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MY WORLD AS I REMEMBER IT: AN INTERVIEW WITH CHRISTOPHER BUTTERFIELD

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Abstract: Christopher Butterfield is a composer and composition teacher. His music has been performed across Canada and in Europe, with recordings on the CBC, Artifact, and Collection QB labels. He is currently the Director of the School of Music in the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Victoria. Christopher was born in 1952 in Vancouver, BC. He studied composition at the University of Victoria with Rudolf Komorous and at the State University of New York at Stony Brook with Bülent Arel. He was a performance artist, rock guitar player and composer while living in Toronto between 1977 and 1992, after which he returned to the University of Victoria as Assistant Professor of Composition.

I studied composition with Christopher between 2000 and 2005. Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to sit down with him in Victoria. During our interview, I asked him about his life and work, and for his thoughts on how Czech-Canadian composer Rudolf Komorous has influenced composition in Canada over the last few decades.

Where did you grow up?
I think because I moved around so much when I was a child, that my first sense of being in a kind of stable place was – I guess I must have been about 13 – and my family had moved to Victoria, BC, and, even though there were several homes before that, I can't say that any of them were the place that I grew up. I spent five years in a choir school in England, and that was kind of a home, but it had no follow up, in any kind of normal way, and no continuity after that, so it's a separate event almost. Not that it isn't important . . . and you know, you say growing up, [laughs] I don't know when you stop growing up. I grew up in Victoria. I grew up in the years I was in Toronto. I kept growing up when I returned to Victoria. But if I had to say there was a particular place where I feel – if growing up is part of being connected to something or to a place, then it's definitely here.

And when did you begin writing music?
It must have been in 1971. I was eighteen years old and I woke up one morning and decided I would be a composer. You could apply to the department of music at the University of Victoria, and I think they wanted to know what you did. I couldn't play an instrument very

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well; I was a terrible pianist. I may have auditioned on the cello, I'm not sure [laughing]. But I wrote a piano piece, and I also made some electronic music too. And I'd been aware of contemporary ideas and music and material for a few years before that.

I used to work in a record store in Victoria. I don't think work is quite the right idea, but I hung out there and re-organised the records and it was mostly jazz and classical but they were fairly indiscriminate about what they put together with classical so you'd get the latest Stockhausen Deutsche Grammophon records. In those days you could listen to records in the store and so I would listen to this stuff and I was fourteen or fifteen. I remember when I was about fifteen I went to a concert by the absolutely legendary Al Neil at the art gallery in Victoria, and I was very naive and asked him if he had ever heard of John Cage and he said, yes, he'd heard of John Cage. I mean Al was kind of at the far end of free improvisation in a jazz sense; he'd been a kind of hard bop pianist. So, sorry what was the question? [laughs]

When did you start writing music?
So I never wrote a thing until I was eighteen, and I actually came across it the other day. It was one and a half variations on 'Wachet Auf', the Bach chorale 'Sleeper's Awake', except [laughs] it had no particular allusion to any kind of tonal centre or anything else, and it had a variable tempo marking that sort of curves, that went up and down.

When you heard those records in the store, what were you drawn to?
I think just the sense that these were things I hadn't heard before. My world had been very much English church music, that's the world I lived in, and I have to say that my Father's world was Gilbert and Sullivan and the Red Army chorus and Verdi opera choruses, so there was that too. Although I wasn't necessarily there very much in that environment, I certainly knew all that material and you obviously absorb it. When I came back to Canada I heard blues bands for the first time and I got absolutely obsessed— this would have been 40s, 50s and 60s American electric blues.

So it's a mixture of things, and the experimental side of it, or whatever that was called in those days, avant-garde or whatever, was just one more interesting part of the musical landscape. And I was just very lucky to be in a place like this store, run by this curious guy who liked new jazz and contemporary music and that was in Victoria. So as usual, Victoria ... is not quite like other places.

What drew you to composing?
I've always had the same answer which is that it seemed like an interesting way to live. I don't think I had then, and this is a very curious admission, I don't think that I have any kind of fluency as a composer. I've known lots of composers who have an extraordinary grasp of technique and materials and ways of realising music, realising what they want to hear in notation so it can be played. But for me, I think it was all a little more concept-driven. So the idea would come and then you'd find a way to articulate the idea, but you wouldn't use words, you wouldn't use images, you'd use notation, you'd use the possibility of sound. Which isn't to say that it was in any way a programme music, or even that it was a conceptual music in the sense of, I don't know, extreme minimal music, or where you can hear obvious process or a lot of repetition or something like that; I usually allowed it to mutate in its own particular way.

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You know, when I was younger I was involved in theatre a bit, because there was very good summer theatre in Victoria. It had a very good theatre department when I started at the University in 1969. It was very much an experimental department. They did things that I'm wistful about because I've never really seen that kind of theatre since. I know it exists, but it hasn't really here. It's a different time.

Does anything come to mind?
Oh, they did wonderful things with mystery plays, the old Medieval mystery plays. A lot of it was group-based, a lot of input from the actors themselves, a lot of early inter-media, mixed media, a lot of film. I remember puppets; I remember really provocative things. I wrote music a little bit but for some reason I found the theatre world, you know, it wasn't quite right, I don't know why. I certainly couldn't act [laughs]. It seemed very odd to me to try and act.

I think I went to university originally with the idea of doing history because I love history, mostly modern history but, of course, [laughing] modern can be anything you want from about 1600 on. So when I started university I was very young, 16, and I wanted to do second-year history because I already knew what they were doing in first year history. But the second-year history course met at 8:30 in the morning and the history teacher was the most boring person I think I've ever met in my entire life, and I'd been out playing and partying the night before so I'd just go to sleep. So I failed that course [laughing], but I'm happy to say I've kept up my study of history.

Just that when I did go back to university, I chose to go back as a musician, and it was the best thing that could possibly happen. You think you'll write music but you have no idea what you'll write, or what there is to know about it, and how you'll learn it, and who you'll learn it from. In that sense, I think I got quite lucky.

What did you write? And who did you learn from?
Well, this Czech composer [Rudolf Komorous] arrived at the university to teach at the same time I did. There were a few of us who were there: me, Owen Underhill, David MacIntyre (and they both teach at Simon Fraser now). You know, there was something about the teacher; we formed this really powerful group where we gave concerts and performed each other's pieces and it was coming very much out of the avant-garde, the American avant-garde. It's really a curious thing because here I am on the west coast of Canada being taught about Cage and Feldman and Wolff, but I'm being taught it by a Central European and in 1971 – you know this was a little odd. Maybe it's a little more common now, but in those days Cage was not a household name. But Rudolf had brought him to Prague in the 60s and so knew him a bit. Rudolf's own work, I think, was considered a part of that world, although it was so individual you could never have said it's based on something these guys did.

But he was our composition teacher and that was a good thing because it allowed everybody to do the work they wanted and needed to do, and I think gave everybody a very strong sense for how to go forward. And that's always been central to the way I think about learning how to be a composer, which is how you hear and get to know your voice and are in some way happy with it. You know you *do* have to be happy with it. You may have issues, but you do have to, overall, be happy with it. You also have to let it go, let it be heard. It's for other people, it's not really for you.

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What were you interested in exploring at that time?
Again, it's going to sound like I'm only ever interested in the American experimental composers in the 70s. And I was interested in the art movements that you could link to that, both earlier ones like the Dada movement – I've sometimes been called a Dada composer but I don't think that's appropriate – and other movements. When I was a kid, I got very interested in Expressionist theatre, so late nineteenth-, early twentieth-century theatre. Nobody plays these things now unless they make musicals out of them like *Spring Awakening*.[1] But nobody produces *Gas 1* or *Gas 2* or *R.U.R*[2]. It's a historical moment in the theatre and now it's just mawkish and odd, but I was much taken with it because it was so artificial. It had this desperate, ideological, psychological thing that it wanted to convey. And so in art, I liked the minimalist and conceptualist movements in the 60s and the sorts of things that Fluxus was doing in the 50s and 60s, which is all very much concept-based. The thing about all that work is that the person creating the work has an image of the thing they want to see or hear, and they try to convey the greatest meaning with the least materials. I was much taken by that, and I think because there was so much graphic notation floating around in those days, time-space notation. It was very interesting to see Cardew scores, or there was an English composer who visited named David Bedford whose scores were very effective in their notation, in making a clear and strong musical result. And people like Sylvano Bussotti, and those extraordinary scores which are more decorative than anything else: they're a little hard to work in time. I think he must have seen Cage's piano concerto and just said 'that's the best thing I've ever seen in my life, I'm going to do that'.

What came out of twelve-tone music, and specifically the Webern side of it, the idea that you could have this extraordinary structure in the music which gives you a certain musical result which is so far beyond the idea of any structure at all . . . it's a perfectly-invented music. That was influential. And I'm not sure if it was the sound, I mean I could never write like Webern, ever, but it was the way he approached structuring materials, and what could come of that.

The affinity for structure and for process, do you see that in your own work?
Oh yeah, completely, because I tried various things over the years and one moment I was much taken by an analysis of 'Kyrie' from Satie's *Messe des pauvres* which shows it to be a kind of modular music – Varèse called Satie the first electronic music composer – because it was like cut and paste, it was like spliced tape, and so I tried that for a while and it was okay, it wasn't hugely effective. And then I just ended up with this curious mixture of taking very small pitch sets and transposing them in a very limited way, and then a table of durations and each pitch gets assigned a chance duration and you sort of plug it in like you're making your own jigsaw puzzle. For some reason this satisfied the need for structure and play at the same time, and you know, it's just a way of working and sometimes it's successful and sometimes it's not [laughing]. I think I like things that give me a lot of structure, especially around pitch, and that I can sort of work through. I guess you could call it kind of a modal

[1] Frank Wedekind's original play *Spring Awakening* was written in 1890–91.
[2] *Gas 1* (1918) and *Gas 2* (1920) are two plays by German dramatist Georg Kaiser; *R.U.R.* (1920) is by the Czech writer Karel Čapek.

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composition, but with the chance durations that mode gets a little wonky. But that's fine. I'm very happy to hear what happens.

I'd like to talk about your time in Toronto and what you were doing and interested in while you were there – I guess that's Toronto via New York?
The two years that I spent in Stony Brook, that was kind of on the way to Toronto. In Toronto, I was associating mostly with visual artists. I don't even remember knowing musicians in Toronto for the first couple years. 1977 I was in Toronto, and then 78 I was in Montréal, because I got a job giving a performance art workshop at the graduate visual arts department at Concordia. That was because I used to do these one-man shows of pieces of my own and sound poetry; I did Schwitters' *Ursonate* which I started doing in 75 or 76 and Guido Molinari offered me a job teaching a performance art workshop. I moved down to Toronto the next year because I was going to start a band with a friend from Stony Brook and my brother, Philip, and we were going to be rock stars. So we all lived together and we wrote songs and we rehearsed the songs every day. We were the tightest trio of graduate student wannabe rock musicians the world has ever seen! Then we needed a drummer and we asked a friend who had been at Stony Brook if he would come and drum for us for a recording session. So he came in November of 1979 and we rehearsed with him, and he never went home [laughing]. It was very funny. He's still there! He never went back to the States. I think he's still a little mystified! What happened . . .?

What was a typical day like?
Well we all had jobs; we worked delivering flyers or something. I had a job working in an architect's office editing the master plan for a university in Saudi Arabia. We just all did stuff, and in the evenings we'd come home and rehearse. Our first rehearsal space was directly behind the tenement where we lived on King Street and it was a workshop that made the moulds for bottles and containers. They made the mould for the Crown Royal bottle. That's pretty mythic. And because the guy was very kind, he let us set up every night in his workshop and then we'd have to break down all the equipment and put it back in the corner. We'd come back the next night and do it again. We moved because I worked for a music publisher for a very short time. He had been the director of Ricordi in New York, then he had his own imprint. He was Varèse's publisher. So we rehearsed in this basement in downtown Toronto which was the world supply of the works of Varèse [laughing] . . . you could flip through *Hyperprism* while you were rehearsing. Actually Rick Sacks (the drummer who came from the States and never went home) revised *Hyperprism* from thirteen percussionists down to four or something and the revised edition was published again.

For years we played all the bars in Queen Street and downtown and I had very little to do with any kind of concert music. Occasionally I'd go to a concert. I remember Cage coming in 82 to do *Roaratorio* at Convocation Hall. The one that I still kick myself about is that Messiaen came and played *Vingt regards*. That must have been about 82 as well. I knew it was happening but I didn't go and I've never forgiven myself. So I still had an ear for music but in no way had anything to do with the composition world.

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But you were quite involved in the visual art world?
I was closely associated with people in the visual art world and I think that was because visual art had always been part of our lives as students. There was a great deal of discussion because Rudolf Komorous was very interested in visual art – so you talk about Russian Constructivists, about Malevich, about Renaissance painters, about Bronzino. And you know, when you're young you just expect that; that's just normal. And then you actually find out, no . . .

I think it was also because at the University of Victoria, the music department (which was tiny) was right across the hall from the art department (which was tiny) and that was our world. It was truly an interdisciplinary school without being one, just because of proximity, because people were all there together.

So in Toronto I got grants to do performance pieces in the early 80s, and in a funny way I was in between worlds then.

Can you describe one of these performance pieces?
There was a material that I loved called oilstick. It's basically like heavy, thick, solid oil paint— the blackest, muckiest stuff you can get, it's just awful. But fabulous to work with as it's quite soft and everything just gets really black. So I did this all-evening wall drawing using oilstick on this pristine gallery wall, drawing this geometric set of lines about the way around the globe and a kind of personal history. I used to do these pieces called *My World as I Remember it*; this was one of them. It was a way of knowing what you'd done. Anyway, I put this oilstick on the wall and, well, getting it off was one thing, that took hours, with solvent. Then it had to have several coats of paint afterwards, because it just kept coming through the paint, so it wasn't easy. I did start writing music again, because I hadn't for quite a long time, and that was around 1984.

What made you start?
I just started one day. I just switched. I started writing a big piano piece called *Pillar of Snails*. It took me three years to write that.

What brought you back to the west coast?
I'm very much a west coast person, that's just the way it is. Living in Toronto was wonderful for a number of reasons but I had this feeling I would come back here and there was a job that came up at the university, teaching composition, and I got it, which seems to me to be a complete and total miracle now. And so I came back.

What year was that?
1992.

I was going to ask a little bit about Rudolf, if you could talk about his influence not only on your own work, but also on Canadian composition.
Well, it wasn't what anyone else was doing in the country because it really was based in experimental ideas; it wasn't playing into any particular musical model. There were interesting things to look at, but lessons about form or structure or things like that just weren't there. And I actually thought later on that maybe I hadn't been educated right because I didn't think I knew what I was doing. The curious thing is I guess I knew exactly what I was doing; I was doing what I knew how to do, and so, you either keep doing that or you just stop. Because anything you start learning about you start thinking, well, if I do that I'm going to sound like this, maybe, and that's silly, I don't

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need to sound like that, I need to sound like me. So you get used to sounding like you. And I think that's largely because of Rudolf. He was very supportive to the ideas that people had. He was more interested in the music that could be realised by the imagination. And most people would think, 'what does that mean? music is music, you just imagine it and there it is, it's music'. No, that's not quite the case, because you have to imagine it to be something very particular. It has to have a life of its own. I don't think a piece of music is well served by you wanting it to be a certain way . . . I'd rather hear it on its own terms, rather than your terms. That's not to say that composers aren't control freaks because I think probably most of us are, but I still do think that a piece of music has a life of its own. And then of course there's the whole issue of it being played and how the performers will play it and that's a complicated one, and you have to learn endlessly about how to make those symbols recognisable enough, comprehensible enough that they translate into the sound you want to hear, and that's a life's work.

But Rudolf, I think he gave people the confidence to actually feel good about what they made. And he never said, 'oh this should be this and that should be that', you never once were told to do anything. And if I think about the way things work by influence, it's very funny because how does that work? Owen and I went to Stonybrook. In Stonybrook we met Linda Smith. She was an undergraduate; they didn't have a graduate composition programme at Stonybrook, so we said, you should go to Victoria, BC, so Linda went to Victoria, BC [laughing]. Linda's one of the major composers, certainly in Canada, I would say she's a major composer anywhere, but, you know, she went from Long Island to Vancouver Island, so that was something there and then we would organise a lot of concerts at Stonybrook and everyone said, what's that? and we said it's this, and don't you know about this? And they said . . . no . . . and we said, we're the hicks from the sticks, and you're in New York and you don't know about this? You know, we were doing Kagel, and these funny things and so I don't know, maybe there was some influence there . . . people finding out about things in that world that they didn't know about.

Then later on there was a group that came in the mid-80s, with John Abram, and Martin Arnold, Stephen Parkinson, Allison Cameron and John Cole. They put on concerts and had a very particular idea about creating a musical community, and also doing work that was . . . the thing about Rudolf, I wouldn't call it anti-virtuosic, but it was usually simple means to complex ends. So they weren't too hard to play but the result was . . . 'wow, how did you do that'. And then it turns out you do it with really very simple instructions for people.

That group pretty much all decamped as one for Toronto in the later 80s. In Toronto those days there really was nothing like what they had to offer. They started ensembles, they had the Drystone Orchestra and they did the Arcana Ensemble and people were very taken by what they were doing and found their way in to be part of the group. By then Linda Smith is in Toronto and I'm in Toronto and doing things again more or less musically, and I think that now we get to a discussion of music in Canada, which is what was acceptable in those days, because what they were doing was definitely *not* acceptable. And if you'd run it by the kind of modernist orthodoxies in Toronto at the time, as we did, in council juries for commissions and so on and so forth, people would just completely blow it off. They just said, well this is nothing. But the work had a certain power to it and a certain staying power as well, because people

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tended to hoe the same row a lot – to work it out. It's no different from a painter with a certain kind of image in mind, you just do it until you've got it right. And now of course, it's absolutely clear. And people like Martin Arnold and Linda Smith are now being recognised for the powerful voices that they are, but in those days they couldn't get arrested. And so I think that it takes years to change a cultural ship, or move it around, and musical life in Canada's based on the little centres where there's activity. And as we all know, it's not terribly connected, so if you're in Montréal, you do what they do in Montréal, if you're in Toronto you do what they do in Toronto, if you live in Vancouver . . . and then there's Winnipeg, and that's a whole other world, and Victoria, that's a whole other world. But at some point, if you stay at it long enough, it does become part of the conversation. And I think that kind of started with Rudolf and went out through his students. They stayed in place long enough to convey a certain kind of thing . . . not that anyone would necessarily track it back to Rudolf. It's more an attitude about music and I think that went out through these people.

Could you talk about a piece that's very meaningful to you.
There's a piece I wrote in about 1989 or 90 called *Jappements à la lune*, which means howling at the moon, and . . . I've always had trouble setting text to music. I used to set French poetry 'cause at least it wasn't English, it was easier. And I found out a lot about sound poetry, twentieth-century sound poetry, and performed a lot.

There was a Québécois poet,[3] a member of the Refus Global people, and his work is extraordinary by any measure, and he sort of went nuts and died in rather tragic circumstances. But at the end of his life he ditched any kind of conventional syntax and just was writing – you know they're words, but they're meaningless words. So there's this set of poems, it's almost the last thing he wrote, that are quite wonderful to read. I thought maybe I've got a vehicle here, or can create a vehicle for a voice, singing these.

There were eight very short poems and it seemed to me like I might have written something that had the perfect balance of structure. I mean, you hear a voice and immediately you're trying to hear what the voice is saying, but the voice is speaking nonsense, and that's a problem right there, because you don't know what the voice is singing about. So it's up to the music to maybe help out doing that, but the music itself is not exactly a conventional idiom. But the voice is being extremely expressive in its utterance – it's very forthright, it's very clear. It has movement, it has pitch, it has contour, it has nuance maybe, and it means something, but you don't know what it means, and I like that a lot. I like that it means something but you don't know what it is. And with luck, you'll take away the feeling that you know something. But it might take you awhile to figure out what you know from that experience. So that always seemed to me to work pretty well.

Are there connections to your opera, Zurich 1916*?*
Well that's kind of serendipitous because of finding this libretto for an imaginary opera by John Bentley Mays. That must have been about 85 I guess, and John wrote something that obviously had Gertrude Stein not lurking [laughing] in the background, you know pretty front and

[3] Claude Gauvreau (1925–1971).

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Example 1:
Christopher Butterfield, *Jappements à la lune*, p. 22

Example 2:
Christopher Butterfield, *Jappements à la lune*, p. 46

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centre, because of the repetition and the broken syntax. And also it was about this historical moment which always intrigues me, that Lenin and Hugo Ball were active on the same street in Zurich in the middle of the first war, and so here you have these two revolutionaries in completely different fields that lived basically down the street from each other. John had brought them together and seen both of them as revolutionaries who failed in a certain way, and that's always a very powerful idea, that the revolution never quite works, or it works in ways perhaps you didn't expect.

So again, that's based on text that's really quite problematic; it doesn't lend itself easily to a musical setting. Here are all these words and we've got to say them and, actually, they're going to sing them, and there's going to be music too. That's another way to get the thing out: just to have sheets of language coming at you.

I didn't make any attempt to sort it out as far as comprehension was concerned; in fact, I made it more difficult because it's very disjunct settings of breaking words and putting stresses in the wrong place. If you were lucky, you'd get enough material that you could actually put your own meaning together out of it.

Figure 1: *Zurich* 1916

And the Pavilion of Heavenly Trousers?
That's very much a process piece of finding two stories that are faintly exotic (in a very old-fashioned sense of the way the western world used to look at the eastern world and write about it) and just taking these two romantic stories and literally interleaving them, running them together, and then creating a new story out of that by reading it aloud. The whole thing is sort of nonsense, but extremely elaborate nonsense because you know that there are things being alluded to which you learn about, and so everything begins to . . . it's reflexive, it comes back on itself, and it endlessly complicates itself. It's a very rich kind of field to set up. And reading it on the page is one thing, but reading it aloud . . . 'cause it was recorded . . . took about 27 hours to recite.

How does the audience experience it?
Just through a loudspeaker.

And how long did the process of creating it take you?
Eight months. Every day for an hour, sit and write three pages by hand, going from book to book, sentence to sentence, and physically

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that's about all I could take 'cause my hand would just lock up after an hour of this writing.

Can you talk a little bit about Madame Wu said?

Well, that's the sequel! [laughs] That's also a process piece. One of the things I was taught by Rudolf was this kind of method for pitch class analysis by this Czech theorist/musicologist named Janeček (not Janáček, the composer).[4] It's kind of like set theory, but simpler. And what you get out of it is a very limited number of possible sonorities made of intervals. So it works out to about 350 . . . 352 actual chords, but then one of them is silence, that's the absence of any chord, and one of them is a totality, all 12 notes in a chromatic set. So there's this very limited set of sonorities you can use. *Madame Wu said* is a piano trio based on a couple of minutes of music using just the pitches in that set, whether it's a two-note set, three-note, four-note, five-note, six-note, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve-note set – and I got to about the 79th one, and I haven't done anything since (laughing) but I'm going to finish.

But you have presented it?

Oh yeah, the whole thing was actually part of a visual art show at the Victoria Art Gallery where the actual scored music was pinned up, as well as all the pages of all the sets yet to come. So I'd done up to 79, and then there were all these blank pages as far as 352. The existing music was played over a 12-hour period, because I'd decided that rather than playing it contiguously, I actually wanted a break between each section. So I made an arbitrary six-minute pause between each one, which was actually amazing, because you completely forgot what you'd heard. And it really upset the memory a little bit, because most music is based on memory for a listener, that's how you know music, you try to remember things that come back, and so on and so forth.

What is the intended length for the final version?

I honestly don't know, for some reason three days sticks in my mind. It all came about because one evening I was sitting with André Ristic, the pianist and composer. André, in those days, was playing with the Fibonacci Trio, and I said I've got this idea for this very, very long piano trio and he said, how long? hour? two hours? I think I might have had the three days in mind then, I'm not sure, or maybe a day, and he thought for a minute and he said, yep we can do that! [laughs] So that basically gave me permission to do it. But these big things are all long-term projects. The opera took 12 years from the time I started it. This project, it's a work-in-process, but 12 years. The interviews I did with composers 25 years ago have yet still to see the light of day, but I'm working on them! Some things take a very long time.

Is there anything you're working on now?

This installation piece that will go up at the Art Gallery of Ontario in the Fall. Sandra Meigs, who's a very well-known painter here, and teacher, has this big show at the AGO. We'd worked together a little bit in the past: she'd made images for me for a big piece I did of bizarre French children's stories[5]. . . So she wanted me to write some music and first of all it was music for the opening, and then

[4] Karel Janeček, theorist (1903–1974)

[5] *Contes pour enfants pas sages* was premiered in Toronto by Continuum Ensemble in 2012. It is an adaptation of Jacques Prévert's 1947 collection of stories by the same name.

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it was music for the show, and I said no, because I hate cheap loudspeakers in art galleries. And then I said if we have a large array of dipole loudspeakers, and very good amplification, and the things are disposed in the space rather than peripheral to the space (stuck on walls or high up by ceilings or whatever) so that people are actually in the sound, they can get very, very close to the source. The whole thing's based on tuning and critical band, things moving towards dissonance, and the kind of phenomena that come up through that. As well as this live brass trio that plays every afternoon at 4 o'clock for 15 minutes and disturbs this lovely meditative state.

How do you think you would be spending your time now, if you weren't a composer?

Oh god only knows! When I was younger, I remember thinking I should be a psychiatrist, until I found out you had to become a medical doctor. And then I remember discovering -- this is going to make me sound very morbid indeed! I found myself in the library, because I loved just poking through the university library, I would just see what was there. And I discovered the mortuary section, like the funeral business section, and so I read these exposés on the funeral business and thought, this is the worst thing I've ever heard of [laughing], I think I should go into the funeral business. I'll take over my parent's house, and there'll be cats [laughing]. And we'll just take over the bedrooms and people can be sort of laid out there. And people can come through and have a cup of tea you know, stroke the cats . . . the cats somehow seemed . . . I think that was when I was still in high school. So yeah, there were things along the way.

But I think the 15 years in Toronto . . . all I did was play in the band and try to pay the rent by waiting tables and doing odd jobs and then finally things kind of got back towards the musical world. And I remember I met a guy, Tom Sokolowski, who was producing a lot of theatre in Toronto and producing Murray Schaffer's big multimedia pieces, or spectacular pieces, and they wanted a music director for the one he wrote called *The Greatest Show*. That was a kind of carnival. Took place outside in Peterborough with all these side shows and it was all Murray's music. So Tom brought Murray down to my pad on Spadina Avenue, it was basically a kind of tenement, and Murray came up and we talked for a while. Murray's a kind of laconic guy and so Tom said 'what do you think' and he said, 'yeah, it's fine, it's fine, he can be the conductor', – 'cause I was reading Hermann Broch in those days and *Sleepwalkers* – 'any guy who's reading Hermann Broch is fine with me'. It's funny how things happen. And that's when I started to get back into composing again, and conducting, and all of a sudden it was commission time, and that was interesting, and then I left. They actually got me the job so I had to leave. That's what Bob Aitken always said, 'we liked you so much we got you a job 2700 miles away!' [laughing]. Yeah . . .

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