

## Articles

# Compose, Communicate and Connect

By Alex Shapiro

Composing is a lot like making love. We're trying to please ourselves. We're hoping to please at least one other person. And we are communicating. Passionately.

I compose to communicate.

I'm fascinated by the process: the arc from the first notes on the score pad, to the performer's energy in sharing those gestures, to the audience's experience of the new music. I call this the magic triangle: the unspoken relationship between author, interpreter and listener. When it's right, the music is transcended, time is no longer ordinary, and we're taken to surreal and sometimes ecstatic places. What a joyous life this is.

It is impossible to write about music, just as it is impossible to describe how something tastes. Like lovemaking, these are sensual experiences that must be experienced firsthand. But I can write about the concepts that influence me as I compose, sharing what has been meaningful and hoping that at least a few of these ideas might resonate with you as well.

### Background

I was born in 1962 and raised in Manhattan, the quintessential New York City kid of two quintessential New York City intellectuals who surrounded me with their love for art, music and Zabar's pickled herring. My youth was spent in every museum, ballet theater and concert hall, often alone, since I knew few other adolescents with similar interests. With money I made from baby-sitting, I became adept at buying standing room tickets to the Metropolitan Opera for three dollars and then snagging an abandoned orchestra seat at the first intermission. Thanks to appearing older than my years, I spent much time at jazz clubs such as the Village Vanguard and the Blue Note, and, being the 1970s, I could also be found at Studio 54 and CBGB's. The New York scene was unique, and the diversity of music I experienced as a teenager led to the diversity of how I compose as an adult.

My parents adored music and our apartment walls rang with great recordings of Brahms, Beethoven, Mahler and the like. Music seemed as natural a language to me as English, and I began composing when I was nine. Growing up in New York gave me access to an excellent education: I attended both the Ethical Culture Fieldston School and Juilliard Pre-College, as a composition student of Craig Shuler and Bruce Adolphe. Immediately after graduation, I enrolled in the Manhattan School of Music, where I was a student of Ursula Mamlok and John Corigliano. The months between each school year were equally ambitious: I spent my 15th summer studying composition at Mannes College of Music with Leo Edwards, and my 16th and 17th summers drenched in the

wonders of Colorado and the Aspen Music School and Festival. I was a composition student of Michael Czajkowski, attending master classes with everyone from Eliot Carter to Erich Leinsdorf to Freddie Hubbard. My first paid commission came that summer at age 16, from a generous and far too trusting brass quartet, as did several performances and local radio broadcasts of other new pieces. My passion and I had found each other.

In addition to discovering a life in music, I realized that the summers in Aspen exposed me to what a life in nature could be like. Between composing, practicing, rehearsing and attending classes, I took every opportunity to explore the shimmering environment. I had never seen so much sky at one time in my life. White-water rafting



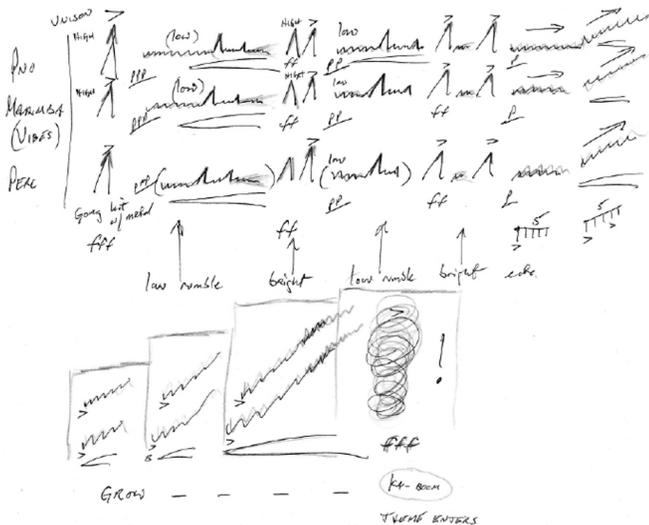
Alex Shapiro

and backpacking thrilled me, and experiencing the wilderness around Aspen was life-changing, both musically and spiritually. I moved to Los Angeles in 1983, and have lived at the beach in Malibu since the early 90s, and when I am not composing I might be ocean kayaking, sailing, rollerblading or

skiing. Having grown up as a completely non-athletic city kid, I found those months in Colorado unlocked a door to the joys of the physical world and to observations that deeply influence my music.

### Connecting the Dots

Aside from a couple of private students and a few guest lectures each year, I do not teach. But the longer I compose, the more I appreciate my own mentors. My primary composition teacher at Manhattan School of Music (MSM) was Ursula Mamlok. Ursula is a gifted composer with an enormous heart, and lessons at her home were insightful journeys of understanding form and development. Ursula taught me the intricacies of the arc of a piece and how to express myself consistently, and I absorbed her quiet tenacity.



Ex. 1. *At the Abyss*: the rough drawing.

I also had classes and private lessons with John Corigliano, who was on faculty at MSM at the time. From him, I gained some extremely valuable tools that are worth detailing here.

John taught me how to hear and compose from the deepest part of my instinct by avoiding the use of staff paper and piano until much later in the writing process. He suggested that long before touching a page of manuscript paper, I lie down, relax and simply hear in detail or not the piece I intended to put together. Once I had a sense of the energy and movement of the music, the next step was to pick up a blank pad and some colored pencils and create a visual representation of the music as it came to life in my head. He suggested following this free, abstract drawing by writing a narrative of what transpires during the piece, and using a list of adjectives and adverbs to guide what I am searching to reveal emotionally. Only after all of these steps should I approach the keyboard or score pad and commit to musical notation. This was priceless advice, and has freed me at times when I feel daunted by the prospect of putting lots of little black dots on endless reams of paper. I have always been especially verbal and visual. I see intricate, colored patterns of music in my head as I listen, and this synesthesia may explain why these concepts so easily became part of my writing process.

There is a constant struggle between the right and left hemispheres of the brain, each working at cross purposes to the other. Traditionally, the moment one side has a Great Idea, the other side needs to notate it, thus removing the Great Idea and catapulting us into the world of the Great Math Problem. The brilliance of Corigliano's method lies in detaching the composer from this difficult sleight of hand, allowing the right brain to take over and flow in whatever abstract way it wishes, focusing on the raw truth of the music and leaving the translation process for a later time.

These techniques proved to be essential a couple of years ago, when, in a moment of supreme klutziness, I managed to break not one, but both of my feet simultaneously, in three places. I am nothing, if not thorough. I looked like Nancy Sinatra: The Dark Side, wrapped in two black boot-like casts

for Teresa McCollough  
**At the Abyss**  
1. Observe

Alex Shapiro

♩ = 112 (very fast)

Percussion: Tim Tam hit with buzz end of stick, on the lip (side), parallel (state)

Marimba, Vibes: marimba, hard mallets (4) on intense and ominous rumble

Piano: an intense and ominous rumble

10 Perc: cowbells medium gong hit with stick on lip

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Ex. 2. *At the Abyss*: pages 1-3. (Audio excerpt can be heard at: <http://www.alexshapiro.org/AttheAbysspg1.html>)

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The musical score is divided into four systems, each with three staves: Percussion (Perc.), Marimba/Vibes (Mar. Vibes), and Piano. The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 4/4.

- System 1 (Measures 14-17):** Percussion part includes a mallet (mzt) and a snare drum. Marimba/Vibes and Piano parts feature complex rhythmic patterns with triplets and sixteenth notes. Dynamics include *fz* and *f*.
- System 2 (Measures 18-21):** Percussion part includes a gong hit and snare on lip. Marimba/Vibes and Piano parts continue with rhythmic patterns. Dynamics include *mf* and *fz*. An *attaca* marking is present.
- System 3 (Measures 22-26):** Percussion part includes sus. cym. with sticks. Marimba/Vibes and Piano parts feature a crescendo. Dynamics include *mp* and *cresc.*.
- System 4 (Measures 27-30):** Percussion part includes sus. cym. and large sus. cymbal with stick. Marimba/Vibes and Piano parts feature a very grand dynamic. Dynamics include *mf* and *very grand*.
- System 5 (Measures 31-33):** Percussion part includes a snare drum. Marimba/Vibes and Piano parts feature a poco rit. marking. Dynamics include *fz* and *mf*.
- System 6 (Measures 34-37):** Percussion part includes a snare drum. Marimba/Vibes and Piano parts feature a soft mallets (s) marking. Dynamics include *mf* and *mp*.

and barely able to sit up, much less walk. The timing of this misadventure paralleled a looming deadline that could not wait the several weeks it would take until I could return to my original upright and locked position. In my reclining state, I was already at step one of John's method, and proceeded to allow my mind to compose the opening theme of a piece for piano, marimba, vibraphone and metal percussion titled *At the Abyss*, which I now view as one of the strongest works in my catalog. By the time I could sit up at my computer many days later, the drawings and meter indications I had created served as a paint-by-numbers map. Knowing the details of my musical intent, I found it easy to put the notes in place.

### Connecting with Myself

By my second year at MSM, I had begun scoring documentaries for local cable TV shows after taking the only class offered at that time for commercial music; it was taught by Roy Eaton, music director of the Benton & Bowles ad agency. I learned about click tracks and the basics of scoring to picture, and began assisting Roy in some of his commercial jingle recording sessions. I really enjoyed the chameleon-like aspects of writing commercial music, and, inspired by Corigliano's success with his striking film score to *Altered States*, I decided that given the kind of music I write—not academic uptown, not minimal downtown, but just midtown, I would have a better chance of having a career in film and TV scoring than I would in concert music. I also believed that my music might reach more people through the media than on the concert stage.

I happened to meet a producer on a trip to Los Angeles, and three months later I moved there and scored my first commercial video documentary. It was an eye-opening experience: in the conservatory, I could get away with writing a mere ten minutes of music in an entire year; we were coddled as artists. Here, in the working world, I was expected to have more than 30 minutes of music written and recorded in ten days. I was terrified of missing the deadline, wondering just how all those new notes planned to appear. But amazingly, they did, and I delivered the tracks on time. Not that the cues in question were anything close to brilliant, but they were all used and the check cleared. It was a breakthrough in my self-perception that has served me well over time as I have faced one deadline after another.

Fast-forward 15 years. I had been working steadily, scoring average, nondescript documentaries, corporate videos, TV pilots and feature films. All were low budget, mostly low profile, but it was a modest living. One year in the mid-90s was particularly hard: I had been hired to score three independent films, and one by one, each lost its financing and shut down production. I went without working for nine months.

On a rainy afternoon with nothing better to do, I pulled out some old scores from my conservatory days that I had

not looked at in years. A light went on in my spirit: I remembered why I became a composer in the first place. I realized that I was tired of having my creative life tethered to other people's business goals; I just wanted to compose. I began reworking an old piece from the stack, and it was performed not long afterward. Encouraged, I abruptly decided to shift my career to what I truly love, and against the warnings of some who felt I should have my head examined, I began to reinvent myself as a composer of concert music. Unfortunately, none of the music I had written since coming to Los Angeles was relevant to the world I was choosing to enter. I set out to build a catalog of chamber works composed from the heart. I was 37 years old and beginning from scratch.

The combination of California's lack of tradition, with its numerous cultural influences, makes it a wonderful place to compose, because especially in Los Angeles, there is a sense that anything can be presented and judged on its own merit rather than held to the Eurocentric standards I grew up with on the East Coast. I see evidence of this freedom in the wildly diverse styles of many of my colleagues, and it inspires greater creativity within my own work. I had the perfect environment in which to find my voice.

Connecting with Musicians

Since the late 1990s, my happiest focus has been composing music for small ensembles and soloists. Blame it on my having been an only child, but the intimacy of the relationships between small groupings of instruments and people is very compelling to me. I also work extensively with electronics, having transitioned from the primitive gear of the 1970s to the soon-to-be primitive wonders of today's world. Yet even in my electronic pieces, I feature a live soloist playing against the prerecorded track to breathe humanness into an otherwise digital output.

Perhaps unlike the stereotypical only child, one of the things I enjoy the most about composing chamber music is the joy of collaborating with musicians and sharing ideas. Although my pieces are through-composed and my commissions are delivered in their initially conceived, completed state, for me, this is where the fun part of the process really begins.

When a composer has the great luck to work with exceptional musicians who are usually very friendly as well, an astonishing amount of discovery comes from experiencing a new piece together. I am fairly meticulous in my phrasings, dynamics and tempo markings, yet I view them similarly to the suggested serving photo on a cereal box: sure, you can put the flakes in a bowl

with milk, but there are many other things you can do with them, too. So I listen carefully to the comments and interpretations of the players, and often incorporate changes which, while usually subtle, are things I would never have considered myself because I had been limited by hearing the passages the same way repeatedly in my head as I composed. In the midst of our writing process, we risk losing a perch perspective as we become entwined with our initial ideas. That comfortable familiarity doesn't always equate with our best work; we need to find fresh ears with which to listen to our own instincts and to judge them honestly.

Ironically, it is that necessary act of judging that can get us into trouble early on in the composition of a piece. Creative paralysis/writer's block on one level or another usually stems not from a lack of good ideas but from the fear that the idea we commit to the score pad will not be the right one, or the one that is perfect. But if we judge our output at the very moment we are trying to create the gestures, we are sabotaging ourselves. We can never compose with the conscious intent of writing something wonderful; that result is just an unexpected by-product. Likewise, it is paralyzing to expect

The image shows a musical score for a chamber ensemble, specifically page 3 of 'Bioplasm'. It features four staves: Alto (C), Bass (C), Alto (A), and Bass (B). The score is divided into three systems. The first system (measures 21-24) includes a dynamic marking of *p*. The second system (measures 25-33) includes a tempo marking of *♩ = 126* and various dynamic markings (*p*, *mp*, *mf*). The third system (measures 34-37) includes a dynamic marking of *mp*. The score is annotated with several text boxes and symbols:
 

- A box at the top right of the first system says: "With a slow vibrato; pulsing, throbbing; textural."
- A box between the first and second systems says: "All breathing should be staggered between players for continuous sound. Marked breaths may be ignored in favor of player's preference. All entrances/note attacks should begin very quietly. Dynamics are suggestions." This box is accompanied by a large 'B' in a box.
- Two boxes in the second system say: "slowly, randomly bend pitch up and down; legato, no attacks" (one for Alto and one for Bass).
- Two boxes in the second system say: "randomly sing or hum a bending G; let the voice float in and out" (one for Alto and one for Bass).
- A box at the top of the third system says: "players should cue each other and not worry about meter".
- Additional markings include "legato, no attacks" and "slowly bend pitch up and down" for the Alto part in the third system.

Ex. 3. *Bioplasm*: page 3. Text boxes and a variety of symbols guide the players.

every passage we scribble down to be a good one. I find freedom in the unlimited supply of blank manuscript pages or new computer sequences, allowing me to keep trying out ideas until the one that really holds my attention appears. Remove the internal pressure to be perfect, and the notes suddenly flow. Write first, ask questions later.

One of the differences between authors and composers is that the latter usually have no editor. Writer friends complain bitterly to me about their work being ripped apart by those who might have been better suited for a career in a meat department. Meanwhile, a composer's offering placed on the music stand is often viewed as an inviolate, nearly sacred artifact. I am always amazed at the humble reluctance of the very musicians learning a behemoth of a piece to make suggestions to the composer that would make the music more playable. And conversely, I am appalled by the arrogance of some composers who immediately blame the musician, not their own ill-conceived concept, if something in their piece isn't working. I encourage feedback from players who will be premiering a new work of mine. It's my most naked and vulnerable time,

but the music is still malleable and can be gently shaped a little more if needed, and the rewards are enormous.

An especially fruitful collaboration I have enjoyed has been with pianist Teresa McCollough, who has an innately great sense of how a piece of music should flow. At her suggestion, I made significant improvements to the first movement of my *Sonata for Piano*, which she then recorded in 2000 for her *New American Piano Music* CD on Innova. Teresa offered no particular thematic or rhythmic advice; it wasn't that she didn't care for the material, but that she knew it had to be organized differently. I knew it, too, but needed someone to give me a push. Talking openly with me about the possibility of refocusing energy in a score that seemed too diffuse, her frankness was a gift, and the revised movement subsequently became her favorite of the entire piece. Three years later on a new commission for Teresa titled *At the Abyss*, which opens her 2004 *Music for Hammers and Sticks* CD for Innova, no rewriting was necessary, but Teresa's guidance helped me cut two excess pages from the first movement. Again, the adjustments made an enormous difference in the success of the music, and I would not have thought to make them without someone else's input.

Another rewarding collaboration has been with the Los Angeles Flute Quartet, for whom I wrote a 2003 piece courtesy of a commission award from the California Association of Professional Music Teachers. There are challenges to expanding the sounds of homogeneous ensembles, and knowing how adventurous the quartet members are, I decided to treat the foursome as a unified, primordial creature oozing across the sonic floor in a piece titled *Bioplasm*. It is a one-movement work in which I use many extended techniques in my quest for a wall of undulating textures. After devising a few ideas with special demands to create these unusual sounds, I asked the quartet if I might run some passages by them to check that everything would be playable before I committed to finishing each section. The resulting afternoon was as filled with laughter as it was with notes; everything I heard in my head worked with the flutes. We conferred on some tricky notation, and I went home to safely complete the piece. But I would never have wanted to spring these soundsósome uniqueóon the flutists without their input. I received the most wonderful compliment a composer could hope for when the quartet told me that there was nothing in the repertoire like this, and that I had expanded their sense of what they were capable of playing. For me, that is the pinnacle of a great collaboration:

The image displays a page of musical notation for the piece *Bioplasm*, page 13. It features four systems of staves, each with four staves representing different instruments: C (two flutes), A (oboe), and B (clarinet). The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings (p, ff, mf, f, pp). Performance instructions are written above and below the staves, including "return to meter", "legato", "stacc.", "gliss.", "do not bend notes", "add voice", and "voice and flute in unison". The score is divided into measures, with measure numbers 201, 207, and 212 indicated. The key signature is G major and the time signature is 4/4.

Ex. 4. *Bioplasm*: page 13. (Audio excerpts can be heard at: <http://www.alexshapiro.org/Bioplasm1.html>)

I could not have composed the music without feedback from those bringing it to life. The 2004 recording will appear on their CD, *Above and Beyond*, and will also be featured on my own upcoming disc.

Pieces for acoustic instruments are not fully realized without the players to launch the sounds into the air, and I feel a commitment to be responsive to the realities musicians face as they take on a new work. In my sonata for bassoonist Carolyn Beck, *Of Breath and Touch*, I discovered that blue is not the natural coloring of a wind player's face, and thanks to pianist Deon Nielsen Price I became far more adept at planning page turns for those musicians unfortunate enough not to have been born with three hands. And always, there is a constant challenge in translating the amorphous gestures I hear in my head into notation that will allow other humans to convey them to listeners. The smallest details can have the greatest effect on how our music sounds to the public.

### Connecting With the Public

Just as I cannot compose music for acoustic instruments without thinking of how the notes will feel under the fingers and against the bodies of the players, I rarely compose music of any kind without considering the experience of the audience, or at least, what I guess their experience might be. When a work of mine is programmed on a concert or a recording, I am given a temporary gift of time, which I can use to take the players and the listeners on a journey. And that presents me with a responsibility to consider just what kind of trip we are going to take.

In this sense I'm mildly programmatic in my approach; like a filmmaker, I want to elicit emotion. Occasionally, a dramatic event will be attached to my intent, as with a trio called *Desert Passage*, which alludes to a violent thunderstorm sweeping suddenly across an arid landscape. More often, I choose subjects like the tides in my string quintet *Current Events*, or human inadequacies, as referred to in *At the Abyss*, and use them as the emotional focus guiding me through the structure of the piece. Many listeners find program notes useful in assisting their connection with unfamiliar music, so I like to share the visions that glided across my mind as I composed.

There are inherent dichotomies in the act of writing music. Composing is mostly a private pursuit, yet the result from being sequestered is usually a very public one. If I expect an audience to not only listen to my music, but to pay money to do so, then while I am composing I think in terms of what will communicate not only to myself, but to others. Because I enjoy having my music performed as much as it is—once or twice a week somewhere in the world—thoughts of those who will be hearing it are rarely far from my mind. Interestingly, this has not affected my artistic choices; even my more experimental pieces are considered tame by comparison to those of many of my peers, and so perhaps I am

just lucky that my own taste is not far afield from that of audiences. I can be true to my instincts and responsive to listeners at the same time. But composers have to earn the interest of our audiences, rather than expect that because we deem what we do to be important, they will, too. And so just as I honor my relationships with musicians, I also believe that I have one with concertgoers as well.

There have even been times when considering the listener during the writing process has been a useful tool when I am stuck on particular a passage. I try to distance myself from my own writing, and ask: "if I were sitting in the audience hearing this, what would I want to happen next?" This question helps get me out of myself and thinking like a listener rather than a creator, since after all, once the piece is finished, listening is what will occur. The theory of composition is almost entirely meaningless to the heart of the listener.

### Shop Talk

There has never been a better time to be a composer than right now. Desktop publishing and the internet have given us access to innumerable potential audiences and musicians, as well as considerable control of our art and of the opportunities we can create. In my experience as a self-published composer, taking advantage of this has required a willingness to sleep a little less and devote some brain space to staying very organized, but because I am happy and motivated it has been a pleasure. The reality of this life is that I spend about 40 percent of my time actually writing music, and the other 60 percent on administration and publishing.

If we as composers are game for doing the additional work, publishers and record companies are no longer necessary conduits for our music to reach the public. It is up to each of us to find the market for our expression, and in exchange for our efforts we retain much more of the income from sales, performances, broadcasts and the like. If we can gather the required startup funds for a computer, printer and supplies, we can print and bind our scores, parts and promotional materials, produce our recording sessions, master, burn and package our CDs, set up distribution deals, and program websites viewed each month by thousands of potential buyers from around the world. We have the tools to disseminate our work and build international client and fan bases without gatekeepers filtering our personal vision. We need no one's approval; all styles of music are welcome. All that is required is the belief that what we create has worth, coupled with the skills to build a resulting income stream. What a positive economic model this can be.

The downside to having so much control over our careers is that we now wear countless professional hats, and the extra work cuts into precious composing time. It is a good thing that I have a tendency toward organization and time triage methods, because they have turned out to be crucial for this particular career. It is not uncommon for me to be

doing an adaptation of one piece, the score and parts editing on another, the recording or mixing session on a third and the composing of a fourth all at the same time, and often each piece has completely different instrumentation and mood. Add to this sending out score orders, following up on emails, updating the website, and other administrative tasks, and suddenly the day is 19 hours long. No one hands us our composing time on a platter. I have learned to guard it and draw boundaries so that I can get my writing done; no amount of business will ever be more important.

In addition to all the enmeshed contact I have with the world, the importance of personal relationships in my professional life cannot be stressed enough. It seems as though with everyone I meet, no matter how significant, the connection has mysteriously led me toward something positive. This interconnectedness occurs in ways that are wonderfully unpredictable. I often joke that composing is a faith-based activity, because with experience, we learn to trust in our abilities to deliver intricate pieces on time. That faith also extends to the serendipity of life, and the unexpected paths presented just by being prepared and receptive. In addition to friendships with other composers and musicians, introducing myself to producers, distributors and radio music directors has been invaluable, as have been my relationships with the people at ASCAP, who always make me feel much more important to them than I think I am, and make themselves available to me and to their other composers, assisting in our careers with advice and networking. Additionally, relationships with the staff members of composer's organizations like American Composers Forum, American Music Center and Meet the Composer have also done a tremendous amount to orient me in this otherwise solitary pursuit.

### Community Talk

As the natural world broadens my output as an artist, so does my participation in causes I celebrate, and this involvement with my community balances my life. When I started out, one of the best things I did was to get involved with music organizations where I quickly met colleagues and learned a great deal. I always feel a responsibility to share whatever bits of knowledge I have picked up along the way because in addition to helping peers, the more of us who succeed, the better for the state of our art in general.

Currently, I am President of the Board of Directors of The American Composers Forum of Los Angeles, and in recent years I have served as an officer of NACUSA, The College Music Society's Pacific Southern Chapter and The Society of Composers & Lyricists, among others. I also do a great deal of public speaking and event moderating within Los Angeles's broad new music community.

Another passionate interest has been civil liberties. During the time I was composing for film and TV in the 1990s, I served three terms on the Board of Directors of the American

Civil Liberties Union of Southern California, including two years as the 30,000 member affiliate's vice president. As one might guess, I was the sole composer in the organization, but a reminder to others that an American doesn't need to be a constitutional lawyer to care about the Bill of Rights.

My involvement had begun on the smallest scale, attending ACLU house meetings and doing a little lobbying. Alarmed by the growing attacks on women's rights to reproductive health, I soon found myself working closely with The Feminist Majority, Planned Parenthood and the National Organization for Women, when a group calling itself Operation Rescue rolled into Los Angeles and began a campaign of forcibly blockading clinics. A handful of us countered these attacks by forming The Clinic Defense Alliance, rallying thousands of men and women to physically defend the facilities and escort the frightened patients to their doctor's appointments.

I became the ACLU's local spokesperson for pro-choice issues, and I was often pitted against the President of Right to Life and various politicians in formal public debates and in the media. It was exciting and rewarding, but after several years of balancing my music career with intense volunteerism, what happened one afternoon led me to rethink my schedule. In the midst of a recording session with a hired player at my studio, the phone rang with a talk radio station on the other end asking me if I could go live via phone in five minutes for an interview on a court ruling announced moments earlier. I asked the musician to take a break, and I did the interview, rapidly switching mental gears from music to legalities, but I realized that as much as I cared about social issues, I could no longer afford to participate quite as actively if I wanted my music career to flourish.

Art is both a reflection of society and a reaction to it. To have dual means by which to express myself has been a blessing. I believe it is important for artists to be involved with their community, in whatever sort of activism interests them. Since what we do as composers is meant to reach others, making a connection that could have an effect on the community outside of music can be powerful, integrating us in our neighborhoods and making our work even more relevant to the public. Not surprisingly, the name of my publishing company is Activist Music.

### Girl Talk

I have never thought of myself in terms of being a female composer, only a composer. Music is about soul and passion and communication, and none of that is gender-specific.

Mine is the very first generation of women composers to benefit from an unlimited potential, thanks to the enormous efforts of women who preceded me and fought so hard against discrimination. By the time I entered conservatory in 1980, half of the composers in my small class were female, and the composition faculty included Ursula Mamlok and Ludmilla Ulehla. I came of age without any idea that it might be odd to

have chosen this profession, due as well to progressive parents who raised me to believe that I could do anything I wanted, as long as I was good enough. That sense of personal responsibility for my success or failure has been significant.

From time to time I am contacted by undergraduate students taking gender in music classes, and I am perplexed by the nearly combative phrasing of the questions I am asked in these interviews, as though the student believes that the world automatically shuts women out. Reading these biased queries from such young women, I wonder from where in society they acquire all this animosity, since not only have I never been discriminated against, but have found that being female has occasionally been helpful. I am aware that because I am neither in academia nor performance, I am sheltered from the ongoing battles some women continue to face; my perspective comes solely from being an independent working composer. But since being able to make a living as a composer is one of the goals we strive for, my limited perspective is worth sharing.

Opportunity exists for anyone who visualizes it. What matters is what we have to say with our music, and how we interact with people. A career in music is made up of talent and also of social skills. Some women with a gender-chip on their shoulder can be so offensive to others in their muted anger that their negative perceptions become a self-fulfilling prophesy. But if we walk through the world viewing ourselves as equals, we are more likely to be treated as such.

I have enormous respect and appreciation for the IAWM, on whose concerts I have frequently and gratefully been included. But I am not convinced that all-women concerts do anyone's composers or audiences a favor. When presenters limit the selections to a particular, smaller pool of entries, there is a greater chance that the quality of the concert suffers, ironically at the risk of doing female composers a disservice. This observation does not refer to my colleagues or to the IAWM, but to the larger concept of self-segregation as it relates to our otherwise equal standing in society today. Yes, it is very, very important to ensure that women's music

be programmed regularly. But I believe the most effective way of achieving this is to educate women to be not only excellent composers, but excellent business people as well, capable of promoting their work professionally. I would love to see the IAWM produce a series of workshops offering members further tools for expanding their careers. My own modest experience in the chamber music world has been that the playing field is far more level than it appears.

I have found that an attitude of abundance brings abundance to my life. It thrills me to see more composers working than ever before, and I firmly believe that there is room for us all to thrive as we find colleagues and listeners who resonate with our unique offerings. Like fingerprints, no two composers are alike, and the only person I am in competition with is myself.

I feel very privileged to have work that I love, and I try to share my enthusiasm for this life hoping it will inspire other composers to take risks and follow their instincts to creative happiness. There is power in numbers, and the more living composers whose music is heard by the public, the greater our influence, as we communicate passionately and build a strong connection between ourselves and our society.

*Audio excerpts of each of the pieces discussed, as well as many others, can be found on Alex Shapiro's comprehensive website, <http://www.alexshapiro.org>, and she welcomes emails from readers at [alex@alexshapiro.org](mailto:alex@alexshapiro.org).*

#### 2005 Catalog of Published Concert Works by Alex Shapiro

All works are published by Activist Music (ASCAP) and registered with the Library of Congress. All publication dates are the same year as the copyright date. (Up-to-date information on new works can be found at <http://www.alexshapiro.org/ASWorks.html>, and up-to-date information on new CD releases can be found at <http://www.alexshapiro.org/ASRecordings.html>.)

The works are listed in reverse chronological order, and the performance times are approximate. The works are in one movement unless specified otherwise. Works that have been recorded are marked with an asterisk.

*Bioplasm* (2004) (flute quartet: 1 piccolo, 2 C flutes, 2 alto flutes, 2 bass flutes)\*

Dur. 12'. Commissioned in 2003 by The California Association of Professional Music Teachers. Premiered February 2004 in Los Angeles, CA and recorded March 2004 by the Los Angeles Flute Quartet for their 2005 CD, *ìAbove and Beyond.ì* Winner of a 2005 award from the Music Teachers National Association.

*Elegy* (2004) (trumpet, cello, piano)

Dur. 8'. Commissioned in 2004 by The Orenunn Trio. Premiered by them September 2004 in Spearfish, SD.

*Deep* (2004) (contrabassoon and electronic soundscape on CD)\*

Dur. 7'. Commissioned in 2004 by Carolyn Beck. Recorded by Beck in October 2004 for her 2005 CD, *ìBeck and Call.ì*

*Sea Song* (2004) (solo B-flat clarinet)

Dur. 2'. Teaching piece, beg. intermediate level. Premiered May 2004 in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, by Adam Kubiske.

### Congratulations to Kathryn Mishell

*ìInto the Light,ì* the radio program that Kathryn Mishell produces and hosts, was a winner of The Communicator Awards 2004: Award of Distinction. This is an international award that recognizes outstanding work in radio. For the second year in a row, *ìInto the Light ì* has won the award. The one-hour program of women's music throughout the ages celebrated its fifth anniversary in January. It is broadcast weekly throughout central Texas on two stations, and is streamed every Sunday from 2 to 3 pm, central time, at <http://kamu-fm.tamu.edu/live.php>. Many of the works played are by IAWM members.

*Plasma* (2004) (recorded flutes)\*

Dur. 11. Premiered September 2004 in New York City. Recorded by the Los Angeles Flute Quartet, March 2004.

*Current Events* (2003) (string quintet)\*

Dur. 16. Three mvts. Commissioned in 2003 by Gerry Aster and by J. Christopher Kennedy for Pacific Serenades. Premiered March 2003 in Los Angeles, CA. Recorded by Miwako Watanabe and Connie Kupka, violins; Victoria Miskolczy and David Walther, violas; and David Speltz, cello, June 2003. To be released on Alex Shapiro's 2005 CD.

*At the Abyss* (2003) (piano, marimba, vibraphone, metal percussion)\*

Dur. 15. Three mvts. Commissioned in 2003 by Teresa McCollough. Premiered April 2003 in San Francisco, CA. Winner of the 2003 Best Original Composition Award from Mu Phi Epsilon. Recorded by Teresa McCollough, piano; Thomas Burritt, marimba and vibraphone; and Peggy Benkeser, percussion; June 2004 for iMusic for Hammers and Sticks, i Innova Recordings 630.

*Celebrate!* (2003) (SSA choir and piano)

Dur. 5. Commissioned in 2003 by Thea Kano. Text by the composer. Premiered June 2004 in Los Angeles, CA by the San Fernando Valley Youth Choir.

*Desert Passage* (2002) (violin, tenor saxophone and piano)

Dur. 10. Commissioned in 2003 by James Umble. Premiered June 2003 at the World Saxophone Congress in Minneapolis, MN by The Cleveland Duo.

*Water Crossing* (2002) (B-flat clarinet and electronic soundscape on CD)\*

Dur. 10. Commissioned in 2002 by F. Gerard Errante; recorded on his 2005 CD iDelicate Balance. i

*Celebrate!* (2002) (SATB choir and piano)

Dur. 5. Commissioned in 2002 by the University Campus Choir. Text by the composer. Premiered June 2002 in Los Angeles, CA by the University Campus Choir.

*Intermezzo for Violin and Harp* (2002)

Dur. 4. Commissioned in 2002 by Simon James.

*Desert Notes* (2001) (oboe, bassoon, piano)

Dur. 10. Commissioned in 2001 by Carolyn Beck.

*Desert Passage* (2001) (violin, cello, piano)

Dur. 10.

*Desert Waves* (2001) (5-string electric violin and electronic soundscape on CD)\*

Dur. 10. Commissioned in 2001 by Sabrina Ann Berger. Premiered April 2004 in New York and recorded by Berger June 2003 for iE-Scapes for E-Violin, i on Millennia Arts.

*Of Air and Touch* (2001) (oboe and piano)

Dur. 10.

*Of Wood and Touch* (2001) (cello and piano)

Dur. 10. Premiered February 2004 in San Francisco, CA by Gianna Abondolo, cello, and Teresa McCollough, piano.

*Re:pair* (2001) (flute and oboe)

Dur. 7. Commissioned in 2000 by flutists Tom Moore and Laura Ronai. Premiered June 2002 in Ontario, Canada, by Penelope Clarke, flute, and Colleen Gibson, oboe.

*Voila!* (2001) (solo viola)

Dur. 2. Teaching piece, beg. intermediate level. Premiered November 2002 in Hong Kong by Philip Kubiske.

*Slip* (2001) (violin and harpsichord)\*

Dur. 9. Commissioned in 2000 by Robin Lorentz. Premiered January 2002 in Santa Fe, NM and recorded November 2003 by Lorentz, violin, and Kathleen McIntosh, harpsichord. To be released on Alex Shapiro's 2005 CD.

*Re:pair* (2001) (flute and bassoon)

Dur. 7. Commissioned in 2000 by Carolyn Beck. Premiered March 2002 in Los Angeles, CA by Patti Cloud Kaufmann, flute, and Beck, bassoon.

*Re:pair* (2001) (bassoon duet)

Dur. 7. Commissioned in 2001 by Carolyn Beck.

*Fanfare for Four* (2001) (B-flat trumpet, french horn, trombone, tuba)

Dur. 3.

*Of Bow and Touch* (2000) (double bass, piano)

Dur. 10. Premiered October 2001 in Long Beach, CA by Tom Peters, bass, and Mark Uranker, piano. Winner of a 2001 Award from The International Society of Bassists.

*Re:pair* (2000) (flute duet)

Dur. 7. Commissioned in 2000 by Tom Moore and Laura Ronai.

*Introspect* (2000) (string quartet)

Dur. 7. Premiered December 2000 in Los Angeles, CA by Daphne Chen and Melissa Reiner, violins; Alma Fernandez, viola; Adam Esbensen, cello.

*Intermezzo for Clarinet and Harp* (2000)

Dur. 4. Premiered September 1999 in Austin, TX by Martha MacDonald, clarinet, and Delaine Fedson, harp.

*Re:pair: for Two Baroque Flutes* (2000)

Dur. 7. Commissioned in 2000 by Tom Moore and Laura Ronai. Premiered January 2001 in Princeton, NJ by Moore and Ronai.

*Music for Two Big Instruments* (2000) (tuba and piano)\*

Dur. 7. Commissioned in 2000 by Norman Pearson and Cynthia Bauhof-Williams. Premiered February 2001 in Los Angeles, CA and recorded November 2003 by Pearson, tuba, and Bauhof-Williams, piano. To be released on Alex Shapiro's 2005 CD.

*Transplant* (1999) (solo organ)

Dur. 4. Commissioned in 1999 and premiered October 2000 in Claremont, CA by Frances Nobert.

*Shiny Kiss* (1999) (solo flute)\*

Dur. 4. Commissioned in 1999 by Chelsea Czuchra. Premiered October 1999 in Carmel, CA, and recorded November 1999 by Czuchra.

*Of Breath and Touch* (1999) (bassoon and piano)\*

Dur. 10. Commissioned in 1999 by Carolyn Beck. Premiered March 2000 in Los Angeles, CA and recorded October 2003 for iBeck and Calli by Beck and Delores Stevens.

*Journey* (1999) (5-string electric violin and electronic soundscape on CD)\*

Dur. 7. Commissioned in 1999 by Mary Lou Newmark. Premiered November 1999 in Los Angeles, CA by Newmark. Recorded by Sabrina Ann Berger May 2000 for iE-Scapes for E-Violin i on Millennia Arts.

*Evensong Suite for Flute, Clarinet, Bassoon and Piano* (1999)\*

Dur. 17í. Six mvts. Commissioned in 1999 by St. Bede's Episcopal Church. Premiered May 1999 in Los Angeles, CA and recorded June 1999 by Brice Martin, flute; Charles Boito, clarinet; Carolyn Beck, bassoon; and Frank Basile, piano.

*Piano Trio No. 1: Elegy* (1999) (violin, cello, piano)

Dur. 8í. Premiered April 2000 in Bakersfield, CA by Donna Fraser, violin; Norma Sexton, cello; Charles Badami, piano.

*Trio for Clarinet, Violin and Piano* (1998)\*

Dur. 12í. Three mvts. Commissioned by Bronwen Jones. Premiered November 1998 in Claremont, CA by Jones, clarinet; Marcy Vaj, violin; Genevieve Lee, piano. Winner of the 1999 Best Instrumental Composition Award from The Composers Guild. Winner of the 1998 Best Performance Award from The Delius Festival. Recorded by Berkeley Price, clarinet; Nancy Roth, violin; and Deon Nielsen Price, piano, June 1999 for *Clariphonia: Music of the 20th Century on Clarinet*, on Cambria Master Recordings 1125.

*Intermezzo for Piano* (1998)

Dur. 3í.

*Intermezzo for Clarinet and Piano* (1998)\*

Dur. 4í. Premiered April 1999 in Rindge, NH by Jamie Rainville, clarinet, and Rebecca Ahlfors, piano. Recorded by Berkeley Price, clarinet, and Deon Nielsen Price, piano, May 2000.

*Sonata for Piano* (1997; re-copyrighted 1999)\*

Dur. 16í. Three mvts. First version premiered May 1998 in Los Angeles, CA by Barbara Burgan. Revised version premiered April 1999 in Santa Clara, CA by Teresa McCollough. Recorded by McCollough June 2000 for *New American Piano Music* on Innova Recordings 520.

*Piano Suite No. 1: The Resonance of Childhood* (1996) (solo piano)\*

Dur. 12í. Five mvts. Premiered November 1996 in Los Angeles, CA by Zita Carno, piano. *For My Father* recorded by pianist Susanne Kessel October 2004 for *Das Kalifornische Konzert* on Oehms Classics.

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