

A Moving Image of Elliot Goldenthal

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**A Conversation with Frank J. Oteri
Videotaped and Transcribed by Randy Nordschow**

- 1. Becoming a Composer**
- 2. Discovering the Role of Music in Film**
- 3. Cinema vs. The Concert Hall**
- 4. Making All The Pieces Fit Together**
- 5. The Need for Orchestras**
- 6. Finding Sources for Inspiration**
- 7. Writing Music for Theatre**
- 8. Beyond the Double Life**

1. Becoming a Composer

FRANK J. OTERI: More than almost anyone else who comes to mind, you are someone who is able to successfully divide yourself between these two very different worlds. I think it's rather fitting that you're sitting where you are, between a piano and synthesizer. It's sort of a metaphor, in a way, for our whole discussion today. But before we plunge into a specific decision of where your career has gone, let's take things back to the beginning. When did you decide you wanted to be a composer and what did that mean to you at the time?

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: I suppose I was extremely young. Two-ish? Three-ish? Something like that. I was exposed to, possibly, Beethoven or Louis Armstrong, whatever. The sense of logic in the music was very attractive to me, like little bits of information that made up a whole. I remember being attracted to that as opposed to just melody.

FRANK J. OTERI: It's interesting that you say Beethoven and Louis Armstrong both without even breathing between them. So, for you, from the very beginning there was really wasn't a divide between so called Western classical music and America's popular traditions.

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: No. If you listen to Louis Armstrong's solos, without him studying Beethoven they're very Beethovenian. Again, there are little bits of motivic material that get developed in an effortless way, especially his early solos. In the *Hot Fives and Hot Sevens* you hear a huge amount of construction in his work. And then it just swings like Beethoven.

FRANK J. OTERI: Like "West End Blues"...

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: Yes, yes.

FRANK J. OTERI: But you then went on to study formally. You went to the Manhattan School of Music and became an official composer in the Western classical sense of what that means. I think it's very interesting that two of your teachers were Aaron Copland and John Corigliano who are the only two composers in American history thus far—hopefully this will happen to you—who've won both the Oscar and the Pulitzer, two of the most prestigious prizes in America for film music and for concert music composition respectively, and both of whom lived in both of those worlds to some extent, although not as much as you do.

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: We all grew up within a three-mile radius, it's really weird, in Brooklyn. Corigliano was my official teacher and I got to know Aaron very well in the last ten years of his life. He was very helpful with my scores and I had the great pleasure of sitting down next to him and reading through many of his scores really, really slowly. He was getting on in age and I wasn't the best sight-reader, so it was the perfect tempo. It was a tremendous pleasure asking him questions about... okay we're at this bar, what

did you feel here? And there? It was a tremendous learning experience right there. As for John Corigliano, I studied with him for seven years, every Wednesday, privately. He continues to be my *consiliere*, so to speak, for any musical problems I have.

2. Discovering the Role of Music in Film

FRANK J. OTERI: Now, to take it a little bit backwards with a question, when were you first aware, in your training or as a child, about music in a motion picture as an entity in and of itself, separate from the film?

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: I'd have to say when I was a really little boy, four or five or something, these horror films from the 1930s would come on, like *Frankenstein* or *Dracula*, and the music would scare me completely. I remember folks saying to me that if you take the music off, it's not frightening. You know, then the images just looks kind of silly, and they were right. I think that was my first childhood memory of how synchronization of music and drama work together. Then, of course, as a teenager there used to be a theater in Manhattan called the Thalia. Basically it was the only art theater. What was lovely about it was that you could see real cinema. Whether it was John Ford, Truffaut, Hitchcock, or whatever, you got to really learn about cinema. I became a cinema buff, and through that I was very excited about that very, very, very new art form.

Can you imagine being around for the very beginnings of opera within the first century of its development? Or anything else? I mean its very exciting that it's such a new art form.

FRANK J. OTERI: So is that what you were initially driven to do? Were you thinking at time, even as a young person, that you wanted to write music for film?

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: Oh, yes. Absolutely. I felt that I could contribute in that medium. It's what seems comfortable to me and others.

FRANK J. OTERI: But in the early years when you were training as a composer, certainly you couldn't just turn around and write music for film and expect...

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: Well, sure you can.

FRANK J. OTERI: ...So, were you working at that time?

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: Yeah, student films. Sure, I signed myself up at NYU. I put a note up on a bulletin board saying that I'll do any score for free if they could pay for the musicians. I did maybe thirty or forty little five-minute films.

FRANK J. OTERI: Wow.

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: ...and then learning with students the lingo of film, about editing, etc. You make a director, in the meeting that you have with him, very comfortable because you're approaching it from the film side and not the music side.

FRANK J. OTERI: Now you were doing this at the same time that you were studying composition formally and discovering the concert hall repertoire...

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: Oh, yeah.

FRANK J. OTERI: ... string quartets, and all these sorts of pieces. But there was a love for doing that as well. Did you see them as two separate worlds?

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: Oh, absolutely not. No. You have to use different muscles but you're basically swimming in the same ocean. Every task has a set objective that you have to accomplish. Whether it's an oboe concerto or whether it's an opera or a ballet. They're all so different in the way they're approached. Think about Hindemith and his sonatas. You can see how practical he was in composing these sonatas. He took every instrument, very specifically, and wrote for it very effectively, as opposed to just writing music. Every task is different.

3. Cinema vs. The Concert Hall

FRANK J. OTERI: Are there dos and don'ts for film music that don't apply to music for the concert hall and visa versa?

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: I wouldn't know. Because every time I think I know something someone comes along and does it right. I don't know anything about dos and don'ts.

FRANK J. OTERI: Is there something you'd write....

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: (laughing) Don't make people bored!

FRANK J. OTERI: (laughing) In either one?

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: No.

FRANK J. OTERI: Are there things you'd write in a film score that you wouldn't write in a piece for concert hall?

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: Well, there are times in film music where you have to create tension, or you have to suspend time, and do it in a way where it's completely unobtrusive. So much so that the content of the music has to be so spare that there can't be much that is intellectual or bits of complexity. Sometimes at the concert hall you might want more to elapse within a timeframe, sometimes. But there are times when you still have to clear the palette for more dense information as well.

FRANK J. OTERI: Well, it's interesting because in the concert hall you don't have a film image accompanying the music, so basically the music is all you've got. The music has to be one hundred percent of the sensory information to the audience members. Whereas in film your eyes are being activated, your ears are being activated, your sense of narrative flow is being activated. Lots of different parts of your brain are being channeled at the same time. Yet, there have been composers, yourself included, who've written really out-there, sophisticated, experimental music for motion pictures. You know this has been going on for over fifty years. Leonard Rosenman was writing twelve-tone music for film in the '50s. Jerry Goldsmith wrote twelve-tone music for film...

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: Don't forget Takemitsu!

FRANK J. OTERI: Yeah. His film music is really wonderful...

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: Well, Takemitsu also is someone that you can really aspire to want to have a career like. At times his film music and concert music were indistinguishable.

FRANK J. OTERI: I think only now audiences in America are aware of just how much he contributed to films because a lot of those films did not get circulation in this country.

We didn't realize. We know these concert works of his. I think actually a lot of his work are getting attention now that he's dead. This is the terrible thing that happens to so many composers; now that he's dead his music is getting out there in ways that it never did...

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: It gives us composers something to look forward to.

FRANK J. OTERI: (laughing) For me personally it doesn't sound like a good gamble, but....

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: Don't forget Shostakovich. He also wrote over forty film scores. I mean tacky love stories, stupid documentaries. I mean he tackled a lot of dumb projects and he did it with grace and vigor. His music is quite captivating but it's servicing the movies.

FRANK J. OTERI: And he actually had a theremin in one of his scores before Rózsa did. Everyone said that Rózsa was the first one to use a theremin in a film score....

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: That makes sense.

FRANK J. OTERI: It was a Soviet invention. Certainly after talking about Shostakovich and people of that earlier generation, the palette for writing for movies then was much different than it is now. It was really this kind of expanded post-Richard Strauss orchestra. Now, there are also electronics and world music influences. I know a lot of that figures in your own work. It's even elements of rock, pop, rap. It's anything goes. It's not just so-called classical orchestral music. It's all part of the vocabulary of writing for film. So in a way it has almost morphed into a separate genre whereas earlier in the century, film music was kind of a subcategory of orchestral music, to some extent.

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: To some extent. I think once the Americans started forgetting the European and the Europeans started discovering the Americans, interesting things started to happen. For example, in the 1930s and the early Berlin films you had a lot of German composers experimenting with jazz, bringing them into that— also in the French cinema, as well. I think post-World War II opened the floodgates for so much more experimentation, which also went along with the improvement of recording techniques. When you look at movies post-World War II like *The Third Man* for example, just using the zither with a cimbalom as the major component of the score. Some of the neo-realist filmmakers, Rossellini, De Sica, Fellini, and Pasolini— the work that Morricone did with Pasolini is really startling, some of that early stuff.

FRANK J. OTERI: One of the things that's so interesting about writing for film as opposed to writing for the concert hall is you're dealing with fixed form. You can do things in the studio. You can create effects in the studio with electronics that you might not necessarily be able to pull off the way you want it to sound every time in a live concert hall setting. So in a way it kind of allows you more room. But, at the same time,

it also constrains you because it locks the score— cues have to be a certain length of time.

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: I don't find it constraining. I don't disagree with you but I think both concert music and film music thrive on constraint and thrive almost on human accuracy that needs to be either reproduced on the spot or recorded. Certainly if you look at the scores of Penderecki, everything is clicked out according to seconds. It doesn't have to be, but that's his method. Even the desire for Beethoven to use the metronome...

FRANK J. OTERI: Well it's interesting. There are certain kinds of aleatory processes. You can certainly experiment with them using a stopwatch, as Penderecki does in his early scores. But you can't really experiment in an aleatoric, free form way temporally with music that you write for film because you always have to be aware of what the music is supposed to be serving, I would think.

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: Well, I use a lot of aleatory techniques of writing in film. In the score for *Alien 3*, for example, I pre-composed the electronics using homemade samples and different sounds ranging from scissors to stretching strings, to clangorous sounds, etc. I basically had the electronic score. I had this orchestra score in mind, but not a typical European orchestra sound. I wanted the orchestra to sound like the musique concrète that was already recorded. In order to do that one had use a lot of aleatoric techniques; boxes with clusters of strings and smears across the page. You have to coax and coerce the musicians not be as logical as they would. So I found that technique very, very effective— with a click, aleatoric. Going from letter A to letter B, not counting measures. Just cueing in what the next event will be.

4. Making All The Pieces Fit Together

FRANK J. OTERI: Certainly working with classical musicians who are used to playing standard repertoire and putting a score in front of them that has weird aleatory notations or quartertone or eighth-tone notations is an uphill battle sometimes. When you're dealing with a session musician recording a film soundtrack who is really not used to that sort of thing at all, how do you bring in some of these elements?

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: I usually record with orchestras like members of the New York Philharmonic or members of the London Symphony, for example. Many of the L.A. recording musicians came from that world. When you're dealing with the London Symphony Orchestra or New York Philharmonic, they know. They know exactly what you mean. Sometimes you just go over to the concertmaster and very politely tell them what effect you want. It's not just pick the stick up and go. Very often I'm going from section to section explaining what the technique is, what muting to use, what the aleatoric smudge on the page actually means. You know, things like that.

FRANK J. OTERI: So when you work through a film score and record a film score do feel you have more control of musicians than say an average concert hall composer would writing a piece and maybe getting three rehearsals if they're lucky with say the Boston Symphony?

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: Absolutely. Absolutely. When my oratorio was played by the Boston Symphony with Seiji, who is so great, conducting the orchestra, then he went to conduct the chorus and the children's chorus. Things were going at such a fast speed. There wasn't the luxury of taking the piece of paper, going down in the middle of the orchestra. Every second— it's like a war. Every second you're counting down to the solemn curfew, so to speak, of when there's no more time left and you have to put that concert on. It's really, really scary.

FRANK J. OTERI: The clock is also ticking in film production though.

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: Yeah, but it's different. It's a little bit different. You have a little bit more... You want to get it right. The director is in there deliberating; thinking whether he likes the last cue or not. Listening back to it while you're out there fixing. There's a little bit more wiggle room usually in film production. Even though you have to accomplish a lot every day.

FRANK J. OTERI: It's interesting. When people who come primarily from the concert world look at the film world, they look at it as this giant act of collaboration. There are so many cooks in the kitchen. There is the director, screenwriter, and producer, obviously the actors and the crew. It's hard, maybe, to have an individual voice with all those other voices there. That's a perception, it's probably not an accurate perception because you're saying that working with an orchestra seems even more that way, to a certain extent.

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: I think that it is an inaccurate analogy. I think it's more like the workings of a fine restaurant where everyone has their own role, completely. It's not a lot of cooks and a lot of chefs in one kitchen. It's a chef and everyone else doing their job. The executive producer would be the guy that pays the guy that buys the food. That person who buys the food is real, real important. The person that delivers the food is real important. The actual executive chef, of course, is important, but you have the whole line. You have all the *sous-chefs*. The guys who cut the potatoes are important. The one that reduces the stocks. The people who clean the dishes— I know I'm being simplistic, but the *maitre'd*, the laundry that all the tablecloths go out to, every single thing is extremely important in the running of a great restaurant. But no one is doing the work of anybody else's twice. There are not a lot of cooks in the kitchen, so to speak. That's the way it is in a film production. The editor is sitting there. The director is there. The producer is there and the orchestra. Everybody has a well-defined role. So it is collaborative in a sense that composer and director work together closely; everybody else's role just follows after that.

FRANK J. OTERI: In this restaurant analogy, what is the role for the composer?

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: Well, the role of the composer is yet another cog and piece of what has to be to make a successful establishment. I'd like to say it's the actual ingredients. (laughs)

FRANK J. OTERI: (laughing) I was thinking maybe it's the guy who makes the sauce!

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: Possibly. The person who makes the sauces, okay. You know, the analogy is not airtight. However, in terms of collaboration, I thought I was a little closer.

FRANK J. OTERI: Now then, can people in the so-called classical music world— that term is so dead. Anyway, I'm thinking of the concert hall world; the symphony orchestras, the chamber groups, recitalists. Is there something that we can all learn from this wonderful restaurant that is a great motion picture that we're just not getting?

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: In the concert world?

FRANK J. OTERI: Yeah. Why should it have been a battle with the Boston Symphony? Even though you got a great performance and later on the piece got a great recording—it's a piece that has gotten a lot of circulation—but you used the word battle. You have a luckier scenario than most composers with a work like that. It shouldn't be a battle.

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: Orchestras seem to put on two hats. When they're working for a film production they seem to function business-wise, or personality-wise, less as an orchestra than as studio musicians. This is a delicate point. When an orchestra is performing as an orchestra, rehearsing as an orchestra, there's a different mentality. Within the orchestra, any orchestra, there are many factions. People circulate their own

newsletters within the orchestra that may oppose the conductor, or oppose the administration. There are people who don't like to rehearse at eight, or nine. They like to rehearse at three. You know what I'm saying? It goes on and on and on and on— all the demands within the orchestra. There are orchestras that don't want to play Wagner or Philip Glass because it hurts their arms. They don't want to play this. They don't want to play that. They get very finicky and they have their own personalities. The concertmaster might not like the work that they're doing or might not like contemporary music. There's a faction that hates contemporary music. There is not a unity in that setting for most orchestras. I have always found this. When they are working on a film it's something different. They think differently. They toss all that aside and they're just very helpful. Did you get what you wanted? Can we do any better? There is a great pride that takes over and fractionalization kind of disappears.

FRANK J. OTERI: That is fascinating. Maybe in the orchestra the "too many cooks in the kitchen" analogy does work.

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: Well, musicians have a lot of pride and they work very hard. Each musician has a world and universe of their own. They have their own students. They come from their own styles and their own musical cliques. It's very difficult. Imagine, a baseball manager has just eighteen guys or something. Imagine being a conductor of an orchestra. You have all those personalities.

5. The Need for Orchestras

FRANK J. OTERI: The orchestra is a very large organization. Certainly with recorded sounds and with electronics people are creating film scores with many fewer people. Your breakthrough film score *Drugstore Cowboy* certainly doesn't have a large orchestra. It works with electronics and does some really, really fascinating things. Is it necessary to have an orchestra to really flush out a film?

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: Obviously not. But on a movie like *Interview with a Vampire* or any of the *Batmans* I did, you need that orchestral tonnage. You need that, as Stravinsky called it, testicular weight. To give the audiences what they feel they deserve when they walk in. They want to hear that big orchestral sound that takes them for a ride. It really is sort of a carryover and a true extension of what people expect when they went to grand opera. It's expectation. You see these giant cinematic images of heroism and it's very, very difficult to provide what you need dramatically with a few instruments.

FRANK J. OTERI: There is something almost quaint and silly about seeing a silent film accompanied by an upright piano. Here you have this big chase scene (laughing) and they're just kind of running up the scale and down the scale.

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: Every movie has its own, again, task. You have to say, what is this about? What do I have to accomplish here? What set of instruments? Whether it's one instrument or no instruments or a large orchestra? What does it really feel like it needs? Sometimes it's very, very mundane kind of reasons. It's their studio. It's a franchised movie. They need to make back a hundred million dollars so there's a certain expectation that you need to fulfill for the audience at one point. Other times it's an art house movie. It's kind of unusual. You can really, really experiment. There's not the crazy need to make back tons of money for the producers. The directors are less nervous and they tend to let you experiment more.

FRANK J. OTERI: Now, a lot of people go to these heroic movies with big orchestra scores. They hear that and expect that, as you said. But that might be the only time a lot of people ever hear an orchestra. These are people who don't go to symphony orchestra concerts. Yet the sound of the orchestra is still a part of their lives. There are lots of people who say the orchestra is this antiquated dinosaur that is not relevant to America and that it is not relevant to the 21st century. But clearly it is when it's in these film scores that so many people see.

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: Clearly it is. And they are being exposed to very avant-garde things in the orchestra that if they heard [the same music] in the concert hall, they'd just think it was really weird and they'd walk out.

FRANK J. OTERI: Well, or they wouldn't be in the concert hall to begin with. The argument that I use all the time is the people who are open to many of these new ideas are people the concert hall, for some reason, is not attracting.

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: That's right. I couldn't agree with you more and the orchestra is, indeed, part of their life.

6. Finding Sources for Inspiration

FRANK J. OTERI: Now, something interesting you said about heroism wanting and need to have the big orchestra. Miklós Rózsa is a composer who's music I've studied for years, both the film music and the concert hall music. One of the things he said in his autobiography is that when he was working on a score that was set in a specific period, he would go immerse himself in that period. Whether it was ancient Rome or, for example, he did this movie about Sherlock Holmes and immersed himself in Victorian-era stuff. Yet you hear the scores he wrote and they sound nothing like the music of those times. I know that you did the score of *Michael Collins*, which is a really great film about a historic figure. How much turn of the century Irish music figured in that for you? What's your pre-composing process when you get the storyline?

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: In terms of *Michael Collins*, I met with Neil many times in Dublin before hand. After reading the script, I thought the challenge for me was that there was not a big female presence in the film. Ireland does have a big female presence. I thought of Bernadette Devlin and other people who were very, very important in Irish cause. I asked him if he'd let me record female chorus singing in the Irish language, in Gaelic. He said yes, it would be great to sing in Irish. I then thought of chorus and Sinéad O'Connor—she's a compelling singer in that style—and orchestra. I said we'd take certain Irish instruments but not use them in an Irish way. I used uilleann pipes for example. I had these tone-rows that the musician was playing in different metronomic speeds. It was recorded at different speeds and manipulated. It's almost closer to a late '60s John Coltrane solo than Irish reels and jigs. That with orchestral punctuation was something that was preconceived. There was one tune in there, a waltz, that I thought was very proper and Edwardian; like the way the love story was set and the way costumes looked. Other than that, even in *Michael Collins*, there was some experimentation.

FRANK J. OTERI: With a score like *Titus*, where you're dealing with an ancient Roman subject matter filtered through Shakespearean times, some how. What was your pre-composition process there?

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: It's interesting where your composition ideas come from. There's a print of a production that was done of *Titus* in Shakespeare's time. It shows people in Roman togas and Elizabethan costumes. That gave me, and also the director, the knowledge and license that even Shakespeare in Elizabethan times wasn't going for a pure Roman idiom. Another thing is when I was in Rome looking for the locations, standing in front of the Colosseum, there were these two Roman guys dressed in red Roman outfits to have their pictures taken with tourists. They had a boom box underneath playing Elvis. Then you'd hear Fiats go by with rap music. At the same time you'd see a window open, and Puccini's music was playing in there. You get the point that Rome today is probably exactly the way Rome always was, which was a collision of many cultures, a citadel of anachronisms. It's possible to exist totally and consistently within an anachronistic world. That gave me the freedom but lead to certain disciplinary choices in the movie. For example, you have three generations. *Titus*'s music was

mainly orchestral. He's sort of the patriarch, a serious general—either percussive or orchestral. The music of Saturninus, a generation younger—it kind of felt like in the staging almost 1930s fascist— the music was also big band, twisted big band— very, very brassy, jazzy. The younger, younger generation, the two boys Chiron and Bassianus, their music felt like post-skinhead punk music. That felt very comfortable for them. The one consistent thing was to find what in practically every character is the great leveler. What we've found is almost all the principal characters found themselves in the position where they were begging for their lives or their son's lives or whatever, on their knees, begging. Publius did it. Tamora did it. Aaron did it and on and on. I found a simple two-part contrapuntal melody that I call the compassion theme that works for each character when they're in that similar situation. That binds everything.

FRANK J. OTERI: What is that two-part melody?

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: (sings part of the melody) It's very chromatic. (sings the another part of the melody) It's played with solo cello and solo viola. And the orchestra plays it. That happens consistently in the movie.

FRANK J. OTERI: Another question in terms of pre-composition things that go into something: we talked a little bit about the score to *Alien 3*. Clearly this was the third part in a series of films that involved other directors and other composers. I think Jerry Goldsmith did the score for the first of the *Alien* movies. You worked on several of the *Batman* films. Certainly Batman has a whole legacy going back even before the recent films. There are all kinds of people who did Batman stuff. In the first of the new batch of movies, if memory serves, there were a bunch of songs by Prince. The question becomes, how much does the earlier music that gets done for films that are sequels figure in you head when you're going in to do the score?

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: Sometimes there are non-musical things that trigger off a score. In terms of *Alien 3*, it's a sense of isolation, being a zillion miles away in space somewhere in some prison. You want to create that sense of isolation, that sense of despair, that nauseating feeling that you're not going to come out of it alive. Certainly the earlier composers might have responded to those events. The second *Aliens* movie, I believe, James Horner did. It was very action motivated and so he responded to that. Each composer, of course, on the level of Goldsmith or Horner and myself, we respond to the drama and the action. We're responding to what we see. We're not responding necessarily to what those capable composers did before. When Elfman did his great work on the other *Batmans*, I'm not responding to his work so much. I'm responding to what Joel Schumacher, the director, is bringing to the production. It had a sense of big heroic quality. It also had a zany quality that Jim Carrey brought to it that was not in the early movies. It had more of a flip, comic kind of attitude. So a composer responds to it. I don't necessarily go back and listen to— as a matter of fact I try to avoid listening to it. I think what the audience wants is a fresh experience. Quite often people asked me about the *Batman* theme. Elfman wrote one. I wrote one. Really the one everyone knows is [sings a portion of the original TV theme] You know the TV one. We all know that.

7. Writing Music for Theatre

FRANK J. OTERI: Theatre is a very different experience from both the symphonic concert world and the film world because there you have all this collaborative stuff happening the way you do in film a lot of the time, but it's in real time. You've done a ton of work in theatre. It's an area that is very important to you and you're still doing a lot of work in.

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: I'm writing an opera now. That's theatre. Last year we had *The Green Bird* on Broadway. My ballet was performed down at the Metropolitan Opera and San Francisco has just recorded it for *Great Performances*. It was done at the Garnier in Paris, the old opera house, this past year. Theatre has been one-third of the triumvirate that makes up my professional career, which is personal concert music, theatre, and film. Theatre is wonderful because you really have to roll up your sleeves and get your hands and arms dirty. You really have to get in there. You have to make it work. I did a lot of regional theatre works like the *The King Stag* at the A.R.T., which is still running now, since 1984. It's touring the world somewhere. Whereas you go in there, you're the only musician. You have the director, who happened to be Andrei Serban at the time, and a bunch of actors and you start from scratch. You might compose stuff, but you're basically improvising with actors in a shut room for six hours a day until you have a theatre piece. You play all the instruments. You play the keyboards, winds, and percussion. After rehearsal you go down to the basement and put all the instruments away. You do everything. In a way, that type of theatre, where you're at an instrument, there are actors in a room, then the director goes "go." There's no idea in your head, but you got to go. You do it right on the spot until it becomes something. I did so much theatre like that.

FRANK J. OTERI: The work that really put you on the map in an international way is *Juan Darien*. It's such an unusual piece on so many levels. What is it? It's not a musical. It's not an opera. It's somewhere in-between a concert work and a theatre work. It's really your own unique form.

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: It's a carnival mass! What it is, it's taking elements that you'd expect at the carnival and elements that you'd expect at a mass. The elements that you expect at a mass are an attempt by high culture to express a religious event. In other words, you work real hard to get the fugue as beautiful as you can because you're honoring God. What you do at a carnival is the opposite in a way. You want to compose music, or sing music, or hear music that is common and that thrives and derives from common events, so that people can feel that they're enjoying themselves together. The collision of the carnival and the mass was something that in the story of *Juan Darien*—you have a set of collisions: the collision between human life and animal life, the collision between the church and the jungle, the collision between morals and miracles. It's really a very special part of my life to have worked on that work.

FRANK J. OTERI: When we talk about your kitchen metaphor, it's an interesting metaphor applying to this piece. In the wonderful kitchen that made *Juan Darien*, it's the

kind of a piece you could never imagine being on Broadway, per se. Broadway rarely takes those kinds of chances anymore, though they used to.

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: *Medea* is on Broadway. Simon McBurney's work *The Chairs* was on Broadway. *The Green Bird* was on Broadway. It happens from time to time. They don't expect huge, huge returns, but there are very, very brave producers who do put really interesting things on Broadway.

FRANK J. OTERI: I'm thinking of the kind of labor of love that Music-Theatre Group was behind.

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: Music-Theatre Group, specifically Lyn Austin, was sort of the mystic main spring behind *Juan Darien* in the sense that she believed in it so much. She wasn't even interested in hearing a preview or a workshop situation. She said, "Just do it. I trust you; just do it." There are very few Lyn Austins around.

8. Beyond the Double Life

FRANK J. OTERI: There are so many elements at play in *Juan Darien*. Perhaps only a composer with your background could have written a work like that because it is all these elements at once. I am reminded once again going back to Rózsa's autobiography, which he called *Double Life*. In a way having a double life troubled him. He wrote this violin concerto for Jascha Heifetz. He wrote this piece that got played by Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic. He wanted to get that recognition as a concert hall composer, yet he couldn't get it at the time because there was this stigma of being a film composer.

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: I think the stigma should be less now. I can't live my life thinking about those who want to stigmatize me. I think it was harder then because there was very much an expectation in film that the music had to be a watered down version of late-19th century romantic music. That's honest. Even though Saint-Saëns wrote for film, believe it or not one of the first films. I think once people like Prokofiev, Shostakovich, and Aaron Copland started working with their own voices and not necessarily mirroring or continuing those traditions. There wasn't much difference between Aaron Copland's tone poems and his film music. I don't hear any difference between *The Red Pony* and *El Salón México* in terms of style. I think those lines got blurred and it was harder for Europeans to have to write that watered down 19th century stuff. I don't feel that way because everything that I do seems, so far, to have been completely different from the last thing that I do. There's not that much expectation for that genre.

FRANK J. OTERI: So can the music that you write for film have another life in the concert hall?

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: Perhaps. I had some concerts and they were very successful. They work in the same way as Beethoven's incidental music or Mendelssohn's incidental music. If you listen to it, quote unquote, cue by cue, it behaves in the same way that film music does.

FRANK J. OTERI: But it's appreciated in the concert hall...

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: But it's appreciated in the concert hall!

FRANK J. OTERI: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* gets done all the time.

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: Right.

FRANK J. OTERI: To tie this all together somehow, there have been concerts, there are pieces that work, there's certainly an audience for it. John Williams will do a concert of his film scores and it's more successful as a concert than most symphony orchestra concerts playing music originally intended for the concert hall. Can film music somehow--I don't want to use the word "save" because it sounds a little too evangelical--but can

this world somehow help the concert music world which everyone seems to think is in a bad place right now?

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL: That's an interesting question. Yes, of course. Every orchestra should have a composer-in-residence. I think the composer-in-residence then should have some influence in pulling in other composers and interacting with other media. Let me end this by being somewhat dogmatic. This is basically directed towards critics and those who liked to stigmatize Rózsa or other composers and made their lives miserable. You out there in computer land, this is Goldenthal dogmatic time. This is it. Ten to fifteen percent seems to be the percentage of good art that comes out of this world. If you have to slog through the 19th century operas, there may have been ten thousand operas written. Then you start to get to some of the good ones—like the works of Goldmark for example, and you go eew, it's awful. We only get the rarified stuff, the best Wagners. How many *Rienzis* do we see? How many *Die Feens* do we see? We get the best. There's only one Mozart every five hundred years. You know what I'm saying? Everything else, if you add it all up and you look at it, is mainly garbage, like eighty-five percent garbage. That goes for art. Go and look at Pre-Raphaelite art if you want. You'll get sick looking at the stuff until you come across two or three great paintings. It kind of levels out when you look at this stuff. With most art, fifteen percent floats to the top. Sometimes it's even within a composer, that they aren't as consistent as a Mozart, for example. Fifteen percent of the work they write might be really, really, really great. I think within film music, it's been only a hundred years now, it's really well represented in that you can find a good fifteen percent or ten percent which is amazing stuff that's worthy of being studied in it's original form as a film, that's worthy of study in the classroom; it's worthy of study and enjoyment on the concert stage, as well. There's really remarkable stuff out there. There's the Prokofievs, the Shostakovichs, the Coplands, the Bernsteins, the Coriglianos, the Philip Glasses, even some of the early Morricones, the Takemitsus, there's also a great body of work out there that's about to be discovered. The interaction between hip-hop, and music and rhythm and electronics is very, very, very exciting. Okay end of dogma.