Janice Giteck Interview

Kirkland, WA
July 25, 2006
Jonathan Middleton, interviewer
Janice Giteck's studio

JM:

Can you describe your creative process?' Like how do you start, what do you do, can you share those ideas?

Janice:

Well, I have been really fortunate to have commission situations for probably about thirty years, so pretty much every piece that I've written came from a request; it was a relationship situation, and so that automatically sets up a relationship in my mind to the piece. With a commission, I am thinking about how long, what it's going to be for, who the person is, or the situation is. Often I have done pieces for a particular occasion, like the millennium, or to celebrate a situation. So, right away, the piece exists, and I think of it as the piece existing right from the beginning, when I first start.

JM:

That is, you imagine it. You imagine it in its existence?

Janice:

Yeah, in a way I have to meet it. It's a dance, like I said it's like a relationship. And I have to be in that relationship, It can't just be the occasion for the person that I am writing for. So what has to be true for me is what is important for me at the time. What is my cutting edge in terms of my inner life, my musical interests, my sense of responsibility to those

things. All those things. So it's complicated from the beginning, because any relationship is dynamic.

So then where does the music come in? Where does the music drop from, or appear from? So that is another part of this process. At this point I become a consummate researcher. So let' s say, this state that I am in right now, about letting music come from breath, or letting it emerge and not pushing it; the consummate researching that is going on for me, alongside of sitting and meditating, is reading Buddhist material. I'm currently exploring what is non-conceptual thought. What happens when you immediately start creating a concept: you're not in the present anymore, but if you just sit there and you don't ever write anything down, or put one on one together meaning two notes, and another two, as soon as you start doing that you are in conceptual thinking. So how to stay as close to the bone as possible, and still have all of the exquisite intelligence and thinking ability that I can celebrate about myself for having been composing for fifty years. I don't want to leave that behind necessarily because that's a part of me; I tended it, it's mature; it's been cultivated, I don't want to leave my ego at the door, that's important. On the other hand, I don't want to get too attached to some of those ideas or thoughts, and be patting myself on the head by extending the melody too long, (chuckle) you know, that kind of thing - so it becomes again another complication and so pretty soon we are in this conundrum of complicated thoughts dancing around in the head in every direction and that's a mess, and so the way I like to work is - I like to let things float up and be completely chaotic for as long as possible, and consider every snippet of paper a jewel, you know whatever gets written down, if it's a sitting for an hour, write it down, if it's a sitting for thirty seconds, and it feels good write it down or record it. If I read something that impresses me, put a little piece of paper in the book, put the book near the piano, or photo copy it. I am a collector; I'm like a researcher for everything, and so if there is a commission on the other end or a deadline or a piece of paper that says its going to be performed at such and such a place, I will give myself as long as possible before that deadline, as long as possible up to that deadline to stay in this very freefalling process.

And to me that is absolute sheer delight. If I don't have delight, what's the point of doing it? I gave up that gnarly process of writing notes down at the beginning of a piece and tracing them through to the end, and calling that my piece; I gave that up about twenty years ago. To me that was the greatest departure of baggage that I could have thrown off a cliff in my lifetime; it wasn't meant to work that way, that linear process. And I had a few wonderful inspirations from people along the way. Do you know Vivian Fine. Do you know who she was?

JM:

Yes, I know who she was.

Janice:

I may have told you this story when I had visited Eastern Washington but one of the pieces my former husband and I commissioned for an ensemble was an opera, a chamber opera by Vivian, that we premiered and I got to have a few lessons with her. She was probably a full generation older than me, so she was kind of a jewel in that way; she knew a lot, and she was writing this opera in the oddest way. She would write a whole line of one character,

without writing out the orchestra part or the other character in the scene, she knew the other character would be in the scene, and it was just this beautiful arc, arc is so overused. It was just this beautiful shape that made perfect sense for that character, that intensity, that expression of what that person was trying to say, and she would actually put that away and then write the next one, and then she'd write the flute part, she'd put them away! I thought she was crazy! I said "how are you going to get this all to work?" she said "well you know, by the time you are my age, it works!" Its like you just have to trust that you're in the same sort of frame of mind and you're kind of hearing the same key centers and if it doesn't quite work, then you snip out this and snip out that, but she said "what people use to do when then wrote lines,' Monteverdi and pre-Monteverdi, 'is they were lines."

JM:

There is no full score; the music consists of only parts.

Janice: Exactly, and you know this was how true counterpoint really emerged from the convergence of things or the concurrence of things, and so I tried writing a piece that way, *Callin' Home Coyote*.[1]

JM:

Oh really?

Janice:

Yep I wrote that piece that way. I wrote whole big sections of each of those three parts separate: the tenor, the steel drums and the string bass; and that was eureka for me.

JM:

Wow.

Janice:

At this time I could begin to trust myself better in other projects - to be able to use that as a technique, and so with this thing of letting things emerge, I might have a whole lot of melodies, not just fragments, sometimes whole melodies that I might have been singing out on the ferry boat while crossing over to one of the other islands [Puget Sound] (chuckle) and that goes in my folder, my preliminary folder. I might be in love with it, I might not know how I am going to use it, or any number of things like that little sound right out there… the wind chimes…

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[1] Composed in 1978 for tenor voice steel drums and string bass, *Callin' Home Coyote* was recorded by the New performance Group on the compact disc "Janice Giteck," Mode Records, 1988.

JM:

Oh yeah.

Janice

…it just kind of filters through? [Janice quietly sings a few random notes] So I'm just kind of a collector, like I am [metaphorically speaking] aimlessly walking around on the beach, you know collecting seashells and little stones and things, taking photographs and glimpses of clouds, or something.

JM:

Do you collect various items that find themselves in a piece later on, lets say three years from now? In this case, there may be elements that you've collected, that you would never have imagined would combine well. Or do you collect things and kind of keep them herded in a specific area, for a specific piece?

Janice:

I usually do the latter..

JM:

Yeah.

Janice:

Because I am a little bit practical, (chuckle) and I kind of divide my time up into three segments: the first third of time, let's say I have a nine month period, so just using that as a reference. During the first three months I will be in this freefall, but anything is fair game. If I start, in that first three months, putting some things together, fine, but I am not forcing myself to do it. In the middle period I really am trying to see what is going to happen with the piece, how many movements it might be, if its going to be one long thing, with things strung together or things coming back. Usually I have an idea of about

how long something needs to be, and lately things have gotten longer than shorter, which is okay, it can be problematic. These four songs ["She Who Dances Through the Sky" (Songs of Yeshe Tsogyal)] turned out to be about 25 minutes and I think I wanted them to be about16-18 minutes, but I inserted Tibetan language chanting at the beginnings create a very clean palette. It was a way of grounding the piece, in contrast to the very dramatic vocal writing; so the piece got a lot longer doing that, but it made the piece better, and it kind of ritualized it the way I wanted it to happen.

JM:

Right. When you do step two, which I imagine this as the step for getting the shape of the piece in order; do you find yourself working from a variety of sections of the piece: the very end, suddenly in the middle, then back to the very end, than back to the beginning, or do you try to get back to some sort of linear approach by starting at the beginning?

Janice:

Well, that is a really good question. I would say that there has to be attention paid to a linear trajectory, because music is in time, so there has to be an intention to meet that objective. There is an important step between the first period and second period of my process that is very crucial, and that is, I will go through the file of what I am working on (and it could be a hundred pieces of paper with little bits of things on it) and I'll label them to see which ones seem to go for whatever reason with other ones. Maybe there are 6 motives or six themes or six somethings that are emerging, and so I'll just put a number one on everyone that seems like number one, and place each numbered group in separate files. Then I'll say "well what is it that's joining all of these to be number ones?" Is it their melody? Is it their color? Is it the energy? The tempo? Any of those things, and then I start playing with them and stringing them together and then I will almost always photocopy all of the material so that I can have multiple copies. I've got two or three copies of everything in there, so I can literally use scissors to cut and paste. I like to see it all laid out on the floor. I don't like it to have it on a computer and to keep flipping

files, I like to play with it, and say "okay well this, I really like this, it should come back later on. Maybe I can put it in a different key, or maybe it needs to be exactly the same. Sometimes something wants to come back five or six times, so through the process I will discover what the form of that whole section will be. So that is what segues me into the second phase is seeing (1) what's in that big stack, (2) separating it into smaller stacks, (3) seeing the relationships, and then I will let myself in the second phase dance around from one file to another. It's akin to Joseph Campbell's quintessential teaching "Following Your Bliss." I will sit down at the piano, or wherever I am working, (I do work at the piano a lot, its just a part of my …it is like another piece of my body ((chuckle)) right now), but, I will just sit down, and whatever comes first; that's the file I will work with, that's the place that I will compose. And then when I am done with that, in that sitting … it might be that day, it might be a week, it might be an hour - its like the end of the breath. It just goes back on the shelf (clap), the next time I sit down, I say "Oh wow, this would be fun!" And I try to follow in my fun! My bliss! You know?

JM:

Nothing is forced.

Janice:

Nothing. I try to not force. The forcing is about half way through the period of time I have for the whole project. That's when I start saying "okay, I've got this concert coming up at school, I've got this trip back east I've got to take, I better get my calendar out and really mark in which days of the week I'm going to work, because by the time I get through to that… to the end of that second third, I have to be really beginning to trust that the piece will be done on time, but before that time, I really try not to hyperventilate that the most important thing is spaciousness, because this kind of process can't work if you're pushing me, and the best music comes out of me in this process. I actually teach

my students, to… and this sounds paradoxical, I will enforce this process on my students for a semester at Cornish… to try it out, because it is so not what we were taught.

JM:

Ah Yes.

Janice:

Yet I found this process over a lot of years of working linearly. And one time I met a playwrite while I was in the Djerassi Resident Artists Program in California (an artist residency retreat center in the Santa Cruz mountains). I was a resident there a couple of different times in the nineties, and they have ten artists there at a time, each from different discilpines.

JM:

It's like the MacDowell Colony.

Janice:

Yeah, it's like that. You spend a month there, and the only time you talk to the other residents is at dinner, and it's a very lavish dinner that they put together and at night you sit for hours and talk to other people; you play darts and drink beer in the barn until midnight.

There was this playwright there and one night we were talking and it turned out that she used almost the exact same process. I went and visited her studio, and she showed me how she put her files together and kept them in separate files. She didn't even know what the play would be about, she would develop characters, individual characters, or just some character that she wanted to have, and she would be searching to create a character, and then the play would emerge from these characters that she was creating. It's pretty interesting.

JM:

It's as if she is not worried about the global scheme, just specific details.

You mentioned earlier how you teach your students this process, but has it gone the other way where your students and the experience of teaching composition has shaped your creative process?

Janice:

OH yeah, absolutely…

I know it has, I am trying to think how it has…. one thing I can think of is, that with the increased use of computers and the cut and paste potential that there is out there: the sequencing, the transposition possibilities, more and more, and you and I did talk about this quite a bit, when I was over visiting with your students, is it is hard to know what they know. What the students know and what they don't know. Sometimes something very sophisticated will come out and yet, while it's completely intuitive on their part, they don't know how to make meaning of it, in terms of how to think about it. Does that make any sense? And something I have valued tremendously in my own work, is having a way to make meaning through thinking about material so that… so that I can have as much mastery with the material as possible, which has its paradox, because in a way that gives you the most freedom. And if you can trust that you know something, or how to do something, or why it works, you can access it or go over it again, and then it can also develop from one piece to the next. I am being rather abstract.

JM:

No, I was thinking just along those lines recently. Let's say you have a snippet of paper with an idea. Well the real challenge now in the process might be to develop that (idea)

and you can see how students might struggle in developing their ideas, but for more experienced composers, it can almost become second nature to them.

Janice:

Right, exactly.

JM:

Is that the fun part of the process for you? Is it safe to assume that developing your material is a second stage in your process?

Janice:

Absolutely.

JM:

Are there any techniques or things you like to do that help you along?

Janice:

Yeah, there is a lot of them, but I want to stay with the first question just a little bit longer because I find it a really challenging question and I don't know if I can come up with an answer that I can feel good about. But can I stay with it for a minute and then come back to this?

JM:

Sure.

Janice:

I think the way that teaching does affect me is almost in the negative, like what students can't quite grasp, deepens my understanding of grasping something for myself as a

composer. For example, we were just talking about using a sequencer or something where you can cut something up, turn it upside down, you know, multiply it or whatever, it will still sound like something concrete and not supple. If you don't have some ways to connect with it that are more fundamental in terms of developing material and in terms of hearing sound that you're making in the moment, just for that moment, by playing something over and over again, you begin to believe that it exists and you can become attached to it and you can have a relationship with it, but it can be a fairly surface relationship. And if you stack up enough things that are surface relationships than you think that it's layered, and it is, but it doesn't come from having created those, in an immediate/present hearing sense of it. I can't explain it much better than that… it's like being able to push a button and have three measures of music reproduce itself in another key without your having tried it note by note.

JM:

Maybe it's less hands on….and students can be too quick to say "well that is good enough."

Janice:

Yeah, right.

JM:

And they listen to it over again in class that's exactly the way "I want it," but they haven't necessarily really created it (chuckle).

Janice:

That is really right. Its how they wanted it because they heard it.

JM:

It was presented for them…

Janice:

Exactly, exactly, and I don't see this as necessarily negative, its just another relationship in that complex of many relationships that come up in creating something, but it can be depended on in a way that it's just taken for granted - instead of being a precious tool.

JM:

Right.

Janice:

It becomes…you know with things being so fast now, everything is done so fast (snapping). One of the first things that I tell my second year theory class, is that my goal as your teacher, is to make sure that we go as slow as possible this semester, because everything else that you are going to be doing is as fast as possible, and this is such an endless process learning music theory and counterpoint and so on. You may as well just go really slowly and really enjoy it and really hear everything.

JM:

Right.

Janice:

And so this really just totally fits in with where I am in my life now and it's not because I'm getting older, it's because I feel like I am getting a little bit wiser and maybe that does come with certain things of urgency or ambition of certain types and it's a sort of reverse ambition right now (laughing). Go slow!

JM:

(laughing) I agree. I think you need to enjoy learning the concepts of music theory and not be rushed right away..

Janice:

Right. Well I think that, to fill out that question a little further about learning from students; it is such a responsibility to be an artist, because it is such a privilege. I mean who is going to pay somebody else to make something. And we get that. We get it to teach, we get paid to make things, we get paid to teach people to make things and making things that are not manufactured, mass produced that can be sold on the market. So I see it as an enormous responsibility to tell the truth, whatever that is. You know, your own truth, my own truth, and to hold that up as a mirror back to the culture or society that has endowed us to put food on the table to do this thing, and so my teacher, Trungpa (Chögyam), he considers art and art making at the very highest level of endeavors that people can do, it's right under meditating (laughing) sort of right under breathing. But along with that goes the responsibility you know to really deliver the goods to yourself, and therefore the person that you relate with.

JM:

To be honest and genuine.

Janice:

Exactly, exactly. And so, you know, I am always working with my students to ask that of them. Not waste their time or anybody else's time, life is so precious and those sound like clichés but they are really just at the bottom of the heap. And so how do I learn from my students? To see students have passion for expressing something, I think that I….I feel like I am in communion with young people who are on that path and it's validating for myself that it's a worthwhile thing; and the very fact that art continues, that it's irrepressible.

You know they keep coming to school, they keep coming to study, people still writing clarinet pieces. It's like the continuation of culture in the deepest sense of what culture is and can be. I learn from that! It's a kind of ….it's a human activity, human beings do it and it changes with the times; and I can't stand phoniness.

Here is an example of a student who is a classical guitarist, this is years and years ago, and he was a very good classical guitarist and he was writing guitar quartets and little chamber music pieces, and man it is not easy writing guitar music, it's not easy. He was quite talented doing it, and he went off to Peabody [conservatory in Baltimore, MD], he left Cornish after a couple years, he went to Peabody, and he came back after a year and decided that he wasn't a guitar major any more, he decided that he wanted to be more of a composer. He stayed at Cornish for another couple of years and alongside of being a composition student and this classical guitarist, he was playing rock music; and one day he came to a lesson and he said "I want to take you into the electronic studio and I want to play something for you that I have been working on" and he had this really raucous/ wild rock kind of thing, and I said "this is fantastic!" I said "why don't I hear this in your concert music, why don't I hear this level of passion?" And sure enough within a year, he was doing these outrageous pieces wiring everybody up. I told that story a lot of times, because that was a lesson for me to say how my students influenced me. I think that was the first time that I ever looked somebody in the eyes and said, "you have to at least try to integrate these parts of you to really be whole" and I was also talking to myself, and the fact that he did it, he became my teacher. I will always celebrate that guy; in my head and in person since then, because he really went for it.

JM:

I had asked earlier about the process of piecing together your ideas and developing them; did you want to expand on that topic?

Janice:

Well you know, I've lived in a big chunk of the 20th century and now the 21st century, but a big chunk of time when a lot of different things have happened. When I was a student, Schoenberg was still being taught, however having studied with French composers I never looked at any Schoenberg**,** which is interesting because one technique I like a lot is a Schoenberg technique which is continual…. what do you call it? continual variation?

JM:

Yeah, developing variation…

Janice:

Yeah, I love that technique, I have used it so many times….its very natural, its very intuitive for me…to take something and stretch it here and truncate it here or you know this kind of thing, and spin it out five or six times and have it wind up somewhere else. So I was very close with Lou Harrison and… …the way he used octaves, he can make some things sound so spacious and yet you have a whole orchestra playing and nobody is even playing in thirds or fifths they are just playing different octaves and its so gorgeous; you can hear every instrument. So I tend to, as I am sure every composer does, see what material wants to do with itself and just try to support it by not shoving it around too much. And I think the trickiest thing is to not overdevelop. As soon as it gets over developed it's dead; it's like dead meat.

JM:

If I may interject a little bit, it reminds me of how you say you start your process: there is this entity out there which is going to be your piece and you want to "meet it" and I get the sense that with your themes or musical ideas you want to "meet them" as well, that they want to become something and so you constantly have this approach where you want to develop something but you don't want to force it.

Janice:

Right.

JM:

Let it become what it becomes.

Janice:

Yeah, it's kind of like parenting.

JM:

(Chuckles) Yes, yes, that's true, and yet with parenting you have a child that isn't just going to develop as a person under your influence, but under their own initiatives too, and here we're talking about musical ideas that aren't going to develop from their own initiatives; it's you all the way, and sort of… relying on you to recognize the potential of things.

Janice:

Right, exactly. Sometimes something wants to be tight and complex… or not really complex, but have a lot of tension in it. I'm not devoid of density or tightening things up. It's not like things have to be spacious all the time. If they were, nothing would be musically spacious. Everything is in contrast to everything else in the world. And my meditation teacher talks about how we are always in a relationship to otherness; we are always experiencing otherness. Everything. One remark that I have heard a number of times about my music is that people are sometimes surprised that I use as much dissonance as I do, or that my music is so contrapuntal or so dense in places in relation to other places that are so open, and then I say "well that is precisely the point, you know, it's like it wouldn't work otherwise," and sometimes I'm very aware that I want to go to something that's more dense or more gnarly and getting there is a big issue as you well know, do you just cut to the contrast or do you wind your way there. How do you do that? And that is the trickiest thing - transitions.

JM:

Very tricky.

Janice:

That is the hardest thing for a composer, wouldn't you say?

JM:

Oh, absolutely. All my students struggle.

Janice:

In a way composing *is* transitions, because that's where you can over do something, or trivialize something.

JM:

Oh yes, there are so many perils.

Janice:

Yeah, so many perils, exactly. Having something morph - you remember when that word became popular?

Something morphs into something else. It's kind of like a carpenter that will… you know, its not a tongue and groove situation, but it's kind of like (chuckle) the joinery. The joinery of things**.**

JM:

Yeah. The process of convincing listeners that things are properly connected.

Janice:

And that becomes a really big question for me. Recently, in this last piece that I wrote ["She Who Dances Through the Sky"], I tried to drop that completely. I thought: 'this is just phony - this whole thing of joining things like is. I'm going to just flash [to the next idea] and I am just going to trust that everything that I have put together alongside of everything else will go with it.

JM:

Like a collage. Like a Max Ernst collage.

Janice:

In a way yeah..

JM:

Just put them together.

Janice:

Exactly, I just thought I really want to try that I want to see if something stays more alive than the treachery of something sounding phony in the way it is connected. I don't think I can get away with this flashing technique for too long myself; I think I will wind up with the question again of transitions. I just think that it is the hardest thing, I really do.

JM:

Well, it must be a big issue for you with your process if you have all these little pieces of ideas that are categorized in some way and put together and developed, then transitions would be a big part of your time.

Janice:

Yeah, absolutely, as opposed to writing linearly?

JM:

Yeah.

Janice:

So that the transition is just a concern all the time?

JM:

Yeah, right. because if you have pieces of paper with ideas on them, over a course of several weeks or a month there could be some very different ideas for the same piece.

Janice:

Oh Yeah, but you know, my interest in psychology tells me that we don't stay on a thought for very long, unless we force ourselves back to it. Our minds jump around. Our minds are just jumping all the time, and so why not represent that in music in some way. It's sort of scintillating in its best sense. It's like scintillating light; it's this kind of dancy thing. And I know, for example, that Van Gogh or Prendergast (Maurice) were after that characteristic - in not dwelling on something, letting it dance, short strokes, small very tiny strokes. Dots. I am kind of fascinated with that and what does it all add up to be?

JM:

I do find this "dwelling" trait in some of your pieces from the seventies I guess. You have the ability to stay on an idea for a while, like there is a slow evolution to the idea, and that too could minimize the transition issues by staying in one place, with a nice sense of space.

Janice:

I think that is possible because I am very melody oriented, very line oriented, and just by my nature, it can stay in one place for while.

JM:

Another composer… well there are so many that have done that too… but… has Morton Feldman's music inspired you in some ways…with respect to the time issue?

Janice:

Yeah, definitely. Yeah and Cage also.

JM:

Oh, I was going to say that about Cage as well.

Janice:

That sense of stasis, but it's not really stasis, it's a suspension of time. And then there is Messiaen too, because he is such a melodious on top of it. On top of that sense of opening up time and the way he opened up time with his understanding of developing material on a kind of very small cellular level rhythmically and all that. It's just very, very appealing to my sensibility in terms of not codifying something into a meter, but having it be very buoyant and rhythmic and more gestural and phrase-oriented. Takemitsu is another one that's been a big influence on me. I first started listening to Takemitsu in the early seventies… even earlier than that: the late sixties, because I think that he probably impressed me even more than Berio, except that I was still so involved in drama and theatrical drama, and I was married to an opera singer, a performance artist and so it was natural for me to be engrossed in drama and theater developments; that was an incredible period for me because I went to so many different operas and different productions of same operas and when I was living in Germany with John [Duykers] in Frankfurt they did "Moses und Aron" by Schoenberg and I sat through the whole rehearsal process of that piece and that was incredible.

JM:

Maybe that also got you into line as well. Vocal music has many lines.

Janice:

Yeah, absolutely. I sing when I work. I sing every note. You know someone will call me up on the phone and I sound hoarse - I just UHH! and they say: "you're sick! What's wrong?" [and I say] "oh wait a minute I've just been working!"(laughing) and I think singing is really important to me because it keeps me connected to my body and having my music connected to body feels very… very telling it's sort of a truth teller about whether the music is coming from somewhere other than one little shaving of grey matter somewhere.

JM:

Do you sing at the piano or do you just kind of sight read at a desk, how do you sing? Or does it matter?

Janice:

Well if I am working at the piano I will sing. I will check out lines and intervals….. I'll sing anywhere. I'll check intervals in my head, singing them out loud.

JM:

And does the discriminating process kick in as you're singing? Are you choosing one interval or gesture over another?

Janice:

Oh yeah, absolutely yeah. I think that Mozart was just a big influence on me in terms of the shapes of phrases, the lengths of phrases, the singability of a phrase …I am not saying that my music is always following the tonality or the modality of what feels good in the voice necessarily or even the distance of intervals - you can sing a tenth or a thirteenth

and it can be magnificent, but you never find that in Mozart, melodically speaking. **(55:07)**

JM:

I'd like to go back to your retreat [a Buddist retreat in Colorado] and how they basically denied you the opportunity to jot down all your notes. You are naturally a collector and yet, you were unable to document on a piece of paper what you were doing. At the same time you are having musical ideas that you have experienced during that month. Is that a new experience in your process now that maybe you are no longer having pieces of paper, but sort of involuntary memory? Like the way Marcel Proust would write his novels… touch something and it would remind him of a vacation he once had? Is that…

Janice:

Wow…well…

JM:

*I am only saying this because you say that you haven't written for maybe about a year now, so I was thinking maybe you were taking a new angle on things***.**

Janice:

I think you are bringing up a lot of really important things for where I am now. My meditation teacher is Reggie Ray, who I met a year and half ago. I went and talked to him right away about where I was in my life, and what my responsibilities are, and what my sense of creativity is, and how I kind of felt stuck on this career trajectory, and what meaning did it have to me - to my soul as an artist and that's always been my questions. One of my questions is how those two things live alongside each other and he said - after about a half an hour of talking to him: "well I think you need to stop doing everything for a while, just stop, and I was like "what? (chuckles) you want me to stop writing music and doing everything for a while?" he said "yeah, you will come back to it, but you just

need to be stopping this way for a while. Just stop." And so, I had this commission I was working on, the choral pieces that I had mentioned and as soon as I finished writing those, I stopped. I was in a place in my life where I could do it: I didn't have a piece coming up, *per se*, I didn't have any obligations, and it was scary! But I had stopped for three years, years ago in the late eighties, and so I had had that time to refer back to, that I survived it! And I actually came out better for it! And something really had shifted and it opened up fifteen to twenty years of a lot of music, but this was a little different, because he was basically saying drop your whole sense of goal orientation, whatsoever, period; and see what emerges. And so, what has emerged is of course a lot of fear: is there any new music left in me? Where is it going to come from? Is it going to come from what I already know? No, because that doesn't interest me. What's new? Breathing. (chuckles) Is there going to be any music from breathing? (laughing) But you know what it is with breathing - watching your mind and sort of all the little games that you play and what is useful and what is not useful… what's exhaustive, compulsive circles, these little twirls you get your mind into…. figuring something out: you figure out that it is not even important, what you are trying to figure out. Huge amounts of brain cells being burnt up for absolute bullshit.

JM:

So this is meditation that we are talking about, meditation and getting musical ideas from…?

Janice:

Well, no. What happened during this retreat is - I mean kind of out-of-the-blue, some little wafting, beautiful, little intervals of stringed instruments started showing up one day, and I just started weeping. This is after a full year of not writing anything and kind of taking Reggie to heart and feeling mature enough in myself that I could just trust that, well maybe I'll never write anything again, and maybe, you know, I have done my big

orchestra pieces and all of this stuff, maybe it is okay? Maybe I have something else I need to do in my life. And then the wafting little sounds came out they were so pure. So Pure! And to me that is kind of where I am right now, like, what do I do with this? Am I supposed to write it down? Am I suppose to kind of let it waft around more? And maybe it will never come back? Maybe another little thing will come back? Maybe some oboes and clarinets will come back someday, or something. Scary! It's really scary, but I bet if somebody called me up and said "we want you to write a blab blah blah piece" I probably would, but I might be tortured quite a bit, because I'm really trying to see if I can write from a more pure place; the *most* pure place.

Have you seen that documentary, the Arvo Pärt documentary? It is just fantastic, because he's really working with the same issue. How pure of a place is the music suppose to come from? – this is really his dilemma. Every time he's faced with the camera and he tries to talk about it and he's just playing these three notes over and over again and he comes back forty-five minutes later in the film [and says] "but you have to listen to them! You have to play them! You have to play them so many, many, many, many times!" and it is just *the* most inspiring documentary about a composer that I have ever seen! Actually, I just sent it to my son for his birthday, and you can get them from Amazon for twenty-two bucks. Buy it for your students; it's just really a gem. It's kind of like, "okay there are these few people out there that are asking some of these same questions!" And so I am in a place of "I don't know." I don't know what's to come now, and that's okay, sort of… in a protective environment.

JM:

So you are just trying to make a decision right now whether you try to capture those wafting sounds, or leave them alone, or some other alternative…like capturing an impression of them or something?

Janice:

I have this sense that if I try to capture them (if I started writing them down) that it would be premature right now… that I know them well enough…. that they're more of an indication of some place of freshness that I have been allowed to enter, and I am much more interested in doing my meditation practices right now than I am in capturing them and putting them in this …

JM:

In a box?

Janice:

…in a box.

JM:

I had the same impression with timbre. I'll hear an orchestral chord in my head, and I thank whoever it is that I don't have the ability to orchestrate everything I hear perfectly. I'd much rather orchestrate the impression of what I heard, because that leads to other really neat decisions and other neat ideas… so that I am not just transcribing; I don't want to transcribe, even though, sometimes the chords that I hear are just really "Wow, Super!" But I'd much rather capture the impression.

Janice:

How do you differentiate between capturing them exactly, and creating an impression? Or tell me how you differentiate those.

JM:

For example, Gunther Schuller came to visit us at Eastern [Eastern Washington University] and he just basically explained how he transcribes in a stream of conscious way. He does it spontaneously. He hears a note in his head, he knows exactly which

instrument, which range… he just writes them down; it's just phenomenal! It's this totally spontaneous mechanism without any playback. I think he works at a desk; and I think that is admirable and I am just fascinated with that, but I'd much rather have more decision making in the process…

Janice:

I understand what you are saying…

JM:

…*so when I hear a colorful chord in my mind that I might find interesting, I might say: "well I'll try to capture the impression of that instead of trying to transcribe every instrument that I think I'm hearing." Does that make sense?*

Janice:

Yes, it does.

JM:

And I just find that much more interesting to me as a process. That doesn't happen a whole lot when I compose per se; it could be just when I am out walking. When I compose I am usually too busy to be listening to a specific chord.

Janice:

Right…that transcribing process that you mentioned, I actually use that sometimes; and then I'll take a look at what's there and evaluate, you know, maybe I'll cut out three quarters of it, but there's some real things that are fabulous and then I will work with those. And I actually give students that as an exercise, just for play. I'll start them with three notes so that they can actually hear three tones and they are singing and writing note heads at the same time, and I will have them do that for a few weeks, five minutes a day

or something so that they can get them use to trusting their ear and stay connected to their ear.

JM:

Right, that is a great exercise.

Janice:

But also, you can get a lot of material that way. I wouldn't… I mean… to edit from that place [a transcribed moment] *is* different than the interpretative process that you're speaking about. I like what you are talking about it's very… that's a pretty spacious way of working.

JM:

Yeah, it calls into mind more decision-making mechanisms than just transcribing. In some ways transcribing doesn't have the same set decisions as creating impressions.

Janice:

It's kind of like being a bird, like whatever chirps come out, that's the music. I mean it is kind of being a creature on that level. I think Messiaen was fascinated with that primitive level, but then he had such a brain. But he was *so* fascinated by that, that he spent all his years doing it .. transcribing bird calls is outrageous.

JM:

Is that equivalent to the "pure" location you mentioned before…you've used the term "pure" does that stand for Messiaen's fascination for bird calls in some way as an approach to some sort of purity?

Janice:

And Cage, too! I mean Cage was very elemental.

JM:

In terms of the chance…?

Janice:

No.

JM:

….with the aleatoric results given to him?

Janice:

I don't have enough knowledge about Cage's later process, but my sense is that - you get what you get …that was his general philosophy that "you get what you get" and then to call that music was always the puzzling thing to me, but it's very Zen. It is absolutely Zen. It's pure.

JM:

And it is so liberating.

Janice:

Yes, Exactly! In the Tibetan Buddhist practice that I am in, they call that "sacred outlook," and everything, *everything(!)* is part of sacred outlook and that it's not bad or good. If something is bad you greet it with the same liberated, you know, it's like "Oh! you have identity theft! Well that is kind of…"

JM:

Everyday is a good day (laughing).

Janice:

Exactly, and you can say to these simpletons "what are they thinking," but all you have to do is look in John Cage's eyes in the last six months of his life, and it is like this aura is coming off of him.

JM:

Yeah…He figured it all out…

Janice:

Yeah, I think he did, you said it right. I think he did. And Carol, my partner, got to know him over the years too, and she could see the same thing: "My God this guy glows! (laughing) Where is he from now?!"

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