Magee: As part of the strategic plan of the University, Creativity and the Arts is one of the foundational parts of it. And I’m conducting a series of interviews with people, some of our students, some of our faculty, and also _____ this topic. And students themselves already asked you many of the questions that I had on my list. So I’ll just follow up with a couple and then let you go on. But the first question I wanted to ask you about was when did you first start to think of yourself as an artist?

Bell: As an artist, using that term, in a way, really from the beginning. And I think the way I approached music was, that’s hard to answer because I don’t remember a time where I suddenly started calling myself an artist. I certainly think I was, I mean there definitely was a turning point at age 11 or so where I started thinking of music in much deeper ways. But growing up, when I would approach a piece of music it definitely came from feelings and expression. I wasn’t just doing something mechanical. I was definitely emoting and that’s what an artist does. I didn’t consciously think of myself as an artist or label myself that way, but I certainly feel I was making art from really the beginning, four years old I think.

Magee: So that’s just part of your persona, who you are as a person.

Bell: Yeah, I think so.

Magee: Have you ever had that experience where somebody asked you what do you do and you say, you may say I’m a musician or I’m a violinist, have you ever said, well, I’m an artist?

Bell: If someone were to ask me what I do I would say I’m a musician. But in other contexts, I refer to myself as an artist, yeah, absolutely.

Magee: So that is part of your self concept.

Bell: Yeah.

Magee: And you’ve been involved in several film projects, including the one I’m most familiar with is Ladies in Lavender.

Bell: Oh yeah?
Magee: Yeah. That’s one of my favorite films.

Bell: Oh, wow.

Magee: I love that film. And one thing I like about it so much is the connection of the music to the emotions, especially the emotion of love and discovery. But in terms of, so are you branching out into other areas with your?

Bell: Well, the film is really an extension of what I do. It doesn’t, I had some opportunities. The first big opportunity was a film called *The Red Violin*, which was probably bigger, in a way bigger than, for me much more involvement than the *Ladies In Lavender*, although I enjoyed that. But I’m just making music for a film like that is really no different than, doesn’t take a different sort of mindset as an artist. When you’re playing music, whether it’s for film or whatever, you’re still telling a story through your music. I didn’t have to learn a different skill to do that, to play for the movies. I just had to kind of have the interest. And I liked the medium. I like the medium of film. Music and film I think there’s a lot that can be done with it.

Magee: It feels all-encompassing.

Bell: Yeah. It’s just another thing. I wouldn’t want to only do film. I think there’s nothing more complete than a great violin sonata. You don’t need a film to tell the story. But a film is just another medium that I think is certainly valid and it’s not just an up and down just for commercial reasons. It’s artistically valid I mean.

Magee: Right. I like the connection that you make between music and narrative. I’m a short story writer, my background is literature, so I studied narrative. And so when I, especially a violin, which is so connected to the human voice. I can hear the story emerging from it. And I don’t know if that’s common among musicians. Do most musicians see themselves as story tellers in a way?

Bell: I don’t know. They should I think because that’s what they are. I mean it’s telling a story. It’s just more abstract. It’s not a story like, it doesn’t mean I can tell you what the words are at the beginning of every sonata and exactly what the story is. In fact, it’s not a plot, but you’re definitely telling a story and it has to be conceived as well thought out as a story. It’s more abstract, the music itself is an abstract form. It goes very directly to the emotions. But there’s a lot of, like telling a story, there’s a lot of it’s like, it’s like a movie director tells a story. They’re responsible, even they’re not the ones acting, the director is the one telling the story in a way because he’s the one pacing everything and knowing what to bring out. And that’s what you have to do as a performer. You’re being the director, not just the actor. You have to really figure it out very consciously. There’s a lot of brains behind making music, not just – I know you know this, I’m
just saying, but not just, I think it’s not talked about enough I think. A new student you think well, I mean that it’s just, if you’re emoting that’s enough. That’s what so great about music. It’s a great combination of the architecture, the mathematics, and the pure emotion.

Magee: Well, if you weren’t a violinist do you know what ______?

Bell: I don’t know. I think if I hadn’t of started on the violin, if I couldn’t play the violin now I’d probably, I’d love to do more composing, maybe conduct. But definitely music. If I hadn’t gone into music I don’t know. Probably, I always liked math and science, I probably would have been -

Magee: So you do compose.

Bell: Uh-huh, a little bit. I write all my own cadenzas and I write some music as well.

Magee: Just a couple of other quick questions. One is what do you think is the biggest obstacle you’ve encountered? You talked a little bit about when you were a child and the school system wasn’t really receptive to your needs. But as an adult.

Bell: As an adult, obstacles. I’ve had a lot of obstacles. I’ve created my own. I’m sort of like struggling with balance issues, balancing my life(?). I wouldn’t call that an obstacle. I’ve been, I have been very lucky to have very few real obstacles.

Magee: So internal struggles.

Bell: Internal struggles and those are, and trying to figure out how to balance ones life and not get burned out and not do too much. But those are all the things that one struggles with.

Magee: And being present in the way that you are present with the students today, which is so meaningful, but yet really guarding your own space and your own privacy. You’ve been selected as a, I can’t remember the name of the award, one of 200 –

Bell: Oh, recently?

Magee: Yes, very recently.

Bell: From the Global Leaders ______.

Magee: I saw some sort of name.

Bell: I don’t know what that means exactly. It’s from the World Economic Forum. I don’t know how they came up, decided on me.
Magee: You don’t know what you’re supposed to do?

Bell: No. I don’t know. I don’t know that it’s something you’re supposed to do, maybe it’s just a recognition of what you’ve, for the role you play somehow. I don’t know. I’m not sure if I have an assignment or not.

Magee: Well, congratulations.

Bell: Thanks.

Magee: We’ll let you go.

Bell: I’m sorry I’m a little busy.

Magee: No, we fully understand that and –

Bell: I have two more concerts to do _____ as well, and an hour of CD signing after that. It’s a tough day.

Magee: Well, we don’t want to take away from your day.

Bell: Well, thanks for having me here.

Magee: Yeah.

END