

## GENE PRITSKER: COMPOSER AND GUITARIST

Американский композитор и гитарист Джин Прицкер родился в Ленинграде (1971), через семь лет семья переехала в США. Он вырос в Нью-Йорке, получил музыкальное образование в Манхэттенской школе музыки (консерватории), обучаясь композиции у Джанпаоло Бракали. Три текста, публикуемые ниже, написаны им в манере, весьма контрастирующей стилю академических статей. Автор придерживается живого, неформального повествования.

Первый текст представляет собой интервью, где музыкант рассказывает о своей учёбе в Школе музыки, композиторском формировании, своей музыкальной деятельности и музыкальных пристрастиях (интервью у Джина Прицкера взял в 2015 году Марукка Рохас для дипломной работы на степень Бакалавра науки в области аудиопродукции Художественного института Лас Вегаса).

Во второй статье «Sound Liberation Movement» («Движение Освобождения звука») Прицкер освещает то новое направление музыки, которое он, по сути, представляет. Позиция автора такова: следует быть открытым для любого стиля классической и популярной музыки и не отгораживаться ни от какого её вида. Эту идею некоторые могут воспринять как утопическую, однако она находит практическую реализацию в политике концертных программ ряда концертных серий современной музыки в Нью-Йорке, в том числе и осуществлённых в разное время под руководством Прицкера. Имеются в виду его выступления с «Absolute Ensemble» («Абсолют ансамбль»), основанным вместе с живущим в США эстонским дирижёром Кристианом Ярви, а также возглавляемым им с 1990-х годов камерным ансамблем «Sound Liberation» («Освобождение звука»); деятельность концертной организации «Composers'

Concordance» («Композиторское созвучие»), где он состоял в администрации (с 2005) и затем выступил руководителем (2010), сменив на этом посту нью-йоркских композиторов Патрика Хардиша и Джозефа Персона, работая ныне вместе с коллегами Дэном Купером, Милицей Параносич, Питером Джарвисом, Светланой Буквич и Мелиссой Грей. Эстетическая платформа этих нью-йоркских очагов современной музыки – сочетание в одной программе самых разных стилистических направлений, их сближение и тем самым создание культурного диалога.

Третья статья «The Composer as Performer. When did composers become non-performers?» («Композитор как исполнитель. Когда композиторы перестали быть исполнителями?») представляет собой краткий исторический экскурс, где прослеживается история западной музыки на предмет утраты композиторами исполнительских навыков, а вместе с тем – и навыков импровизаторства, и более живого и гибкого подхода к интерпретации музыкального текста. Прицкер начинает очерк автобиографическими сведениями о собственном пути композитора и исполнителя, затем рассказывает о концерте, организованном им в рамках «Composers' Concordance» (2010), где композиторы выступали как исполнители. После этого подобные концерты, где выдерживается принцип выступлений композиторов-исполнителей, проводятся объединением «Composers' Concordance» ежегодно. Джин Прицкер призывает современных авторов не утрачивать способности игры на музыкальных инструментах и, тем самым, поддерживать многовековую традицию сочетания композиторских и исполнительских функций как единой составляющей музыкального искусства.

*Д-р Антон Ровнер*



## INTERVIEW WITH GENE PRITSKER

*What inspired you to become a musician in your youth?*

My parents were both musicians and at age 4 I took up the violin. Growing up in Russia it was very common for children to start music that early. When I immigrated to America I continued on the violin but soon found my passion in the guitar, through heavy metal music. I was excellent on the guitar for a while, taking up classical guitar and expanding my musical exposure, then I started writing music and realized that that was my calling. I went to the Preparatory Division of Manhattan School of Music, and a teacher there really inspired me. One of my early inspirational moments was at that school; I was singing Mendelssohn's 'Walpurgis Night' cantata in the chorus and had to stop singing and just listen to the amazing music and how it was put together, I knew then this is what I wanted to do. Other early inspirations was listening to the Rite of Spring and not understanding it, but then I would listen over and over until finally it made sense to me, this fascinated me, how music can challenge you and how YOU have to rise to the occasion to understand this greatness. Also Franz Zappa's music was a great influence, I knew when I hear it that that was my language, an eclectic culmination of all of the world's sounds through my own personal voice.

*How did you pursue your goals so that you may achieve them?*

I went to a really great school for college, Manhattan School of Music, which is one of the top music schools in America, I had a great teacher, Giampaolo Bracali, and I realized early on that nothing will be handed to me, that everything I want to achieve I have to do myself. In school I had many compositions performed, since there were all these musicians at my disposal for free, I probably broke the record of amount of concerts one composition student produced. I also started a group called Absolute Ensemble (grammy nominated) with my friend Kristjan Jarvi, and made lots and lots of connections with many different types of musicians. To this day I work with many people that I met in those 4 years of college and we still tour with Absolute Ensemble around the world, at least once a year. After college I continued producing concerts started another group called Sound Liberation, an eclectic hip-hop/jazz/rock etc. band and later on took over as the director

of a 30 year old contemporary music presenting organization called Composers Concordance, we produce approximately 15 concerts a year and I have music on all of them. So basically I am a 'do it yourself' type of person, I do not wait for people to ask me to play my music (though they do with more and more frequency) I will just produce the concert, start the group, and make it happen, cause the end result for me always has to be; me writing music and it being premiered and hopefully even performed multiple times.

*Whom or what influenced your passion for composing great and beautiful music?*

Like I mentioned a little above the 3 composers whom inspired me the most are: 1. Felix Mendelssohn – for his amazing melodic language, I find Mendelssohn's melodies to be the most beautiful ever written, of course I love a Beethoven, Bach and Mozart tune but there are a few melodies by Mendelssohn that are just out of this world. 2. Igor Stravinsky – for his pure originality and unique voice, everything he writes you know is Stravinsky, also his rhythmic structure and harmonic experimentation are very influential on me. 3. Franz Zappa – for his eclectic outlook on the world of music and the ability to combine cultures and genres seamlessly and uniquely. I do this quite a bit, where I ask myself "what if?", for example my first big orchestral work starts with a question "what if you have a 10 minute heavy metal, double bass drum on the drum set, music for full orchestra"? – the result was my piece 'Pretty Maidens Slam Dancing.' A play on Stravinsky 'Dance of the pretty maidens' and using the melody from the 'Rite of Spring' as an inversion and the assumption that the first great scandal of the 20th century was the premiere of the Rite of Spring' in 1913 in Paris.

*What qualities or virtues would you look for in a musician or sound engineer?*

I like to work with engineers who know their stuff, have everything set up correctly, who do not waste time and who move to as close to my speed as possible. Of course if an engineer can read a score along with me while recording the music this would be very helpful but most importantly is being able to get a great sound by knowing exact mike placements, levels and the mastery of the board that they are using. I have worked with great engineers but no matter how great they are if they

waste time on playing with their gear while the musicians and I sit there and wait this is always the worst.

*What are your greatest achievements you are most proud of, and your worst obstacles you've had to overcome in your career?*

I have over 500 pieces of music, so that in itself is an achievement I am very proud of. One recent piece of mine is the 'Cloud Atlas Symphony' is a piece I am very proud of, it is based on some of the melodic material from the motion picture Cloud Atlas, which I orchestrated and the 6th movement of the Symphony is featured in the closing credits of the film. We recorded it and it will hopefully come out on a commercial recording in the near future. I also just released a one hour chamber opera called 'Manhattan in Charcoal' which I love very much. In past years I have had many great performances, a few that stick out as highlights include '3 Poems from Flowers of Evil' performed at the Bremen Music Festival with the Latvian National Choir, Absolute Ensemble and me as Di.J. soloist, My violin and Di.J. concerto we performed last year in Seoul 'Mind I Have a Question For You', My band Sound Liberation performing my piece 'The Rite - Through an Eclectic Spectrum' at the 2014 Outreach Festival – My eclectic answer to Stravinsky's the Rite of Spring. As far as other accomplishments – I have my own record label Composers Concordance

Records and have been steadily releasing albums of my and other people's music for 3 years. We produce 15–20 concerts n NYC a year, travel with various ensembles and perform at various festivals around the world and as a side job orchestrate major Hollywood movies. Next on coming up is called 'Hologram for a King' starring Tom Hanks.

*What advice would you give a musician and Audio Production major to help him succeed in earning his degree as well as success in the professional field?*

In your early years make lots and lots of connections to artistic people who have a similar outlook on art as you. Of course, first you must form an outlook, think about aesthetics, ask the important questions why? – Why are you making music, Why is it important, why is this is the only possible answer to your life's calling. and after you formed your outlook and aesthetics, and found the people around you who share similar ideas ask: How? – How do I go from here to here in a bigger picture, How do I achieve this one project, this next project etc. How do I make others understand my ideas. Besides making connections also learn the basics really well, learn the history – now did these basics we are learning become basics, what makes them good how to I experiment and establish my own basics that people will be studying in the future. What can I do that is revolutionary, yet useful.

## **Gene Pritsker** **SOUND LIBERATION MOVEMENT**

Joseph Pehrson writes about programming diversity and the need to break barriers between musical forms and styles. I call this the Sound Liberation Movement, in my opinion this is the logical next step in the evolution of Music. The basic principle of the Sound Liberation Movement is that all music is created from the same material: sound vibrations. It may be organized differently, it may be played by an assortment of different instruments, various traditions may have their own characteristic grooves, feels, moods, etc. But what it comes down to is that all of sound may be placed under the general heading of music. People's prejudice towards certain types of music is usually the result of personal, political, economical, geographical, or a number of other musically unrelated factors.

You only jeopardize your own understanding of music by not opening up to the full scope that

music as an art form has to offer. Lutheran historian Wolfgang Printz von Waldthurm said the following in his book of 1690: "Anyone who does not like all Music is an enemy of Music". His three categories are as follows: 1. Those who hate all of music. several figures in Roman and Turkish history, also Francois I of France. 2. Those who approve of only certain kinds of music. Plato heads the list, together with the Lacedaemonians, who permit no innovation; Aristotle and other Athenians who did not like the flute; Zwingli, who permitted no music in church, etc. 3. Those who despise hard working MUSIKANTEN, and like virtuosity."

The 21st century musician is a person who is familiar, if not a master of, all the musical traditions and styles. Also, he is a person who is constantly searching to expand those traditions and his/her own knowledge. The 21st century

composer is a person who is familiar with as much music as possible in one life time, a person who is knowledgeable enough to be able to write in any tradition and style, and whose own work reflects the diversity and multiculturalism of our time. The 21st century listener is a person who is open enough to enjoy and understand all music, intelligent enough to be able to appreciate more than one or two types of genres. As for people who are programming concerts, I just want to ask you all to open up your ears, listen to what is out there. Most new music concerts have only new music by conservatory trained composers, many of them who write like their predecessors. To tell them apart mostly is impossible. I usually

get bored at these types of performances, for me there is a serious lack of diversity. There is a lot of other “new music” out there, do not be scared of it, program it. Hip-hop, various rock forms, new compositions from other countries, popular music from other traditions, our own jazz, electronic music, dance hall electronics, Caribbean music like reggae and son, etc. Also do not hesitate to program older music, not only the popular pieces we have chosen as standard repertoire, but lesser known composers, do not be scared of it, program it. New music connoisseurs, do not be scared of it, revue it. Performers, do not be scared of it, play it. There is no need for us in this day and age to constrict ourselves to anything, it is all good.

**Gene Pritsker**

### **THE COMPOSER AS PERFORMER. WHEN DID COMPOSERS BECOME NON-PERFORMERS?**

I started playing violin at age four, piano at ten and discovered the guitar at age twelve. I locked myself in a room for five years or so and practiced like a madman. In my late teens I discovered composition and this became my obsession. Practicing scales and constantly building technique came to a stop while figuring out how to notate the music I was inventing became my primary course of study. I am sure most composers start off their musical journeys by picking up an instrument as a child and learning to master it. However, it seems that more and more, composers do not perform on their first chosen musical vehicle and rather immerse themselves entirely in their scores, never setting foot on the stage from which their music emanates.

I found this to be true and confusing when I went to college at The Manhattan School of Music as a composition major. Many of my colleagues did not really possess much mastery over any instrument and most certainly did not perform the music they were writing. I had many concerts in my four years at MSM, and I made sure that the composers who did possess proficiency on an instrument were part of these performances. Two composers I met there were singer Charles Coleman and pianist Luis Andrei Cobo. Charles has premiered many of my pieces and is the singer in my chamber hip-hop ensemble Sound Liberation; Luis is a technically proficient pianist, and back in our MSM days, he premiered a bunch of my music.

When did composers become non-performers? We can trace the tradition of composer-as-performer back to the beginnings of western classical music. Medieval and Renaissance singer-composers, baroque church organist-composers, classical prodigies like Mozart, Beethoven performing his piano concertos (and improvising cadenzas), Chopin, Liszt, Mendelssohn, Wagner...!!! Wagner? What instrument did Wagner play? What about Schoenberg? Babbitt? It seems that towards the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, as scores became more intricate and precise, composers were becoming more and more immersed in their written notes and perhaps any passion that they had as a child for a musical instrument dissipated. Of course, some would conduct their music and find their way on to the stage, but not many were instrumentalists interpreting their own compositions.

In the past fifty years or so this changed. I believe that jazz and rock music, where improvisation is essential, gave composers of my generation an ambition to learn how to play an instrument well, and to continue playing even after the composition bug bit us. In my band Sound Liberation I not only write all the music but also play guitar, rap and occasionally conduct. Three other members of my band are also composers-performers: singer-composer Charles Coleman, bassist-composer Dan Cooper and trumpeter-composer Franz Hackl. Not to mention some



of the other members of the band who are now becoming interested in composition, most notably cellist David Gotay, drummer David Rozenblatt, singer Chanda Rule, guitarist Greg Baker and bassist Mat Fieldes.

Other organizations that I am associated with also have composers who perform: In the organization Composers Concordance, founding Director Joseph Pehrson has been involved in performances, and at one point even made a living as a pianist in New York. In the chamber collective The International Street Cannibals we have many composers who present their own work, Arthur Kampela, Dary John Mizelle, Daniel Schnyder, and of course we have many performers who compose and present many of their own pieces at ISC concerts: co-director Dan Barrett, Dave Taylor, John Clark, Melanie Mitrano to name a few.

I am always concerned about quality though. In both cases, composers who do not practice their instrument enough for performing and performers who have not immersed themselves in the study of composition and esthetics writing music. I have observed dilettante performances and compositions from both types. For me, the performer as a bad composer is the worst of the two. Too many performers later in life decide that they have something to say musically and start trying to notate and develop their ideas. This in itself is fine, as long as they have time for trial and error to test and tone their skills in a student-like atmosphere, but many of them are already on the professional concert circuit, so these undeveloped amateur compositions wind up on professional concerts along side with accomplished and polished composers. For me the result is usually frustrating. Just because you figure out how to notate music does not make you a composer, just because you could write a melody and a chord progression does not make you a composer, just because you figured out how to combine some instruments to make a color does not make you a composer, etc. Just because you can play a few scales on the piano does not make you a pianist, just because you can produce a sound on the cello does not make you a cellist, etc. Craft sometimes is missing, and for me it is always clear as day when a performer is not ready to present a composition. I have also heard composers who do not study their instruments enough and give bad performances. This though is forgivable, since usually the performances they are presenting are of their own music, and sometimes it is hard to tell

whether it is truly a bad performance or this is what the composer intended.

So it seems we went from an age when all composers were performers, even some virtuosos, and performers (with a few exceptions) did not attempt composition on a whim, to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when composers mostly stuck to the score and performers were too busy interpreting these demanding compositions, to the mid 20th century, when African-influenced musical forms demanded that everyone improvised, to today, when we have composer/performers and composer-as-performer, where the line is getting blurry and the quality of both is becoming jeopardized.

But I believe the composer-as-performer tradition is strong and that it will solve the quality problem and weed out the bad performer/composer. There is a beauty in a composer interpreting his/her own work. I find that when I practice a guitar part I wrote, I take extra care that it is precise and clean. When I write a guitar part that I know I will be performing, I make sure I can learn and execute it, and sometimes I even make it a bit easier depending on my schedule and the amount of time I will have to put into practicing it. So the composer as a good performer is certainly possible and necessary, providing composers approach this carefully and intelligently. The performer as composer on the other hand is tricky. Unless performers put in real time and study, real thought and ask themselves the most important compositional question "why?", we will hear many more amateur compositions on concerts we attend in the future.

I had this idea for an event for a long time. Why not have a concert made up entirely of composers performing their own works? On January 31st, 2010 Composers Concordance, a group I co-direct, presented such a program at the club Drom in New York. I wanted to explore the relationship between composers and their instruments, as well as how they go about writing music in which they know that they will be the performers. Dan Cooper, another co-director, and I discussed this concert and decided that we know so many composer-performers that this should be a marathon. 'Composers Play Composers Marathon' featured 23 composer-performers playing four-minute compositions. This was a multimedia event featuring video artists Astrid Steiner and Carmen Kordas providing the visual background to this 3 hour performance.

Five of the directors of Composers Concordance: Dan Cooper, Joe Pehrson, Pat Hardish, Bill Rhoads and I chose 140 composers, and on a random day and time I e-mailed them all, inviting them to participate. The first 23 to respond would be part of this show. This random criteria – being by your computer by chance and responding to my e-mail, was impartial and exciting. Within two hours we had all 23 composers. We feel that this event, in addition to showcasing many composers, which is in the mission statement of Composers Concordance, is also thematically unusual and eclectic. We intend to make this marathon an annual event and hope to feature many more composers in the years to come. So, will a concert like this encourage composers to keep practicing their instruments, and make sure they are still capable of performing when my e-mail arrives? We sure hope so.

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I want to boost the performing energies of composers and show them that musical creation has many outlets. Besides concerts like the ‘Composers Play Composers Marathon’, I have a series of compositions called Sound Liberation Improvisations (SLI) in which the musicians are given a musical idea, rule, germ of a concept, game etc., and the performers involved improvise and create a piece of music based on these musical recommendations. It makes everyone involved a composer-performer. I would like to present a concert where I get a bunch of composers to perform these SLIs. The tradition of composer-as-performer should certainly continue to grow. I myself hope to lead by example and keep on producing concerts where composers perform, and perhaps in the process, they will rediscover themselves and their original musical passions.

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