Vining marks ‘time’ at Cambridge

Professor Joseph Vining was among the speakers for a special millennial presentation of the Tanner Lectures on Human Values at Cambridge University during the summer.

“This millennium year, the trustees of the Tanner Foundation decided to have at Cambridge a millennium celebration and symposium on the subject of ‘time’ over a three-day period, involving 10 lecturers from the United States and five from Britain representing various disciplines, rather than the usual single lecturer,” said Vining, the Harry Burns Hutchins Collegiate Professor of Law.

The series was “a fascinating interdisciplinary effort,” he reported.

Stephen Jay Gould of Harvard University opened the series on June 30 with a talk on “Large and Small Scales of Time.” Pulitzer and Nobel Prize-winning author and Princeton University professor Toni Morrison concluded the series on July 2 with a talk on “The Loss of Lost Time.”

“Between them were three groups of lectures,” said Vining, “the first, by historians of science, anthropologists, and an historian of religion, addressing calendars and calendrical existence; the second, by physicists, biologists, an astrophysicist, and myself, addressing the scientific measurement of time; and the third, by composers and historians of music, on time in music.

“Each of my books has wrestled in some way with the problem of time in legal thought, and with various aspects of the reality of time not captured in our sense of it as a sequence of units — what is sometimes called ‘real time.’ My talk on ‘Unmeasured Time’ was placed at the end of the second group to provide a transition from discussion of the scientific measurement of time to discussion of the musical performance of time.”

William E. Bolcom, the Ross Lee Finney Distinguished University Professor of Music at the University of Michigan School of Music, also spoke in the series. Bolcom discussed “Musical Time vs. Real Time.”

The Tanner Lectures on Human Values rotate among seven American and two British universities — Michigan, Stanford, California, Utah, Yale, Harvard, Princeton, Oxford, and Cambridge. The lectures are sponsored “to advance and reflect upon the scholarly and scientific learning relating to human values. This intention embraces the entire range of values pertinent to the human condition, interest, behavior, and aspiration.”