



***Tell us about your background and development as a performer and composer?***

I actually came from a family of pianists. My childhood music education included orchestras, bands, concert bands, and jazz bands in the public schools back then.

Personally, I was always interested in the viola, but when I auditioned for the orchestra, my hands were a little stronger, and the conductor put me on the cello instead.

In high school I joined the jazz band and started playing jazz piano, where I was introduced to the big-band music of the '40s through the '70s. There were still several big bands around then, so we listened to and played everything from Count Basie to Duke Ellington, and Isaac Hayes. My early attempts at writing jazz was for the big band sounds.

***How did you get into jazz composition?***

We were all improvising as kids, just kind of picking it up on our own and making things up all the time. Composition was like a natural progression after I got out of high school, because it was just something we were doing all the time as kids.

***Do you think our youth today improvise and play similarly now as you improvised back in your youth?***

Perhaps, but there's probably more influence from hip hop. Plus there are a lot of jazz musicians that are coming out of other countries now that are young. And jazz is pretty fluent in their cultures.

***Are they learning to do more improvisation in other countries than our musicians in the U.S.?***

As I look at an array of the cultural music around the world, improvisation is actually part of that training. As I travel out of the U.S. listening to world music, I hear how improvisation is kind of a natural thing. It's kind of interesting to see that parallel going on.

***Do you think that there's any meaning in that?***

Yes. We are working in the language of music very closely with each other with many types of sound and how we approach it, even.



I think the broadness of the music sometimes escapes us here in the US. I know that we're still kind of a new country, but it's interesting that when I visit other countries, just how they seem to bring various genres into their lives. They're not saying; "Hey, I'm not going to listen to that! I'm just going to be open and listen to a lot of things, present and past."

***Tell me about your evolution from classical to jazz?***

My music teacher's son, who is a Jazz musician, starting giving me records to listen to like Chick Corea, Herbie Hancock, and all these great piano players. But at the same time, I started learning about other music connected to the keyboard. The synthesizer was coming into tone at that time and connecting to a lot of artists worldwide. Because I could read the synthesizer schematics and understood the wave forms – and how to create the sound on it – I was allowed to take the instrument home to learn it.

It was quite accidental, but I kind of transformed from classical into jazz and electronic music. I even got a scholarship to a university seeking a synthesizer student. This was the first time in our country that one could get a degree playing this instrument. But it was considered serious music, a real instrument -just like the violin or the trumpet.

It was an interesting time for music to meet technology, because the computer hadn't quite come on the market yet. The computer added beautifully to the keyboard by the time you got into the '80s. So it was one of these interesting and mysterious things that started happening.

***What was it that you liked about synthesized sound that so intrigued you?***

First, the synthesizer freed me from a fixed tonal system on keyboards. The second was the sound bank of a synthesizer. I was playing with real wave forms that build up all sounds that are on the earth, so I could think about it as combining wave forms, creating not only new sounds, but emulating other sounds besides music. I could get sound orchestration right at the same time, without having to learn the musical instrument, but by building blocks of sound. So I was learning sound, really, in its pure form.





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***Is that what influenced you in forming this jazz octet when you created Resonance?***

Well, indirectly yes, because at the time certain sounds or certain instrumentations were played all the time, as if to say: "This is the way it is in jazz." In a way, musicians were kind of forbidden to step outside that sound. One of our goals for Resonance was a chance for audiences to see a viola played in a medium-sized ensemble up close. We wanted audiences to see a violin, viola, and cellos not just in an orchestra, but in their neighborhood club or café playing jazz.

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***Tell us about the sound you're creating in your compositions. What's unusual about a jazz octet sound?***

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I combined the sax with a string quartet, and then I added the rhythm section to build the octet. That really was just fun, because we don't ever play in this type of situation.

I find that people don't often get to hear solo cello. That's exactly why I wanted to compose some pieces with a different type of instrument that audiences don't associate often with jazz. We're generally more familiar with that instrument playing Bach instead of a Coltrane piece.

***Are you trying to make sort of a statement about bringing classical to jazz or vice versa?***

Honestly, some of these things are very accidental. We do a piece that is a classical piece. It's written by Gustav Holst. We do the chorale from one of his "Planet" pieces, called "Jupiter." he wrote this probably in the early 1900s. But if we had just heard the piece today as we play it in the band, we would have thought it was written by Keith Jarrett in 1970. That's what I mean about how we're really more connected than we think we are.

***What kind of reaction do you get from people in the audience? What do they say?***

They just love the sound.

***What is it that you most enjoy composing for this particular Resonance band?***

I think from years playing so much electric, it's nice to return to acoustic, especially because of the volume. I've noticed a lot of work that was done in the electronics can now transfer back to the acoustics, and it makes even the orchestration much more fun and interesting as well.

***As a composer, it must give you a freedom of writing pieces that can be richer, because you have string, horn and percussion to create something different than a traditional jazz band?***

Definitely. One of the things we're always dealing with is balance. It's something you have to work with when orchestrating a composition. It's really fun to figure out the orchestration with this group sometimes. Particularly, because strings are not very loud, so you need a lot of them to get a really big sound. But if you put them next to the saxophone, you have to be careful because the sax can easily cover up the strings. The sax is really a hybrid instrument, a reed and a brass instrument, made to be loud. So, it's been fun to figure out how to balance those really soft instruments with the really loud ones.



***Does that require a different type of musician for this kind of an ensemble?***

Yes. We are an eight-piece group, which is kind of a rare scene. And so we need true ensemble players who really know how to listen and blend well.

***Because some of your players are classical, don't you require some jazz improvisation ability, too?***

Our approach for our players is; "Don't worry if you don't improvise. If you'd like to, this is the best place to be, because we'll support you, and you improvise as much or as little as you want."

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As a pianist, my instrument's wide range covered up the strings range, so I felt the strings were in my way when I first started playing in this group. I had to rewrite the piano charts, because they just weren't working: I had to rework tunes with instruments in my range and redo all the sets. You start learning this thing in orchestration about "give and take" listening: First you're in the way of them. Then you need to get out of the way.

The other difference was that previously in this type of ensemble, some of those instruments played in a background situation. They're just the same as the "Charlie Parker with Strings" album. I remember when I first talked about Resonance, I had to tell people the strings are up front and equal to the sax.

I have two band members who double on instruments: a soprano, alto, bari sax and one who sings and plays piccolo, C flute and alto flute. I wanted to make sure all their instruments were getting used by creating a well-rounded set list.



Yes, it's always rare when audiences get to hear an alto flute. The kids call it the big peppermint cane, because it's got the hooked mouthpiece.

***How does jazz or electronic music influence your compositions?***

Some of the pieces are in compound meters. They're not in the traditional three or two beat measures, but rather ten and eleven, similar to a group in the '70s, the Mahavishnu Orchestra. They explored strings and brass—kind of like what Resonance sounds like today, but in electric format with jazz rock and electric instruments.

It's funny, but those old synthesizer and electronic bands got a bit chastened and ridiculed by the critics for their music, which now we realize created enormous headway in the advancement of music.

***Will you be recording a CD with Resonance Jazz at some point?***

We'll be recording our first full length CD in September, with probably an early 2013 release.\*\*

I think we're probably going to do a combination of some standards with original compositions, too.

We're hoping people will say; "Oh, I never heard that song use this type of instrumentation."

*\*\* note: the band released their first CD entitled "Introductions" in June 25, 2013 at their concert at Yoshi's Oakland.*

***What are your ultimate goals for this band?***

I would love to take this group to Europe. I just think it would be too much fun to play in Europe in some of those concert halls that are hundreds of years old. The sound would be tremendous.

I definitely have an original vocal song I want to do with Resonance. Our vocalist, Laura, is the only one we ever had with this band. Up to that point, our band had always been instrumental. So having the vocal has really changed the orchestration, coloring, and texture of the band.



***How?***

People just relate to the human voice and as an instrumental band, when the voice shows up, people are automatically tuned into it.

***What would you say have been some of your biggest influences in travel on your music? Or people that you're meeting?***

Just meeting a lot of different people and different musicians in other parts of the world and being in their environment has had a huge influence on me. Sometimes composing is so ethereal – being in that creative realm and getting exposure to other music and experiences in life allow me to bring that to the music I compose for this band.

***What is special about each one of the players?***

Our band members all come from different backgrounds, and that makes it interesting. Nancy plays with the Berkeley Symphony, so she's coming from a symphonic background. Michele, who's from Switzerland, comes from a European background coming to America playing jazz. Greg and Ted, who have been playing with bands for years, come to Resonance with total open ears in playing. Georgianna, who has a similar background to me, comes from the academic side where she also played jazz music. Laura has a master's in English literature, writes plays and novels, but has also studied flute. So each member brings many influences from their backgrounds, which I think makes the Resonance soup much more interesting.

***Why the name Resonance for your Jazz Ensemble?***

Resonance is represented as the Q symbol in physics. I got the idea, because the acoustic instruments need resonance to make their sound.

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