

A Conversation with Lukas Foss

by David Thomas

The following article is a composite of an interview with Lukas Foss conducted by David Thomas in New York City on February 13, 1998, and three pre-concert talks by Maestro Foss, given at Boston University on November 11 and December 8, 1997, and March 30, 1998. It is published here in an edited version with permission of the author and Mr. Foss.

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DT: Mr. Foss, it is a pleasure to meet you after having admired your work for many years. Do I have your permission to tape our conversation?

LF: Yes, as long as you don't sell it to Kenneth Starr!

DT: Fair enough! To begin, could you share with me your thoughts on the composition process that you use? Are your works completely planned out before you set pencil to manuscript paper?

LF: It depends. At given moments in my life, I have used various approaches with different pieces. Sometimes I don't really know what will happen. I find myself beating my head against the wall, will get an idea from somewhere, and start to write what may turn out to be the beginning, the middle, or the end of a work. At other times, I clearly know what I want to do, and that allows me to start from the beginning in a very orderly fashion.

DT: I know that some composers have very elaborate formal plans; they know prior to selecting the first pitch exactly what the form of the work in hand will be. What is your approach to the formal aspects of your compositions?

LF: This may surprise you, but I am not the least bit concerned about structure. I let structure take care of itself, an approach that usually works for me. In so many words, I don't care whether a work develops the form of a sonata or any other form during the compositional process.

DT: In your opinion, what elements need to be present in "great music?"

LF: It is important to realize that the essence of great music rests in its uniqueness. Too much time is spent analyzing the formal aspects of great music, which usually are quite similar to the ones found in bad music. We should analyze or concentrate on the elements that make a given work unique. Also, we should look for any inherent humor.

When I was writing a cello concerto for Slava Rostropovich, I had great difficulty when it was time to write the *cadenza*. I had a large number of sketches that I could not piece together. It was really becoming difficult. Then I thought, why not leave them as sketches, and let Slava practice and play them? The *cadenza* could be just the sketches. Admittedly, a weird notion. That night I conducted Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, and suddenly realized that the master had beaten me to it. There is a moment in the cellos and basses that presents a number of false starts (*plays Example 1*).

Why did Beethoven do that? Why have the same motive, pause, again, pause, again? The answer is: He actually has the cellos and basses practice in public. I can imagine him saying to his friend Schindler, "I bet you that nobody will laugh, because they *know* I'm a serious composer! Ha, Ha, Ha!!" I can just hear him saying that!

Arthur Rubinstein and I once had a discussion

Example 3: Ludwig van Beethoven, *Symphony No. 7, Movement IV, measures 400-409, strings only. The half-step pattern (E-D#) in the low strings begins at m. 389.*

about humor in music; it took place at Bernstein's house. I mentioned humor in Beethoven, and Rubinstein replied, "There is no humor in Beethoven!" Then Lenny said, "Go on Lukas, show him; show him your example in the Fifth." (Of course, I had previously shown it to Lenny.) So I played it for Rubinstein, and I think it made a dent. He seemed *somewhat* convinced.

There are many other examples of humor in Beethoven's works, although not all equally obvious. For example, in the *Scherzo* of the Seventh Symphony the Second Horn plays a repeating semitone (plays Example 2 and stops at repeated dissonant chord, m. 191).

Let me stop here for a minute. This example is where Beethoven created Stravinsky. You will not find a more Stravinsky-like moment than this one. The way he orchestrated the passage, putting the repeated half-steps in the horn, is almost obscene. One definitely gets the feeling that he meant it to be funny. That is why it is a mistake for a conductor to reach the D major section and play it as if the Emperor were making a solemn entrance. It should be more brutal and uncouth.

Beethoven's fascination with that half-step interval is so great that after using it in the *Scherzo*, he then brings it back in the *Allegro con brio*, a movement which structurally has nothing at all to do with a half-step (plays Example 3). Conductors never pay attention to that interval in the finale. When the

orchestra arrives at that passage, I turn to the basses and cellos and tell them to play as loudly as they can; once I went so far as to double the low string lines with bassoons, so we could *really* hear it. It is fascinating, because nobody but Beethoven could have written it, first to use the repeated half-step interval at all, and then to add emphasis to it in that fashion. I think that section fits the description "humorous," although that description upsets some people.

Once, a long time ago, in Israel, I used this same example, and a teacher became angry, stood up, and said, "I don't see any need to talk about Beethoven in terms of a joke." "First of all," I replied, "I didn't say it was a joke, I said it demonstrated a sense of humor; secondly, not only did Beethoven have a sense of humor, he also had gonorrhea." Pretty bad! So, all right, I got carried away! At that moment I guess I just had to say something naughty! The episode told me that many people have the wrong impression about "humor." They think it is the opposite of seriousness. It is indeed so when it is "locker-room humor" (like the above joke), but when it is true humor, it is not. Even the works of the most tragic poets contain humor. In my opinion, when a work of art does not contain some humor, it becomes solemn rather than serious. I think it is very important to have humor in the arts in general, and in music in particular.

I also feel it is important not to label composers.

We tend to place each renowned composer in a category. We say that “Bach is Baroque.” The wonderful thing about great music is that it cannot be wedged into a single era or group. It transcends everything. Bach can be romantic, which is the reason he did not go “out of fashion” during the era of Romanticism. Instead, his romantic side was discovered. The same is true of Beethoven. When Romanticism was no longer fashionable, he was thought of as a structuralist. We can think of the masters in a variety of ways, because great composers transcend all the limitations of a given “category.” Nothing is more detrimental to a good performance than to “limit” a composer. For instance, many conductors try to appear elegant when conducting Mozart. Then, when they conduct Beethoven, they’re all muscle. To me, that makes no sense, because I consider Mozart to be the Shakespeare of music. Elegance is just one aspect in the broad spectrum of his style.

DT: Does composing come easy to you?

LF: Sometimes I get composer’s block. I remember Oliver Knussen once asking me what to do when he developed writer’s block. I told him, “Write a bad piece!,” but when I try to follow my own advice, it doesn’t always work! I really have no recipe for composing, except that you must love what you do. You have to get involved and love the process and results of your work; never, ever just write “dutiful” stuff. That is *the* most important concept for young composers to absorb. Also, never write something in a specific style, just because it happens to be “trendy” at the time. For one thing, anything that is trendy is already behind the times. It is very important to remember that all great composers were rebels and misfits in their own time.

DT: In your lifetime, I assume that you met most of the great composers of this century.

LF: I used to know them all, with the exception of Ives and Prokofiev. I have met everyone else.

DT: What can you tell me about Stravinsky?

LF: Stravinsky was a big influence in my life. I met him when I was in Boston. I had just been appointed orchestral pianist for the Boston Symphony. He arrived to guest conduct. I was very intrigued by the way he conducted. He pounded the rhythm and listened. He’d stop and say, “I want the *staccato* more like ‘aw!’” I could hear all these “aw’s” going on in the orchestra, as they imitated and poked fun at him; but I could hear exactly what he meant by that “aw”: a kind of ponderous *staccato*, not the dry *staccato* you normally get in ballet music.

I was intrigued. I thought he was the most interesting guest conductor that came to the Boston Symphony while I was there. But everybody else disagreed with me. I think the audience had a particular problem with Stravinsky’s conducting because he was the exact opposite of the stereotype conductor. He didn’t walk onto the stage of Symphony Hall the way most conductors did: “Here I am, the great man of music,” full of himself as it were. He walked on stage quickly as if he were going to the bathroom! It’s not surprising that he did not make it as a conductor. He was very critical of other conductors, even of Leonard Bernstein. He liked conductors to be extremely rhythmic, as if they were holding the reins.

Stravinsky was kind enough to visit my studio and listen to my music, which was a great compliment. We became friends. At one point he asked, “Why did you give this part to the trumpet?” “Because it *sounds* like a trumpet tune,” I replied. He echoed, “It *sounds* like a trumpet tune? Then give it to the violin!” To create a fine melody and then give it to the obvious instrument, that was too much of a cliché for him.

Stravinsky never taught, never accepted students, but he was very perceptive in his own way. I remember the night we first met. After he had visited my studio, we went out to a party. He took some brandy out of his pocket and began drinking. I remember thinking to myself, “That was a nice session

we just had, but he didn't really say much about my music, whether he liked it or not." Then, after he had drunk a little brandy, he called me over and said, "You know, Lukas, my teacher was Rimsky-Korsakov!" "Yes, I know that," I answered. He continued, "Well, Rimsky-Korsakov never really let me think that perhaps I was a little different from the others. maybe a little special, but I knew that he knew," and he nudged me with his elbow. That little gesture kept me going for the next three years.

In March, I'll be conducting *L'Histoire du Soldat* at Boston University, using my own translation. It is a unique piece. Even within Stravinsky's oeuvre, it is unique. If you look at Stravinsky's early works, *Firebird* for example, you'll find a lot of Russian tradition, the legacy of Rimsky-Korsakov and of the French tradition, especially of Ravel. Even in *Les Noces*, one can hear the influence of Russian peasant music. However, when you arrive at *L'Histoire du Soldat*, it's pure Stravinsky. There are no external influences, other than a little jazz. But it is so static that the term "jazzy" no longer applies. Later on you get neoclassic Stravinsky and even twelve-tone Stravinsky, but *L'Histoire du Soldat* is the most uniquely "Stravinsky" piece of all.

In order to write it, he actually abandoned what he did so well before: orchestration. He himself said that he "wrote for the instruments," he did not orchestrate. By this point he no longer "dressed things up," because he had rejected the concept of "dressing up" any of his works. He wrote for the instruments, which are violin, double bass, clarinet, bassoon, trumpet, trombone. In other words, two brass, two winds, two strings, and percussion. He chose seven instruments that are so different from each other, you cannot possibly blend them to make a beautiful, "creamy" kind of sound. This type of instrumental juxtaposition will always create a kind of "naked" sound, no matter what you do with it. Of course, that speaks in favor of the work, the way it turned out. *L'Histoire* is also fascinating from virtually every other point of view. The rhythm, for instance, is typical Stravinsky. It does not have the

type of syncopation found in jazz. Syncopation means that something fights a steady beat. Here, it is the steady beat itself that becomes unsteady and changes. It is like walking on a floor that begins to move while your gait remains regular.

It is best demonstrated in the *March Royale* (*plays Example 4*); the accompanimental chords of the first 5/8 bar are on the beat, but since the meter immediately shifts to 2/4, where they had been on the down-beats, they are now suddenly on the off-beats. And then, with the return of 5/8 bars, the accents once again occur on the down-beats (*Example 4*). Stravinsky more or less invented that. I call it "static rhythm."

The same kind of static quality is found in *Le Sacre du Printemps* (*plays "Dances of the Young Girls," mm. 1-8, Example 5*). Stravinsky's approach to rhythm, for example, is quite the opposite of someone like Beethoven. With Beethoven, rhythm is a march towards God, something dynamic that moves forward. With Stravinsky the rhythm is static. When I conduct Stravinsky, I don't even indicate the accents. I just let them happen by themselves, to bring out that static feeling. Actually, in later works Stravinsky applies this kind of "petrified" approach to harmony, but a harmony that does not move forward, as in the *Symphony of Psalms* (*plays third movement, Example 6*). It is a slow, ponderous sort of idea.

I believe the first time I conducted *L'Histoire* was in Boston, with Sarah Caldwell as the narrator; I think Del Tredici was the soldier; Michael Steinberg, the music critic, was the devil. I well remember how this arrangement came about. Steinberg had written a review of one of my concerts in which he asserted that what I had done to Mozart's version of Handel's *Messiah* was an abomination. He wrote, "Not only did Mr. Foss not leave a single movement without some form of a cut, he didn't even realize that one shouldn't do Mozart's arrangement in the first place." He went on to say, "... the young should not be exposed to this conductor," or something to that effect. I had never met him, but I found his telephone number, called him and said "This is type-casting. We are

M.M. $\text{♩} = 112$ 1

Cl. *ff*

Fg. *ff*

C. a P. *mais moins fort que les bois*
sf

Trb. *solo*

Cymb. et Gr. C. *(bois)*
f *maillöche* *molto*

Vi. *sim*
ff

C.B. *ff*

Example 4: Igor Stravinsky, *L'Histoire du Soldat*, "Marche Royale," measures 1-9.

13 *Tempo giusto* $\text{♩} = 50$

I.II.III.IV (I.II senza sord.)

Cor. *V.VI.VII.VIII*
sf sempre

V-ni II *arco (non div.)*
f *sempre stacc.* *sempre simile*

V-le *tutti (non div.)*
f *sempre stacc.* *sempre simile*

V-c *tutti*
f *arco (non div.)* *sempre stacc.* *sempre simile*

C-b. *tutti*
f *arco (non div.)* *sempre stacc.* *sempre simile*

Example 5: Igor Stravinsky, *Le Sacre du Printemps*, "Dances of the Young Girls," Rehearsal 13, measures 1-8.

Example 6: Igor Stravinsky, *Symphony of Psalms*, Movement III, Rehearsal 22, measures 1-6.

looking for someone to be the devil in *L'Histoire du Soldat*." There was a moment of silence, and then he agreed! After he played the devil in that performance, we became friends.

There were even stranger performances later on. I remember one which I conducted with the New York Philharmonic; the devil was John Cage, the soldier was Elliot Carter, and the narrator was Aaron Copland. Quite a star-studded combination! I also did one with Frank Zappa, the guy from Mothers of Invention. I invited him to be the devil, and he said, "I'm sorry, but I have to decline." Surprised, I asked, "Why, do you have another engagement?" "No," he replied, "but I can't *always* be the bad guy." I then suggested, "Why don't you be the narrator?" He exclaimed, "Oh, can I be the narrator? *All right!*" Thus he became my narrator, and Ernest Fleishman took the role of the devil.

Stravinsky once said, "You must always steal, but never from yourself." That is a beautiful remark. When you steal from yourself, you learn nothing. You add nothing to your oeuvre. When you steal from others — and of course Stravinsky didn't really mean steal, he meant "make your own" or "borrow" — then you enrich your vocabulary. I think we should never limit ourselves.

I remember once discussing nineteenth-century music with Stravinsky. He asked me, "Lukas, who is your favorite nineteenth-century composer?" "I hate

to tell you," I replied, "because I know you don't like him." He asked, "Who?" so I confessed, "Richard Wagner." Surprised, he asked, "What makes you think I don't like him?" I tactfully pointed out, "You wrote in your autobiography that his music was 'movie music.'" "Well, I didn't really mean that," he said, "I know Wagner is a great composer, and very important, but I was afraid at the time that Wagner was dangerous for 'things.' Now I realize that *anything* important is dangerous for 'things,' and it's up to 'things' to watch out for themselves!"

It was a great statement that I will never forget. Around the turn of the century, Wagner was viewed as the number-one composer, and everyone started imitating what he was doing. Even French composers like Debussy had a Wagnerian streak in their music, whether they admitted it or not. All music written at that time had a Wagnerian element, even Arnold Schoenberg's. It is impossible to think of the twelve-tone school without the Wagnerian influence on the chromaticism involved in it.

DT: You have seen a lot of trends come and go. How do you feel about the state of music today?

LF: Our current era is not a great one for music, mostly because the media has corrupted us somewhat. Many performers seem to think that if they do

not appear on television, they might as well not exist. They'll do anything to be on television or in the newspapers. In my opinion that is not a healthy attitude. Today, when an individual shows talent, the prevailing sentiment is, "Oh, another talent, so what?" When I was your age, *talent* would open doors. Nowadays, *success* opens doors. This emphasis on success is not good, because success does not mean that a performer is interesting. Unfortunately, today we live in a very success-oriented society.

DT: Which of today's up-and-coming composers do you like?

LF: That is a difficult question to answer, because I am always afraid that I'll leave someone out. There is no one today whom I like the way I like Stravinsky. In my opinion, there is no one of that stature writing today. Quite frequently, I may admire one piece by a composer but not the next. Anyway, I am not an evaluator. I must leave that to the critics.

DT: How do you feel about the different schools of composition that have existed, and such things as the polarity between the serialists, neoclassicists, and neoromantics?

LF: I don't believe in belonging to any school at all. I think we're confusing issues when we talk about "belonging to schools." If someone claims to be a "twelve-tone composer," it is as if Bach said, "I am a fugue composer" and then refused to write anything but fugues. It does not make sense. We are confusing style and technique. It is my opinion that the more techniques a composer employs, the richer his or her vocabulary will be.

This is why I personally move from moment to moment between twelve-tone, tonal, minimalist, and chance. I like to use all available techniques, because that makes the music adventurous. Assimilating all these techniques is essential. Some theories of music and composing are interesting, but one should not adhere exclusively to any single one at the ex-

pense of all the others.

Is it not true that many consider chance music to be the opposite of serial music? Yet when one listens to a twelve-tone piece and a piece of chance music, very often the two works will have many similarities. When you think about it, what does the series achieve? It allows for surprises, because the twelve-tone row provides pitches in a unique juxtaposition that can be used to compose and produce wonderful surprises. The same thing happens when one throws dice, as Cage did. The results are unanticipated and unpredictable. It is no wonder, therefore, that music written in these two styles actually sounds very similar. They are not opposites at all, and therefore there is no reason why one cannot use both techniques: chance in one moment, a series in the next.

Then we have the minimalist school, which can be very boring at times. It is like a drug that makes you feel good for a few moments, but after a brief euphoria you are as miserable as you were before. When I examined the minimalist idea, I wondered, "What's life like? It's minimalist! You get up in the morning, have breakfast, work, have lunch, work, have dinner. . . ." Yet, although everyday is the same, it is also different. So why not do a minimal piece that is like life, the same *and* different? Have it slowly move towards the other life, or death, or whatever you prefer to call it, and let it "imitate life," rather than be "repetition *senza* development."

To be minimalist is to confine oneself to a small area. In music and the arts, we are fortunate to be able to have our cake and eat it too, although Steven Reich and Philip Glass would probably not agree. However, I have written pieces like that. I wrote a piece called *Solo Observed*, or *Solo for Piano*. It does all of the forbidden things. It is minimal. Every bar seems to be the same as the next, but it gradually moves from twelve-tone to pop.

DT: Lukas Foss wrote pop music?

LF: It's not really pop, but it has pop overtones. It

ends in a very diatonic manner, not at all in the twelve-tone technique with which it began. I like to treat each of these techniques as scaffolds that I can discard at any given moment. If I want to leave the row, I do so. To Webern the row was sacrosanct; for him it was a great and wonderful reflection of order, a holy order. To me it's a scaffold that can be discarded.

DT: You founded an improvisational group at one point in your career.

LF: That's right. I became interested in chance long before the term "aleatoric" had penetrated the jargon. When I created that group at UCLA, I had hoped to free my students from the tyranny of the printed note; actually, what it did was transform me into a very avant-garde composer at a time when I thought I was going to stay a neoclassicist. We made a recording of *Time Cycle* that Bernstein conducted; it has improvisational interludes. The New York Philharmonic is doing *Time Cycle* next week, with Kurt Masur conducting. There will be no improvisational interludes, because there is no group today that can do it successfully. That group of mine was amazing. I still don't know how we did it. Whatever we did, it worked out well.

DT: Did you have a framework for each improvisation?

LF: Yes. I would say to my fellow-performers, "Why don't *you* do this, and *you* do that. . . ." We'd try it and tape it. Then we'd try to remember what was good and forget what was bad, and do it again. That's how we worked. *Time Cycle* was not supposed to have improvisations at all. What actually happened is very funny.

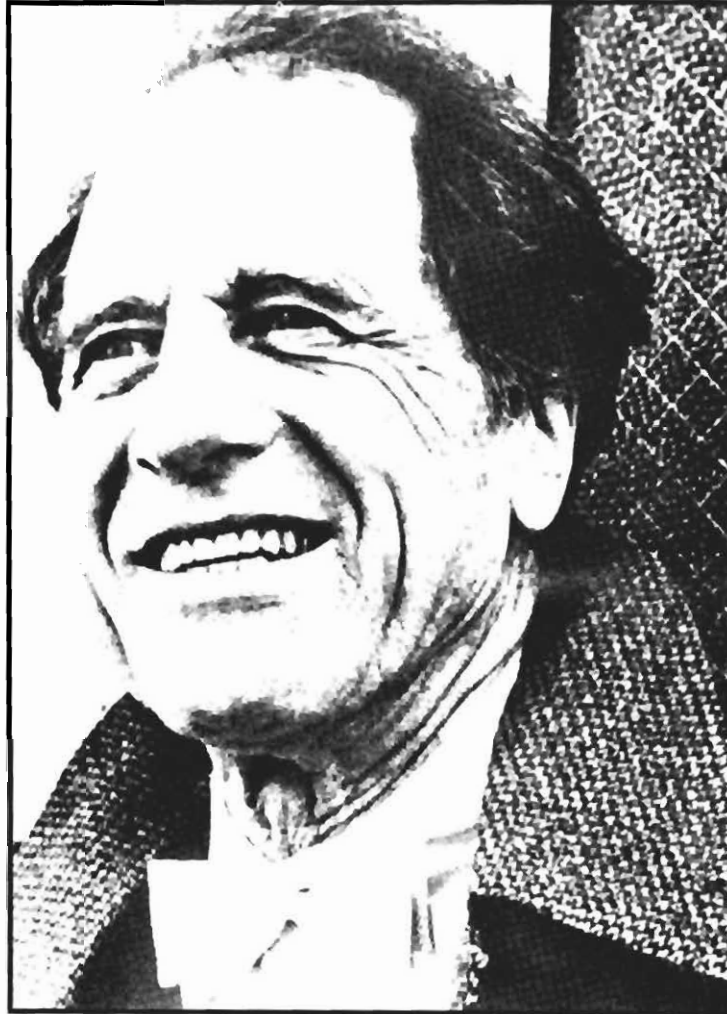
Bernstein visited me in California. I mentioned

how much I was looking forward to him doing the premiere of the piece, and he complained, "Yes, but why did you give your *Improvisational Concerto* to Ormandy?" "Well, you got *Time Cycle*," I said, and he shot back, "Yes, but that doesn't have any improvisation." As a joke I answered, "Well, we can always appear like the clowns of *commedia dell'arte* and come out between the songs and improvise!" The next day I got a phone call from the New York Philharmonic: "You are invited to play with your group for the premiere." When I heard that, I thought, "Oh, how terrible! Now my piece will go down the drain!" But it didn't, it worked. Interest-

ing, how such things happen.

DT: I read another of your interviews in which you said you were jealous of jazz musicians who improvised on a regular basis, and your envy is actually what prompted your improvisatory project.

LF: That's exactly right. That's how it began. For years I tried to imitate neoclassic music in my im-



provisation, but it always sounded like “music badly remembered.” It didn’t sound fresh.

DT: Which teacher influenced you the most?

LF: My first one was terrific, Julius Herford; he was my teacher in Berlin. He eventually came to America and became Robert Shaw’s teacher. Later on, I had some wonderful teachers, for example, Lazar Levy in Paris, Fritz Reiner at Curtis Institute.

In America, at age fifteen, I decided that I wanted to study with Hindemith; when I was seventeen I auditioned for him. He accepted me into his class at Tanglewood. Later on I also studied with him at Yale. The unfortunate thing was that just as I began studying with him, I discovered Stravinsky. What timing! When my allegiance shifted to Stravinsky, Hindemith ceased being my God, and I became a very rebellious teenager in class, so rebellious that he kicked me out on several occasions! In fact, he went so far as to write a letter to Koussevitzky (which Koussevitzky later showed me), saying, “I cannot teach Lukas Foss, because he wants to know but doesn’t want to follow.” Koussevitzky told me, “That’s wonderful! That’s what I want my students to do. I will make him take you back.” As you can see, I was very lucky in those days!

Later on, after I had completed my studies with Hindemith, we became friends. He was an interesting teacher, very dogmatic in a certain Germanic way. He would suggest, “Why not write in my style while you study with me, and find your own self later?” Actually, that is not a bad method. When you study with a teacher who is a sort of international guru, you might as well enter his world and live in it for the duration. As I look back, I don’t think he was wrong. In a letter he sent me he wrote, “A teacher is like a doctor. If you don’t want to follow his advice, go to another doctor,” a recommendation which also makes perfect sense.

DT: Then how does one become a great composer today?

LF: That’s quite a question! “How does one become a

great composer today?” I guess one does it through love. Love for music. Passion. If there is no passion within you while you’re composing, the music will be stultified. Also, retain all the love for the extant music that made one become a musician in the first place. What made *you* become a musician?

DT: Berlioz.

LF: Berlioz! That’s interesting. Yes, I can see some of him in your orchestration.

DT: His *Memoirs* really intrigued me. When I first read them, I was for the most part interested only in jazz, but during the reading I realized that Berlioz had the same sort of recklessly creative genius as my favorite jazz personalities. The stylistic differences between jazz and classical music, which I had previously seen as barriers, melted away as I discovered treasures in both.

LF: Auden once asked me to set to music one of his little librettos, but I didn’t do it. It was about three composers who fell in love with the same girl. The composers were Berlioz, Mendelssohn, and Rossini. To each, the girl meant something different. Berlioz wrote her passionate love letters. Mendelssohn saw her as a sister whom he couldn’t touch. Rossini considered her a great cook, and so he married her.

To have a jazz background is perfectly fine. Bernstein also had a jazz background; I didn’t. I became interested in jazz later in life. Recently, I haven’t listened to jazz that much. At one point I really liked Ornette Coleman and was friends with the members of the Modern Jazz Quartet.

DT: Did you ever meet Milhaud?

LF: When I was eleven years old and living in Paris, my teacher took me to the apartment of Darius Milhaud. I showed him my music, he was very sweet to me, and that was that. Fifteen years later I met him again in Aspen. When he first saw me, he exclaimed,

“You’re Lukas Foss, I remember you!” I was quite surprised and asked, “You remember that little boy?” “Yes,” he answered, “I remember what you said to me. After I had told you that your music was very nice but sort of Schumannesque, I remarked that when I was your age I wrote *modern* music. I well recall your response: ‘Yes, but all that modern stuff won’t last!’” When I heard that, I nearly fell over! You just don’t visit the most famous French composer of his time and speak to him like *that!*

DT: I attended the performance of your left-hand piano concerto last year. Is there a recording of that planned?

LF: There still is no recording planned. I’m not a networker. I don’t try to make things happen. They either happen or they don’t.

DT: Which orchestras are you now conducting?

LF: I occasionally return to the Brooklyn and Milwaukee orchestras, but mostly I just guest conduct.

That brings up another problem in today’s music world: when I am engaged as a conductor, the only twentieth-century composers I am asked to perform are the successful ones who are gone: Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Bernstein, Copland. . . . If I suggest a composer who might be unfamiliar to the audience, I am told, “Oh no, we can’t do that.” Today, orchestra administrators are so afraid they will lose their *audiences*. When I was music director of my own orchestras and ensembles, I introduced a great amount of music that certainly was unfamiliar to *my* audiences.

DT: I found it exciting that the Philadelphia Orchestra recently programmed a Takemitsu piece; unfortunately, the conductor fell ill.

LF: For years, Takemitsu was a good friend of mine. He died recently, and I miss him. I wrote a piece in his honor, an elegy, *For Toru*. It is for

flute and strings. He was a very generous person, but at the same time a very strong person. He was particularly generous to his colleagues, which in this day and age is unusual. He was amazingly prolific, composed so effortlessly, wrote over one hundred film scores, and worked all the time. What is interesting about his music is that it is not written exclusively in a “Japanese” style or any other identifiable one; it strikes me as a mixture of French and Japanese. He is the only Japanese composer I know in whose music one senses Ravel and Debussy. Yet, in its own distinct way, it remains quite Asian. His music is always interesting, and beautifully orchestrated. His last work was inspired by my wife’s paintings, or so he wrote us in a letter. He was a true friend.

DT: I just bought a recording of your clarinet concerto. Since I already owned your *Tashi* chamber piece, I quickly realized that the concerto was the same piece fully orchestrated.

LF: Yes. There are some longer cadenzas in the concerto. It’s interesting that you have all of this information on me. You know me too well!

DT: The first recording of yours that I bought had vocal music on it, including Mark Twain songs, *Time Cycle*. . . .

LF: The chamber version of *Time Cycle*.

DT: You certainly get a lot of interesting effects and colors out of the instruments that you select for a given piece.

LF: The instruments and their effects are part of the music’s original inspiration, not part of the orchestration. I never ask myself, “How should that be orchestrated?,” and then seek the “proper” instruments to achieve those effects; the effects I reach for are part of the composition’s initial thoughts and con-

siderations. For example, in the clarinet concerto the clarinetist walks over to the timpani, puts the bell of the clarinet on the timpani head, and plays the passage so as to produce that very special sound; it is a procedure I discovered in the improvisational experiments. I used it at that moment in the concerto to produce a specific sound. It is not orchestration.


DT: To what music do you currently listen?

LF: Just the music people send me. Sometimes I listen to pieces that I have to conduct, if I haven't heard them in a while. I'm not that much of a listener.

DT: Do you listen to your own music?

LF: Recently I revisited *Echoi*. It's one of my major works. It's probably the one that took me the longest to write. It's a half-hour piece that was composed over a span of two-and-a-half years. During that period, I went crazy; I thought I was going insane. When Bernstein saw it, he said, "Lukas, this looks like your last will." It's for clarinet, cello, percussion, and piano. I have to give a lecture on it next week, so I

listened to it again. It's difficult for me to talk about my own music. I'm not my own connoisseur. I'd rather hear Beethoven and Mozart. Bach. They were the ones who made me become a composer. Their music is still new to me. I try to conduct their works as if the ink on the paper were not yet dry, and conduct modern music with the respect and awe usually granted only to the classics.

DT: Well, Mr. Foss, it certainly has been a pleasure meeting with you today. You have been more than generous with your time and knowledge, have shared quite a bit of your wisdom and vast experience, and I look forward to following your career into the twenty-first century! Thank you so much. 

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David Thomas holds an M.M. degree from the Peabody Conservatory of Music in Baltimore, Maryland. He currently teaches piano and performs as jazz pianist in the Philadelphia area. Mr. Thomas was recently awarded the 1998 prize for Young Composers by the Orchestral past spring.

Both Sides of the Fence

by Barry Tuckwell

The following article is an edited version of an address presented by the author to the Annual Conference of the Conductors Guild in Washington, DC, on January 11, 1998. It is published here with the author's permission.

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It is curious that when someone in industry rises through the ranks — from sweeping the floors to becoming president — he or she is praised; often the experience of learning first-hand how things work at every level is cited as one of the major reasons that this is the perfect person to run the entire organization.