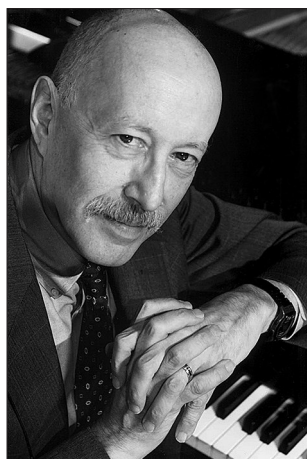


**ANDREW THOMAS – COMPOSER, PIANIST, CONDUCTOR  
AND COMPOSITION TEACHER**

Журнал «Проблемы музыкальной науки» представляет читателям американского композитора, пианиста и дирижёра Эндрю Томаса, преподавателя «Pre-College Division» («Субботняя школа») Джульярдской школы в Нью-Йорке. Эндрю Томас обучался в Джульярдской школе у таких видных композиторов, как Бэррил Филлипс, Эллиотт Картер, Отто Люнинг и Лючано Берио. Музыка Эндрю Томаса в большей степени придерживается диатонической гармонии, с широким использованием хроматики. Ей присущи элементы неоклассической театральности и неоромантической эмоциональной выразительности. Как композитор он прошёл различные стадии творческого развития, прежде чем установился его стиль. На музыку Томаса оказала большое влияние этническая музыка азиатских стран – Ближнего Востока, Китая, Кореи, Японии. Особую известность ему принесли произведения для маримбы – соло и в сочетании с другими инструментами. Его сочинение «Мерлин» для маримбы облетело земной шар, став едва ли не самым исполняемым для этого инструмента. В 2000-е годы оно прозвучало в Рахманиновском зале (Москва). Исполнивший его перкуссионист Петр Главатских позже обмолвился, что ноты этой пьесы он получил у музыкантов из Сибири. Концерт для маримбы «Loving Mad Tom» Томаса



Andrew Thomas.  
Photo by Howard Kessler

был исполнен, в частности, в Германии (Немецкий оркестр Берлина под управлением Владимира Ашкенази, солистка Эвелин Гленни), Корее (дирижировал сам композитор, солист Саймон Бойер).

Эндрю Томас не в меньшей степени проявил себя как педагог, обучая молодых композиторов в «Pre-College Division» Джульярдской школы. В этом качестве его отличает исключительная доброта, деликатность манеры преподавания, внимательность по отношению к ученикам, стремление помочь им найти и развить собственный индивидуальный композиторский голос. Многие из учеников Томаса впоследствии стали известными композиторами и активными музыкальными деятелями США и других стран. Они сохраняют дружеские отношения с преподавателем. В 1980-х годах в Pre-College Division Джульярдской школы у Эндрю Томаса обучался композитор автор этих строк. В 2000-е годы Томас совершал множество поездок в Китай, где читал лекции, давал мастер-классы и дирижировал исполнением собственных сочинений, а также музыки своих учеников и ряда китайских композиторов. Об этом и о многом другом Эндрю Томас поделился своими мыслями со мной в беседе, которая состоялась у него дома на 72-й улице Манхэттана в конце марта 2016 года.

*Д-р Антон Ровнер*

We would like to present our readers with an interview with American composer Andrew Thomas, who is a composition teacher at the Pre-College Division of the Juilliard School in New York. Andrew Thomas studied at the Juilliard School with such famous composers as Burrill Phillips, Otto Luening, Elliott Carter and Luciano Berio. His music for the most part is endowed with a tonal musical language, albeit with a generous addition

of chromatic harmonies. It combines elements of neoclassical theatricality with neo-romantic expressivity. He had passed through various stages of development as a composer, before achieving the ultimate formation of his current musical style. Among the many influences on his music especially prominent was that of ethnic folk music from various parts of Asia – the Middle East, China, Korea and Japan. The composer has received special

recognition around the world for his music for the marimba – both solo and with other instruments. His “Merlin” for solo marimba has been performed throughout the world, having become one of the most performed compositions for the instrument. It was recently performed in Moscow at the Rachmaninoff Hall of the Conservatory by percussionist Piotr Glavatskikh, who mentioned that he had received the score of the composition from Siberia. His Concerto for Marimba and Orchestra “Loving Mad Tom” has been performed in a number of countries, most notably, in Germany by the Deutsche Orchester Berlin under the direction of Vladimir Ashkenazy with Evelyn Glennie as soloist, and in Korea with Simon Boyer as soloist, conducted by the composer.

Andrew Thomas has demonstrated himself no less prominently as a teacher for school-age composers at the Pre-College Division of the Juilliard School. His teaching manner is characterized by a

kind and attentive attitude towards his students, his urge to help them find and develop their own musical voice and a very delicate and friendly manner of teaching. Many of his students have subsequently become famous composers and active musical figures in the United States and other countries. Many of them have maintained very friendly relations with their teacher. I was one of Andrew Thomas’ composition students at the Pre-College Division of the Juilliard School in the 1980s. In the 2000s the composer made a number of trips to China, where he read lectures on music, gave master-classes and conducted orchestras performing his compositions, as well as those of his students and well-known Chinese composers. Dr. Thomas shared his thoughts about all of this and about many other things in his interview, which I took from him at his home on West 72nd Street in Manhattan in late March 2016.

*Dr. Anton Rovner*

*Could you tell me about where you studied, who were your teachers, and what were some of your first musical influences?*

I grew up in upstate New York. My father taught at Cornell University, and all my early musical training took place in the town of Ithaca, where Cornell is located. I studied piano with a local private teacher, Otto Stahl. Although he was not very good as a piano instructor, he was an interesting composer, and he gave me my first writing lessons. He also introduced me to the music of early 20th century composers, such as Bartok, Hindemith, Stravinsky and others. After I finished high school, I went to Cornell University for my undergraduate studies, working with Karel Husa. He was a wonderful teacher and musician, and he also gave me my first lessons in conducting. When I graduated from Cornell, he arranged for me to study with Nadia Boulanger in Paris. I spent two years in Paris in the early 1960s learning from her. Nadia Boulanger was an amazing teacher with remarkable skills at revealing the central aspects of her student’s personalities and strengths. In her studio, I began to get a coherent sense of myself as a musician and composer. She also was terrifyingly demanding on the subjects of basic technique – harmony, theory, counterpoint. I worked privately with her for two years until I was drafted into the United States Army, and I had to return back home.

In the army I wound up teaching music at the band – training unit at Fort Dix, New Jersey for two years. After I was freed from my military commitment, I moved to New York City – an important choice for my career direction. At the end of my army service I had auditioned for the opera conducting program at Bloomington, Indiana, and had been accepted. However I decided that I did not want to go back to the kind of small-town university environment I grew up in, even though the school was a conservatory.

In New York City, I worked for several years for conductor Thomas Dunn at the Festival Orchestra, which was one of the best free-lance ensembles in Manhattan. Then, when Maestro Dunn moved to Boston to become the director of the Handel and Haydn Society, I stayed in New York and applied for graduate studies at the Juilliard School, where I earned my Master’s and Doctoral degrees. At Juilliard I had several composition teachers, including Burrill Phillips, Otto Luening, and then, during my doctoral studies, Luciano Berio and Elliott Carter. They were wonderful teachers and the graduate course work was challenging and stimulating.

I also retain a feeling of loss from that period. One year, I was supposed to study with Hall Overton, a brilliant composer of both jazz and concert music. With him, I felt I had found a teacher who really

understood me. The chemistry was extraordinary, and I felt that I was discovering my central self as a composer. Unfortunately, Hall died unexpectedly and I experienced the loss of an untraveled road.

In 1970, while I was still a graduate student at Juilliard, shortly after Hall Overton died, a composition teacher position opened at the Pre-College Division. It was offered to me, and I accepted it, thinking that I would work at this job for a couple of years – and now it is forty-six years later, and I am still teaching at the Pre-College. I remember that I was very much afraid in the beginning. I was teaching young students who were almost my age. They had been trained as concert artists in a much more efficient and skilled manner than I had been. As far as I could see, they were able to play circles around me. What did I have to offer these prodigies? I remember introducing myself to a student in one of my first classes, talking for a lengthy period, basically telling her everything that I knew about music, looking at my watch and realizing that only ten minutes had passed! Fortunately, I remembered my lessons with Karel Husa and Nadia Boulanger, and I embraced a central insight: my job was to *listen* even more than to talk. I try to describe to the student his or her central abilities, and then, building on their foundation (in whatever style they are working) to expand their musical horizons. This procedure has given me a relaxed, yet disciplined environment to develop a student's creativity, starting from *their* foundation and musical personality. I have learned from my students even more than they have learned from me. I am delighted that many of my students, including you, Anton, have become close friends and colleagues, with whom I have had lifelong relationships.

*Could you tell us about your music and what style it adheres to? As I understand, you had different teachers who followed different musical paths, and you had different stylistic periods during the course of your composing activities.*

I grew up in the 1940s, and I was a teenager in the 1950s, during the peak of the American symphonic tradition in composition, featuring composers like Roy Harris, Peter Mennin and Aaron Copland. I expected that this was the world I was going to grow up into. But by the time I came into graduate school, all that tradition had been swept aside, and everyone was following the new mantras of Pierre Boulez and Karlheinz Stockhausen. In my late twenties, and not wanting to seem old-fashioned, I adapted to this new environment. However, even

though I was expanding my own musical horizons, I never felt totally comfortable in atonal writing. During my serial studies I would also write other compositions that were tonal, which I did not show my composition teachers at Juilliard. I felt that my tonal works represented my true style *more* than my dodecaphonic works. Finishing graduate studies, I drifted away from serial writing to an extended type of diatonicism, sometimes bordering on chromaticism with tonal centrality. Theatricality is vitally important to my music. I want to attract the listener with dramatic gestures and an architectural structure of interesting complexity. I also value a constant sense of forward motion and development. As an adult in my mid-70s, I am enjoying being myself in my music and I am not worrying too much about whether it 'fits in' to current styles or perceptions.

*Could you cite some examples of any particular compositions you wrote a while ago or recently, and describe their language and what they express?*

World music provided a counterbalance to my graduate composition studies at Juilliard. I was particularly keen on Middle Eastern, Turkish, Japanese and Chinese music, as well as the works of a few Western composers such as George Crumb. I have never written a note that sounded like Crumb's music, but he exerted a tremendous influence on me because he was able to carve out a musical language that was his own and that had nothing to do with what the other composers of his time were writing. I found that achievement extremely liberating. I have played some of his scores, and to this day I find his music haunting and gorgeous.

During that period I was deeply interested by the cultures of other countries, particularly, non-Western ones. They offered possibilities that I was not hearing at school. In 1972 I wrote a one-act opera "The Death of Yukio Mishima" about the suicide of the Japanese writer, poet, playwright, actor, film director and militarist. The opera was recorded for Opus One Records in 1973. In this work I created a Western equivalent of a Japanese Gagaku ensemble with the aid of string instruments, a couple of wind instruments, piano, organ, percussion and harp. Even though Yukio Mishima was a man, his role was sung by a soprano, to emphasize the feminine aspect of his character. The soprano was moved around on the stage by black-hooded dancers, as if she were a Bunraku puppet, while she was singing the music. I studied the recordings of many traditional Japanese ensembles, and I paid homage

to Yukio Mishima with my own interpretation of this complex traditional culture. The scores employ twelve-tone techniques and stylizations of Japanese music at the same time – a kind of blend I find fascinating.

I worked with Isabelle Ganz, a singer and flutist who founded the Alhambra ensemble, where she sang and played the flute. In 1987 I composed a set of songs for her: *Seven Songs on poems of Lope de Vega Carpio*. The work is scored for alto voice, Harp, Oud, and Vielle. During the composition, I studied Middle Eastern drumming techniques, including the doumbek and I was heavily influenced by those Middle Eastern traditions.

My spouse, poet and artist Howard Kessler, and I worked for seven years, from 2003 to 2010 on *Focus of the Heart*, an evening length ballet that was commissioned for performances in China. I scored the music for a full traditional Chinese orchestra plus a full Western symphony orchestra. Howard Kessler wrote the story and designed the scenery and costumes. In order to obtain the necessary knowledge to write this project, I listened to a tremendous amount of traditional Chinese music, especially the type that performed by Chinese ensembles from the rural areas – not the slick commercial type of music that one hears in Macao and other tourist venues, but the really rough country bands. This is tremendously exciting and moving music. I would analyze a song that I liked, and write out the entire ensemble as a musical dictation, so that I knew all the different elements of the song and how the musicians were performing it. The traditional melodies are performed as heterophonic music, featuring single lines that are decorated by the other instruments. I would thoroughly study the musical language of a particular Chinese song, throw all my notes and transcriptions out, and then write my own music from scratch, using the techniques I had learned. I absorbed a lot from such activities. This particular project really enriched my appreciation of the varieties of traditional Chinese music - songs which are dramatic, unique, often hugely sophisticated, and emotionally moving.

*Among your earlier works is a composition for two pianos called “An Wasserflussen Babylon,” which features a unusual combination of tonal and twelve-tone writing. Since you mentioned that there was a discrepancy between the twelve-tone and avant-garde styles of Boulez and Stockhausen, which you briefly turned to, and the tonal music, which you were closer to, “An Wasserflussen*

*Babylon” provides a striking juxtaposition between the opposing musical languages of tonality and twelve-tone writing. It starts with a quotation of the Bach chorale of the same name, and then gradually but rather swiftly changes to serial music, and then returns to tonality towards the end of the composition. Could you tell us about this work?*

I wrote “An Wasserflussen Babylon” in 1973, and in the same year recorded it for Opus One Records. Andrew Violette, a wonderful pianist and composer and I made the recording. That was an interesting experiment. because I was actually using techniques that Charles Wuorinen has developed, which he describes in his book “*Simple Composition*.” The techniques involve pitch-classes, which generate rhythms as well. The number of intervals in a particular pitch-class is transferred to a number of rhythmical units of a particular duration, and then to the number of time-units, such as measures or groups of measures in a more lengthy section of the music. So the composition, in a sense, is derived from a single equation, which covers every element of the work, except for the beginning and certain fragments of the work near the end. I started with the chorale all by itself. Then, as the chorale advances, the voices, one after another, gradually take on the time-pointing feature, and the initial diatonicism dissolves into a completely non-tonal spectrum. Ultimately, the composition ends in a sort of major chord, since the serial writing becomes totally dissolved at the end. The transformation in the beginning is wondrously strange, and hints of the chorale throughout the work and more openly at the end add nuance to the rigor of the tone rows.

*You have earned a reputation for writing for the marimba. One of your works that has received performances all over the world is “Merlin” for solo marimba. I heard it played in Moscow at the Rachmaninoff Hall by Russian percussionist Piotr Glavatskikh, who later told me that the score of this composition was given to him in Siberia! I presume “Merlin” has also been performed in many other countries as well. Could you tell us about this piece?*

I have written a whole series of compositions for marimba. ‘Merlin’ is the most famous one. I wrote it in 1983, and it has become a world standard for players in many countries. There are many video recordings of different performances, which can be found on Youtube. I composed the score for William Moersch, at that time a brilliant free-lance percussionist in New York who has commissioned countless works for marimba and other percussion



instruments. William became a faculty member at the University of Illinois, where he has taught for several decades. ‘Merlin’ is in two movements. When I finished the first, I sent it to Bill. He said, “It is beautiful, but very easy. Will the second movement be harder?” I promised him that the second movement would be much more complex technically, which it really is – in fact, it is a fiendishly difficult piece. Then he wrote me a letter, indicating that he liked the work, and asking me, what I was going to call it. At first I thought I would title it “Music for Marimba,” but Bill wrote back, objecting, stating that ‘I WILL NEVER PREMIERE A WORK WITH A TITLE LIKE THAT!’ I realized then, that a short time before I started composing the music, I had been reading a long narrative poem “Merlin” by Edwin Arlington Robinson, who was a late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century English poet. A lot of the mood and atmosphere of the music came from that poem. As a result, I took the title “Merlin”, and included a suggestive quote from the poem for each of the movements. I also know now, that I was grieving the death of my mother when writing this composition.

*You have written a number of other compositions involving the marimba as well. Could you tell us about them?*

I have composed numerous scores for marimba, including works for solo marimba, marimba and violin, marimba and cello and two marimbas. The latter piece is called “Three Transformations,” and it was also written for William Moersch. In 1993 he got married, and I composed a transformation of a Bach Prelude for him and his wife. My score was originally for marimba and harpsichord, since William’s wife Charlotte is a harpsichordist. I wrote the music in the following way: I took one of the Preludes from Bach’s Well-Tempered Clavier, which originally was in the meter of 3/4. I wanted to avoid composing standard clichéd “elevator music” for Bach, which is so easy to write. You don’t touch the music, but you add a ‘groovy’ beat to be hip and slick. In order to present myself with a challenge, I changed the meter from 3/4 to 4/4. To do this, I moved the bar-line in the music, so that there would be a new measure every **four** beats. This, of course, disrupts the harmonic rhythm of the piece entirely, but I was able to make the music sound well in the new time signature. And I turned the Prelude into a kind of slow samba.

After writing this piece, I was introduced to Nancy Zeltsman, one of the most brilliant marimba

players in the world, and a renowned advocate of the marimba as a serious concert instrument. She teaches in Boston. She took an interest in the Prelude, and she told me about her marimba duo group. So I decided to rescore the Prelude and pick two other pieces by Bach to make a three-movement work for Nancy. The first movement is a reorchestration of Bill Moersch’s wedding piece, and it has a larky feeling of a wedding celebration. I titled it “*Lord Cavendish Strikes the Right Note.*” The second movement is a tango, which I called “*Pedro and Olga Learn to Dance.*” This title came from a neon sign for a dance studio on Broadway and West 80<sup>th</sup> street in New York City. The last movement was called “*Rumbarubio,*” and that was because Nancy’s group was called Madam Rubio. The words “Madam Rubio” are an anagram of “Marimba Duo.” All three movements use the same technique of taking a Bach piece with a 3/4 time signature, transcribing it for two marimbas and changing the meter into a 4/4 time signature. The score really dances.

In 1991 I wrote a piece for marimba and violin called “*The Great Spangled Fritillary*” that was premiered by Nancy Zeltsman on the marimba and Sharon Leventhal on the violin. The great spangled fritillary is the name of a special species of butterfly. I dedicated the score to both of these musicians, who at that time comprised a duo called “Marimolin.” ‘Gentle Reader’ will have no problem figuring out the origin of the group’s title! While I was composing the music, I asked contemporary English poet Christopher Hewitt to write a poem for the score that would also serve as program notes for the music. Christopher succeeded brilliantly with a poem that is funny, evocative, touching, and beautiful. The music blooms from his words. The score and the poem alternate fast and slow sections describing the life-process of the great-spangled fritillary. The names of the respective sections are: “In the Cocoon,” “Birth,” “Drying the Wings” and “Under the Full Moon.” The mood of the music is both lively and grotesque, and the music presents some bright, demanding parts for the players to demonstrate their virtuosity. I also wrote a composition for cello and marimba called “*Moon’s Ending,*” in which the low-to-middle register of the cello is blended with the marimba part, usually in the same registers. The music features some virtuosic interplay between the two instruments. In 1986 I composed a work for marimba and vibraphone called “*Brief, on a Flying Night,*” which was inspired by a poem by Alice

Meynell. In this piece, the agile and moderately dry sound of the marimba is juxtaposed with the sustained, reverberating sounds of the vibraphone. The combination of the timbres of these two instruments, which are somewhat similar to each other and, at the same time, completely different, provides a great deal of the color of the piece, as does the use of various contrasting textures, such as chords, repeated arpeggios and dynamic scalar passages. I composed “*Valse triste*” for the brilliant young marimba soloist Simon Boyar. And “*Wind*” for the brilliant marimba soloist Makoto Nakura. Both of these works have poems by Howard Kessler.

*Could you tell us about your Marimba Concerto, subtitled “Loving Mad Tom”? As I know, this work has received a number of major performances, not only in the United States, but also in other countries as well.*

I wrote my Marimba Concerto in 1989. I took the sub-title, “Loving Mad Tom” from an 18<sup>th</sup> Century English anonymous poem that presents the extravagant speech of a crazed beggar who is sharing his experiences as a homeless person. First he is in front of a house, begging for food, then he is in jail, and at the end of the poem he is back on the road again. The composition is in four contrasting movements, which present an assortment of colorful timbres in the orchestra, providing the solo marimba part with a varied background for the marimba’s extremely virtuosic passages. The first two movements are fast and rhythmically agile, with a mood that is simultaneously jovial and grotesque. The third movement, in prison, starts slowly and mysteriously with eerie and dramatic effects in the orchestra, with the solo marimba evoking lonely and violent moods. The fourth movement returns to the energetic, swift mood of the first two movements, bringing the whole work to an energetic conclusion.

The concerto was yet another commission from William Moersch, and the Shreveport Symphony Orchestra in Louisiana premiered it in 1990 with Peter Leonard conducting and William as the magnificent soloist. In “*Loving Mad Tom*” I found a theatrical voice in me that was simultaneously dark and funny. The work remains fresh for me. The concerto has received a number of performances, including those by Evelyn Glennie (Marimba) and Vladimir Ashkenazy (conductor) with the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin in 1998. In 2005 I conducted it in Korea with the young Simon Boyar, who performed it brilliantly. In 2006, Simon and I recorded the work with the Polish State Radio

Symphony for Opus One Records. On the same recording project, Simon, David Leisner (guitar) and I (conductor) recorded my concerto for guitar, percussion and string orchestra ‘*The Heroic Triad*’ – a work about the three cultures in Santa Fe, New Mexico: the Native American, the Spanish, and the Anglo.

*Could you tell us about your composition for solo piano “Music at Twilight”?*

“Music at Twilight” is a virtuoso composition for solo piano. I wrote it in 1986 for the pianist/composer Jed Distler, who previously, studied composition with me at the Juilliard Pre-College. Jed is another one of my students who has become a colleague and a close friend. The music starts as a work of homage to the Fauré Nocturnes for piano, which I was studying at the time. Though being essentially tonal and romantic in its style, the music brings in dissonant passages towards the middle and end of the piece, this juxtaposition serving as an additional dramatic element. There is a very poetic opening, very fast-moving, quiet and rather French-sounding, with elaborate piano textures, a middle section that is harmonically more dissonant, and continuing with a return of the French music, which is subsequently dislodged violently by crashing dissonant chords, and finally, presenting a very sad ending. “Music at Twilight” is a powerful piece, both technically and in terms of its emotional content. I have also performed it myself in a number of contemporary music concerts.

*You have already mentioned your teaching activities at the Juilliard Pre-College. Are there any additional features of your pedagogical skills you would like to share with us?*

My first task with a student is to listen and observe carefully – to determine what the student loves, hates, admires, and what skills he or she has developed to express those ideas. I try to work from that center, within the student, developing those natural and instinctive abilities, while enlarging their artistic horizons. One particular musical aspect is especially important to me: when I finished my service in the army, as a pianist I began to have technical problems that were becoming worse and worse, causing great difficulties in practicing and performing. I went to the composer, Robert Helps, who was also a brilliant pianist, took lessons with him, learning the Whiteside technique, and began the process of learning how my body actually works. Body awareness is important to me in composition, as well as piano. I seem to create like

a choreographer. I think in terms of body motions, the weight of the arm, how bowings feel when you are playing. In composition I am constantly asking my students: “How does this phrase breathe? How does this note down here get to that high note, four measures later? What is the difficulty of the journey? How does the line sing itself to get from one place to the other?” It is a hard thing to describe in just a few words, but it has to do with adjusting your entire body to become aware of the music.

Much of my work for Thomas Dunn at the Festival Orchestra involved transferring his articulation marks and bowings from his conducting scores into the performing parts of the orchestra members. Then, in rehearsals and the concerts, I could see the effect of these markings. It was a postgraduate exercise in composition and, ultimately, in body awareness. I sense it in my piano playing – it is not merely placing a finger on a key – it is the finger, plus the hand, plus the arm, plus the shoulders and the whole column of the back. All of these elements of the body are involved in making that sound. During the times that I am really focused and in charge of the music that I am writing, I have that same vivid feeling in my entire body. This approach to the music also helps me in my battle against Parkinson’s disease, which I have had for the past six or seven years. I try to share my experience with my students, and, a number of them have understood what I was talking about, and were able to understand that composing music or playing the piano is in an odd but true way an athletic endeavor.

*You have had performances of your music in the United States and in a number of other countries, in some of which you have taught – most notably, in China and Korea. Can you tell us about how you wound up getting this contact with China, and what your experiences have been there?*

In 2000 I was asked to be on a panel of American judges for a piano competition in Hong Kong, where the students were playing Western composers and Chinese composers in an equal mix. I had a wonderful time on that trip, and as a group we made a good impression on the Chinese judges. One of the Chinese judges was Li Jiang, a traditional dancer, who came from the Guangxi Arts College in Nanning in southwestern China. The first

time we shook hands, we knew immediately that we were going to be close friends. He straightaway invited me and Howard Kessler to his college in China where he taught, starting a period of fourteen or fifteen visits to the Guangxi Arts College over twelve years, from 2000 to 2012. I taught, coached musicians and conducted orchestral concerts there, primarily in the middle school, but also with the college orchestra and the Guangzhou Symphony, which I conducted in a number of concerts. A lot of the music I performed was music by the local composers, and some of it was for the traditional Chinese orchestra, which I also began writing for at that time. I brought faculty members of the Juilliard School on some of the visits, including Victoria Mushkatkol (piano), Claudia Schaer (violin), Barli Nugent (flute and chamber music), Stephen Piers from the Dance Division, and a number of other people. It was a profound relationship with the university and with Li Jiang. To my great distress, he died of brain cancer in 2014. He was one of the most wonderful people I have ever met, and I miss him terribly.

*What can you say about your musical activities in the most recent years?*

I am grateful that I am still composing, still playing, still exploring and still learning. Music has been a focal point of my battle against Parkinson’s disease, and I also take dance classes with the Mark Morris Company – classes that are designed for people with this debilitating condition. So, the athletic connections I make with the piano and in compositions are mirrored in my activities at the barre! And the dance activity and other physical exercises that I practice daily, make it possible for me to continue my musical activities. I am playing piano better than at any other time of my life, and my compositions have an integration and joy that is constantly expanding.

I feel tremendously blessed that I can teach and have wonderful rewarding close relationships with my pupils. In my ‘golden sunset years’ I am finding comfort and relaxation being myself and not worrying about where modern music is going. The music I write describes who I am at this moment, and I feel blessed to be able to write, to perform, and to share my experience with others.