

TAPE INDEX KN-01-1-C2 & C3

BETH COHEN , player of stringed instruments from around the world

Interviewed for a second time by Kathy Neustadt, Thursday, 4/19/01 to identify slides of instruments from the first interview at her home in Watertown:



[See also KN-01-1-FN, CN1 & 2, and KN-01-1-CS1-17]

TAPE 2, Side 1

32 SLIDE #1: Moroccan Berber rebab: a very awkward instrument, I haven't figured it out yet. Attaches to belt buckle, played like a guitar and the bow (horse hair string) goes up and down. [PLAYS] Pentatonic (5 notes: D, E, G, A, C, D: African origin, sounds like the blues); with beads on the strings across the face of it that buzzes; made like lots of drums with beads and wires stretched across skin. Fast and simple because very few notes. It doesn't interest me too much, but my friend Mohammed (1/2 Berber) loves this. He plays the ny (flute), and he's desperate for me to play with him. Played with flute (ny) [picture from a CD], lotar--a plucked instrument, also 5 notes--and a nakus (brass tube, which I usually use as percussion instrument). The music of Rwais, professional Berber/Moroccan musicians

160 SLIDE #2: 2 instruments. On left, Thracian lyra from Greek Thrace: primitive version (charred from fire-walking), to be bowed. I play it a lot (going to Knoxville, TN to play Greek music, for dancing, with a drum of some sort: Thracian music. Going to be all acoustic). Don't only use it for fire-walking, which is only in 1 or 2 villages; don't use it much at all in Greece: now big ensembles--that's true everywhere. In the islands, it was the violin and the lauto; the traditional zia, which means a pair of instrumentalists, and maybe a hammer dulcimer, and somebody would sing. Now you have whole bands, bigger ensembles, and usually electric. Lauto is used, not with this, but being replaced by guitar and electric guitar; it's going out. [PLAYS: Mantilatos, a dance] Firewalking: Aya-eleni in Thrace (this is the famous one), and in a village in Macedonia, outside Thessaloniki (there's a book on it, there and in the US because it's a New Age thing). A couple of lyras played with a daulis: a big, 2-sided drum that you hit with a big stick on one side and a small dowel on the other (she also

has videos); they play for days, a few days before the event. Ritual takes place on May 21st every year (I've never been; I always want to go), the saint day of Prince Constantine (head of Byz. Empire in Byzantium/Constantinople, now Istanbul) and Eleni. Pagan music; main song in fire-walking is Constandinos, about him, which goes on and on. [tunes then PLAYS 293] Has portrait of C and Eleni carved on the instrument.

305 SLIDE #2: On right, Indian sarangi, a North Indian classical, bowed instrument: looks like a big cockroach. Thirty-five sympathetic strings (not bowed directly), with 3 bowed strings. I did tune it at one point and tried to play it, but it's daunting. I studied S. Indian violin, but never did this. The person who lent it to me does N. Indian singing and wants me to play some things with her. The notes played with the bow sets off the sympathetic strings to vibrate. I'd like to get a version from Baluchistan called a Sorud, which is much simpler: 7 sympathetic strings but still 3 bowed strings; smaller; for trance music, among other things. Trance music in every traditional; even in Greece for dance music, I think it's mostly trance music. This is specifically to induce a trance and invoke specific deities; the compositions are connected directly, to call them forward. The music is very exciting; I just love it, and I can play it at this point (on the sarangi for awhile, then the sorud [CD The Mystic Fiddle of the Proto-Gypsies: Masters of Trance Music--all the buzz words: cool stuff]. I saw them in concert--it's not really for performance--and the woman singer with them went into a deep trance, almost too much because she started arguing with a guy on stage--weird. A friend of mine knows them; after the concert, they went to a friend's house and had a real session, and I wished I had gone. Gypsies supposedly came from Rajistan and Baluchistan. Haven't played the sorud yet but want to.

377 I studied South Indian violin at the Center for World Music in 1974 in Berkeley, CA, while trying to find myself and not wanting to play classical Western music anymore. My life vision appeared before me: in one building, musicians from all over the world who were masters, and I was their student: I studied W. African music, 3 different Indonesian gamelons: Javanese, Balinese, Sundanese. And South Indian violin, for which I was required to study S. Indian singing, tala (the rhythmic system), solkantu (the drum syllables) for 3 months, every day. every day an hour lesson with my violin teacher who was feeding me repertoire by ear. Come to Madras and live with my family, he said, and I'll teach you; I can help you with your career. I know you can do it, you can be a S. Indian violinist. But I'm not South Indian: it's

not my culture, it's not my language; it's not my music--at that point, it was too big a stretch. So I asked myself, what is my music? which I knew I wouldn't find the answer to for years--and just now I'm starting to know the answer. At the end of the 3 months, I knew I wasn't going to go to India, but I was so fascinated by all these different musical languages and how different they are--and on the same instrument: the violin--that I want to study them and make my big palette of colors--collect all these different sounds and textures--and then put together my music, because I am of the world, and therefore, it's all my music. Also at the time, I assumed it would be through jazz, because that's what I'm into now, but it's not--it's too restricting. But I am playing more Eastern music that's more modal and less harmonic, and it's still an improvising music. Even beyond that, I'm also excited about playing traditional music and then playing my own music.

412 A 25-6 year process: 1) what is my music? I was also taken with a couple of aspects of the Indian music that I wanted to be part my music: the virtuosity. I went to New York for my master's and found the greatest teacher because I wanted to clear up all technical aspects of my playing so it wouldn't be an issue, and 2) the devotional aspect because at that point, I hadn't had my Mozart peak experience, but I'd been struck by lightning when I was 15, so I knew... I was 15, at music camp in the Berkshires, and it started to rain, and I wanted to wash my hair in the rain--I was very romantic and wanted to be one with nature. I couldn't get my shampoo because I'd lent it to my boyfriend, so I went and knocked on the door of the boys' house, where I wasn't allowed to go, so I had to wait on the porch. And I was barefoot, and I was counting up to ten--that's cool, it's ten miles away; no problem. At that moment, the whole world became white, electric white. This wasn't a flash, this was the longest, for me; everything slowed down. I was pulled off the porch into the middle of the yard, above the ground, and I was held on what I experienced as a wire, stretched across the sky. And for years, really, I assumed it was a wire, without even questioning this: what kind of wire is stretched across the sky? It was the bolt of lightning, and what it was doing was hitting the tree. It didn't go directly through me--I wouldn't be here now if it had--but I was pulled up and held on the bolt. The light went out, and a wave went all the way from my head through my body down my legs and out my feet, and I was dropped to the ground, then I went unconscious. And I woke up in the boys' house; somebody had carried me in.

452 I wasn't hurt, and I didn't think much about it for a long time—I was pretty young. And my hair got thicker, but that could have been a hormonal thing, who knows? But I guess I realized when I was about 23 or 24—I was playing in a string quartet concert in Norfolk, VA, right near the Edgar Cayce Foundation, right where we had been for a whole day in the library and I had gotten excited about some books about music that day--and I realized I was playing very intensely (and nobody else was), almost I was embarrassed. I felt this current, this passion, and I've felt it many times since, and I really think it's because of the lightning. Because I feel like my body was channeling an energy that should have killed me: a very powerful current, literally, and it didn't kill me. And then when I was 25, right after the Center for World Music--the next year--I had this experience playing Mozart, where I was playing in Koji Asso Studio [?]-it's a school here in Boston, near Symphony Hall: an art school that has concerts--and I was playing with a pianist and a cellist, but I was playing one piece with this pianist that I loved, just with him, a Mozart Sonata, and during that piece, I felt like my whole body was this empty golden column. I felt it, saw it--I don't know, and up--up this time, instead of down, like the lightning--was floating through my body and out the top of my head and just swimming around my head was this love and this joy and this music and Mozart. And I loved myself and my pianist, all the people around, life, Mozart, everything; and this happened the whole time I played. I felt like I was a fountain of love, that was coming out above my head. I'd never experienced anything like it, and since then I haven't. But, between the lightning and that, I felt like those were my assignments: I'm not just a musician; I felt like some kind of shaman or priestess that I'm here to illuminate my body with love and with light and with sound so that other people can partake. They can be inspired; they can be brought to some place else; I feel like I'm--you know how the Vestal Virgins would be devoted to the goddess; they would offer themselves--I feel like I'm offering myself through my body and my mind something really akin to that light that people talk about when they die, you know. I know that that's what both of those experiences to me felt like I touched, especially the 2nd one, because that was so blissful and so joyful--no ego, no worry about how am I going to get from this note to that note; something difficult's coming up ahead: none of that--it just flowed. It was amazing.

490 So at that time, I devoted myself to my mission--I didn't even know what it was--but I knew that eventually, that's how I'd be serving. But I had to go through a long process of training, that I chose for myself or actually I felt guided in, and I just

followed as I went. So if it's whether to play Moroccan music or to get into Greek music really deeply, everything led to the next. The Indian music led to classical European music, so I could get my chops together and my professional ability to support myself: freelance, be able to... 499 End of TAPE 2, Side 1

## TAPE 2, Side 2

7 ...inspiration about being a warrior and be impeccable in any musical situation, and--from Don Juan--to be able to change costumes, and that's what I've done since then, in the classical music world and all the others. I came to Boston after I got my master's in violin performance--totally Western. I had had a plan to spend the rest of my life learning musical languages--travelling around the world, learning from other violinists--little did I know I'd get into all these other instruments that were lurking behind the violin; at that time, it was just the violin--and then I would take these elements, and it would just happen naturally that they'd come out through my music in all these different ways of ornamenting, different ways of coloring the notes, textures, timbers--like all these different instruments have different voices, and I love that. And actually what I'd like to do in performance is to work up a piece that's like a suit, that's seamless, that's continuous, that I would go from bones to...I'd play all of the instruments, on my Echo-plex, or I could do it with all these other people playing the instruments. I've narrowed it down to who I need for what accompaniments; it's not that many. I've been writing about it for the last 2 years and planning it, constantly, and keep refining it. So it's only about 2 or three years ago that I started doing my own music, so that's the birthing process that since 1974 has started to happen. And yet there's still more traditional music that I want to learn. But it also seems important to share the sounds of these instruments that nobody gets to hear at all.

76 [Mozart experience] He always shows up, and there's so much love in his music, and beauty. Mozart's hard to play: in some ways easier than more virtuosic composers, but in some ways more difficult because, as people like to say, he's so exposed, so open. Also I really loved this pianist; he really ignited me. Playing music with him--because he was the first person that I played with that listened to my musical voice to love it and respond musically, in the moment: he'd laugh and play back. And it was with him that I decided, on my own, that I wanted to become a really wonderful musician so that I could be articulate in that language, which is bit verbal, to be able to converse on that level with people. Woven into this was a vision of a

mate, a life-partner that I would do this with, because I felt like I was expressing my love to him (it turned out he was gay; I was disappointed). I also knew the power of that, and when I was sitting on stage, I wanted to be with people I loved--it's more of a person, coming through an instrument--and I felt like that was very important. And I haven't, because if I waited, I'd never play music with anybody but myself, so I couldn't hold those standards, but ultimately I think I'd like to do that. That's still a goal I haven't really fulfilled yet. There are people I play with that I love and a similar aesthetic and value system--that's what I mean. [Experience of hearing the "voice"] After Mozart, I asked my classical musician friends and my then-boyfriend's jazz friends if they'd had similar experience, and nobody knew what I was talking about, and it wasn't what was motivating them--or maybe it was, but maybe it wasn't so conscious. The cellist in the Julliard String Quartet, who was going out with my roommate, and he said he'd never had an experience personally like that, but he remembered one time sitting in an apartment in the Upper West Side playing for an audience of 1--and it was Arthur Rubenstein--and whatever it was they were playing, from the first note, everybody was crying until the end--oh, could you imagine? They all wept, from the beginning to the end. [My Ursula Dudziak, hearing voices story]

212 SLIDE #3, #4, and #5. That's from Norway, the Norwegian hardingfaler, which also has sympathetic strings. This is a magical instrument; if I had funding, I would go to Norway to study. Once I decided to go on this path, I have always been brought to the right people, and to the right instruments. I decided that I wanted to play this instrument, and my student, who is very involved with Norwegian dance and music, said Oh, I just happen to have one of these hardingfaler violins in my studio; some guy bought it; it's his, he doesn't want to use it, but he doesn't want to sell it. I'll ask him if you can have it in your studio instead of mine & he said Yes. Then, a month later, the best violinist of this tradition, who knew my friend and did a number of workshops; I went to his workshop & got initiated. I listened to a CD of his brother's & learned 2 tunes on my own, then these 2 brothers have another brother whose son is a wonderful player, and he came to my house and gave me lessons--it was so wild. But it's not enough. I need to sit at somebody's feet and really study.

245 [Once you already have the grammar down, how long does it take to pick up something new?] That was part of my purpose, to get my technique so together that I could just sit and pick it up; whatever they do, I can do. I got that from the South

Indian violinist; I already had it when I studied with him--that's why he wanted to take me home with him--but I wanted to be able to do it really well. Hardingfaler; 4 bowed strings like violin, with 5 sympathetic strings. Hand-penned decorations: flowers with inlays on tail piece and fingerboard; beautiful hand-carved pegs, sliced with ivory set on top; figure in SLIDE #4 looks like cartoon character: a king or a dog--it's somebody but I don't know. This was made for a woman named Torfrid, because her name is on it. Many tunings (I only know 2; some people have more than one instrument, tuned differently) of the various strings, with names for them--this is the troll tuning--and they're very connected to the folklore, to the mythology, which deals a lot with magic. Tuned for certain tunes, more different occasions, hooked up with different. tunes. This is "The Devil's Tune," for which there's a story, with no happy ending--I started with this at a concert and decided not to tell the story, it was so negative. But it's a beautiful tune. [298 PLAYS]

325 Hear the ringing? That's the sympathetics. There's another instrument called the Viola D'Amore, which is a viola, not much used in Europe much now, though it was used in Turkey. It has a lot of bowed strings and a lot of sympathetic strings, and they call it the viola of love because the idea of resonating--like vibration setting off others. Sympathetics are all over the place: in Turkey, in Capadoccia, there's a lyra that comes with sympathetic strings, as well; they're in India; in Norway, obviously, Greece, Turkey, I'm sure all over the place.

344 SLIDE #6, a Chinese instrument called an erhu or arhu (like Cambodian tro sao); that's an instrument I haven't yet entered into. SLIDE #7 is the Turkish kemencha, related to the Cretan lyra, also the Bulgarian badolka, a bigger version of the same thing: they say that came from Greece by Gypsies, and I don't know if it's true. It's bowed, 3 strings. Introduced to Turkish classical music in about 1900 by the same guy who turned around the plucked tambour--he put it on his lap and played it with a bow--also brought this instrument, which had been mainly played in urban folk music in tavernas, night clubs. This is now the highest approved of bowed instrument in Turkish classical music now--I'm not sure why. You hold it against you [really long pegs]. Great book on Greek instruments, and you can see the relationship between the old ones and this instrument. This also has the name of a woman carved on it, in Arabic on the side. Women sometimes play them, and some play it professionally now. All the instruments are men's; when I went to Greece, on the island of Andros, the first time I went and played with a Greek violin player for

the summer--I met him here, around the corner, at the Armenian Cultural Center and he invited me to come and play with his family. And his daughter was a singer, and she told me she always wanted to play the violin, but her father told her it wasn't a woman's instrument, but then I came along, and she was really angry at her father, but she felt it was too late. The same thing with Hungary, when I went and played a lot; one of my first teachers of that music, a man, said after the lesson with me and another woman, Oh, the next primas-es (primas= leader of the band, violinist) are going to be women. At that time, they didn't even know any women musicians; just singers and dancers. I love to break that stereotype, and there really aren't that many women, even in our country. It's very important. [415 PLAYS]

419 Like Thracian lyra played before, the sarangi, and this Turkish kemenche: the strings are raised, and you put your finger nails against them on the side. In classical repertoire, you'd play all, but this one isn't made well, so I can't get to the bottom string at this point. Otherwise, you come in from the side. You can do it with all 3 strings. When I went to Macedonia, I'm so used to putting fingernails on the side, and I bought this from an instrument maker in a place called Serapultamos, which means dry river--it's a folk instrument. I was trying them out and I couldn't do it on this top string; the guy told me, Oh, no, you're not supposed to that. Use fingernails on the first string; the 2nd is just a drone; and the third you play by putting your finger on top of the string, and--guess what?--that's how the gadulka is played in Bulgaria, across the border--you learn so much; it's fascinating. [Tuning] All pretty much the same shape except the bottle-shaped lyra, which is Turkish--that's a Greek version, but there were Turks in the Black Sea: the Pontiaki lyra (Pontus is Black Sea). Armenian instrument is the kamancha, which is more like the gordone: it's beautiful. More tuning and trying: trouble remembering difference between Thracian and Macedonian: haven't memorized it. Strings made of gut and nylon. [482 PLAYS] Much rougher sound than the Thracian, with bow like a big saw; made by a guy in a village. I videotaped it, and his wife did some kind of folk craft; I tried a bunch of his instruments. He told me to come back the next day to see the neighbor come back and play it--he also dance. 499 End of TAPE 2, Side 2

#### TAPE 3, Side 1

2 Spent whole day videotaping wedding music from their village: but it's not enough. Since I play--I always have someone to speak the language, if I can't--it's so easy to



find the best musicians, wherever I go. It would be so wonderful to be able to spend a year to be documenting: I'm over ready. The Hungarians are having a revival, so they're doing it there--although there's never enough--and Turkey, I could do it there, too. I've done it in Istanbul: I have videotapes of classical musicians playing, not the folk. Last summer, I went and studied again for about a week with this Gypsy Roma violin player--wonderful old man--and I would to sit and document all his repertoire it's not being done enough, anywhere. Instruments I play: the violin and any violin version and the yalitambur, which is Turkish. That's frustrating, too: all of these instruments I've done enough with so I can actually play a bunch of things for a concert or dance, but I haven't had the time. I'd so much love to practice full-time and do this documentation, because there's a lot of music I want to learn, that I know I could learn, and I don't have time.

52 SLIDES 8 & 9, the yailitambur. SLIDE #10 is the gardone, Hungarian/Transylvania, from a village called Gimesh, and it accompanies the violin as a percussion, drone. SLIDES #11 & 12, the trumpet fiddle from Romania; they still play it there. SLIDE #13, a tourist version of an Egyptian rebaba made from a coconut shell; I have the real one now. SLIDES #14 & 15 is the Thracian Greek lyra with the bull's horn. SLIDE #16 is a frame drum or bendir; it's Remo, American-made maybe, but the style I play is Turkish. SLIDE #17 is a riqq, an Arabic instrument, with lots of inlays, from Egypt. [PLAYS 118] I've been studying it with an Egyptian percussionist named Karim Mohammed, who lives in Watertown; he hosts Arabic night every month at Passim's; he played with me in The Art of the Bow as my percussionist. I connect people with music; I open them to different music. I asked Karim to play at Balkan night with me--a Greek set and a Turkish set--and he reported that he'd just been feeling that his musical thing was too narrow, just Arabic, and then I came along and opened other door.

140 The tromba-marina (marine trumpet), a bowed instrument from 12th or 14th century Europe, played with a bow [looks like she's playing strings stretched over a ski, positioned on the floor in front and resting on her shoulder]. The buzz [149] comes from lifting one foot of the bridge--so it's not flat or above; it kind of slapping against it--and it only plays harmonics (overtone series), like the tuva throat singers. People used to play these in ensembles. My friend and I figured out with a calculator where the frets (making notches) were by diving up the lengths of the strings (at the mid point, will vibrate twice as fast = octave higher. Divide it in 3, you

get a 5th. Birds use those pitches, and people do, too. Every note that you play will have overtones. Almost 6 feet long. Not the most beautiful sound, but I want to do more with it. [PLAYS 195] Once you become proficient at finding the notes, you'd have something; there is actually music composed for this instrument and an ensemble of them. Pythagoras dealt with the monochord: this used to have only one string on it, by my friend who made it for me added another string. What a way to educate.

214 Started with Irish fiddler in Boston and New England contradance. I was in a Celtic rock band. I studied a lot of jazz, but it was very theoretical and I didn't get into it much. Then blues, which is so beautiful, Also classical; I was in the Boston Comarada when I was in college, so I did Renaissance and Medieval music: singing, violin, and rebek, which looks a lot like the Turkish kemencha but is held like a violin, but more on the chest--a little medieval violin. Held on your lap with the pegs against your chest. After Indian, I went to New York and found a classical violin teacher and did that full-time for 7 years, which included freelancing in opera, ballet, lots of orchestral playing, chamber music, Broadway shows (the Music Man with Dick Van Dyke), commercials and jingles in studios; I played with Philip Glass. Then I decided to go to Boston and joined Libana, the women's chorus, as an opportunity to try different musics. Then I checked out the Hungarian group that was in town for a week, and I was in awe--the music is so beautiful. At that point, I started doing Greek music and ended up playing Rembetika music with Greek musicians at the Middle East Restaurant every Friday night, Greek night. That's when I started playing with Christos Kovetas from that group--we started learning different folk music traditions together. [story about getting the Thracian lyra and learning some songs on it; Christos able to play by ear]

293 I started giving these traditional music concerts at Longey School--Hungarian, Turkish, Greek, Moroccan music, playing with Moroccan, Arabic, Greek, and Turkish musicians. That was fun because I was bringing all these musicians onto the concert stage, where they had never been before--they'd been playing in night clubs--and the audience was a classical crowd that had never heard this before, then people from the various ethnic communities would come. I felt like I was creating a new audience, which I wanted to do--I didn't like these barriers--and I'd also include in some of the concerts some Western classical music as one of the many languages, so that was good, too. I like the idea of being able to jump from world to world,

impeccably, and be able to really do justice to them. Of course, I'm an outsider, so I can never really be completely, but... [308 PLAYS a song called Keffervesch, "Bitterness," and a dance tune] To be played with a gardone (SLIDE #10)--hit /pluck-- for dance music. That's just the music from one village; there are so many different styles, mostly from Transylvania, where the music has lasted the longest because they were so isolated--Hungarian music over all has gotten watered down--but every village, every region has different styles. [341 PLAYS Mezzershake, to be played with contra chords on the viola and bowed double bass as accompaniment] For many years I had a group called Shardkon, "Dragon"--3 American woman: we were like a Hungarian band from Budapest, doing all the regional music: a revivalist, Pan-Hungarian effort. We played in Budapest at a festival in 85, for diaspora musicians; allowed to play a set--I found out just 2 years ago that we were the big hit; the guys we knew wouldn't tell us.

364 Have gone to Turkey, Greece, and Hungary to study with men (not always old men: in Hungary, a revival musician, was 10 years younger). [How has this worked out] I was never there long enough to be a threat. Depends on scene: in Turkey, with classical music, it's a very elitist scene: not hanging out at bars and weddings and night clubs. So in that sense, the only threat is toward peoples' prejudice, because they don't think women can do it--although now there are more and more women doing it from the conservatory. When I went to Turkey in 89, there weren't that many women playing at all. The only time I felt I was a threat to anybody's wife was this guy in Andros, who was a little bit of a lech, though he never came onto me; he did something tacky but not dangerous. One other time I was studying with a lyra player in Crete who was interested in me, so I just cut off the lessons. People took it seriously because I took it seriously. And also I was a novelty, so I wasn't a real threat; I was an American, so that was a status for them: for one Turkish teacher, and American was a feather in his cap. So there were all different degrees of people taking me seriously: there was a Turkish yailletambur player who I had gotten to study with here, after I heard a recording of his and fell in love with his playing and I decided he would be my teacher: within a month, his group was coming and my group was hosting them, so I had him at my disposal for a day and a half. I told him I would be in Turkey that summer and asked if I could study with him and he said, No, because my wife will be jealous. I can't; I won't teach women, and I'm imagining that something happened in their past. He said if one of the men in my group wanted to study with him, he could, and I know people who have, but not me, and I'm

heartbroken because I adore his playing. There was another kemenche player who didn't really take me seriously; he taught my colleagues everyday and would hang out with them, but he didn't take me seriously, though he respects me as a musician--I think I'm a threat to him; I think I'm too good. In fact, last summer, I saw him in Santa Cruz--I had just seen him in Istanbul; we're good friends; I've known him since 89--and I asked him if I could take a lesson, one lesson, with him, but he said, You don't need lessons, you're too goo. You already know everything you need to know about Turkish music. I said, You're just being lazy; you just don't want to teach. And I think that was really it. We performed together, and he never gave me any room to do improvisation, so I think he was just threatened as a musician--it really discouraged me.

426 Yai means bow and le means with, and tambur is the instrument, so the yailletambur is an instrument with a bow (SLIDES #8 & 9; looks like a banjo only thicker and longer]. The nice version of the tambur is a beautiful all-wood, round shell, wooden top, kind of concave, with a long neck. The reason the neck is so long is because in Turkish music there are 9 units in a whole step, instead of the 2 half steps we have; they're called comas. You don't play every 9th, but you play many of them, and in between, so they put all the frets here. This is a plucked instrument generally; the other kind that you play with a plectrum and pluck it, is called a misrable tambur; this one has a bow.

449 [Picture of her grandmother] Family background: mother's parents from Belorusse, from the Ukraine, came over when 3. My father's family from Aleppo, Syria; first of the children to be born here--there were already 2 kids. Both sides Jewish; both came to New York. My father born on Delancy Street, but grew up in Brooklyn; my mother's family moved to Brooklyn immediately and had a grocery store in Flatbush. My parents met in the Communist Party, the YCL--Young Communist League. Mother's family spoke Yiddish; my other grandparents spoke Arabic. My parents spoke English together and sometimes French, to be secretive with us kids. But they didn't know each others' languages, so I didn't learn Arabic, and I didn't learn Yiddish. But I heard them all the time. All my grandparents spoke English: my father's mother was illiterate, but she bribed somebody to get her driver's license. My mother's mother was a writer, a feminist writer, in Russian. We keep talking about finding her articles, finding her book--she wrote for a Russian newspaper in New York City; we should find them. And also, apparently, in her

village--where Jews weren't allowed to read and write--there was a hidden library under the cemetery, and she did the library. If you see my house--and my parents' house, too--I have a library here, and people actually do take books out. And she taught people to read and write; she taught my grandfather when he showed up, that's how they met, under the cemetery.

483 My other grandparents--that's an amazing story--my grandmother was married to someone else; she was married at 14, and after she had 1 child and was pregnant with another, they went to Haiti--there was a Syrian Jewish community in Port-au-Prince--where they lived for a few years, then took a banana boat to New York. Or maybe the banana boat went from Syria to New York, I don't remember, but she and her husband and her first child, Luna--which shows they were probably Sephardic, since that's a Spanish name--and then within a week, her husband died of influenza. She was 8 months pregnant, so she gave birth--she hardly knew anybody, but somebody from that community helped her--and then her parents came, and then the whole family settled in New York. My grandfather, Haron, was a peddler in Mexico: he used to go by foot selling pots and pans--we have a lot of Mexican Syrian Jewish relatives--they were all over, Venezuela, South America. So he decided to come visit his cousins in New York, and he gets to the Lower East Side on Delancy Street and asks Where are the Cohens, and people say, They're over there (I have this on tape, my grandmother telling the story; it's wonderful). And he shows up, and she said he was dirty, and she made him go upstairs and shave and take a shower, and he comes downstairs, and he looks gorgeous, she says. She's like 17 or 19, and she's got 2 kids--Behiya is her name; I'm named after Behiya--so she gives him a beer..... 504  
End of TAPE 3, Side 1

#### TAPE 3, Side 2

3 So she danced for him--put the phonograph on, and it was Arabic music: chiftateli; I'd have to play it for you; I play it all the time--and he never left. But, he went back to Mexico to get his stuff, and his family tried to talk him out of it because she's a widow--not the fact that they were 1st cousins; that was not a problem. But even though she was a teenager, she was a widow, with 2 kids--she was used. You know what she said to him--I love this--she said to him, Okay, Dolly, you need to go, go; whatever; if you can't do it, okay, no problem. Of course, he did; he couldn't leave her. And they 8 kids altogether; she had already had 2, and they had 6 more--it's very colorful story. And to be Jewish in these 2 ways is interesting, because they're

so different. My mother is a pianist, classical music; she wanted me to do classical music, but so did my father. He was in love with classical music; he was rebelling against his family, which was not very sophisticated, mostly to making money--kind of an Arabic thing, I guess--whereas her family were intellectuals. He tried to play music, recorder and cello, as an adult, but he ended up doing photography and poetry, which is what he does now. Professionally, he had a tablecloth manufacturing business with his brother and father, which is a very Arabic thing: textiles. But all the way through, he tried to do other things, but he was very busy doing this; he was the president of the company. I have 2 brothers; my younger brother is a drummer, plays piano, and composes, kind of pop, jazz stuff. My older brother is a business man and a car person--he deals with cars--but it was his passion, and it's been a very lucrative business, and I'm thrilled that he made it work for him.

70 My parents when I was growing up always had chamber music parties, so they'd invite some amateur musicians--often my violin teacher, whoever it was at the time--and all their spouses and friends. So we would have dinner, and then afterwards, we would sit around, and the ones who weren't playing would read or knit or just listen or write--it was so sweet--and then they would play, and that's how I was brought in: I could play the violin, my father could play the recorder, we would play baroque music. Then I remember I learned the Mendelssohn Piano Trio, the violin part, and once they let me play an a movement, and then the big deal was when I was probably in junior high school, my aunt, my father's sister on the Syrian side, had a big house in White Plains, and they used to hire string quartets and have concerts in the house, and one time the 2nd violinist couldn't come, last minute, and I played. I tell you, at least among my aunts and uncles, no one has ever forgotten that, that was a big deal; and that was my initiation.

100 When I was growing up on the Arabic side, it was a big family--8 kids--and they all had families, and they all had kids, so I had 25 first cousins. And we got together for all the Jewish holidays, and then in the summertime, my grandparents had a house on Long Island on Long Beach, and it was 2 or 3 blocks from the beach, so every weekend we'd all come--it was like a tribe. It was great to grow up with so many people. But during the year, especially in Brooklyn, where my grandparents had a 1-bedroom apartment on Ocean Parkway--really small--it would be packed with people, and on the phonograph, there would always be a 2 or 3-inch stack of LPs of

Arabic music. Classical Arabic music: Mohammed Abdul Mohad. We'd listen to them all the way. And the food was Arabic, and everybody spoke Arabic--at least the older people--and then after dinner, they would clear the tables and chairs, and they'd bring out these big platters of fruits and dates and nuts, and dessert, and then they would turn the music up, and my grandmother would pull everybody off the couch, and everybody would dance--the same chiftateli that she did to ensnare my grandfather--but that's what they would all dance. And then always when there would be weddings or bar mitzvahs, the big catered affairs, they'd always have a big Arabic band, and always my father would bring me up during the break to introduce me to the violinist--same guy: this violinist, Hakio Badiya--"My daughter," you know, "Beth, she plays violin...." But it [traditional music] was never really seen as something I should do, but I always heard it, but I think it always got into my psyche--how could it not?

140 Recently I'm realizing that I have my own tradition; I've been thinking I'm American; because I'm one generation removed from all this, I never really felt this was mine. [Playing with the Klezmer Conservatory Band as ethnic match] I like that: I thought, Maybe I can play Jewish music or Eastern European Jewish music--klezmer music--in a way that's maybe just as much of an effort, but maybe I can access something that's genetic, and also not only genetic, but on my mother's side, they used to sing Yiddish songs all the time, and I used to play klezmer music with my mother--we used to play at nursing homes. And I went to this Arabic retreat last summer, at Mt. Holyoke, and I realized, Hey, that's why I like Turkish music and Greek music; it's the same system, yet it's different, and this is a very different accent, a different vibration, very different frequency of Arabic music from all the others. But I felt like I understood it; I felt like I knew it; and I felt like I could make it sound right easily--really easily--and then I felt embarrassed in myself because my whole thing has been in these other countries, It's too bad that the young people are abandoning the traditions; I'll go pick them up. And then I realized that I had abandoned my own, as if I didn't have any. And even that is not mine, because what's really mine is the music I'll compose or improvise. But I do really want to dive in more to Arabic music, and I am doing more: I'm doing a concert in Nantucket where I'm bringing in all the musicians, hiring everybody, and half of it is going to be Middle Eastern--some Turkish, but mostly Arabic for the first time--and the other half is going to be Eastern European: mostly klezmer, with a little Hungarian and

Romanian—I'm flipping it. So I am actually doing it, and those are the main ones, my main ones.

197 I love the Arabic classical music. It's funny with the American Arabs, particularly the Jewish ones, like my family, they just think Arabic music: it doesn't matter where it's from, it's Arabic (of course, people from Egypt are more aware that Egyptian music is Egyptian, but...). At this point, I don't know: I want to learn Syrian-Jewish music, but I don't know that they have much of a tradition that I could find. The rebaba, that's folk music, and I love it, so I know that I can go in many paths in Arabic music that I haven't even done. Central Asia is unfamiliar to me, for example; the further east of Turkey, the less familiar it is to me. I don't know that I would want to play music from Iran, Iraq: it's like too much; I can't do everything actually. And I wouldn't play the Chinese erhu—but you never know, because I refused to play Greek music when I was playing Hungarian music, and here I'm focusing mostly on Greek for years, so who knows? I play Armenian music with Julia Zarounian (June 1st engagement at Longey) [more on this]—I would love to get into the kemanche, very much like the Turkish kebek (squash) kemane; I just need an instrument to get into it.

250 Born Aug. 7, 1949, in White Plains, NY. Mother born in Ukraine in 1919; father 1917 in NYC. Beth speaks English, some Spanish, some Greek (studied a lot here but need to learn by living there, a little Hungarian, no Turkish. I should learn these languages. Last time in Greece, a musician who played the bagpipe and lauto was furious at me: he talked to me in Greek saying Why don't you learn; we have so many things to say. Next year when I come back, and I didn't come back.

277 Piece: sausa mysi in the beyati macom (a mode) on the yailitambur, a classical Turkish piece [PLAYS]

330 Total and complete. Doesn't need other instruments, no chords; if other instruments, they're playing either in unison or an octave apart. Sometimes played with bendir. Definitely a classical piece, and it's dying out just like Western European classical music: people aren't interested; they want pop music or American, Western music. I played in the group the Eurasia Ensemble for 8 years, so got deeply into it and went to Turkey a bunch, and the people I played with went and studied with people there. [Considered a Turkish musician by Turks?] I don't know. There



aren't that many people who do what I do, playing Turkish music so seriously outside of Turkey. One of my teachers, I played for last summer, and he kind of critiqued me, and he said You have it; you have the aesthetic; you understand the sound and know how to do it. The next thing you need is to spend time here and to really get into subtleties of pitches, because these macoms, these modes, it's not written on the page; you really need to be there. When you go up in a scale or a piece, certain notes are a little higher--microtonal music--there are certain conventions in certain macoms that always at the 2nd degree going down, you slide down to the tonic: you know, these things. I need to hear it more specifically directly, instead of through recordings. I need to spend some more time. But I know people who live in Greece, or France, who have a teacher in Istanbul, and they would go and spend 10 days holed up in a hotel, and have lessons and record everything and practice all day and all night, and go home for 6 months and come back and get the next lesson--so it's possible, but I can't afford, but I'd like to--I need to. Because I don't feel comfortable recording this music right now, even though it's damn close, I don't feel comfortable.

378 The bowed folk instrument from the Black Sea area/Turkish is the kemenche. [PLAYS 381 two short pieces] Played solo or for dancing or with the dhauili, the big 2-sided drum. Another folk bowed Turkish instrument: kebak kemane [CN2] I haven't done as much folk as classical, but I know I can. This is very sweet sounding [PLAYS 411] This can be played by itself or with the saz or balamah, which is like the precursor to the bazouki, a plucked instrument. Turkish instruments are so gentle, so sweet and soft. [No difference between classical and folk sound] It's a Turkish energy, but a lot of classical musicians don't like that instrument (kebak kemane); the kemenche seems more refined to them. [Pictures of the instruments; discussion of Armenian musicians; differences among Armenians] As you can see from the stores here: Arax, they're from Syria; Sevan, they're from Istanbul; Yerevan says "Russian food." My friends from Turkey think the food at Sevan's is actually better than some of what they're getting in Turkey..."

489 end of TAPE 3, SIDE 2, end of interview