I'd like to thank Richard and the members of the Program Committee for inviting me to speak today. Richard emailed me last August, asking if I would be willing, as part of a celebration of the twentieth year of NECMT, to "address the meeting, reflecting on what things were like in the beginning, and how they have evolved over the past two decades." I was of course pleased to be invited, and gladly accepted, although I felt a little reluctant to take on the role of someone who could offer a "grand view." It dawned on me that, although it was clear that I was being asked to speak because of my involvement in establishing our society, it was falling upon me to address the group as an "old timer" who could tell the younger membership a bit about the way things were. So the process of preparing this talk has tapped into a range of personal anxieties that are no doubt shared by a good number of my generation. We're not that old, are we?

I've come to realize that there may in fact be a number of you in the audience who do not know how our organization came about. So I figured it would be useful to recount our early history, even though to me it feels like not so long ago. I think I shall avoid grand observations on how things have evolved since then. We actually held a panel on that subject not long ago, which many of you no doubt remember. So many people have been active in NECMT over the years. I hope you will understand if do not name everyone who has contributed, but rather mention just a few of the pivotal individuals who helped get us established.

I'd like to start us off with a bit music that actually had popped into my mind instantly at the moment I received Richard's invitation. "Twenty years ago today ..." It's clear from the Beatles' tone that they, then in their twenties when they put together their landmark concept album, regarded twenty years as quite a long time. After all, Sgt. Pepper's band had gone "in and out of style" a few times in that period. Twenty years ... It doesn't seem like twenty years since we first met Well, on reflection, turns out it hasn't been twenty years. It was in fact NINETEEN years ago this month, in April 1986, that we held our first meeting at Brown University! I guess what we have here is one of those weird time discombobulations, somewhat akin to the confusion over whether the new millennium began in the year 2000 or 2001. We are holding our twentieth meeting nineteen years after we first met ... and we're beginning our twentieth year. Well, the fact that it's been only nineteen years instead of twenty isn't much consolation. Of course, what's really depressing — at least for us boomers — is that it's approaching forty years (!) since the release of Sgt. Pepper's, a central
touchstone of our youth. I've decided to call today's talk "Waxing Nostalgic." I like this title. It connotes a Victorian, heart-on-sleeve sentimentality, as would befit the musings of an old codger like myself. As you can tell, I'm having some difficulty assuming this role, and my title is intended to convey a bit of irony. On the other hand, nostalgia is a serious business, and I want to show you how important it can be in grasping certain music.

I had expected that going through all of the old NECMT files as I prepared this talk would jog memories of events and circumstances on which I might have become a little foggy. Turns out I had no idea of how much I had actually forgotten. The files have convinced me that, indeed, much time has passed since the early days. The correspondence from the organization of the first conference consists primarily of handwritten and typewritten (not word-processed) letters. I had forgotten how difficult it was to publicize an event in those days. Since we had gotten a late start in making arrangements for the meeting, we missed deadlines for advertising in most of the major publications. Our main publicity was a mailing to theorists in the northeast region, done with labels obtained from SMT. My friend Mary Wennerstrom, then SMT treasurer, chastised me for requesting labels on short notice. (I had given her two-weeks' notice, but it was difficult to assemble such materials back then.) Email was not in general use at that time, and electronic transmission of documents was not something everyone could handle. A lot has changed!

Going through the files, I was realized anew that in academe much changes in the span of twenty years. Few of us are now at the same institution where we were in 1985. Anne Trenkamp, Gerry Zaritzky and I are some of the few I can think of. Many of those who were instrumental in getting NECMT established are no longer even in the New England region. Claire Boge is in Ohio, Charles Smith at Buffalo, Jon Bernard in Seattle, Lee Rothfarb and Pieter van den Toorn in Santa Barbara. On the other hand, Richmond Browne, who always had a stake in our region and who travelled from Ann Arbor to attend our first meeting, now lives here. And then there's David Kopp, who has traversed a boomerang trajectory across the country and back, starting out at Brandeis, arcing out through New Haven as far as Seattle, then returning sure and true to Boston. In twenty years' time it was perhaps inevitable, as well, that we would have lost colleagues in our membership. In the comments that follow, it will be evident that we owe a great debt to our friend, the late David Lewin, who was an energizing force in the creation of this society.

The idea of establishing a theory society for the New England region was something I had been thinking about soon after I came to Brown University as a junior faculty member in fall 1983. I had been teaching at Columbia and Barnard, and had been involved in the established, very active Music Theory Society of New York State (MTSNYS). At Brown I was suddenly the lone theorist at my institution (still am!), and I felt the need to get together with others in my profession, and suspected that there were others like me who could benefit from a theory society in our region. Things began to percolate when I talked with David Lewin at the Schenker Conference at the Mannes School in March 1985. David was the newly elected President of SMT, and I felt it would be appropriate to discuss with him the issue of whether SMT might be interested in setting up regional societies along the lines of those of the AMS. In addition, David was also in the process of moving from New Haven to Cambridge, where he would be assuming a Professorship at Harvard, so he and I were going to be rather close neighbors, as well. He was interested in seeing local theory societies
proliferate—but without the direct aegis of SMT, and he encouraged me to pursue the idea of establishing a society in our area. As our plans developed, David was actively involved in an advisory capacity, and my files contain a number of his famous multi-page, singlespaced, incomparable letters.

The New England region was ripe for the establishment of a theory society. There was an exceptional concentration of theorists in the area around Boston, including a number of the most distinguished people in the profession. I was aware, however, that proximity did not equate with a sense of community. Although, as Mark DeVoto told me, there had been at one time a "no name" theory group that met from time to time in the Boston area, in general theorists there had kept to themselves, devoting their time and energy to the programs and institutions in which they taught. There were even rumors of personality conflicts and the like. I believe that David saw an advantage in having someone like myself, a newcomer without allegiance to any of the Boston theory programs and situated at a "neutral" institution (he even referred to Brown as a DMZ!), attempt to bring together parties to form a society.

In September 1985 I wrote to a number of well-known theorists in the region suggesting that, since all of the major musical societies were holding their meetings on the west coast that year, that spring 1986 would be a favorable time to hold a theory conference for our region at Brown. I suggested that this might afford the opportunity to discuss whether there was interest in forming a local society. I inquired whether they would be interested in such a conference and whether they would be willing to serve on the program committee. I had been forewarned to expect responses ranging from the lukewarm to the overtly hostile. But everyone responded in the affirmative! Accordingly, plans for the conference went ahead, with a program committee comprised of myself, Jonathan Bernard (Yale), Claire Boge (Hartt), Robert Cogan (NEC), Mark DeVoto (Tufts), Allan Keiler (Brandeis), Charles Smith (UConn), and Avo Somer (UConn).

As I read through my files, certain aspects of organizing our first meeting were brought to mind which I had completely forgotten. Perhaps, in my naivete, I had not even appreciated fully at the time the geo-political ramifications of what we were setting out to do! In some of my earlier correspondence regarding the planned conference I had identified its target group as theorists in the "northeast" area. Judging from a letter to me by David Lewin (Nov. 16, 1885) following the grand AMS/SMT/SEM conference in Vancouver, suspicions had evidently been raised by my language, and rumors were flying. He wrote,

_I was concerned, as I imagine you were even more, at the news from the floor of the [SMT] business meeting that MTSNYS was considering expanding to cover the "Northeast" area itself. I am particularly concerned if that idea should have arisen from some misreading of your intentions, in starting preliminary talks about a regional group centered in New England... I have noticed one thing in your plans that may have caused New York some anxiety... That is the word "NORTHEASTER..."

Perhaps the vagueness about the word "Northeast"... gave some people in New York the idea that the New England project was actually a grand power play for turf, to swallow up, preempt, or otherwise compete with MTSNYS. Certainly the idea that MTSNYS should expand to cover Storrs, New Hampshire, Boston, Providence, Yale... sounds like a response in kind to such power plays and turf-grabbing, that may be inhabiting somebody's fantasies... This [expletive deleted] must stop, here and now. What you can do, and I think should do AT ONCE, is to get rid of the word "NORTHEASTERN."

And so, of course, by the time we released our call for papers, our event was called "a New England Conference of Music Theorists." The announcement included the following statement: "In addition
to papers and panel discussions, the conference will provide a forum for discussing the possibility of organizing a regional music theory society."

What happened as a result of our efforts is by now a familiar story. A ragtag, scruffy bunch of renegades—some, I’m sure, have called us idiots!—after a drought of many years, reversed the curse of being without a society. Through sheer heart, guts, and devotion to team, they kept the faith and triumphed over a bigger, lavishly funded club of prima donnas based in a state 200 miles to our west—the evil Empire, MTSNYS. Now that NECMT has prevailed in a stretch of twenty flawless annual meetings, no one can deny us our rightful title: Dynasty!

Well, in my exuberance I’ve reached the point of mixing baseball and football metaphors (although the idea of a Red Sox dynasty seems quite a realistic goal!), and I think there ARE limits to extending sports metaphors to music theory societies. In point of fact, our relationship with our friends in MTSNYS has been superb from the very start. Three of the six papers presented at the first conference were by New Yorkers: Carl Schachter and David Gagne from Queens College, and Murray Dineen from Columbia. (And of course, the program of the present meeting features a large percentage of papers by our New York colleagues.) Carl told me, incidentally, that Providence’s reputation for fine restaurants was one of the main reasons that the first conference at Brown attracted such a large New York delegation. Concerns on the part of either society that we would be competing for a limited pool of the same papers have proved without foundation. In fact, although each group is regionally based and serves a local constituency, the great demand on the part of theorists for venues to present their work has resulted, year after year, in programs that are national, even international, in representation for both NECMT and MTSNYS. From the outset, NECMT elected to hold our meetings in the spring, so as to complement the fall meetings of MTSNYS. At some later date, MTSNYS decided also to hold their meetings in the spring, but even then conflict has been negligible. Our cooperative relationship culminated in April 2003 with a memorable joint conference at Yale, for which I was pleased to serve on the program committee.

That first meeting at Brown in April 1986 was by all accounts a tremendous success. Everyone had a great time, and there was terrific enthusiasm for starting a regional society. I chaired a business meeting held immediately after the paper sessions, and Richmond Browne, then Secretary of SMT, who was present in a semi-official capacity as an observer from that organization, served as secretary for the meeting. Many, including a number of the folks from New York, spoke in favor of establishing a theory society in the New England region. The motion to found the New England Conference of Music Theorists—the same name as the title of our meeting that day—passed unanimously. The program committee was empowered to serve as a founding committee with two charges: to arrange for a second conference to take place in April 1987, and to draft by-laws for NECMT to be adopted at that meeting. Baker, Bernard, and Boge formed the subcommittee that drafted the by-laws. At the second annual meeting, held at Brown in April 1987, the by-laws were approved and the founding committee was charged with nominating a slate of candidates to serve as the first officers of the society. Claire Boge, who was in the process of moving from Hartt to Miami University in Ohio, served as acting secretary, supervising the election of the first executive board, who were: James Baker, President; Anne Trenkamp, Secretary; and Gerald Zaritzky, treasurer. My main objective as President was to foster a
sense of community and to see that responsibilities for running the society were shared broadly. We were able to take advantage of the generosity of Allan Keiler and Brandeis, who lavishly sponsored our third and fourth meetings. Gerry and I finished out two-year terms, and Mark DeVoto and Marty Brody took over as president and treasurer respectively. Anne Trenkamp, as provided in the by-laws, served a three-year term as secretary, before turning over duties to John Armstrong for a regular two-year term. We were off to an excellent start, and we have been blessed year after year with a host of eager members and generous institutions willing to organize and sponsor our meetings and activities.

In keeping with my title, "Waxing Nostalgic," in all sincerity it really IS difficult not to feel tugs on the heartstrings when thinking back to such good old days. I did not want to speak today without bringing in some music. Sgt. Peppers contains a good deal of musical nostalgia of a certain kind, though rendered with an affectionately humorous tone. They even seem to look forward nostalgically in "When I'm 64." The word "nostalgia" comes from the Greek meaning homecoming, and its usage has expanded from denoting homesickness to any wistful or excessively sentimental yearning for something irrecoverable. So, on second thought, the sentimentality in Sgt. Pepper's might better be described as mock-nostalgia—for our Fab Four were only in their twenties with ostensibly the whole world and their entire lifetimes before them. For whatever reason, much of my recent work has involved music with nostalgic content. In an article forthcoming in JMT, I discuss the meaning of the theme of the first movement of Haydn's Quartet Op. 76/6 by comparing it to Simon's aria at the end of Haydn's oratorio, "The Seasons." Time unfortunately does not allow me to show you that today. I have also been immersed recently in Liszt's late piano music, having written two of the chapters of the forthcoming Cambridge Companion to Liszt. As I'm sure you know, A good deal of Liszt's later music is pervaded by a sense of reminiscence and loss. As an example of nostalgia in music, I would like to present, as a brief musical offering, a little-known piano piece by Liszt, the elegy, "Die Zelle in Nonnenwerth."

This piece, dating perhaps from 1880, is a revised keyboard version of his song, "Die Zelle in Nonnenwerth," composed in the early 1840s. This song is of particular interest because Liszt revisited it a number of times over the years. The diverse versions include four different keyboard arrangements, the first three from the 1840s, the last written during his final years. Today I want to compare the final, fourth version with the third, which was published in 1850 as the Feuillet d'album No.2, written nearly forty years earlier. This juxtaposition reveals a number of important features distinctive of Liszt's late style. For the sake of time, I'd like to show compare excerpts from these two versions without playing recordings, but I'll conclude the discussion by playing a recording of the late version in full. The introduction to the third version (Ex. la) sets forth the distinctive juxtaposition of A-minor six-four and F-minor chords in the first two measures (the tonic A minor is therefore weakly represented). This introduction then concentrates on the dominant harmony for the next nine measures, supported by a low-bass E2. The introduction to the later version (Ex.1b) is at once more extended but also harmonically more nuanced. The two-chord motif from the earlier version is set forth in the first two measures, but then sequenced down through more exotic harmonies, including a Db-minor chord in bar 4. Critical to the deliberate harmonic vagueness of the introduction of the later version is the absence of the dominant note in
the low bass. The dominant harmony is never stated outright, but rather is represented by the diminished-seventh chord on Gs (bars 10 and 12), two elements of which are displaced by pungent appoggiaturas in cross-relation: Cs resolving to D against Cn resolving to B. (If you look at bar 3 of the earlier version (Ex. 1a), the lone Cn appoggiatura is ordinary by comparison.) Having arrived at this eerie effect of the double appoggiaturas in the later version, Liszt seems charmed by its strangeness and cannot forego the temptation to repeat it in bars 11-12. Such lingering on captivating sonorities is highly characteristic of Liszt's late style, which often conveys the sense of a consciousness flooded by reminiscences.

Another critical stylistic distinction arises with regard to the treatment of the operatic climax on the cadential six-four in E major (the dominant of a minor). It occurs with the straightforward romantic flourish in bars 26-28 in the third version (Ex. 2a). The parallel event in the fourth version (Ex. 2b) is comparable until the trailing pair of lines in sixths, which ought simply to cadence to the tonicized E-major chord, instead somehow loses its sense of direction with the entry of Es (bar 35), ending uncertainly on the diminished-seventh chord in bar 38. The separateness of this sound-world from the main body of the piece is emphasized by the change of key signature to four sharps, which does not happen in the earlier version. It is as if this odd train of thought leaves the composer somewhat disoriented, and he pauses for a moment to collect himself, then picks up the main melodic strand in bar 41, equivalent to bar 29 in the third version.

The unaccompanied melodic passage, marked dolcissimo, in bars 44-50 in the fourth version (also shown in Ex. 2b) is a distinctive feature of Liszt's late style, in which monophony is frequently employed to avoid strong harmonic definition and to create a pensive or brooding mood. An equivalent passage does not occur at this point in the earlier version. The arpeggiated melodic contour in 6/8 rhythm together with the element of repetition invokes a pastoral topic and suggests a horn call or bells echoing through countryside. The "dolcissimo" indication marks this passage as being of special emotional significance, and one cannot help but feel that the preceding phrase, which has come to rest on the dominant in bar 44, has somehow stimulated recollections of halcyon days now in the distant past. It is important to note that this pastoral subject is not unique to the final version of the song. It occurs in a very abbreviated form in the third version (see Ex. 3a, bars 64-67), stated without repetition in the key of the Neapolitan, Bf major (here marked leggierissimo and perdendo.) The fourth version offers a comparable passage in Bf (see Ex. 3b, bars 101-13), here obviously a recurrence of the earlier statement in E-major, but one which is even further extended through increased repetitions, along with a change of mode to Bf minor. Unlike the third version, this episode receives its own key signature. The Bf passage in the third version precedes a grand cadenza, which in conventional manner constitutes an authentic cadence of great structural weight. This version then ends with the clearest possible harmonic definition, a low-bass tonic pedal (see Ex. 4a). A2 from bar 87 directly following the cadenza, and A1 from 103 to the conclusion. By contrast, the Bf episode in the final version (Ex. 4b) trails off into harmonically indefinite regions, as the introductory material-already fairly vague-recurs in bar 114, strangely transposed up a half-step, to begin the coda. The final version ends without benefit of low-bass support for either dominant or tonic. Instead, as is characteristic of Liszt's late style, a single melodic line is allowed to drift from
bar 123 with only occasional light chordal interjections, merely suggesting the A minor tonic. The concluding high-register chords fade to nothing, creating a sense of floating in time and space.

The big cadenza of the third version highlights the fact that it is an extroverted outpouring of emotion. By contrast, the version of Liszt's later years does not indulge in such gestures, but rather is obviously engaged in introspection and remembrance. All of the features noted—the nuanced, vaguely delineated harmonies; the coloristic passages set off with distinctive key signatures; the phrases that repeat or sequence until they trail off, the development of poignant chromatic motives permeating the structure from melodic detail and unconventional harmonies to the deepest levels of structure—all create a sense of bittersweet nostalgia which surely reflects Liszt's state of mind in his last years.

That Liszt would take up the musical topic of "Die Zelle in Nonnenwerth" late in life tells us something of the psychological motivation for much of the late music. The song had originally been composed to set a poem by his friend, Count Felix Lichnowsky, celebrating a desolate and mysterious island in the Rhine whose main feature was a convent that had fallen into near ruin. Liszt spent the summers of 1841 through 1843 on Nonnenwerth with Marie d'Agoult, his mistress, and their three young children. This idyllic time was the last that the family spent together. Lichnowsky's poem conveys his own admiration of Marie but at the same time a profound sense of loss, which must have captured something of Liszt's mood at the time. In November 1842, after their second summer on the island, Liszt, while travelling and separated from Marie, wrote to her, quoting Lichnowsky's poem:

Here I am in front of Nonnenwerth once again, dear Marie.

And he quoted from Lichnowsky's poem:

Nie die Burgen, nicht de Reben
Haben ihr den Reiz gegeben.
(Neither the castles, nor the vines
Have given [Nonnenwerth] its charm.)

Liszt wrote:

I am going to sing those lines and set them to music, although I am in a mood neither to sing nor to write, but quite simply to weep.

He must have been reflecting especially on the final couplet of the poem:

Dies, das letzte meiner Lieder,
Ruft dir: Komme wieder, komme wieder!
(This, the last of my songs,
Calls to you: come back, come back!)

It is interesting that Liszt would return to this song, so strongly associated with Marie, so many years after the two had become estranged. Their parting had been bitter, and after Marie died in March 1876, Liszt had written to his confidante, Princess Carolyne zu Sayn-Wittgenstein:

Barring hypocrisy, I could not bring myself to weep any more after her passing than during her lifetime.... [A]t my age condolences are as embarrassing as congratulations. Il mondo va da sé—one lives one's life, occupies oneself, grieves, suffers, makes mistakes, changes one's views, and dies as best one can!

It would have been impossible for Liszt to have written this, his final setting of "Die Zelle in Nonnenwerth" without thinking of Marie. The Elegie clearly projects a mood of deep nostalgia,
eliciting a sense of both tender reminiscence and regret. The late Elegie, then, may well have been for Liszt a private lament for Marie, something he could not bear to do publicly. Let's listen.

There can't be a much better example of nostalgia in music than Liszt's final reworking of "Die Zelle in Nonnenwerth." I believe it offers us a key to penetrating the obscurity of his later music. We are often tempted to regard this music as boldly futuristic in its harmonic language, and anticipating in its mode of expression the arcane mysticism of Scriabin or Messiaen. Although one must agree with Princess Carolyne that Liszt cast his javelin further into the future than Wagner, nonetheless the strong attachment of his late music to his earlier work should be recognized. It is clear that in the Elegie of 1880 we hear the experience of the younger Liszt transmogrified through the sensibility of an artist in his final years. I find this music probing, honest, and brave, as well as extremely poignant.

I did not intend to dampen our celebratory mood by playing such sad, pensive music. If anything, this view of nostalgia tells us that our twentieth meeting is in no way an occasion for any sort of nostalgia. Indeed, we've lost nothing of our original vigor and can look forward to continuing our meetings for many years to come.

Well, to paraphrase the music with which I began,

You're such a lovely audience, I'd really like to take you home.

Before I close, I need to bring up one last very important item: the pronunciation of our acronym. To the best of my recollection, those of use involved in setting up our organization always pronounced N-E-C-M-T as NEE-COMT. In fact, in the early correspondence, the acronym was occasionally rendered as NECOMT. I have no idea when, where, or how the spurious and singularly un-euphonious pronunciation NEC-MIT came about (it even sounds a little like MTSNYS!)-but I can assure you that it is simply incorrect. The proper, authentic, and only authorized pronunciation of our name is NEECOMT. Can everyone say: NEE-COMT. Repeat after me: NEE-COMT. All right!

I envisioned my speech today as a "talk-lite." I really meant it to be a kind of extended toast. In a few minutes, directly after the business meeting, we'll adjourn to a special champagne reception. We can all then raise our glasses: to the twentieth year of NECMT, and many more!

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1 Letter to Marie d'Agoult, 16 November 1842, on a steamer from Mainz to Rotterdam; Williams, p. 188, and fn. 17. Note that the contents of this letter cast doubt on the date of 1841 conventionally assigned for the composition of the song. The earliest publications of the work were in 1843; so the song could well have been composed after this letter was written.

1 Walker, Liszt 3:317

1 Liszt finally published the fourth version in the 1 October 1883 issue of the Neue Musikzeitung with the following title: "Die Zelle in Nonnenwerth-Elegie/ after a poem by Count Felix Lichnowsky/Last, considerably revised edition [sehr veränderte Ausgabe]." It is clear from the title that he had had his final say on this topic.

1 In a letter to Emile Ollivier, Liszt wrote: "The memory I retain of Mme d'Agoult is a secret sadness; I confide it to God, and beseech Him to grant peace and light to the soul of the mother of my three dear children." Quoted in Walker, 3: 317-18.

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Example 1a.  
*Feuillet d'album* No. 2, introduction

Example 1b.  
Elegie, 'Die Zelle in Nonnenwerth', introduction
Example 4a.

*Feuillet d’album No. 2, bar 108 to end*

Example 4b.

*Elegie, bar 128 to end*