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The Artful Appropriator: In Conversation with Nick Brooke

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Transcribed and edited by Molly Sheridan

Listening to Nick Brooke's work quickly becomes as compulsive an activity as the looping samples that function as its building blocks, mixed up with all manner of instrumental accompaniment, bits of sound effects, and deliberately plotted silences. Long after the pieces are over, the phrases echo on. It works like a drug, as maddening as it is addictive, and after an eventful hour chatting with Brooke, I find out that's exactly how he wants it. It's a way of "both administering adrenaline and morphine to the audience simultaneously, and doing that strategically," he admits.

Brooke didn't exactly come out of nowhere when his hour-long performance piece *Tone Test* was staged as part of last summer's Lincoln Center Festival, but his work was a new discovery for many in the crowd and brought him to the attention of a wider audience. The 35-year-old composer's reputation had been built mainly on his talent for cutting up and processing audio material and his inventive use of unusual instruments and bits of vintage machinery—calling cards that had attracted commissions from the Paul Dresher Ensemble, the Nash Ensemble of London, Orchestra 2001, and Dan Druckman. A two-year fellowship to Central Java added additional layers to his evolving style after studying with Steve Mackey, Paul Lansky, Louis Andriessen, and Christian Wolff and earning degrees in music composition and philosophy from Oberlin and a Ph.D. from Princeton.

Unlike composers for whom each work is a blank canvas, Brooke seems to be driven by overarching musical and philosophical questions regarding technology and performance practice, as well as a desire to understand by deconstructing. I hardly knew Brooke when we sat down for this interview, but after an hour in his company learning more about his artistry and his motivations, I can't wait to hear what's next.

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Mechanical Metaphors

Molly Sheridan: I've been listening to recordings of some of your work for the past few days, and the repeating phrases and the mechanical sounds are all trapped in my head. Now I have to ask: Did you grow up over an arcade or in a traveling carnival or something?

Nick Brooke: I did! My dad was fascinated as a kid with all the shows in London, and not only the carnival shows of the 1930s and '40s, but he got into the freak shows and displays of mechanical music of the 1830s to 1880s in London. I grew up with books and posters around the house about magic lantern shows and the man who could breathe fire. I don't think they had two-headed babies in London at that time but, yeah, I kind of feel like I grew up in the 19th century—and not just the 19th century, but the alternate, freak show 19th century.

My dad traveled around New England doing magic lantern shows, which you may know were the earliest form of projection. They were moving slides that you could fill with water, they had cranking parts that could move so you could make—in some more grotesque slides—people's heads fly off. I grew up watching those shows and actually helping him, handing him slides.

Molly Sheridan: I know that you have a fascination with instruments from that period, especially the Victrola that was literally center stage in *Tone Test*. Did you have a lot of those types of things in the house to play with from an early age, or did that come later?

Nick Brooke: My earliest two music memories are, one, my dad playing recordings over and over of music boxes. He was a museum curator and he studied all these music boxes for this one show. I was probably six or seven. The other memory is that he also curated a music show there that was Robert Moog coming to the museum and performing on the synthesizer. So somehow the sounds of the synthesizer and the music box are kind of mixed in with my earliest musical memories.

Plus one more, which is that I went to a Catholic grade school where the nuns were just insane! I remember this one who loved to put on the disco version of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony and sort of wildly thrash around in her habit. So these three images of my musical childhood together might help explain a little bit…

Molly Sheridan: How did you then slide into making music yourself?

Nick Brooke: Well, apparently I went to a musical kindergarten and that was some influence, but in high school I really started getting into listening to music. Mainly classical music, but Grandmaster Flash was coming out at that time as well.

I just started writing as soon as I started listening to it. I had a high school theory teacher who obviously I annoyed—I questioned him a lot about things, and so he would give me enormous assignments just to get me off his back. At one point, he said to me, "You need to research the breakdown of functional tonality and don't come back to me until you've found out about it." And I was like, "Oh my god, it broke down! Tonality broke down?" Because I was writing nice marches for band at that point. I took the marches to a teacher at the local college, at Williams College, and he looked at them and said, "You don't want to write this," and he gave me this book on twelve-tone theory—this is when I was, like, 15—and said, "Write this!" And so my second pieces after the marches for band were twelve-tone pieces, and after that I just kind of did a mix of everything. College was a mix of being influenced by Morton Feldman, Christian Wolff who I studied with, and John Zorn, Berio, a lot of different influences come into what I was doing then.

Molly Sheridan: But it sounds like you had a real passion for it from the very beginning, even though you had a theory teacher who was giving you a hard time.

Nick Brooke: I guess so. Sometimes you do it out of passion, sometimes out if desperation.

Molly Sheridan: What do you do it out of?

Nick Brooke: I think you need something that challenges you at that age, and if you're in a rural public high school, you're kind of screaming for something that will make your mind chew a little. I think I've always had a passion for things that I don't understand and that is fundamental to anyone who's grown up in another culture. Which, granted, I grew up in a small New England town with a white church, but my dad was British, and we were constantly traveling around to Australia, to England. I always did things that my dad did, his sort of Briticisms, and I never felt at home in my own culture. So finding out about music, or music that I didn't understand or that intrigued me, seemed to be akin to finding out about other cultures, which I eventually got into after graduating from college, literally, by living in Indonesia for two years.

What I try and do musically is present the detritus of our pop culture in hopefully not a haphazard way but as it might seem to somebody coming from another culture. I put it in a ritualized encasement that it's my hope gives you a sense of, "Oh, this is how they would do Celine Dion in Papua New Guinea. And I finally see it. I finally see the matrix of our culture by the way you've rearranged, chopped up, fragmented, and essentially put it together in a new order that both makes sense and also comments on the previous order that it was in." It's a way to rearrange music so that once you hear that music you go back to the tunes that I base music on and you're like, "Oh, that's what that is."

A friend once heard an arrangement I did of an Indonesian pop song that was on the radio 24/7, and I needed to rewrite this tune, as I do a lot of tunes, just to exorcise it from my head. I started rearranging it, chunking it up and stuff, and he went to the performance and was like, "Hey, I liked that. It was cool," and then a month later he came back to me and was like, "I get it. I just heard the tune on the radio and it's like I could finally hear it, all the pins and wires." Maybe this is the reason I use mechanical metaphors in what I do. It's like I could finally see the pulleys and triggers. Hopefully. That's a grand scheme, but it's what I aspire to in different pieces.

The Trouble with Transcending Technology

Molly Sheridan: We're tackling this issue of appropriation and building new art out of old art in *NewMusicBox* this month. In taking art that doesn't belong to you and making it your own, what are your ethical considerations?

Nick Brooke: I'm constantly dealing with that. I think the main thing is to constantly have your music as an expression of your distance from that culture. Two examples. One, I'm writing a lot of arrangements of Indonesian tunes now and the name of the whole group of pieces is *Jarak Jauh*, which means "long distance." It's less about, "Hey, I've been to Indonesia. I know Indonesian culture." It's more about, "I don't get this. I don't get this and this is how I think it should go to my alien ears. And not only that, but gamelan sounds out of tune." Of course, there are certain prescribed ways certain instruments are out of tune and others are not, but let's take the out-of-tuneness and make that the key to the piece, make that the metaphor for how things work in the piece.

I did a piece for gamelan called *Pemunku*, which constantly accelerates and decelerates, because that's in a sense what Javanese music does, but it did it in a very crude manner using the sounds of car crashes, things dropping, smacking into each other. That was trying to get at what I heard as an incredibly smooth music but which has, in a sense, a violent subtexts underneath. Is it crazy that I hear that? Some of these Javanese songs are about collecting armies together, plus in 1965 there's this massacre of a half-million people, and I hear that. Maybe it's wrong for me to hear that.

Another example is this. The thing nowadays in the brochure for the new music concert: "Hey, I learned classical music, but I grew up with rock, so I'm going to use that as my musical voice." And, yeah, we all did! But why write classical music like rock music? I mean, this is how I sing rock music: In the pathetic isolated one bedroom apartment, I desperately sing chunks of Celine Dion in hopes that I will experience something of love or redemption. And isn't that more interesting? Because I'm sure half these people who say, "Hey, I grew up with rock music," if they were in high school, as they say they were, they probably had struggling crazy lives. Why don't they just sit in a chair on stage and try and lip-sync to the tunes they grew up with, but in an interesting, strategic way. That just seems to me—and I hate this word, so I'm going to use it—it seems more honest ultimately.

Your question about whether I'm related to these musics is really a question about recording. It's like, "Hey, I bought Celine Dion. Does that mean I'm like her?" This is maybe my negative view of technological culture from reading too much Adorno—that that's not your CD. You're trying to be that CD and ultimately we all want to be that CD, so why don't we put four people up on stage trying to be that CD, who try and ultimately fail to be that CD. You structure that in a beautiful way that expresses all the relationships of these people to these objects that they buy but that ultimately they're just trying to transcend somehow, put that on stage rather than a chamber ensemble that's got that rock energy.

Need I say that music is not about sound? It is about the combination of sound and visuals. I think the reason that we got to such a level of abstraction [in music] is because of CDs and recordings. People thought, "Oh, it's about sound." And it never is. It's about context; it's about everything you see around a performance. And for me, given that the only performances we seem to have nowadays…I'm so depressive [*laughs*]…is the isolated listener in their home, pounding the end of their armchair and trying feel what's on the CD they just bought. Obviously everyday people in this culture are obsessed with what's real, hence reality TV. I'm diatribing here, but if you're going to reappropriate something, don't just reappropriate the style, reappropriate the way a domestic listener sitting in a recliner would sing and ultimately scream that tune at home in ways that run counter to the tune. That's a musical tension that you can express musically on stage.

Molly Sheridan: May I take it then that you're not a fan of the "sit in the concert hall and listen to the string quartet" concert experience?

Nick Brooke: I think it's really bizarre and interesting. After two years in Indonesia I came back and was like, "Wow, this is really neat. This is a weird ritual. These people are from a different culture than I come from." And I think it should be celebrated, but the fact is that cultures grow and change when they get an awareness of themselves. I feel that the classical concert hall doesn't see itself.

I go to a classical concert and I say, "Oh, they're trying to tell me that reading is important in this society, because they're all reading that score, and they're kind of reading it like a needle would follow a phonograph. Oh, phonographs or CD players seem to be important in this society. I see. In all the other musical cultures I've seen, people don't do that. And look—occasionally they try and close their eyes and transcend notation. And when you do that you look up. Oh, maybe God's important in this culture." So there's this pianist playing—and we're turning off the sound here, and just looking at what's happening—and the pianist is like, hey, reading is important, but it's important sometimes to transcend and to look at God. And occasionally you lift your hands up as if you don't even need a piano, you can play it like a theremin. Every picture in the *New York Times*, the pianists never play with their hands. They're always playing the piano like this [*raises his hands*] and they're always looking up.

That's a message about our culture that we go to these performances to look for a kind of transcendence—people look to become something, and the person on stage is a stand-in for them and the transcendence they want. The pianist starts kind of like a CD player but eventually has some feeling which is maybe also what we do. I put Celine Dion in the CD player—there's something bizarre and plastic about her—and I'm listening for awhile and I'm like, "Yeah, I feel that!" I think that's the only reason classical performance has survived—people are looking at us as some weird surrogate analogy for transcending their recordings. That's a weird theory, but I think it's totally true.

Molly Sheridan: But it's a very important theory for you that you seem to come back to over and over again, which seems to have culminated in *Tone Test*. You poured all that philosophy into that hour-long piece.

Nick Brooke: And there are plenty of ways people transcend recordings. A ghetto blaster, man, what a great way to trumpet your musical tastes! Or maybe not. I just think there are plenty of ways to play your tape player. Maybe the image I have in *Tone Test* of somebody sitting there fatally banging their hand against their recliner—that image was taken from my grandma who used to listen to tunes like that—there are more redemptive images, and I will obviously chose those more often in future pieces.

All my music is about tone. I was listening to some art songs today and it struck me how the poetry was set. These were happy poems and they were set to happy music. I don't understand that—I mean, why? Even Schubert was more subtle than that. And the same goes for acting. If somebody's happy, why be *happy* unless you're doing vaudeville. I feel that with sampling the only way it's interesting is if you can put a subtext to those samples which is ambiguous. I don't think my music ever wants to wink at people. With future performances of *Tone Test* what I really want to work on is tone. That when someone says, "I love you" that's not what they mean, and that will inform the samples. In a sense you can't do my music without a philosophy of acting behind it. Which is maybe why I go to experimental theater productions in New York, as a kind of study.

Molly Sheridan: So it's much more than composition—there's an entire performance art concept in mind.

Nick Brooke: Yeah, which I haven't quite nailed yet. I think I've nailed the music as I want it.

Molly Sheridan: It feels very solid. It's very obvious that you've grown through the course of the work that I've heard, but you have this voice. You can get a sense of who you are as an artist, at least in a general sense, very quickly. We've talked about outside influences, but who has influenced you in the more nuts and bolts area of the work that you do now. Less philosophically and more hands-on compositionally.

Nick Brooke: I was already starting to chunk pop songs early in my Oberlin career, specifically starting with Led Zeppelin's "Whole Lotta Love," which I rewrote over and over, and then I rewrote the Mozart Clarinet Concerto over and over. I don't know why I started doing that. There are people I listened to, though I have to say in terms of what I do now, there are very few people who inspire me that I feel I can study very specifically. I discovered John Moran recently and I find his stuff really interesting and see him perform whenever I can.

I thankfully had a lot of open-minded teachers who were like, listen to all this and listen to all this. I'm a bit of a sycophant and copy everything, so after a while I became interested in *that* and expressing that. I was talking about transcendence. Why do I constantly want to become something else? How could I make the desire to just be something else all the time a unique style? In a sense, as you say, my style might be unique but it's working at cross-purposes. It uses entirely pre-existing tunes.

My first teachers in high school just gave me a whole bunch of music, from minimalism to avant-garde to performance art. I saw Christian Wolff when I was seven. And then at Oberlin it was just a good classical background, and I think that's a lot of what I got at Princeton. Steve Mackey and Paul Lansky are just generally open-minded and yet they're very good with structure and tonality. Steve Mackey is brilliant in finding the ten seconds in your piece that really just slow it down or just don't work, and Paul's a broadminded guy who supports a lot of different styles.

Molly Sheridan: Do you think your education was a hindrance to you in any way?

Nick Brooke: Especially at the end of Oberlin stuff I was raging against tradition. Where I teach now, at Bennington College, I'm inspired by the students who just throw themselves into creating stuff and playing instruments.

Leaning on the Limits of Copyright

Molly Sheridan: I want go back. You said that you're always asking yourself why you are compelled to copy and reformat. Do you ever come to an answer?

Nick Brooke: I think there should be five contradictory answers to that if it's going to be interesting. One is I like to please people, and that disturbs me greatly. Sometimes I feel like that's my Achilles heel in life. Copying is a form of pleasing people but it's also a form of parody. I find entertainment sinister. And I just want to get at that. It's all these ambiguous things. By copying you right now, repeating your question, I could be mocking you. I could be saying it in a blank way where you weren't sure. I could have a syndrome where I needed to repeat things. It could be a ritual—in church I was taught to repeat what Molly Sheridan says. And it's all these things.

The more positive answer is that I want to bring experimentalism back because I feel that it kind of died in the early '70s. I just don't see people doing the range of experiments that were done a long time ago. I think the way it's going to come back in an interesting way is to use recognizable materials in entirely unheard of—or to use Schoenberg's phrase, unseen before—ways, because I think it's going to involve sight. Using familiar materials makes your experiment more legible.

Some of the experiments I'm doing with fragmentation I was doing with chord clusters at Oberlin, and it just occurred to me, well, why don't I do that with Beethoven's Ninth Symphony? It would just make the experiment that much more legible. It might have just been a matter of skill at that point—I had no idea how to do that. I didn't know what a sampler was, I didn't know what sampling meant in a classical realm.

People who've done reappropriation in classical music I generally find uninteresting for classical instruments. Why? It doesn't deal with the mode of production. The performance is always classical players and they're not questioning the fact that they're going to be reading a score. Or even in those places where the composer is enlightened enough to ask for some different acting or performance venue, they don't have the care to those train those performers over years and really develop something unique. It's kind of plastered on in the last half hour of rehearsals. And if you're really going to make something unique it's going to take time and immense amounts of funding. Yeah, I have no idea how we're going to achieve some of this.

In a sense what I'm doing is really conventional. Everyone's experimenting with sampling, people have been doing it for while, from John Oswald to John Zorn. I don't mean to be snotty about this, but I just don't think I can name so many artists who have done it in a really stunningly compelling manner. And I say that as somebody who is not ready to criticize and who loves to see a lot of stuff—I just feel a lot of the experiments in sampling copy Cage's open-ended, "Hey, let's put all this stuff in a kind of ur-opera mix, which Cage did in a unique and compelling manner. I just don't feel what Zorn or Oswald did over that with their uses of other materials had really any uniqueness to it. Even in John Zorn's case I don't feel it was really informed by free jazz, I just felt like it was cobbled together. I just don't get much on additional listenings.

Molly Sheridan: We touched a bit on the ethics of using music that does not belong to you to create new work. Is there anything that you've wanted to use, that you've not been allowed to use, either before or after you'd already written the piece?

Nick Brooke: Said directly into the camera, "My management has told me not to answer this question."

Let's say, with my next piece…[*laughs*]

Tone Test was pretty safe because a lot of the tunes were written before 1929. It's very hard. It's a little crazy, because certain places just give you form letter turndowns. Let it be said to the camera: "I'm not making any money off of this or any recent productions. Nothing. It's like, yeah, please, sue me! Assume my credit card debt!"

I'm getting cleverer about it. *Tone Test* had its own particular way around it. I've learned so much about copyright laws which are incredibly complex. There are various reasons why something may be identifiable or not. Occasionally I call up friends who are copyright lawyers in a slight panic and ask them questions. They calm me down with their soothing, lawyer-like voices, and say I haven't done anything wrong.

Molly Sheridan: That seems like a really nerve-wracking way to work. Does it get in the way of the art?

Nick Brooke: It got nerve wracking when [the *Tone Test* performance at the] Lincoln Center [Festival] happened because this small piece that I was trying out in a performance space in Brooklyn suddenly within six months performed there. I called up the Library of Congress. They did a lot of research for me, nicely. And I was cleared with a lot of this stuff.

Molly Sheridan: Collectively culturally, are we suffering because artists aren't allowed to build on the materials created by their peers?

Nick Brooke: Very much so. I just think that's going to explode and change. I hope so. The reason these laws are there is so someone wouldn't make a profit by imitating something. But if you listen to my music and think it's imitating someone else, you've got to be crazy. I'm such small potatoes, but maybe someone will take me as a test case, and there are probably small infractions in my pieces. With those laws, you're really outlawing a whole culture in a way.

A Fragment in a Petri Dish

Molly Sheridan: We've been talking about these big philosophical concepts, but the technical process of doing this is also intriguing if you've never done it. What's the procedure from the idea, "I'm going to make a piece out of some old recordings" to a finished piece of your own work?

Nick Brooke: Well, I'll start with a technical issue. The first part is finding a sample that compels you, that you can't get out of your head. With me, it's something like the fact that in Beethoven's Ninth Sym1phony they're singing joy over and over, like they need that to feel joy. I take that two seconds and I put it in an isolated petri dish, I listen to it and kind of experience its presence, see what space it takes up. I might start messing around with reharmonizing it subtly. One of the processes I do is similar to Reich in that you'll take the same melody, maybe the upper stuff that the winds are doing, and then change the chords below, so you think there's progress. That's essentially what I do except there's somebody up here going, "Freude!", "Freude!" Each time I change it subtly so that there's movement there but it still seems like these singers have a repetition compulsion disorder. In a sense, harmony and rhythm in my things is a way of both administering adrenaline and morphine to the audience simultaneously, and doing that strategically.

The other thing I'll do, I'll free associate to textures. I like putting Hollywood Foley in my work because it gives a physical, very surreal impact to everything. It talks about a subtext that may or may not have something to do with it. For instance, with "freude," I put somebody smacking their chest and somebody cracking a whip, and then you tone that down so it's not obvious.

In the song "I'll Make You" from *Tone Test*, I took a vaudeville tune that was all lovey-dovey and just changed the words around until it was a pretty violent domestic battle. I put stuff around that to get a rhythm going and figured out how you add those pieces one by one into a texture that builds and develops and reaches a point and goes along. Often my days are spent painstakingly figuring out, ok, that takes up that much space—"Freude!"—ok, it needs five seconds. The next day I'll say four seconds, the next day I'll say six seconds. It changes until I finally feel right with it.

One way to conceive the form of some of my pieces—which is maybe too often the form of my pieces—is it's an attempt to get through the song. The fragment "freude" is actually from the song "Just Sing" which of course, having that title, is about *not* singing. It's about talking about singing and kind of getting around to it, but actually never being able to do it, which to me is poetic. It's about trying to get into the tune, but having to rationalize it or command it or control it all the time and just never really being able to do it.

Molly Sheridan: There's also a lot of silence in your work that creates a kind of rhythm, even in songs that are not in *Tone Test*. In *127 Studies on a Single Orchestrion*, the listener gets a little bit and then it pulls back.

Nick Brooke: One inspiration is Javanese rhythms which is totally a subtext in my work. Actually, if you look at those pieces they've all got a steady beat, but sometimes it's this far out [raises arms spread wide] and you can't perceive it—the whole piece is constructed roller coaster-like, so each time you go around the spin it's got to be a tighter curve. That I do partially with silence and the expectation of silence. The silences in certain places have to be very exact, which is why it's really hard to perform my work.

Molly Sheridan: Is it intentional then that the audience leaves with the echoes of these songs in their heads, extending the perpetual motion set up? And for you especially, does this music just follow you around while you're working on it?

Nick Brooke: It does because it feels right. For one it feels joyous to me. They hit a point and I can't get them out of my body. I usually have to stand at the back of the auditorium during performances because I instinctually move—as weird and fragmented as the silences are it just feels so visceral to me. I just want people to come back to these pieces, and I do, and hear them over and over again, and get something more from it.

Where Does My Heart Beat Now?

Molly Sheridan: I know you were in Indonesia again recently, and I wanted to talk a bit about the experience of going back to that culture and that musical influence, which is obviously significant to you as an artist.

Nick Brooke: Four Americans and four Indonesians, all of whom specialized in different Indonesian styles, came together and created eight pieces in three weeks. It was insane—ten hours of rehearsal a day. It was kind of an experience in different collaborative processes. What's called contemporary music in Indonesia emerged among people from different areas of music and cultures putting these instruments

together in often radical ways. It's just so unique that it inspires me. So we were going to see if this worked as collaboration and I think it did.

We took a bit of a composer paradigm, which doesn't mean writing music, because it's all taught orally, which is why three weeks for eight pieces is crazy. I did a really fun piece called *Rubber Spike* which is based on this spike fiddle, the rebab. It's the instrument that Americans who hear gamelan say, "I like gamelan, but could you just take that instrument out?" It's nasal, it seems to play a little sharp, it's off the beat, and that's why, of course, I'm attracted to it. I used all those sounds and some extended techniques, made kind of a variation on a tune, mixed in a lot of Foley which I had played live by this Sumatran who's a great player but he's gotten into computer music lately so I gave him a Mac and he was playing the sampler while I was playing the rebab and other people were doing various things, including sawing apart instruments. It was really fun. I went in there not knowing who the other people were but figuring out what their specific talent was and how I could use that well in the piece. That was a great way to work, and I think it's the way I've got to work with my other music, because I teach it orally, I teach it through recording. You've got to be really flexible with how you communicate your ideas when you're working on new music for gamelan in Java in a mainly oral tradition, and there are a lot of specifics that this kind of reduces. You've got to learn how to deal with that, and that's a great skill.

I'm also finishing up a piece for the flutist Margaret Lancaster which is about the two-flute tradition in Northern Sumatra. A lot of music there is about doubles and how your better half has left you, including the flute music which is always played in unison with two flutes but slightly out of tune so they're constantly creating these vibrating clouds of energy.

Molly Sheridan: So, what's next?

Nick Brooke: *Tone Test*'s a good story, but I'm just going to take that mode of working and really take it to the next. There are ways I could stretch it. Literally I'm going to continue with lip syncing and imitating recordings and bringing recordings in and out but I'm going to nuance that and work on it new ways—put live samplers in so we can get the timing better, use more sounds of the live vocalist, maybe inspired by experiments with vocals in Indonesia this summer.

I'm working on a piece called *Mass*, which is in six parts but not the normal six parts of a mass. I listen compulsively to Top 40 and what's interesting is not just the love songs, of which there are many, but that all the love songs are about believing. I'm really interested in believing and what that means, especially right now in the political situation. In a way the whole thing works as a requiem mass for John Cage, various fragments of Cage's text wander throughout. I was interested in how Cage often described his perception of the passage of time or of his life or of musical material as metaphorically mapped on to the United States and what it is to cross from California to Massachusetts. You think of a piece like *Imaginary Landscape* where he's literally going across all the radio stations. My piece is about taking a radio and taking these love songs from across the states and rearranging them into this mass.

You know, in America if you lose your religion or belief you make up something, and so this is my attempt to make up something that I believe in and maybe it's about, I don't know, failure to love or hoping that if I fragment and rearrange enough love songs I'll actually learn how to do that. And why radio? 4'33", you know that was a commentary on radio and Muzak®, it started as a commentary on technology. This is my take on it. He proposed a piece long before that piece happened call *Silent Prayer*—here again the religious imagery—which would be a comment on the standard plug-in length of Muzak® or radio music of the time, which was 4'30", and he wanted something that would slightly extend beyond the bounds of that silence. I think my piece is going to climax with *4'33"*, but totally filled in, like that scene in *Cinema Paradiso* where the guy finally gets all the kisses he's missed.