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Message from the Editor

Nico Schüler, Texas State University, E-Mail: nico.schuler@txstate.edu

As always, I would like to sincerely thank all members of our peer-review board for their hard work and excellent suggestions for improving each article.

All issues may contain articles and announcements in the following categories:

- **articles with a special focus on local music traditions (any region in the world)**;
- **research articles** – generally, all music-related topics are being considered;
- **opinion articles** that are part of, or provide the basis for, discussions on important music topics;
- **composer portraits** that may or may not include an interview;
- **short responses** to articles published in previous issues;
- **bibliographies** on any music-related topic, which may or may not be annotated);
- **reviews** of books, printed music, CDs, and software; and
- **reports** on recent symposia, conferences, and music events.

I would like to call for submissions that fit any of these categories. Submissions by students are, as always, very welcome. All submissions are expected via e-mail with attachments in Word format or in Rich Text Format. For detailed submission guidelines visit http://www.scmb.us.

Research Articles

Dimitar Ninov's *Piano Album: Thirteen Light and Descriptive Piano Pieces* – Analytical Observations

by Elizabeth Lee
University of Oregon
e-mail: elizlee83@yahoo.com

Introduction

After hearing a performance of selected pieces from Dimitar Ninov's piano album, I became intrigued by the various musical concepts incorporated into the music. Of particular interest was the piece entitled *Bulgarian Dance*. Its complex rhythmic concepts and musical structure were quite interesting. Ninov's musical style portrays a composer in whose works different cultures are interwoven and whose music bears a sincere message to the listener.

This article is an extension of the composer's portrait published in the *South Central Music Bulletin* V/2 (Spring 2007): 54-59.

Biographical Notes on Dimitar Ninov[1]

Dimitar Ninov was born in Varna, Bulgaria, on May 27, 1963. His childhood was happy and rich with experiences. At different periods of his life, besides the time he devoted to outdoor plays with the children from his neighborhood, he applied himself to various kinds of creative activities: he would draw (and later paint) pictures, hoping to become a painter one day, or, being inspired by different writers, poets, and playwrights (William Shakespeare, for example), he would begin a novel or write a few poems. These passions held him until he turned 18, and even now he likes to express his thoughts on paper.

Dimitar was attracted to music for the first time when, at the age of 7, he attended a summer camp with his native town boys' choir, the "Choir of Varna Boys." He became a member of this wonderful ensemble, which still exists today and travels around the world. Led by its founder and conductor, Professor Marin Chonev, they gave a recital in the United States just a few years ago. Singing in the choir was an exciting experience to Dimitar, and it was there that he was captivated by the wonderful capabilities of the piano. During the years that followed, he wanted to study either piano or violin, but he never found the determination to clearly express his desire to his parents. His sister, who is six years older, had been studying violin very successfully, but Dimitar seemed to be too distracted by various activities to be able to focus on a single instrument. Although his parents were not musicians, they were very musical and liked singing fragments from opera arias, songs, or duets at social functions and gatherings with friends. Dimitar's father was the director of the board of culture for the city of Varna and the encompassing region – quite an important position at that time. Hence, through organizing different types of concerts, festivals, competitions, plays, etc., the young Ninov had the opportunity to meet and establish connections with a great number of most prominent Bulgarian artists in the fields of music, literature, theater, movies, fine arts, ballet, etc. He always felt thrilled and privileged to spend time in the company of such notable figures, whom he respected enormously for having created symphonies, films, books, and other pieces of art.

At age 13, Ninov began strumming the guitar for the first time – asking some fellow students to show him how to pick certain chords. At age 15, he began to play violin on his own, achieving a good vibrato in a matter of weeks and being able to learn "Neapolitan Song" by Tchaikovsky. This fact highly impressed his father, who asked him what he wanted to study: violin or guitar. Dimitar instantly thought of the possibility of becoming a classical guitarist (just because he had watched one guitarist on television who performed miracles on his instrument) and said: guitar. So, at age 15 he began classical guitar lessons and advanced quickly. In high school, he co-founded a pop band that played

[1] The information for this biography was obtained in personal interviews with the composer in the early Fall 2006. See also the Composer's Portrait in the *South Central Music Bulletin* V/2 (Spring 2007): 54-59.

mostly Beatles songs, and he was fortunate to be the front man of this group. His musical activities gained momentum, and at age 16 Dimitar had no doubt he wanted to pursue the career of a professional musician. It was not until the age of 18, however, that he started taking lessons in piano, harmony, and ear training. He graduated from the French Language High School in his native town. After serving in the army and attending the National Academy for Music and Dance in Plovdiv for two years, he transferred to the National Academy of Music *Pancho Vladigerov* in Sofia. It was here that he earned his Master's degrees in Theory of Music (1992) and in Composition (1996). During his work on the composition degree, Ninov studied with one of the most prominent Bulgarian composers: Professor Alexander Raitchev. His Master's in Composition thesis was a Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra, which was premiered by the Academic Orchestra in May 1996.

From 1992 through 1997, Dimitar Ninov worked as a conductor of the children's choir *Bonka Golemanova* in Botevgrad. He also gave private lessons in harmony, solfege, and other disciplines in Sofia. In addition, he worked as a composer and arranger in the field of popular music. In 1999, Dimitar Ninov traveled to the United States to start working on his doctoral degree. He first attended the University of South Carolina. Later, Ninov transferred to the University of Texas at Austin, where he completed his doctoral degree in composition. His doctoral composition was a three-movement symphony for orchestra, entitled *Spring Symphony*.

Ninov has composed in numerous genres, including orchestral works, chamber ensembles, choir, voice, and piano. His most popular work is the *Piano Album*, which was published by the FJH Music Company in early 2005.

Dimitar Ninov is currently a Lecturer of Music Theory and Composition at Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas.

Ninov's Piano Album

Dimitar Ninov's compilation *Piano Album* (Fort Lauderdale, FL: FJH Music, 2005) consists of 13 short piano solos, ranging from two to five pages. The book is for piano students in the late intermediate to early advanced stage. Ninov states: "Although the book hasn't been designed as a pedagogical tool, the benefits will be enormous for those who learn all the pieces and master them."[1] Some of the technical elements include new sounds (different chord structures) and pedal effects. The tempo, pedal, articulation, and dynamic indications are clearly marked in all pieces. The short compositions are titled as follows:

The Sparrow
Golden Leaves
The Clown
Ragtime
Gossip
Sea World
Little Girl
The Wolf
Solitude
Excursion
At the Royal Court
Bulgarian Dance
Santa Claus' Sleigh

Ninov comments on the wide range of titles by saying: "Flip through the pages of my *Piano Album*, and they will introduce you to a gallery of musical pictures. You will 'see' the sparrow leaping among the branches of a tree; you will 'feel' the melancholy of autumn with it's golden leaves falling; and you will 'hear' the mischievous gossip spreading around the neighborhood, or the threatening growl of a wolf chasing after his prey in the forest. *Bulgarian Dance* will acquaint you with fascinating rhythms from the folk music of beautiful Bulgaria, and the jingling of *Santa Claus' Sleigh* will remind you of the miraculous atmosphere on a Christmas Evening." The following paragraphs will analytically explore four pieces from the *Piano Album*.

"Golden Leaves" is a slow and lyrical composition. The overall form is ABA. The key signature in both A sections reveals e-minor. An interesting example of the use of "tall chords" is the appearance in the second measure of a IV^9 chord leading back to the tonic. The melody starts in the pick-

[1] Introduction to *Piano Album*.

up measure on tonic, but immediately travels to scale degree 5. The ensuing melody revolves around scale degree 5 for the duration of the melody throughout the A section. In measure 4, the chromatic motion in the left hand suggests E-Phrygian. Both A and B sections are lyrical with the thematic movement shared between the right and left hand. Near the end of the opening A section, the main theme modulates to G-Major. The B section introduces the minor subdominant of G-Major and then briefly outlines the key of E^{b}-Major. (See Figure 1.) Eventually the middle section modulates to f-minor. The recapitulation introduces the main theme with more embellishing figures in the left hand, and a little codetta is attached to the end.

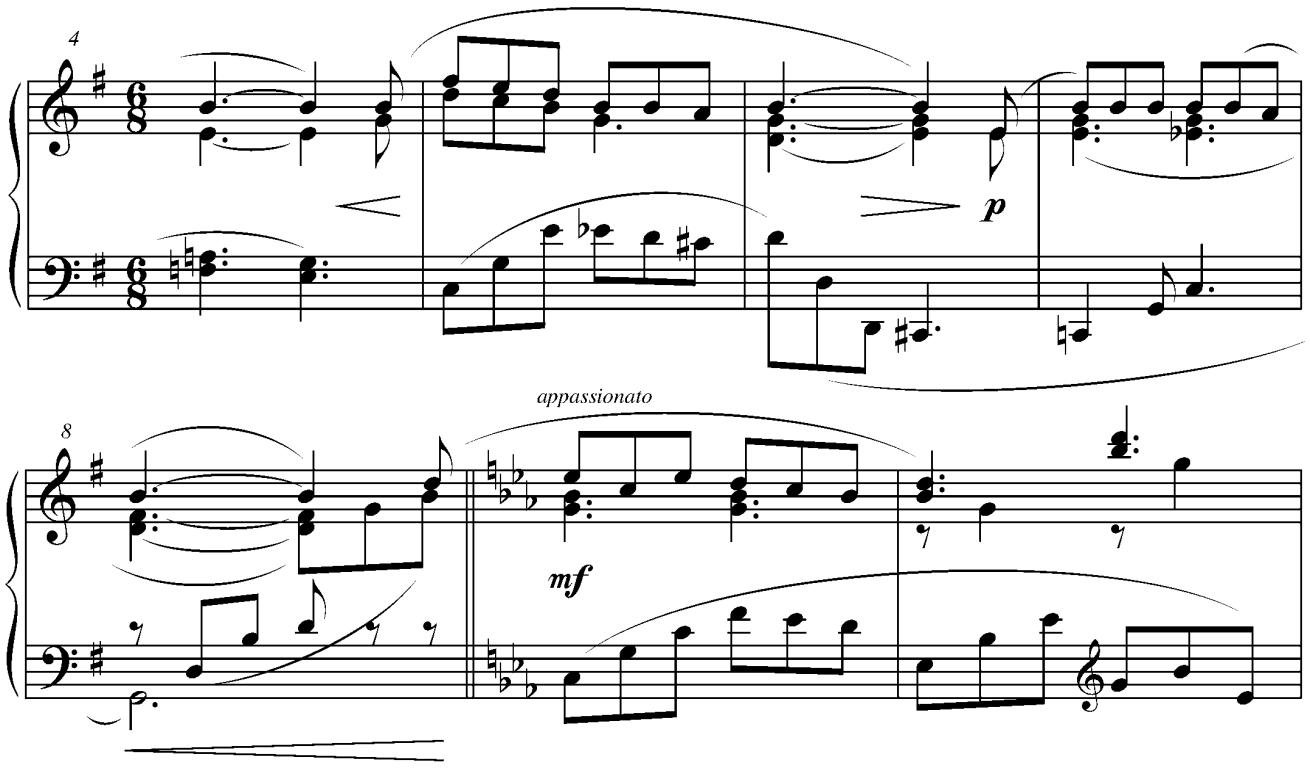

Figure 1: Mm. 4-10 of "Golden Leaves" demonstrate the closing of section A and beginning of section B.

"Gossip" is another great example of surprising features. The meter throughout is 7/8. The pattern of quarter note – quarter note – dotted quarter note dominates the composition. The intervals of 2^{nd}s direct the motive throughout the piece. In the A section, almost every measure includes the pattern of 2^{nd}s. The B section is labeled 'leggiero' quite appropriately. At the beginning of this section, the right and left hands only play together on the beginning eighth note of each measure. This syncopation makes the motive light and delicate, but still keeping uniform with the asymmetric meter. The end of the B section is indicated with long tied notes, creating a break, before the main motive of the A section returns. The end of the recapitulation is climactic with emphasis on tone clusters (see Figure 2). Near the conclusion of the piece, the left hand plays an $F^{\#}$-$G^{\#}$-$A^{\#}$ tone group against the right hands' C-D-E tone group, creating a large tone cluster. This particular group is repeated several times, as the climax, before the final two measures. The ending chord consists of G-octaves with the fifth (D) added to have a very open sound.

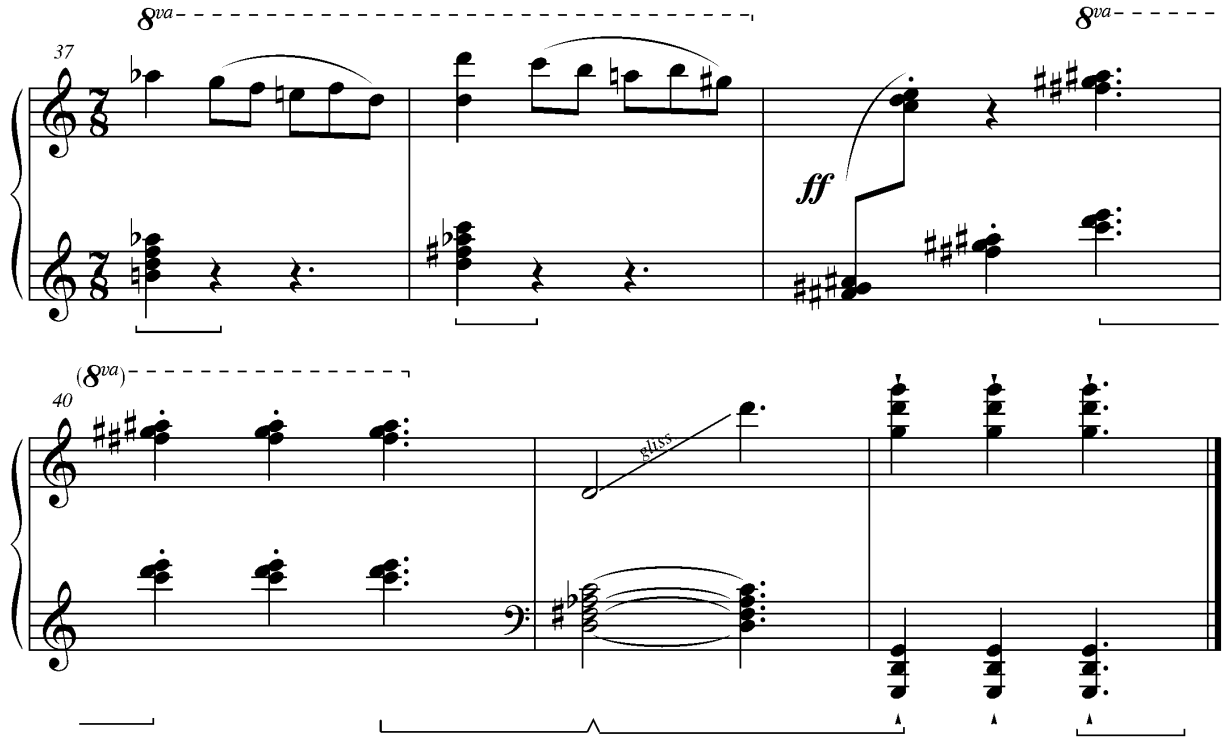

Figure 2: Mm. 37-42 display tone clusters used at the conclusion of "Gossip".

The short composition "Bulgarian Dance" has numerous extraordinary features. At the start, the player will notice an interesting rhythmic pattern – throughout the entirety of the piece, the meter switches from 7/8 to 11/8 several times. This rhythmic pattern (see Figure 3) is an interesting feature in Bulgarian popular music, where the irregular meters can range anywhere from 5/8 to 15/8. The name for this particular rhythmic pattern (7/8 followed by 11/8) is "Iztarsi Kalci" which is translated literally as "Take off your shoes." The 7/8 measures have the following pattern of beats: long, short, short, while the 11/8 measures have the pattern of short, short, long, short, short. Simply put, the short beats are 2 eighth notes (one quarter note) where the long beats are 3 eighth notes (one dotted-quarter note).

The overall form of the composition can also be interpreted as ABA. The beginning A section is almost a nonstop movement of eighth notes, with the left hand keeping the beat in quarter notes or dotted quarter notes. In the A section, the performer can see the pattern of two 7/8 measures, followed by one 11/8 measure. However, at the end of the B section, the performer plays three consecutive 11/8 bars, bringing the listener to the repeat of the A section. The contrasting B section is relatively short. Its texture is more lyrical, bringing lightness and humor. In terms of piano playing, the right hand has the melody, while the left hand gives the steady beat in the mixed meter. However, the melody is shared between both hands throughout the B section. While the motives are the driving force in this piece, the tonal harmony supports them. It is interesting to notice the re-harmonization of the initially introduced 11/8 measure of the main theme each time it appears – it brings a new chord over the long, compound beat. Another interesting point is the use of all twelve tones, although not in any pattern that might suggest a twelve-tone row.

The last composition, "Santa Claus' Sleigh" is fast-paced, yet a light and merry song. With the key signature of F# Major, the student will learn to play in more advanced keys. Another challenging

concept is that both hands play in the treble clef throughout. There are no difficult chords played in either hand, although the left hand plays intervals of 2nds and 3rds and leaps of 10ths and 12ths.

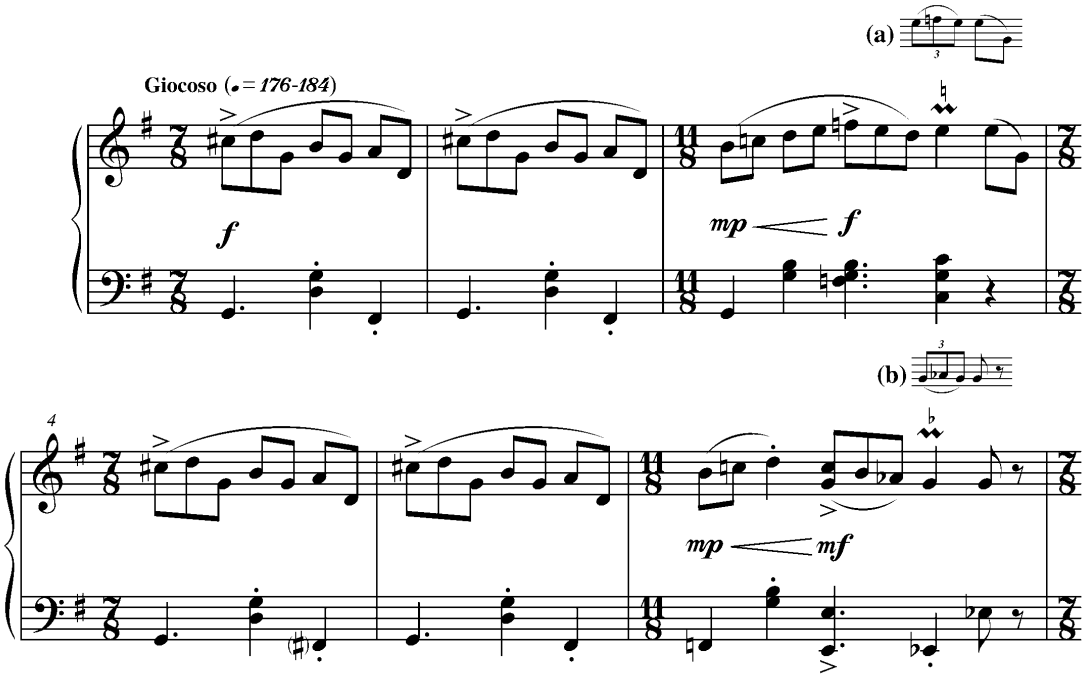

Figure 3: This excerpt shows the unique rhythmic pattern used throughout "Bulgarian Dance".

Throughout the book, one common factor found in several compositions is the use of sonorities that do not necessarily fit the conventional use of chords in the "common practice period." Examples include the use of clusters, the application of upper layers built of seconds over a functional base, and the super-imposition of both altered and unaltered chord tones (see Figure 4).

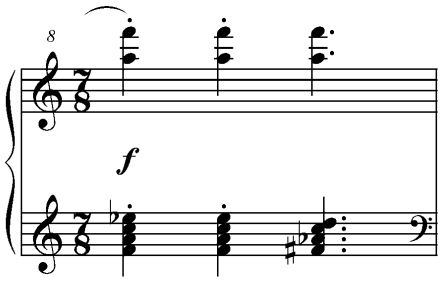

Figure 4: The last chord of m. 8 in "Gossip" shows A coexisting with A♭ in an altered D6/5 chord.

Overall, the collection of compositions, entitled *Piano Album* is truly a collection of "thirteen light and descriptive pieces."[2] The challenges learned in the book will help the student to understand musical imagery. In addition, the technical elements absorbed will further the student's piano playing ability. As stated in the opening Notes from the Composer, "The benefits you will reap in terms of piano technique will be enormous."

[2] The subtitle of *Piano Album*.

Philosophies of Teaching Adult Group Piano Revisited

by Sunnie Oh
Texas State University
E-Mail: ohsunmusic@gmail.com

Introduction

The piano is one of the musically most flexible instruments in terms of accompanying, chamber music, solo performance, as well as teaching music theory, history, different styles of music, and teaching music in general. Group piano[3] – which is taught at most colleges and universities to most music majors – can be taught on the basis of various philosophies. But most often, teachers of group piano do not design their curriculum according to a specific philosophy, due to the unawareness of the possible impact that the teaching philosophy has on teaching. However, even then a specific philosophy can be derived from the teaching approach. This paper will first summarize selected literature on various philosophies of teaching group piano at the college level.

The second part of the paper describes a short survey on adult group piano instruction as well as the results of this survey. The participants of this survey were graduate students at the University of Oklahoma who have taught adult group piano. The purpose of this study was to examine existing philosophies of teaching group piano – although not necessarily explicitly known to the instructor – in order to serve diverse groups of students and to provide adequate, functional skills they need as they complete group piano classes. Specifically, the results of this survey will show what percentage of instruction is being spent on sight-reading, harmonization, performance techniques, etc., and how these emphases correlate to a teaching approach that is perceived, by the instructors, as an "ideal" teaching approach.

The third part of the paper summarizes how undergraduate students wish to see the emphases of group piano activities. This summary is based on a survey of undergraduate music majors at Texas State University.

Finally, I will conclude with some practical suggestions for a philosophy of group piano instruction for future music teachers – in a broad sense, music graduates are ambassadors of music, and they are music educators.

1. Publications on Philosophies of Class or Group Piano Teaching

Much of the literature written on philosophies of group piano teaching is in form of dissertations, although a few articles have also been published.

Cynthia Benson wrote, in 2002, on "The Effects of Instructional Media on Group Piano Student Performance and Attitude." For this study, over a two-week period, groups of students were taught with different media (recording, videotape, interactive multimedia program). The groups were then compared to a control group that was taught traditionally, with no media. Students' performances were recorded before and after the instructional module. Benson concluded that the various media did not influence the student performance itself, but the media raised the attitudes towards instruction and performance.

Steven L. Betts and Jane Weeks Cassidy, in 2000, tried to measure the improvements of harmonization and sight-reading skills of 39 subjects in six sections of class piano. The authors observed from videotaped classes and via statistical analysis that the right hand was more consistent and accurate than the left hand, whereby the left hand made greater improvements. The right hand by itself was more accurate while completing harmonization tasks than while completing sight-reading tasks.

Soon Eng Lim Chao (in 1997) reviewed 15 software items and five videos for their use in college-level class piano. Evaluation criteria were, among others, the depth of music fundamentals, presentation style, interaction between the student and the media, technical function, and the overall organization. The author drew clear conclusions and made recommendations for the use of the software and videos.

[3] For the purpose of this paper, the terms "group piano" and "class piano" are used synonymously.

Penny Gail Dimmick wrote a dissertation in 1994 that was a case study on attitudes and piano skills of elementary education majors, specifically on the effects of class piano instruction on these attitudes and skills. One of the main conclusions was that motivation by the teacher increased the success of the class. The skills and attitudes of students were low when more advanced students were in class. Comparisons between a pre-test and a post-test showed the success of the approach.

The dissertation by Clinton Dale Fjerstad from 1998 was on the proficiency of sight-reading harmonic notation. Two ways of acquiring the proficiency in class piano were compared: perceptual training and forced response training. Although the study showed no significant difference between the two teaching approaches, their learning outcome exceeded a non-participating group of students.

Martha F. Hilley discussed, in 1997, the importance of composition and improvisation in class piano instruction. Betsy Burleson Hines, already in 1994, discussed the relationship between piano skills, as obtained in class piano, and the retention of these piano skills. Hines re-tested 32 students 12 to 18 months after their successful piano proficiency test and measured the degree of their success.

Andrew Hisey, in 1997, discussed the incorporation of composition and improvisation in college-level class piano. He showed that composition and improvisation provide an outlet for positive piano skills development, while fulfilling a general necessity for music education (to include composition and improvisation). Marilyn J. Kostka (1997) described a pretest-posttest study, in which college-level class piano students were observed in terms of "knowing" and "valuing" specific piano skills. Part of the study were self-evaluations, which were correlated. One of the results of this study is that "knowing" and "valuing" were more associated after specific instructions and self-assessments.

The dissertation of David Calvin McCalla (1989) is based on a survey of secondary music teachers. The survey showed that there was no agreement regarding the goals of class piano instruction and its philosophy, especially since no state-adopted textbooks were available for the teachers. Most teachers used different teaching materials, and many teachers used materials intended for individual piano instruction. Finally, many teachers even spent most of their instructional time with individual students. The main problems were the budgets, class sizes, control of student enrollment, and lack of teaching materials.

Finally, the dissertation of Melanie R. Nalbandian (1994) is an application of the Dalcroze music-educational philosophy to class piano pedagogy. The emphasis is here on functional skills and not as much on artistic skills. The author provides useful examples of in-class activities and assignments, including active learning, cooperative learning activities, as well as activities that stress musicianship comprehensively.

2. A Survey on Issues Relates to the Philosophy of Group Piano Teaching at the University of Oklahoma

Very few writings on philosophies of class / group piano instruction is on practical skills and on the emphasis on various types of music. The purpose of this pilot study was to examine existing philosophies of teaching adult group piano with regard to such practical skills and music types.

The participants of this survey were graduate students at the University of Oklahoma who have taught adult group piano. There were seven participants, three male and four female. This pilot study was done in answering 66 survey questions. Specifically, the goal of the survey was to show what percentage of instruction is being spent on sight-reading, harmonization, performance techniques, etc., and how these emphases correlate to a teaching approach that is perceived, by the instructors, as an "ideal" teaching approach. The survey itself is printed in the Appendix of this paper.

The results of this survey can be summarized as follows: The average subject did not show significant influence by their education and psychology classes on their teaching; the mean value of that question was "3" – on the scale of 1 through 5 (1 being low and 5 being high), with a standard deviation of 1.29. (All of the mean values given here are based on a scale from 1 to 5.) Most graduate students do not have a favorite teaching philosophy; the mean value for this question was 2.57, with a

standard deviation of 1.13. The absence of a favorite philosophy may possibly even be the lack of a philosophy. However, if those graduate students find something to be helpful for them and their group piano students, most subjects have a very high willingness to adjust their teaching philosophy (with a mean of 4.58 and a standard deviation of 0.53) and a very high willingness to adjust their curriculum (here, the mean was 4.29, with a standard deviation of 0.95). The group piano students themselves also had a great influence on the teacher's change of philosophy; this question was answered with a mean value of 4.0 and a standard deviation of 0.82.

The most important part of the survey was the difference between emphases of the *current* teaching to emphases in *ideal* group piano teaching (Table 1). Considering that for every subject "ideal" may mean something different, and that it is often related to the subject's "current" teaching, the following results should not be over-interpreted. All mean values are based on a scale of 1 through 5 (1=least important, through 5=most important).

Concept	CURRENT Emphasis	IDEAL Emphasis
Fundamentals / Music Theory	Mean=4.29, S=0.49	Mean= 4.86, S=0.38
Listening / Aural Skills	Mean=3.00, S=1.29	Mean= 4.14, S=1.46
Rhythm Skills	Mean= 4.00, S=0.82	Mean= 4.29, S=0.95
Music History Knowledge	Mean= 1.43, S=0.53	Mean= 3.00, S=1.15
Playing Scales	Mean= 2.71, S=0.76	Mean= 2.71, S=1.50
Sight Reading	Mean= 4.29, S=0.95	Mean= 4.43, S=0.53
Analyzing Music	Mean= 3.71, S=0.76	Mean= 3.86, S=0.90
Playing by Ear	Mean= 2.29, S=0.76	Mean= 3.71, S=1.11
Transposition	Mean= 2.71, S=0.95	Mean= 3.14, S=0.69
Score Reading	Mean= 2.29, S=1.25	Mean= 3.00, S=1.41
Harmonizing Melodies	Mean= 4.00, S=1.15	Mean= 4.57, S=0.53
Performance Techniques	Mean= 3.29, S=1.25	Mean= 3.29, S=1.11
Memorizing Music	Mean= 2.00, S=1.15	Mean= 2.57, S=1.51
Expression & Phrasing	Mean= 3.43, S=0.53	Mean= 4.14, S=0.90
Chord Progressions	Mean= 3.29, S=0.76	Mean= 3.86, S=1.07
Accompanying in general	Mean= 3.71, S=1.11	Mean= 4.57, S=0.79
Diversity of accompanying patterns	Mean= 3.29, S=1.25	Mean= 4.71, S=0.49
Knowledge about Styles of Music	Mean= 2.57, S=1.27	Mean= 3.43, S=0.98
Composing	Mean= 1.86, S=1.57	Mean= 3.43, S=1.72
Arranging	Mean= 2.43, S=1.40	Mean= 3.71, S=1.50
Baroque Music	Mean= 2.71, S=1.11	Mean= 3.29, S=1.25
Classical Music	Mean= 3.29, S=1.11	Mean= 3.14, S=1.21
Romantic Music	Mean= 2.57, S=1.13	Mean= 3.00, S=1.29
Modern Music	Mean= 2.29, S=1.38	Mean= 2.86, S=1.46
Popular Music & Jazz	Mean= 2.86, S=1.35	Mean= 3.43, S=1.62
Non-Western Music	Mean= 1.29, S=0.49	Mean= 2.43, S=1.40

Table 1: Emphases of Current and of Ideal Group Piano Teaching

From these results, we can observe the differences in the priorities that group piano has (currently) and should have, based on the opinions of the subjects of this study. Table 2 lists the top 10 categories of group piano emphasis in the current and in the ideal situations:

Top 10 Categories - CURRENT	Top 10 Categories - IDEAL
1. Fundamentals / Music Theory (M=4.29)	1. Fundamentals / Music Theory (M=4.86)
1. Sightreading (M=4.29)	2. Diversity of accompanying patterns (M=4.71)
3. Rhythm Skills (M=4.0)	3. Harmonizing Melodies (M=4.57)
3. Harmonizing Melodies (M=4.0)	3. Accompanying in general (M=4.57)
5. Analyzing Music (M=3.71)	5. Sightreading (M=4.43)
5. Accompanying in general (M=3.71)	6. Rhythm Skills (M=4.29)
7. Expression & Phrasing (M=3.43)	7. Listening / Aural Skills (M=4.14)
8. Performance Techniques (M=3.29)	7. Expression & Phrasing (M=4.14)
8. Chord Progressions (M=3.29)	9. Analyzing Music (M=3.86)
8. Diversity of accompanying patterns (M=3.29)	9. Chord Progressions (M=3.86)
8. Classical Music (M=3.29)	

Table 2: Top 10 Emphases in Current and Ideal Group Piano Classes

The greatest "gain" in terms of ranking can be seen in the emphasis on the diversity of accompanying patterns. In addition, the ideal situation shows, in terms of ranking, a greater emphasis on accompanying in general, and listening skills & aural skills. Slightly increased within the rankings are sigh reading, rhythm skills, analyzing music, expression & phrasing, and chord progressions. Although among the top 10 with the *current* emphasis, performance techniques and classical music are *not* among the top 10 in the *ideal* situation. Listening and aural skills are not among the top 10 in the current situation, but are felt to be among the top 10 in the ideal situation.

Returning to the results shown in Table 1, the subjects, on average, believed that only one category needs a *de*crease in its emphasis: the emphasis on classical music. Two categories were believed to be almost ideal, as they did not show any change in their mean values: those categories are Playing Scales and Performance Techniques. All other categories are believed to need an increase in emphasis, from the current situation to the ideal situation. The greatest emphasis increase (more than 1.00 increase of the Mean value) is believed to be necessary in the following categories (listed in order of the increase):

- Music History Knowledge, with an increase of 1.57 in the mean value
- Composing, with an increase of 1.57 in the mean value
- Playing by Ear, with an increase of 1.42 in the mean value
- Diversity of accompanying patterns, with an increase of 1.42 in the mean value
- Arranging, with an increase of 1.28 in the mean value
- Listening / Aural Skills, with an increase of 1.14 in the mean value

The current success of group piano teaching is perceived to be with a mean value of 3.86. However, the ideal success is rated much higher, with a Mean value of 4.57.

There are some gender differences of the perceived ideal situation. Table 3 shows these gender differences. (There were three male and four female subjects.) All significant gender differences are highlighted in that Table. While male subjects perceive the following concepts to be of high importance in the ideal teaching emphasis, they received low rankings by the female subjects:

- analyzing music,
- performance,
- techniques,
- knowledge about musical styles,
- composing,
- arranging,
- Baroque music,

- Classical music,
- Romantic music,
- Modern music, and
- Popular music and Jazz.

On the other hand, playing scales and Non-Western music were, by the male subjects, perceived to be of low importance in the ideal teaching emphasis, but received high rankings by the female subjects.

Concept	Male Subjects	Female Subjects
Fundamentals / Music Theory	M= 4.67, S=0.58	M= 5.00, S=0.00
Listening / Aural Skills	M= 4.33, S=0.58	M= 4.00, S=2.00
Rhythm Skills	M= 4.33, S=1.15	M= 4.25, S=0.96
Music History Knowledge	M= 3.00, S=1.00	M= 3.00, S=1.41
Playing Scales	**M= 2.00, S=1.00**	**M= 3.25, S=1.71**
Sightreading	M= 4.67, S=0.58	M= 4.25, S=0.50
Analyzing Music	**M= 4.67, S=0.58**	**M= 3.25, S=0.50**
Playing by Ear	M= 4.33, S=1.15	M= 3.25, S=0.96
Transposition	M= 3.33, S=0.58	M= 3.00, S=0.82
Score Reading	M= 3.00, S=1.00	M= 3.00, S=1.83
Harmonizing Melodies	M= 4.67, S=0.58	M= 4.50, S=0.58
Performance Techniques	**M= 4.33, S=0.58**	**M= 2.50, S=0.58**
Memorizing Music	M= 3.00, S=1.00	M= 2.25, S=1.89
Expression & Phrasing	M= 4.67, S=0.58	M= 3.75, S=0.96
Chord Progressions	M= 4.00, S=1.00	M= 3.75, S=1.26
Accompanying in general	M= 4.67, S=0.58	M= 4.50, S=1.00
Diversity of accompanying patterns	M= 4.67, S=0.58	M= 4.75, S=0.50
Knowledge about Styles of Music	**M= 4.33, S=0.58**	**M= 2.75, S=0.50**
Composing	**M= 4.67, S=0.58**	**M= 2.50, S=1.73**
Arranging	**M= 4.33, S=1.15**	**M= 3.25, S=1.71**
Baroque Music	**M= 4.00, S=1.00**	**M= 2.75, S=1.50**
Classical Music	**M= 4.00, S=1.00**	**M= 2.50, S=1.29**
Romantic Music	**M= 4.00, S=1.00**	**M= 2.25, S=1.26**
Modern Music	**M= 4.00, S=1.00**	**M= 1.00, S=1.41**
Popular Music & Jazz	**M= 4.33, S=1.15**	**M= 2.75, S=1.71**
Non-Western Music	**M= 1.67, S=1.15**	**M= 3.00, S=1.41**

Table 3: Gender Differences of Perceived Ideal Emphases

3. A Survey of Students at Texas State University

At Texas State University, I surveyed students on how they felt about specific emphases in class piano instruction. Among my 14 subjects were 8 male and 6 female students, mostly juniors. Most of them had taken 2 semesters of class piano.

The following are the questions asked that I would like to focus on in this article:

- Which part of the following items do you feel that you have *learned competently* through your group piano experience?
- Which part of the following items do you consider *lacking* from your group piano experience?
- Which of the following items are *most important* to be included in a group piano learning experience?

Nine of the 14 students listed "Technique" among the answers to the first question (what students felt they have learned competently). Seven students listed "Sightreading" and seven students listed "Transposition". Harmonizing melodies, accompanying, and different patterns of accompanying were listed 5 times, Fundamentals and Music Theory 4 times, and performance techniques also 4 times. 3 students listed listening skills and 3 students listed score reading. Not mentioned at all were knowledge of music history and styles of music, composing and arranging, and the specific types of music.

The items that students considered lacking from the group piano class were especially popular music and jazz (8 students), knowledge of music history and styles of music (6 students), and composing and arranging (6 students). Each 4 "votes" received aural skills, modern music, score reading, and – interestingly – music from the common practice period. Most other items were also listed at least once, but sight reading and transposition was *not* listed at all.

Finally, when asked "Which of the following items are *most important* to be included in a group piano learning experience?", students listed:

- Technique – 9 times
- Sight Reaching – 9 times
- Fundamentals and Music Theory – 6 times
- Transposition – 6 times
- Harmonization and Accompanying – 6 times
- Performance Techniques – 5 times
- Score Reading – 4 times
- Listening and Aural Skills – 4 times, and
- Popular Music and Jazz – 4 times.

Not listed at all were music from the common practice period and non-Western music.

4. Toward a Philosophy of Teaching Class / Group Piano for Music Majors

This final part of my paper is based, in part, on the survey results, and supported by the literature, but this part is also based on my teaching experiences in college group / class piano and on my teaching in public schools.

Class / group piano at the college / university level is one of the essential core courses for undergraduate music majors, especially for music education students. Even though many instructors discuss the contents of such a class piano curriculum, the *philosophy* of teaching class / group piano is seldom discussed. If musicians think of the importance of music education and its impact on youngsters, it is imperative that the philosophy of the instructors, who would directly or indirectly shape future music educators, should be sufficiently discussed.

I mentioned in the opening statement of this paper that the piano is one of the musically most flexible instruments in terms of accompanying, solo performance, as well as teaching music theory, history, different styles of music, and teaching music in general. Many music students do not think that piano skills are essential for the profession they pursue, even if they are pursuing a teaching degree. Because of what they have seen when they went to school, they are usually not motivated to acquire piano skills as much as possible for the best of their teaching potentials. From the perspective of the group piano instructor, this fact is neither very pleasing nor makes the teaching easier. Needless to say, we as instructors must feel the heavy responsibility of educating future music educators.

As stated earlier, David Calvin McCalla (1989) discovered the disagreement between the goals of class / group piano instruction and its philosophy, especially because of the lack of materials and financial limitations. Penny Gail Dimmick's research (1994) shows that motivation by teachers increased the success of the class.

The quality of music education partially depends on how comfortable students are with the piano and what kind of repertoire and styles they are familiar with. Otherwise, (future) teachers will have to limit their means and methods of teaching to the resources they have available. As college textbooks and curricula suggest (Hilley 1997, Hisey 1997, Betts and Cassidy 2000), basic skills in sight reading, harmonization, transposition, technique, repertoire are all important and must be practiced. What music teachers actually need are: (1) the ability to learn new music quickly, (2) good sight reading skills, (3) the ability to play score reductions, (4) at-sight-harmonization and transposition skills, (5) the ability to make musical changes to adopt music to a

special occasion, (6) skills to sing and play at the same time, and much more. With these skills and abilities, teachers will be able to build a repertoire of songs and compositions – pieces that are commonly used in standard textbooks. But most of all, with these skills music teachers will be able to accompany their students. They should also have the ability to utilize standard textbooks and expand beyond them.

So, what can we do to build these skills and develop such abilities? As group piano instructors, we need to introduce a variety of styles and a variety of methods to students. Although we do have standard college textbooks, it is necessary to think beyond what books suggest. We need to incorporate aural learning into piano instruction, in other words: adopt the sequential learning procedure of aural learning for teaching group piano with a variety of styles. However, as educators, instructors should be open to the needs of students and to the current trends of the musical world. As many authors of college textbooks suggest – which is also supported by the survey results discussed earlier –, more improvisation and compositional skills need to be included in our curriculum. The diversity of accompanying patterns largely belongs to the improvisation category. Benson (2002) and Chao (1997) also suggested that multi-media technology needs to be promoted.

We need to challenge our students with harmonization and transposition skills that are musically satisfying. We should incorporate more familiar songs (both, classical and popular). The surveys also support that both students and teachers wish to include popular and jazz music as well as other music learning experiences, such as written and aural theory, history, and styles. This will motivate and challenge many students to practice some basic skills in, and techniques of, piano playing; that way, students realize why they need to practice, for instance, scales and arpeggios. This will also open the doors to possibilities of students accomplishing feasible goals in piano playing. It is a very difficult task for instructors as well as for students; however, if we parallel our piano classes with theory core courses (both, aural and written theory) and communicate efficiently among the faculty, we can reinforce positive learning experiences in each area and, thus, make the curricula stronger and even more fun for students.

The ability to sing and play at the same time requires much practice, too. Some aural learning textbooks offer such exercises (to sight-sing and -play). While this emphasis may remain with the aural learning curriculum, this emphasis needs to be reinforced in group piano.

Lastly, multiculturalism and globalization have been one of the main phenomena of the world as well as of music education in recent decades. We can easily find traces of this in musicology, music theory, and music education. However, group piano instruction has not yet adopted and utilized this aspect. As we include piano instruction as means of a teaching and learning tool, this multicultural aspect will be essential for the future instruction in group piano. Philosophy of group piano teaching needs to be discussed and reviewed actively among instructors.

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Appendix: Adult Group Piano Teaching Survey

Demographic Information

1) What is your gender?
    1) Male
    2) Female

2) What is your ethnicity?

1) Anglo
2) African-American
3) Hispanic
4) Asian
5) Other

3) How long have you taught class piano or group piano?

1) I have never taught class piano or group piano.
2) less than one year
3) 1-2 years
4) 3-4 years
5) more than 4 years

4) What is your status at the University of Oklahoma?

1) Master's Student
2) Doctoral Student

Your Philosophy of Adult Group Piano Teaching

The following questions are about your CURRENT and PAST class piano or group piano teaching. Please rate, on a scale of 1 through 5, the importance of the concepts in your current teaching approach (1=least important through 5=most important).

5) My education and / or psychology classes that I have taken previously have influence on me and my teaching. 1 2 3 4 5

6) I have favoritism towards a particular educational trend or philosophy?
1 2 3 4 5

7) I am willing to adjust my philosophy of teaching if I find something to be helpful for me and my students?
1 2 3 4 5

8) I will be willing to change my curriculum according to my (hypothetically) new findings.
1 2 3 4 5

9) My students have challenged my philosophy of teaching.
1 2 3 4 5

10) I will be willing to adjust my curriculum if I find out that my curriculum does not serve my students' needs efficiently. 1 2 3 4 5

Your **Current** Group / Class Piano Teaching

The following questions are about your CURRENT class piano or group piano teaching. Please rate, on a scale of 1 through 5, the importance of the concepts in your current teaching approach (1=least important through 5=most important).

11) Fundamentals / Music Theory 1 2 3 4 5

12) Listening / Aural Skills	1	2	3	4	5
13) Rhythm Skills	1	2	3	4	5
14) Music History Knowledge	1	2	3	4	5
15) Playing Scales	1	2	3	4	5
16) Sightreading	1	2	3	4	5
17) Analyzing Music	1	2	3	4	5
18) Playing by Ear	1	2	3	4	5
19) Transposition	1	2	3	4	5
20) Score Reading (e.g., string quartet score or orchestral scores, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
21) Harmonizing Melodies	1	2	3	4	5
22) Performance Techniques	1	2	3	4	5
23) Memorizing Music	1	2	3	4	5
24) Expression & Phrasing	1	2	3	4	5
25) Chord Progressions	1	2	3	4	5
26) Accompanying in general	1	2	3	4	5
27) Diversity of accompanying patterns	1	2	3	4	5
28) Knowledge about Styles of Music	1	2	3	4	5
29) Composing	1	2	3	4	5
30) Arranging	1	2	3	4	5
31) Baroque Music	1	2	3	4	5
32) Classical Music	1	2	3	4	5
33) Romantic Music	1	2	3	4	5
34) Modern Music	1	2	3	4	5
35) Popular Music & Jazz	1	2	3	4	5
36) Non-Western Music	1	2	3	4	5

37) On a scale of 1 through 5, how successful is your class piano or group piano teaching (1=least successful through 5=most successful)?

1 2 3 4 5

38) On average, how large is your group or class in group piano or class piano?

1) 2-4 students
2) 5-7 students
3) 8-10 students
4) 11-13 students
5) more than 13 students

Your **IDEAL** Group / Class Piano Teaching

The following questions are about your IDEAL class piano or group piano teaching. As "ideal" you may assume to have **no** time limits, **no** financial limits, **no** technology limits, and **no** other limits. Please rate, on a scale of 1 through 5, the importance of the concepts in your IDEAL teaching approach (1=least important through 5=most important).

39) Fundamentals / Music Theory	1	2	3	4	5
40) Listening / Aural Skills	1	2	3	4	5
41) Rhythm Skills	1	2	3	4	5
42) Music History Knowledge	1	2	3	4	5

43) Playing Scales	1	2	3	4	5
44) Sightreading	1	2	3	4	5
45) Analyzing Music	1	2	3	4	5
46) Playing by Ear	1	2	3	4	5
47) Transposition	1	2	3	4	5
48) Score Reading (e.g., string quartet score or orchestral scores, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
49) Harmonizing Melodies	1	2	3	4	5
50) Performance Techniques	1	2	3	4	5
51) Memorizing Music	1	2	3	4	5
52) Expression & Phrasing	1	2	3	4	5
53) Chord Progressions	1	2	3	4	5
54) Accompanying in general	1	2	3	4	5
55) Diversity of accompanying patterns	1	2	3	4	5
56) Knowledge about Styles of Music	1	2	3	4	5
57) Composing	1	2	3	4	5
58) Arranging	1	2	3	4	5
59) Baroque Music	1	2	3	4	5
60) Classical Music	1	2	3	4	5
61) Romantic Music	1	2	3	4	5
62) Modern Music	1	2	3	4	5
63) Popular Music & Jazz	1	2	3	4	5
64) Non-Western Music	1	2	3	4	5

65) On a scale of 1 through 5, how successful would be your IDEAL class piano or group piano teaching (1=least successful through 5=most successful)?

1 2 3 4 5

66) On average, how large should your IDEAL group or class in group piano or class piano be?

1) 2-4 students
2) 5-7 students
3) 8-10 students
4) 11-13 students
5) more than 13 students

Composer Portrait

A Portrait of, and Interview with, Composer Stephen Lias (born 1966)

by April Stephens
Campbellsville University
E-Mail: astephens@campbellsville.edu

Biographical Notes

Stephen Lias, the younger of two children, was born in Suffern, New York, on March 18, 1966. Just one year later, the Lias family moved to Lakewood, New Jersey. Stephen lived in New Jersey until he was fourteen years old. He attended high school in West Chester, Pennsylvania, where he graduated in 1984.

Upon graduation, Lias left home for Grantham, Pennsylvania, where he attended Messiah College. In 1988, Lias received his Bachelor of Science in Music Education degree (with a vocal emphasis) and relocated to Lindale, Texas, to work for vocal coach Chris Beatty, nephew of the American composer Samuel Barber. After a year in Lindale, Lias moved to Tyler, Texas, and began his work as a freelance musician in 1990. It was also during this time that Lias worked on, and received, his Master of Arts in Music with an emphasis in Composition from Stephen F. Austin University in Nacogdoches, Texas.

Upon completing his Masters in 1991, Stephen Lias married Roni Brown. The couple continued living in Tyler for two more years, while Lias taught at Tyler Junior College as an adjunct professor.

In 1993, Lias moved to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where he completed his coursework for his Doctor of Musical Arts in Composition at Louisiana State University. Teaching again at Tyler Junior College, Lias completed his dissertation and received his doctorate from Louisiana State University in 1997.

In 1997, Lias accepted a position on the faculty of Kilgore College in Kilgore, Texas, about thirty miles east of Tyler. Then, in 2000, Lias returned to Stephen F. Austin University as a faculty member. He and his wife continue to reside in Nacogdoches, Texas, today.

Interview

This interview with Stephen Lias was conducted on October 13, 2007, in Nacogdoches, TX.

April Stephens:
I'd like to start with some questions about you growing up and your musical influences. What were your most important influences as a child? And what was your musical environment?

Stephen Lias:
I have important musical memories both from my school environment and at home … some from the church environment as well. But I would say, certainly, my mother's influence was the strongest of any of those influences. As a pianist, she would play the piano to put us to sleep at night. My father also played piano, we would sing hymns at the piano with him. So, I have very vivid memories of those sorts of things, and I remember the first time I made some music up and my mother helped me write it down. I think a lot of her enthusiasm for the process of "Oh you made something up – that's wonderful, let's write it down!" I think that really set me off on a path that valued original writing.

The school environment provided me sort of a traditional musical experience. I got to sing in a choir, play some instruments, and things like that. It was, I would say, fairly generic and unremarkable, compared with the level of excitement that was generated in the house.

April Stephens:
Your mother helped you write down your first compositions, as you just said. Who else influenced you early in your compositional endeavors?

Stephen Lias:
I would say, there were a couple of supportive piano teachers along the way, whose names I don't recall. But when I got into high school is when, I would

say, the influence of teachers started making a big difference. And probably the two most important influences at that stage were a woman named Anita Greenlee and Robert Stuart. Anita Greenlee was an organist at the church we attended. She now teaches organ at West Chester State University in Pennsylvania. She was really wonderful about guiding my early compositional attempts and giving me a sense of how chord progressions worked and how countermelody worked and things like that, so I owe a great deal to her. And then my high school choral director, Robert Stuart, was also wonderful about not only providing that sort of guidance, but finding opportunities where original works of mine could be performed in various venues – piano works or choral works. He also helped with some of the band arrangements that were performed in that early stage. Those were the people that really started me on firm footing.

April Stephens:
At what point did you decide that composition was what you wanted to do?

Stephen Lias:
Both in high school and in my undergraduate years, I was extremely creatively energetic, but unfocused. I didn't see any reason why I shouldn't pursue composing, acting, singing, conducting and piano playing … all of them. They all interested me, and I tried to do as well as I could in many of them, probably not doing any of them really well. And it wasn't until I was in my Master's program that I finally realized that in order to excel in something I needed to refine my interests and leave some things out. So, I would say it was when I was in my Master's program that I finally started thinking of myself as a composer, rather than all these other things that I had been involved with.

April Stephens:
Who of your composition professors were most influential and in what way?

Stephen Lias:
If you are a receptive student, and I think I was, I think you can learn a lot from any composition teacher. If you go at it from the perspective of "What do they know how to do that I wish I knew how to do?", then it's very difficult for me to say these teachers did more for me than these other teachers, because I was always hungry for what they had to show me. I can think of specific things that I learned from specific people, so I will answer your question chronologically.

My first important composition teacher was at Messiah College; his name was Richard Roberson. At that stage, I think he taught me one of the most valuable lessons I could have learned, which was understanding what a cliché was. I think a lot of young composers tend to write in clichés, and he helped me understand what a cliché was, how to recognize it and, rather than me coming out of that feeling that they should be avoided, I understand what a cliché is, and I know how to use them effectively when I need to, which served me well later when I was writing children's musicals and things like that. It was a useful skill. I learned lots of other things from him as well, but that sticks out in my mind; every time I write (or avoid) a cliché, I think of Richard Roberson.

In my Master's program, I studied with two giants here at Stephen F. Austin State University, where I teach now, whose shoes I have to daily attempt to fill. One of them was Dan Beatty, the other was Darrell Holt. I did different work with each of them, and they each took me in different directions. From Darrell, I learned a great deal of more practical matters, like how to get published, how to submit your works to competitions, and how to write and play jazz. Dan Beatty guided me through, I would say, the more intellectual esoteric side of composition. He was always interested in philosophy. If I would write something, he would always challenge me on why did I write it this way and compare it with other works of great masters. And so the sort of self-critical evaluation that a composer goes through when they write a work, those were some of the skills I learned from Dan Beatty.

At Louisiana State University, I studied with two composition teachers as well. I studied primarily with Dinos Constantinides who, more than anything, I think showed me how to fill in the gaps in my technique. I think he did what a good teacher

should do to a more advanced student, which is figure out what he doesn't do well yet and help to fill in those holes. He did that extremely well. And he would frequently challenge me, in a healthy but frustrating way, when I thought a piece was finished, and he would challenge me to say "no you can really still refine this and make it better yet." And I would begrudgingly go back and rewrite and discover that he was correct. So that final polishing stage of rewriting I learned from Dinos.

I studied electronic music with Stephen David Beck at LSU and, of course, studying electronic music in many ways is a different sort of an enterprise. You are thinking not just about the artistic merits of what you're creating, but you are actually having to create the sounds themselves from scratch, and often those sounds are built out of equations and programming. I studied mostly working with a package called Csound, which was a fascinating experience for me. I went on, then, to write one of the scores for the Texas Shakespeare Festival a few years later entirely with Csound, because of the work I did with him.

I feel, each of those teachers contributed some valuable angle to my understanding that no one else had offered.

April Stephens:
Along that same line, were there any specific compositions or composers that served as models for you in your writing?

Stephen Lias:
Yes. There's a bit of a personal connection to Samuel Barber that I should mention. When I entered high school, we moved to West Chester, Pennsylvania, which is where Samuel Barber was from. And I went to a high school that had an alma mater written by Samuel Barber. I went to a high school that had rules on the books that were instituted by Samuel Barber's father, who was a school board member fifty years prior, that allowed music students to go to Philadelphia to hear concerts at the Curtis Institute. I thought this was normal. It never occurred to me until much later how unusual this was. I attended the church that Samuel Barber had played the organ at when he was twelve years old; that was right across the street from relatives of the Samuel Barber family, who were still living there. So, all of that was coincidental and then, when I was in college, I met Samuel Barber's nephew, Chris Beatty, who was a voice teacher in the Lindale area. Part of why I moved to Texas was to work for him. So, there's been an ongoing affinity for Samuel Barber. I love Samuel Barber's music, and I feel a great deal of connection to the style he wrote in.

I would probably include in that circle of composers that influenced me Copland and Bernstein, who were also part of that similar American accessible style of writing at a time when other styles were considered more intellectual. And so those composers, all three of them, got a lot of pressure from the outside to write in a more dissonant, more abstract, less accessible style, and they didn't. They chose to write for the audience, and that is something I feel has influenced my understanding of how I write and how I relate to an audience. Certainly, if you start talking about individual genres, there are composers who influence me a great deal. For example, when I write songs, vocal literature, or art songs, I can't divorce myself from what I've learned from studying the scores of Gerald Finzi. When I write incidental music for live theatre, it is impossible for me not to be influenced by all the movies that I saw as a child – dominated, of course, by John Williams. *Star Wars* was the first orchestral score I ever encountered. New composers that are coming on the scene that are influential to me … certainly Michael Torke is a composer who I admire very much right now. I have just recently become fully aware of some of the larger works by John Adams, and I find them fascinating and they've introduced new ideas into my vocabulary. So those are a few.

April Stephens:
How did formal training influence your compositions?

Stephen Lias:
I think there is, perhaps, a developmental arch that many composers go through. When you're a student studying composition, your teacher is rightly re-

minding you how many different types of musical expression there are available to you. They are trying to broaden your vocabulary, that's their job, and I think that's good. What the student tends to get from that, though, is an impression that writing conservatively is bad and writing in ways that are experimental or that push your technique into new territories is good. And although it is good to explore new territories and although it probably is bad to only write in the most conservative ways, I think most composers come to the end of their educational process, feeling a certain amount of guilt when they write something that's simple or very accessible or unpretentiously populist. I don't write exclusively in any of those voices, but there is a time period after you finish your studies when you go through a self-evaluative process and you ask yourself: "What is okay for me to do in my compositions? What things are fair game?" And I just mentioned Michael Torke … I remember reading program notes of one of his pieces where he said he realized that if everything was fair game, which composers nowadays tend to think, then functionality is fair game and we can relieve ourselves of the sense of guilt we feel when we're tempted to write a very functional, traditional, accessible piece. So I think, rightly or wrongly, our education tends to give us that bias, and then eventually after we've gone on past our educational years and into our free-creative years, we tend to re-evaluate that and question where we stand. Each composer may fall in a different place on that question. But I think it's an interesting journey you take and it has a lot to do with who your teachers were and what sorts of value judgments they either deliberately or inadvertently gave you with regards to the different styles of composition.

April Stephens:
I would like to focus specifically on your use of text in your compositions. I know you have written several compositions with Biblical texts. Do your religious beliefs influence your compositions, and in what way?

Stephen Lias:
I would say yes. However, it would be more accurate to say my religious beliefs have shaped my life in ways that have caused me to write sacred music. My faith is a very important thing to me, and it always has been in my family. So, obviously, I ended up at a Christian liberal arts undergraduate school, where if I were going to write works that the choir would perform it was only logical that they would be sacred works. Also, as I mentioned earlier, one of my great mentors early on was our church organist, and if she was going to help provide opportunities for me to have works performed, obviously, I would be writing sacred works in that context too. So, the fact that I wrote sacred works is less a result of any particular faith issue and more the result of simply that was the appropriate avenue for me to get works played. Certainly when I wrote works at the high school where I was going, they weren't sacred works most of the time. My faith is very fundamental and important to me; however, I don't see my compositional career as necessarily an outlet for my faith. I see that my faith shapes my compositions sometimes, but I don't necessarily set out to write a new piece and feel that piece has to be an expression of some faith-based issue.

April Stephens:
Let me ask you about the relationship between text and music in your approach to vocal music. When given a text, what is your approach to set it to music, and what is the starting point of the composition process?

Stephen Lias:
I'm fairly methodical about this, rightly or wrongly. I have no idea whether it's the right approach, but what I do is I always start with a text that I feel I have something to contribute to. If you pick a perfect text, it's already music really, so I tend to not pick texts that I read and think is complete and perfect unto itself. I tend to pick texts that I think I can add some level of meaning to. Then I write out the texts and I go through, sometimes a few dozen times, circling important words, underlining syllables that will get emphasis. Then mulling that over for a few days and going back and starting fresh and

circling other words, slowly the text will begin to take on a shape in my head where I know which words are going to be the prominent words in each phrase. I know where there will be breaks between phrases. Then I'll often, even on that piece of paper where the text is, start jotting in rhythms to get an idea of the declamation of how the text will be set rhythmically, maybe where it will go up and where it will go down. And then from there I move to staff paper and actually set that melodically, sometimes with actual notes, sometimes just with x's kind of generally going up and down in the right rhythm. Then I start asking myself: "What is it that the piano contributes to this? How will it support the vocal line? Is it trying to illustrate something the singer is talking about, or is it simply supporting the emotional sense of the lyrics?" So from there, I usually come up with chord progression ideas, and at that point the next step would be to actually flesh it all out into actual notes for both singer and piano, but there's a whole lot of sketching that goes into that. For me it's all based on what the text is saying. It's the natural emphasis that our language gives text. The meaning that I add to the text by putting emphasis on certain words that the poet might not have originally put on and then the further level of meaning that the piano can provide.

April Stephens:
Have you written any of your own text or poetry?

Stephen Lias:
Yes, but none that I'm proud of. I'm not a lyricist, and I don't claim to be a lyricist. There have been certain situations where I've written novelty pieces for specific situations for which my lyrics were fine. But, in general, I don't like to write music to my own texts, and I actually discourage my students from doing it, too, mostly because it tends to provide the composer with a cheap, easy escape clause, if they can't figure out a way of setting these words to music and it's their words, they can change the words. By comparison, if you're working with a poet's text, you're stuck with the text and you have to solve the problems creatively.

April Stephens:
I've noticed that even your instrumental compositions often have very descriptive titles (for example, *Sassafras* or *Ebullience*). Do you consider your works programmatic in nature? And how do you find titles for these works?

Stephen Lias:
It's a difficult issue, and it changes from work to work. And I do have some works that have very classically oriented titles: *Sonata No. 1* … things like that. But there are a couple important things to consider. First of all, would we like "Flight of the Bumblebee" if it were called "Etude No. 3"? It's a difficult question, if all the notes are exactly as they are now and it's called "Etude No. 3," suddenly that piece becomes far less interesting. So, as a composer, your decision as to how to title a piece is often a very pragmatic decision about the life of the piece. You say to yourself: "Which is more marketable, which is more memorable, which is more evocative?" Is a pianist more likely to play a piece called "Frenzy" or a piece called "Etude"? And I think, generally, our tendency in society right now is to like titles that imply some extra-musical meaning. So that's one level of answer … that I tend to title things in a way that I think will make them memorable or evoke a certain sense beyond the notes. That being said, there are some works for which I know the title before I write the notes. I just finished a piece called *Glide*, in which that title was the inspiration for all the notes I wrote. However, the first movement of the flute sonata is called "Wide Blue Run," which is a description of a certain type of ski slope. I wasn't thinking of that at all when I wrote the piece. I finished the piece, and then I listened to it objectively and I asked: "What does this make me feel like?" It made me feel ideas of speed and exhilaration and coldness. So immediately skiing came to mind. In that case, a title that sounds programmatic got put on the piece afterwards. If anyone that comes along later and says "oh let me show exactly where the skier falls down in the music" … that would be incorrect because, of course, I wasn't thinking of skiing when I wrote the notes. So each piece came to its title in a different way, and some of them I like better than others.

With *Ebullience*, I finished the piece and thought it sounded effervescent, but that word was too much like a soda pop commercial. So I looked it up in a thesaurus and one of the synonyms was ebullience. I think titling works is very difficult for me, because I know how much importance the title carries in what the future life of the piece will be. So each one's entirely different.

April Stephens:
I would like to talk now a little bit about your musical style. How would you characterize your musical style? Do you see a development of musical style or styles throughout your growth as a composer?

Stephen Lias:
Yes. I'm answering the last question first, yes I see a development. I think most composers are wired in a way that makes them resist any characterization of their style. It feels like an oversimplification if someone calls you "oh that minimal composer" or "oh that serial composer." It feels like you're being pigeon-holed in ways that composers tend not to like. That being said, I think that's why many composers, if there is a word they will agree to be called these days, it is 'eclectic.' And I would use that word to describe me. I think certainly a lot of my recent works have been very accessible and kind of "comfort food" sounding. But I'm itching to write a real crunchy, angry piece. I'm actually working on an octatonic piece right now and, you asked about whether I feel like I'm evolving, I think that the evolution of a composer's style that depends on them constantly wanting to try new voices, to try and incorporate new things into their style. And although I've incorporated little octatonic gestures in pieces before, I've never tried to write a piece that really focused on the octatonic scales in the way that *Petrushka* does. So this piece is for wind ensemble, and I'm literally trying this on for the first time and feeling myself grow into it as the piece evolves. I'm developing more and more proficiency with that technique. One thing that I think lends credence to the eclecticism label is that you can see from my list of works that I've done so much work in professional theatre, and you simply can't have a style and successfully score play after play after play. If you're going to approach *Twelfth Night* and *King Lear* with the same style, you're going to write a fundamentally bad score for one or both of those shows. I think, as a composer, a certain amount of flexibility in your vocabulary lends itself to writing incidental music either for plays or for film, because the needs of the film outweigh whatever your personal stylistic tendencies are. I scored a production of the play *Angel Street*, which is also known as the film *Gaslight*, about a woman slowly being driven insane by an abusive husband. That demands a score that slowly falls apart, that has really harsh dissonances, and that confuses the audience. Whereas a play like *The Boys Next Door*, which I scored, is a comedy about mentally handicapped people living in a group home. Making it charming, but somewhat clumsy, would be an entirely different compositional style than something like *Gaslight* was.

April Stephens:
Have you experimented much with electronic and computer music compositions?

Stephen Lias:
Certainly I've used sampled sounds and sequencers and audio production techniques in a lot of situations. Some of the theatrical scores I've done have been done entirely that way. I've done work in recording studios and things like that. When I teach my students, I also prepare them to do film scoring. We do sessions on how to use sampled sounds and how to sequence. So that's a fairly conventional use of electronics. Since my doctoral work, where I did some real electroacoustic composing, my career just hasn't taken me that direction. The sorts of commissions I'm getting, the sorts of opportunities that present themselves, haven't necessarily been that style, and so I haven't had the opportunity to pursue it. I'd be happy to if they arose, but as a composer you do whatever the next opportunity presents itself. Over the last few years, that's been writing chamber music and incidental music, rather than electroacoustic works.

April Stephens:
As far as analyzing music goes, many composers don't like their music to be analyzed, because they believe music is supposed to work by itself through listening. What is your stand on that?

Stephen Lias:
I think it's silly to suggest that your music shouldn't be analyzed. An analysis doesn't imply necessarily that that's what I was thinking when I wrote the piece. So I'm not at all offended or surprised if someone analyzes a piece of music and finds things in it that had never occurred to me. I think that's wonderful, I think it's fascinating and illustrates, yet again, how much nuance and depth there is to this art we're working on. I don't compose with my 'theory hat' on, but often, once I'm finished, or nearly finished with a piece, I'll often polish the piece with my 'theory hat' on. I'll discover that my understanding of counterpoint reveals a weakness in something I've composed, so I can use my background in music theory and analysis to help refine or strengthen a piece of music. Then also, I'll finish a piece to discover I really like it and have no idea why, and I'll wonder what did I do to make this piece work so well. So, I'll take off my 'composer hat' and put on my 'theorist hat', and I'll sit there and go back through it and figure out what were the things I did in this piece that I'd like to understand and how can I recapture that for my next piece. I think analysis is, of course, a wonderful tool. Music is our language, and the more you understand the language in which you're writing, the more depth and nuance your writing will have. I'm not one of those people who think that to pick it apart and analyze it will ruin the magic of that. I know a lot of people feel that way, but not me.

April Stephens:
I know you've lived in various places, including New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Texas. For you personally as a composer, do you believe there is such a thing as regional or geographic identity that would be reflected in your music?

Stephen Lias:
I agree that there can be a geographical identity for a composer. I'd be silly to deny that there are certain composers whose music does have its roots in a geographical area and certain stylistic traits that are used in that geographical area. Do I think it does to me? Probably not, although I feel that East Texas is home now, I don't draw on anything concrete from this region as my musical inspiration, nor do I draw on anything from the northeast where I was spending all my formative years. So I don't think that that's particularly true in my case the way it might have been in Charles Ives' case.

April Stephens:
Do you see changes in your music that was composed at different places?

Stephen Lias:
I think it's a natural evolution over time and not having to do with geography. Certainly when I go back and look at some of my earlier works, I'm very conscious of the fact that I'm not who I was then anymore. And in the rare situation where I've had to revise a work that I wrote many years earlier, I find that very difficult to incorporate material from my current brain into a piece that was written with previous brain. I think that's very challenging. I attended a lecture that Hilary Tann gave in Tyler, and she said: "All you can expect from a composition is that it be an honest reflection of who you were when you wrote it." And I've taken that to heart, because there's a great temptation for a composer to pull out an old work and realize its flaws and how it isn't a reflection of who I am now and want to rewrite it. And I always hear her voice asking: "Was it an honest reflection of who I was then?" And if the answer is 'yes', then I should leave it alone. So I think just the natural evolution of time in my styles is what has caused changes, rather than the differences in geography.

April Stephens:
Do you think, in general, that modern US-American music is established as such that it has its specific identity?

Stephen Lias:
It's difficult to say ... I would have to, to answer it effectively, live abroad for a couple years to find out how American music is being perceived internationally. I know there are certain works and certain composers that I listen to that feel uniquely American to me, but I don't know if they feel that way to someone in the Ukraine or someone in China. I don't really feel qualified to answer that question. Probably so, though, my guess would be that yes, there is a perception of what American music sounds like. But those lines have certainly been blurred from 50 to 75 years ago, when American music was Jazz or American music was the Copland sound of the American West. I don't think we have as clear a model as we had back then.

April Stephens:
What do you personally, but also in general, think is the role of the composer in our contemporary society? And how should the music reach the audience?

Stephen Lias:
You asked me a hard one! I'm reluctant to say what my views are on behalf of composers everywhere. You said to answer for me in particular and in general, I am much more comfortable talking about me than in general, because I don't think there should be a single role that composers need to fill. For me, I often discuss with my students the question of whether a composition is a form of communication or a form of personal expression. It's an important distinction, because if it's communication, then it is vital that it be in a language that the audience understands. If it's personal expression, not only doesn't it matter what language it's in, but it doesn't matter if there's an audience, because you're writing it as an expression of something going on inside you. Once it's on the paper, once it exists, you're done. If it's communication, you're not done until someone has heard it and hopefully understood it. I tend to write as communication. Not every piece is that way; I've written pieces that were purely self-expression, but most of the time when I write, I think of music as a kind of communicating from a composer through a performer to an audience. So, as I figure out what my role in that is, I'm trying to write something in a language that the audience will understand and using a vocabulary that the performer will enjoy and do well. I think that music as a communication method should feel that the full range of human experiences is fair game. I don't think that only beautiful music is good music. I don't think that the converse is true. Some people have come through the twentieth century into the twenty-first century feeling that if it's beautiful and accessible and easily understood, that's evidence of how bad it is. I don't believe that either. I think that looking at the full range of emotions – of grief and joy and serenity and terror – and all the things we go to the movies to find out about. I think exploring that full range of emotions in compositions is certainly fair game and that's one of the strengths of music is that it can accomplish all that. So I ask "what's my job as a composer?" Usually I think of it as selecting one of those emotional or dramatic contexts, creating a piece of music that encapsulates some element of that and writing it in a way that will communicate well to whoever is going to end up hearing it. I don't certainly suppose that that's what everybody should do; that's just what I think is my job as I'm sitting down to work.

April Stephens:
I'm very interested in the shift that our society has made between the popular music of our day and the popular music of, let's say, Beethoven's time, which was, at least partially, 'art music'. I would love to hear your thoughts on why you think art music is no longer the 'popular' music as it was years ago.

Stephen Lias:
Well … I have a theory, and I'm not a musicologist, I'm not an expert in music history, and I'm not a sociologist, and part of my theory has to do with those sorts of things. So I'll tell you my theory, and you may write it down, and we may get letters from people who are far more qualified than I am, explaining why I'm completely in error on this. However, it seems to me that, left to itself, the general masses of public out there like things that are short and easy to understand. I don't think that's a flaw, I think that's a natural tendency. Left to themselves,

composers probably tend to value complexity and ingenuity and maybe length. We consider very impressive for someone to write a forty-minute work as opposed to only a three-minute work. We, as composers, tend to value very different things than the general masses do. And if you go back a couple hundred years, I think the society was structured in such a way that in order for any regular person to experience music they either had to go to a concert or make it themselves. So, although they probably still had the tendencies toward simple, short, easy to understand, they had the additional requirement that they had to know how to make music, or they had to take the personal initiative to go to a concert. Likewise, composers, in one way or another, were deriving their income from what they were writing. So they needed the audiences, and the audiences needed the composers. I think there was a symbiotic relationship there. There still is to a certain extent, but certainly it was the case a couple hundred years ago – talking about Beethoven. I think that relationship broke down early in the twentieth century for a variety of reasons, one of them being technological advances.

The advent of pre-recorded music in the form of piano rolls and then eventually LP records made it possible for the general public to have a constant supply of short, easy to remember, easy to understand songs, and it freed them of the need of knowing how to play the piano or needing to go to a concert hall, they could turn on a radio now. So, I think the general public had their needs supplied in a much easier, cheaper way. Whereas the composers, at that time, starting in the early twentieth century, began to be employed by universities. What is valued in a university? Experimentation, breaking new ground, trying new things, and not the most popular music – it is not what a university would value, it would be the most progressive, experimental music that would be valued highly. So I think that in that respect composers stopped looking to audiences for their income and started looking to universities, which were giving them raises, based on whether they were experimenting or not. So I think those two things – the advent of prerecorded music and the advent of the new kind of patronage system, where all the composers were working for universities, which we mostly still do – those allowed composers and audiences to drift apart. I don't think it's anyone's fault. I don't shake a finger at George Crumb and say if only you had written prettier music, this never would've happened. I don't think it's anyone's fault. I do think a lot of people have woken up to that gap and said: "Let's do something about it." There are certainly a lot of composers now who are making a real concerted effort to do sort of what Copland decided to do, which is to write in a self-consciously accessible style, but still maintain the artistic integrity of what they're writing. So we are seeing maybe a drift back together now. But that's my opinion of what caused the rift.

April Stephens:
Do you think that, especially here in the US, there is a problem with contemporary music in terms of not having a large audience or the audience getting smaller (people who are interested in contemporary art music)?

Stephen Lias:
I would describe it as a reality. Yes, the public that's sitting out there, itching for new contemporary music, is fairly small. I'm not sure if it's a problem or not. It's a reality that causes us to invent new solutions for how new compositions can make their way to the floor. We institute competitions now, rather than a new work automatically getting a premiere and then fifty people hearing it and wanting to perform it also. More often, it gets submitted to a competition, where its jury of other composers selects the best three and then the winning one gets selected for publication, then, because it's in print, finally the performers get it. I guess, I'm too optimistic to refer to it as a problem. It's a challenge, and it would be nice if, as those of us who are writing, find audiences, find people who are interested in the music that we're writing. It would be nice if that group grew, but I'm not counting on it.

April Stephens:
If we would try to fix it, how could we fix it? Or is it possible? What could be done to raise awareness of contemporary art music today?

Stephen Lias:
I honestly don't know. If it changes, it will change incrementally, because a few hundred people invite more friends to concerts. And the people who are putting on those concerts do good enough work and interesting enough work that those new people that came want to come back to another one. Then it will slowly, incrementally grow. I don't know of any alternative fix to that. Culturally, obviously, there are ways of introducing these concepts into education. I suppose, if we taught our children to value this kind of music, then it might grow up with a generation and have a difference. Most people on the street, though, don't know the names of living composers. So it's too big, it's not something I know how to solve. It seems like too entrenched a way of thinking about things for there to be a quick fix of it.

April Stephens:
Do you think that educational programs that developed after the Tanglewood Symposium, such as the "Composer-in-Residence" program, where schools were paying composers to come to schools and write music and interact with students, do you think programs like those are something we should push for again? Would that be a possible solution?

Stephen Lias:
I think that sounds wonderful. It would probably spur more of those high school students to be interested in becoming composers, but I'm not sure about those that didn't want to become composers if it would spur them to go to more recitals. And we already have so many out-of-work composers, that I feel this great burden, when we admit composition majors here at the university, to make sure I'm not walking them toward a cliff. I don't know, I haven't thought a lot about how to remedy the sociological problems of the arts. So I feel like I have poor answers.

April Stephens:
Looking toward the future, where would you like to go from here compositionally? What are your plans for the future?

Stephen Lias:
I've got a few commissions I'm working on right now. I've got to finish a band piece, and after that I would like to write a trumpet and piano piece. After that, I am looking at a flute and marimba piece, and possibly an orchestra commission. Professionally, what I'd like to see happen over the next three or four years, is for me to be able to build some bridges internationally. I've been very fortunate to have lots of pieces performed in the US over the last few years, certainly many conferences and recitals, new commissions, and so on. I've had just the beginnings of some international activity happen. So I'm trying to focus my energies in ways that will make that next step, so that things will start to happen overseas. I think that in terms of professional development, that would be the next big step for me. In terms of creative output, I continue to be happy to write whatever the next opportunity is. Every composer daydreams about the wildly successful new orchestral work that they write, but the fact of the matter is, you spend a year of your life writing a symphony that might get performed once or twice, and in that one year you could write five or six chamber works, that will get performed for decades. So I have tended recently to write chamber works just because they are easier to publish, easier to get performances of, but I'm certainly excited about the wind ensemble piece I'm working on, and I hope there is another large work coming down the road.

Selected Works List

Lias, Stephen. 2007a. *Songs of a Sourdough for Baritone and Piano.* Manuscript.
Lias, Stephen. 2007b. *The Rock, the Prayer, and the Cross for Horn and Piano.* Manuscript.
Lias, Stephen. 2005a. *On the High Chisos for Percussion Ensemble*. Manuscript.
Lias, Stephen. 2005b. *Pursued for String Orchestra.* Manuscript.
Lias, Stephen. 2005c. *White Water for Piano.* Manuscript.
Lias, Stephen. 2004. *Sassafras for Small Jazz Combo.* Manuscript.
Lias, Stephen. 2003a. *Sonata for Flute and Piano.* Manuscript.
Lias, Stephen. 2003b. *Five Characters from "David Copperfield." for Saxophone.* Manuscript.
Lias, Stephen. 1998a. *The Buccaneers* from *Sea Dreams for Men's Chorus.* Manuscript.

Lias, Stephen. 1998b. *Sea Dreams: A Song Cycle for Mixed Choir and Orchestra.* Manuscript.

Lias, Stephen. 1998c. *Sonata No. 1 in G Minor for Piano.* Manuscript.

Lias, Stephen. 1999a. *Psalm 23 for Unaccompanied Mixed Chorus.* Manuscript.

Lias, Stephen. 1999b. *Summer Diaries for Piano.* Manuscript.

Lias, Stephen. 1997. A Comparison of Leonard Bernstein's Incidental Music for the Film "On the Waterfront" and the Subsequent "Symphonic Suite" for the Film, and an Original Compositions: Symphony No. 1: "Music for Theater." D.M.A. Dissertation. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College.

Lias, Stephen. 1995a. *From the Diaries of Adam and Eve: A Dramatic Concert Piece for Soprano, Baritone, and Chamber Orchestra.* Manuscript.

Lias, Stephen. 1995b. *Lecheuguilla for Flute and Clarinet.* Manuscript.

Lias, Stephen. 1993. *Live With Me, and Be My Love for Three-part Voices*. Manuscript.

Lias, Stephen. 1989. *As the Hart Longs for Mixed Chorus.* Manuscript.

Lias, Stephen. 1987. *Come Glorify the Lord for Mixed Chorus*. Dayton, Ohio: The Sacred Music Press.

CD Reviews

Voice and Cello Groove Songs: *900 Miles* by Bethany & Rufus

by Keith J. Robinson
Email: nkrobin@satx.rr.com

Bethany & Rufus. *900 Miles*. [Nashville, TN:] Hyena Records, 2006. Compact Disc, HYN 9353. http://www.HyenaRecords.com

Bethany Yarrow's rich vocals alternately soar, then wail, as she breathes life into the melancholy folk songs found on Bethany & Rufus' *900 Miles*. The grooves created by Rufus Cappadocia, playing a 5-string cello much like a bass, are intricate, bold, and hard driving throughout this captivating CD. Although *900 Miles* is their first recording endeavor together, one gets the immediate impression that they have lived and loved this music for a long time.

The opening track, "900 Miles," is a railroad folk song from the 1900s. The cello sets up a relentless insistent groove, conveying the constant forward motion of a locomotive chugging on down the line. Bethany's smooth vocals provide contrast to the energy of the cello, as she tells the tale of a traveler, far from the comforts of home.

"East Virginia" is a sad story of lost love: which shares the same tune as "Poor Wayfarin' Stranger." The lyrics say: "All I want is your love darlin'. Won't you take me back again?" The moaning sound of the bowed cello, played over a gently rhythmic bass line, speaks directly to the spirit of this Appalachian mountain song.

A frenetic, driving barrage of sounds fly off the strings and finger board of Rufus's cello as he opens the third song, entitled "Linin' Track." This is another railroad folk song told from a different perspective than that of "900 Miles." Rather than riding the rails, this song tells of the arduous work of laying track, or linin' rails. "This is an old railroad work song, first recorded in the prisons of Tennessee in 1933. The rhythm of the work chant was used to pace the work, pull and lift in unison, and to make the day pass more quickly." (Liner notes.) Bethany very clearly takes on the role of work foreman, calling to the workers "Oh boys cancha line 'em. Oh boys cancha line. Oh boys cancha line 'em."

The next two tracks are immensely painful, filled from first note to the last with a beautiful, overwhelming sadness. "The Swallow" begins with a sorrowful drone from the cello, as the vocals tell of a woman whose heart is broken by man and child. "St. James Infirmary," a traditional New Orleans song that has its roots in an Irish ballad, tells of the death of a woman, "so pretty, so fair… There are seven girls who are going to the graveyard, but only six of them are coming back." Bethany virtually whispers many of the lyrics as she sings "St. James Infirmary." This illustrates a strong technical feature of this disc: It is recorded in such a manner as to allow Rufus to play cello with great intensity, while at the same time, allowing Bethany to sing with a beautiful haunting quality. She never struggles to be heard over her accompaniment.

Two spiritual songs follow, asking "Isn't That So?" and wondering what would happen "If I had My Way." Bethany energizes the lyrics of "Isn't That So," as she sings of the manner in which we are created and the temptations and problems that face us *because* of the manner in which we were created. "If I had My Way" speaks of the frustrations of living in an imperfect world and wanting to take matters into one's own hands: "If I had my way, If I had my way, If I had my way in this wicked world, I'd tear this building down." As Bethany tears it down, Rufus, with the assistance of percussionist Gaston "Bonga" Jean Baptiste, pours a funk driven foundation, starting with sparsely delivered cello riffs, building into a fully furnished two-story rhythmic mansion, nicely appointed with luxurious drumming provided by Baptiste.

Although not a folk song, the cryptic poetry of songwriter Phil Ochs fits very nicely into the spirit and beauty of this disc. His song entitled "No More Songs" equates the loss of music with losing everything: "A star is in the sky. It's time to say

goodbye. A whale is on the beach. He's dying. A white bone in the sand, a white flag in my hand, and it seems that there are no more songs." Bethany and Rufus follow this tune, quite thoughtfully, with a piece that features solo cello, conveying an absence of songs through the absence of singing. Rufus plays a beautiful free-form improvisation, displaying great expressiveness within a commanding technical ability that never obscures the delivery of inspired music.

The closing track on *900 Miles* is a traditional Spanish folk song entitled "Astruiana." The lament of this song is fully realized through a haltingly syncopated bass line providing counterpoint to Bethany's melancholy, pure vocal tone. A perfect ending to a CD filled with lovely heartache and constant examples of meaningful contrast.

Throughout *900 Miles*, Bethany and Rufus contrast and compliment one another continuously: The calm serenity of the vocal, and the intensity of the cello groove; her flowing lyric and his relentless pulse; the song, and the groove; Bethany & Rufus' *900 Miles*.

Viento De Agua Unplugged: Materia Prima

by Samuel López
E-Mail: samlopez@austin.rr.com

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Since 1998, Viento De Agua has contributed to the innovation and growth of Puerto Rico's *bomba* and *plena* music. For *Materia Prima*, Viento De Agua director and renown *requinto player* Hector "Tito" Matos put together an all-star team of musicians and made a 12-track recording, consisting of percussion instruments, voice and chorus, and extra hand drums, all influencing the progressive sounds of *bomba* and *plena*.

Bomba and *plena* are two musical art forms from Puerto Rico. The *bomba* genre is Puerto Rico's direct link to its African roots. *Bomba's* many different rhythms are played with the traditional *barril* drums, a *maraca* and a pair of sticks called *cuá*. It sounds very percussive and uses a singer and chorus in a call-and-response style to depict life experiences.

Plena music is rather upbeat, very percussive, and is used to publicize celebrations, protests, sentiments, and perceptions of the Puerto Rican people. The traditional percussive instrumentation for *plena* is three *pandero* drums and one *güiro*.

CD track 1 entitled "Ahora Sí" is a *plena corrida* or running plena. This style of *plena* is very fast in tempo and extremely high in energy. Written by Juan "Llonsi" Martinez, "Ahora Sí" begins with a traditional call by the lead singer, then breaks from the percussion are added, followed by the chorus and rhythm. This *plena*, like many others on the CD, includes an extra low-pitched *pandero* drum, which adds accents, character, and depth to the percussion section.

CD track 2, entitled "El León," is a classic *plena*. First recorded by Rafael Cortijo in 1968, this *plena* is about a true event in Puerto Rico, when a lion escaped from its cage in the zoo. Even though this song is in a minor key, it is very humorous and fun to listen to. In the middle of the song, the group drops out, leaving only the *güiro* playing. This song has three different choruses, each getting shorter in length, which intensifies the story of the lion escaping. With each chorus, the listener can hear the lion getting closer.

CD track 3 entitled "Del Oyé" is the first *bomba* of the CD. This *bomba* is in the 6/8 rhythm of *yubá*, which is often considered to be an emotional rhythm in *bomba*. According to the liner notes, the meaning of "Del Oyé" was lost over time. This song is sung by Roberto Cepeda, son of the late Don Rafael Cepeda, the patriarch of *bomba* and

plena. The song begins with the chorus singing in quartal harmony. After the chorus, the drummers come in with the *yubá* rhythm. Juan Gutierrez plays the *primo* drum (improv drum that works with dancers) on this piece.

CD track 4 entitled "Quinto y Tumbador" is another *plena corrida*, which was written by *plenero* Félix Díaz. The title refers to the smallest and largest *pandero* drums. The *requinto* is the smallest, and the *seguidor*, which is sometimes referred to as the *tumbador*, is the largest. This song, like "Ahora Sí," incorporates an extra *pandero* drum that helps embellish strong sections of the music. There is a 28-bar break in the middle of the song, followed by a second chorus and the addition of a cowbell. The use of the cowbell makes the song push in more of a salsa style. This is then followed by three *requinto* drums soloing simultaneously.

CD track 5 entitled "Sire Siré" is a *bomba* in the rhythm of *hoyoemula*. The rhythm of *hoyoemula* has been recorded very few times, making this recording one of the few resources to hear this rhythm. This song is about the urge to go to the town of Mayagüez and dance a *balancé*. It is mellow sounding and moderate in tempo. This song is an original composition by Roberto Cepeda, the lead singer in the song.

CD track 6 entitled "Las Tarimas" is a *plena* written by Juan "Llonsi" Martinez and talks about the street corner. The word *tarima* in Spanish means stage, and for *pleneros* (people who play *plena*) the stage for playing *plena* could be any street corner in the neighborhood. This song gives thanks to these street corners as a means of communication, preservation, and self-expression for all *pleneros*. Included in this song is the use of the *tumbandero* (washtub bass). The use of this instrument adds to the originality of this CD. Very rarely has this instrument been recorded, and it is rare to see anybody play this instrument nowadays. The lyrics and meaning of this song, with the use of the *tumbandero*, makes this one of the most important songs on the CD.

CD track 7 entitled "Ola De La Mar" is a *plena* written by Pedrito Ruiz. Instead of using the traditional *panderos* for this song, Viento De Agua has created a polyrhythm consisting of all bells – adding personality to the CD. The percussive composition was done by Hector "Tito" Matos. The melody of the song and bells combine to make a very unique sounding *plena*.

CD track 8 entitled "Mayelá" is a *bomba* in the rhythm of *gracimá*. The song opens with a long call by the lead singer, followed by the chorus and rhythm section. The song is about a *bomba* dance in *Maleyá*, which is said to be a neighborhood on another island of the Antilles. Singing this song is Roberto Cepeda, and the song was written by his brother Jesús Cepeda.

CD track 9 entitled "Pa' Un Plenero" is another *plena* composed by Juan "Llonsi" Martinez and sung by Hector "Tito" Matos. This *plena* is a *plena lamento* (lamented *plena*) which tributes all *pleneros* that have passed and those who are still around. This song also uses the *tumbandero*, which is played by Hector "Tito" Matos. Many of the improvised verses express thanks to the different *plena* groups that are around. This song represents a deep sense of pride for *pleneros* everywhere.

CD track 10 entitled "Cucú" is a *bomba* that combines both the *cuembé* and *holandé* rhythms. This song is another composition of the late Don Rafael Cepeda. Singing is Sammy Tanco, whose deep voice is very distinguishable from many of the other *bomba* and *plena* singers. The song begins with a slow *cuembé* and later goes into a fast *holandé*. The same chorus is used in both rhythms.

CD track 11 entitled "Maringracia" is a *plena corrida* written by Don Rafael Cepeda and is sung by Hector "Tito" Matos. The word Maringracia is short for 'Maria en Gracia' – the person for whom is was written. In the middle of the song, the rhythm slows down and the use of Brazilian percussion mixes with the *plena*. Agogo bells, cuica, and other percussion are used to create a fusion effect.

CD track 12 entitled "Viento de Agua Llegó" is another *plena corrida* written by Hector "Tito" Matos. In this song, Tito Matos sings and demonstrates his solo abilities on the *requinto* drum. In the middle of the piece, the rhythm of the *plena* falls apart as to deconstruct the rhythm. Before this happens, the lead voice of Tito Matos says 'deconstrullela' or deconstruct it. This is clearly part of the arrangement of the piece, and listeners who don't

understand Spanish may think that there was a mishap. The musicians then restart the *plena* and quickly change to a *batá rhythm* on the *pandero* drums. This use of *batá* rhythm is influenced by the Afro-Cuban drumming tradition. The song then changes back to *plena* and fades out.

Materia Prima is a good source for contemporary *bomba* and *plena* music. Each of the twelve tracks is characteristic of its art form, while adding originality. There is no doubt that the musicians on this CD are knowledgeable in these two genres and many more. Viento de Agua is an innovative *bomba* and *plena* group that is always experimenting with new sounds to add to the advancement of Puerto Rican *bomba* and *plena* music.