead. Nobody...nobody cared about it anymore. The war...both wars had ended and...we were back in business as a country.

**Ball [01:23:40]** Was there any sense of let down coming back to school after Potsdam and playing for all those troops?

**Canin [01:24:07]** Well. Well yes in a way. You know, you go from the Potsdam conference to Julliard. It's a little...no matter that you're in Julliard, a big school, famous school, lots of fine students there. But you know when you're young that stuff...I mean you think about it. I mean you're always thinking of your career but whether you can big moves to advance

your career is another thing and I was not one of those that was...I was interested in playing the violin well. That was really my...and I was interested in becoming an asset to classical music and that's really where my thoughts were. I was not...I was not really in showbiz to make a career, I would go where the currents took me and I thought if I played well I would get where I wanted to go.

**Ball [01:25:02]** Tell us a little about your career post Potsdam

**Canin [01:25:16]** Yeah well. It's a little bit of that had already started with the Jack Benny/Fred Allen feud.

**Canin [01:25:36]** I do not know to this day and no one I can ask why my father other than that he was a mad lover for the violin. A violin was for him the instrument and he was determined I guess, I mean I never...he brought home a violin one December and said...and I remember him bringing home a music stand, I didn't even know how to open it and he opened it and he had bought some music and he gave me a violin and he played the violin a little bit. He knew how to...but he was an acute judge of good...goodness in violin playing. I started to study the violin. As a matter of fact I started to study the piano and the violin at the same time because my mother was kind of one of these Jewish amateur pianists who played at synagogue meetings and all that kind of thing. So I started both instruments. After six months I gave up on the piano. I just simply could not get my hands to do what the piano needed and strangely enough my brother who was four years younger became a wonderful pianist and great...has a great professional as a teacher at Julliard for 50 years.

**[01:26:54]** Well anyway, I started to play and it was pretty obvious. I would study with a local teacher in...in Far Rockaway where I lived and it was obvious that I had some good talent because I remember after playing for two years, my teacher had a little orchestra and I played a Vavaldi concerto with this orchestra and I still remember it. In those days they dressed you in short velvet pants and a white silk Russian-style blouse. That was the uniform for young prodigies. So anyway I played and it was obvious that I was making good progress and then...So I was seven, eight, nine. At age 10, Fred Allen, who had a radio program, a very well-known radio program, Top of the Heap. **[01:27:48]** He was having young instrumentalists or any actually, any entertainers they could whistle, they could three-part harmony or tap dance. As long as you could hear it on the radio, and you could hear a tap dancer on radio strangely enough. Anyway, he put a...there was an ad in the newspaper that he's auditioning for young talent and they said it would pay \$75 if you were chosen. So if you remember the days. My father was making \$25. He said well, let's try for it. So I went into the city...in Far Rockaway, I went into the city and went to the studios and played for Fred's assistant, Jim Harkins, Uncle Jim they called him. He was Fred's assistant, and I played the Preludium and Allegro and at the end of it he said, oh we love it. He said it takes four and a half minutes and no sponsor is going to give a kid of 10 four and a half minutes on national radio. **[01:28:58]** Do you have something shorter and smaller? I said, yes I have something called Schubert written by...not Franz Schubert but Francoise Schubert; another Schubert, called The Bee. I went home and I practice it and we timed it. I got it down to 45 seconds. I went back and he said perfect! And December 30, 1936, I was scheduled to

appear on the Fred Allen show and I did, and in those days we played two performances; one at nine when Fred's show was on in New York and one at midnight for the West Coast. They didn't have any coaxial cable over there or whatever they call to carry the voices across the continent. So at midnight I played it again. He knew Jack would be listening because they listened to each other's programs and this was at the midnight one when Jack would be hearing it at 9 o'clock in California. [01:30:02] And he said something to the effect that here's this 10 year old kid who can play the violin so much better than Jack Benny. I'm just paraphrasing you know? And Jack can't even play on the linoleum as he used to say. That was on a Sunday night...on a Wednesday night and that was it. I got a nice hand from the audience. It was very nice. I went home. Sunday evening we always listened to Jack Benny. As a matter of fact we listened to Fred Allen and Jack Benny. Those were the two radio programs, what we did for entertainment in those days. And Jack took issue with Fred about whether he could play the violin or not, and the next Wednesday Fred answered him. Took issue with him whether he could play the violin. The next Sunday Jack answered and it went...and then a couple of months later I was on the Maxwell House Radio show.

[01:31:00] That was another one of these big variety shows and then when Jack came to New York in March of '40...of March of '37, the first time he was in New York he played at the Waldorf. He did the show from the Waldorf Astoria Hotel and he asked me to be his guest and not to bring your violin. So I didn't bring my violin and he spent the entire time trying to prove that I was more than 10 years old and he finally found out I was 10 years, eight months, six hours and three minutes older than 10 and so, in his own mind he had nailed Fred for a lie, you see? So...anyway it went on and the feud went on for four years and they finally finished it in 1940. [01:31:54] They made a movie, probably one of the worst movies ever made called Love Thy Neighbor for obvious reasons, you know? Fred and Jack. And they had the opening at the Paramount Theater in New York and they asked me to part of the stage show. Okay well, you know that's big stuff. I mean here your career is moving on with this sort of hyper kind of famous sort of thing that is happening to you. So I played The Bee on the stage show. And...to conclude the feud they shook hands.

**Canin** [01:32:35] They...to conclude their feud, they gave me a check for a thousand dollars which in 1940 was okay, you know? To further my music education. So that was nice. That was that. Then a number of years later Jack asked me, he called me when I was teaching at Oberlin College at the conservatory, he asked me if I would join him on his radio...on his television show that he had, The Jack Benny television show and come out to Hollywood. So I came out there and played with Jack, against Jack. I played this...this famous...the infantrymen's theme song, La Vida Breve, I played it on his show. Then we played a little duet of The Bee. Now I took the hard part, he took the easy parts, you know we sort of changed all of...and you know it was very...very nice. [01:33:39] I was kind of an Oberlin professor type and a little stiff on...So I realized that showbiz was not...that kind of showbiz was not really my métier. But anyway that's...that took a...and that was in '65. But a few years before that, in '59, I was looking for a competition to...I had won the YMHA competition in New York at the 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y and I was given a recital on there. They had a very prestigious violin. So you know I was making...I was making career moves in a sense. But very slow, almost...almost sort of like a glacier type career. But I was...it was happening.

And then I...I happened to know Zino Francescatti, the famous French violinist and he said do you know the Paganini competition? [01:32:43] I said I looked it up and I saw that their repertoire for the competition was stuff that I played. He said go for it. He said it's a big competition, go for it. So I went over there and in Genoa in...in October of '59.

**Canin [01:34:59]** Oh so. I...I had decided that my...oh I was teaching at the University of Iowa now. I...I was married and needed to...and had children...make a living and all that sort of thing and I had decided to go to the Paganini competition and I actually won. Won first prize at the Paganini, which was a pretty big international competition and it was written up in all the press and all that. I remember the...the Italians had it...it was on October 12<sup>th</sup> which was, they called it Columbus Day Celebrations and they gave a medal for sport, they gave a medal for music and they gave a medal... I'm blanking out on what the other medal was. But the person who got the medal for sport was the person who used to run the Olympics. Do you remember his name anybody? Oh, very famous.

**Canin [01:36:09]** Avery...No Avery Brundage. That's right because...

**Canin [01:36:19]** The Brundage Collection at the... at the Museum of Art in San Francisco...the Oriental...the Asian collection is his. Yeah. Avery Brundage. Oh, and I...I remember, it was communication and the fellow that got the medal for communication was David Sarnoff. He was the head of RCA and he was a big man in the beginning of radio. So there were three guys. It was Brundage, Sarnoff and Canin, who got the...who got the Paganini prize you know? And I played on Paganini's violin. That was part of the prize. I played for the president of Italy. His famous Guarnerius violin they called it. It's called Il Cannone, the cannon, because it's so big, it sounds so big. [01:37:07] Anyway was the...that was the Paganini. Came back and got an appearance with the New York Philharmonic at...at Lewisohn Stadium, at which I was awarded the Handel Medal of the City of New York and that...because of my cultural contribution to the life of New York, that sort of thing.

**Canin [01:37:31]** Okay. The Paganini prize obviously is...is named after Niccolo Paganini who was probably the first great violinist and he started the...he...he just became the icon for all violinists. If you could play the music that he wrote you were a master violinist. The Paganini Caprices. He used to concert... he concertized everywhere in Europe and he was idolized, lionized. He was also a showman. He used to cut three strings. The lower, the E string, the A string, and the D string, leaving just the G string and he would have to play everything way up near his nose with his left hand and so that was... he was sort of like List was on the piano. [01:38:32] Then he just became one of these incredible touring artists and showbiz people and if you've ever seen pictures of him, he was tall and skinny and he had, what's the syndrome where you can't...

**Canin [01:38:47]** Marfan, yeah. He had this syndrome called Marfan syndrome which means he could bend his fingers every which way. He could tie knots with his fingers. So he was very adept at playing all his music. You know whether everybody today has to have



Marfan syndrome I don't know. But...but he had it and that's you know part of his claim to fame. No, he was a great, great, great, great violinist.

**Ball [01:39:14]** What do you want to say about your experience as a GI

**Canin [01:39:25]** Well, the experience that I had as a GI I think stemmed from my...my carrying my violin across to Europe because I could not really live without having the fiddle with me and as I said, you never know – and it turned out that it was very useful. So when you're marching off into the unknown and you have something like that to hold on to, it's...you know, and it became my life.

[end]