

[Betty Freeman](#) in conversation with [Frank J. Oteri](#)
July 10, 2000

Transcribed by Lisa Kang

1. The Last 40 Years
 2. Promoting a National Contemporary Music Culture
 3. Music & Visual Art
 4. American Music vs. European Music Today
 5. Great American Composers
 6. Audiences & Exposure, Here & Abroad
 7. Salzburg
 8. Newport Classics
 9. The Internet
 10. A More Intimate Future for Music
 11. Beyond Contemporary Music
 12. Photography
 13. Personal Music Background
 14. Encouraging Music Philanthropy
- American Composers Photographed by Betty Freeman: A Virtual Museum
A List of Betty Freeman's Commissions

1. The Last 40 Years

FRANK J. OTERI: I wanted to begin by getting your view of the current state of funding for the arts in the United States, specifically new music. Congress is back in session today and they're doing another one of their votes on the NEA which may or may not have negative ramifications on the contemporary music world and I wanted to get your opinion on how you see things, and on how it has changed in the last 40 years since you've been involved in the field.

BETTY FREEMAN: Well, certainly they've changed in the last 40 years, certainly due to the preponderance of [television](#), and [rock music](#), and pop music. When I started listening to classical music, these things didn't exist. Television didn't really [come in](#) until the [late '50s](#). So when I started in music, this other element didn't exist, there was only classical music, and then there was [swing](#) and sway with the [big bands](#). But in the last 30-40 years, the preponderance, the emphasis on pop and rock, and now all the [Latin music](#)...that has been a big huge change.

FRANK J. OTERI: Now, is that something that could be helpful to the contemporary music world, or do you see it as a negative toward what we're trying to accomplish.

BETTY FREEMAN: Well I think it's siphoned off a lot of the young people including my own children and grandchildren. They have no interest in classical music, and when I take them to the [opera](#) I never ask them if they like it because I'm afraid of the answer.

FRANK J. OTERI: (laughs)

BETTY FREEMAN: I just tell them we're going.

FRANK J. OTERI: What operas have you taken them to see.

BETTY FREEMAN: Well, whatever the [L.A. Opera](#) does. [Rigoletto](#), [La Boheme](#), [Tosca](#), [La Traviata](#)...

FRANK J. OTERI: So standard repertoire. Not new music

BETTY FREEMAN: No. No they don't do new music.

FRANK J. OTERI: Now in terms of funding for new music, looking back over a period of 40 years, do you feel the situation has gotten better or worse in terms corporate funding, government funding, private funding.

BETTY FREEMAN: I only know the situation in [California](#), unfortunately. For example, the [L.A. Philharmonic](#) used to be funded by corporations and my understanding is that

most of the corporations that funded the symphony have moved out of [Los Angeles](#). They've moved away to other cities and other states too. So most of the big funders, and I think that includes [Mercedes](#), and [Arco](#), and the big supporters of the Philharmonic, aren't there - the headquarters aren't there.

FRANK J. OTERI: So now they no longer support the Orchestra.

BETTY FREEMAN: So that's a big change. And privately, private support doesn't seem to be strong anymore. It is in [New York](#), I know that for [Carnegie Hall](#), and for the [Metropolitan Opera](#), I don't know about [Lincoln Center](#), probably not, but it is strong in New York, [Chicago](#), [Cleveland](#), [Philadelphia](#). In [southern California](#), the big money is in the [film industry](#); it used to be in the [aircraft industry](#) also. The film industry doesn't support culture; it doesn't support the [Museum](#), or the music - the Opera or the Philharmonic. They support their own people. I'm sure they have their own [hospitals](#), and schools. They have their own support for their own people. But they do not enter the cultural community of Los Angeles at all. They don't even attend. They're not even on the Board, except, I think [Steve Martin](#) is, or was on the Museum Board but now I'm not sure.

FRANK J. OTERI: Now 40 years ago, was the relationship different between Hollywood and the concert hall?

BETTY FREEMAN: No, but there were other forms of support.

FRANK J. OTERI: There were a number of great film composers who also wrote music for the concert hall. I'm thinking of [Miklós Rózsa](#), [Bernard Herrmann](#)...

BETTY FREEMAN: But they weren't played in the symphony.

FRANK J. OTERI: That's only starting to happen now.

BETTY FREEMAN: There's been no connection between classical music and the film industry as far as I know.

FRANK J. OTERI: Now, in terms of government support, on a state level and on a federal level. Do you feel things are better, worse than they were in 1960?

BETTY FREEMAN: I don't know how much the Philharmonic gets in government support. The only thing I do know, because I was on the Board for 5 years. I dropped off the Board when the emphasis changed from raising money for an endowment, which is what our Symphony needed, and still needs, we had the 17th lowest endowment of any orchestra in America... We're actually the 6th biggest in budget. So when I first sat on the Board, they were raising money for the Board for an endowment, which I thought was a

great idea. But then they came up with [Frank Gehry](#) and the new building. Now I'm not really interested in buildings. Some people are and some people aren't. I'm interested in what goes on inside a building. It doesn't matter to me if I hear music in Carnegie Hall which is certainly one of the plainest buildings that there could be, but has wonderful music. The same in [Amsterdam](#) with [their hall there](#); it's wonderful music, wonderful sound in just a straight hall. [Boston also](#). But all the fundraising went for the Frank Gehry building, the [new building which isn't ready yet](#); they're just starting. It's been about 7 years in the works. That's when I dropped off the Board.

2. Promoting a National Contemporary Music Culture

FRANK J. OTERI: One of the things that has interested me about the way funding has worked, for the most part, both corporate funding of orchestras, private donors, and even government funding, things like the [NEA](#), is that money is given to institutions but there's rarely a mandate to try to push contemporary music, specifically contemporary American music.

BETTY FREEMAN: Except to smaller groups. There are smaller groups that raise money for contemporary American music. The [American Music Center](#), [Meet The Composer](#), things like that. There are smaller groups. I don't think the government should enter into specifics. I like that idea that they support big institutions.

FRANK J. OTERI: Now it's interesting because you look at models in the other countries like [Canada](#). Canada has a situation where half the content that's broadcast on [Canadian radio](#) has to be somehow of Canadian origin.

BETTY FREEMAN: That's awfully provincial. Personally, I really do think that. That doesn't grab me when things are limited like that to nationality.

FRANK J. OTERI: It's a way to make sure that people hear these composers.

BETTY FREEMAN: Well maybe they don't deserve to be. I have a list of hundreds of names that could be dropped easily.

FRANK J. OTERI: Well, here in the United States, the [orchestras play so little American repertoire](#) to the point that a lot of people don't even realize that it exists.

BETTY FREEMAN: So now I have a solution to that. Instead of what they're doing now, these friends of mine, they're sandwiching in contemporary pieces. They're having a piece opening with [Bach](#), or [Beethoven](#), then they're having a contemporary piece, then they're having a little [Mahler](#) or something. And they're very proud of it. But it doesn't work; it just doesn't work. My solution is to have two contemporary pieces and an older piece sandwiched in the middle. That would bring a different audience. It would bring me, for example to concerts. I almost never go anymore to [LA Phil](#) concerts. The programming is so tragic.

FRANK J. OTERI: Which is weird because with [Esa-Pekka](#) there's more contemporary music there than there is in the rest of the country.

BETTY FREEMAN: No, no, not really... It's older American; it's not that much contemporary.

FRANK J. OTERI: Now, getting back to your grandchildren and their not necessarily being interested in opera, and you being afraid to ask them what they thought. Maybe if they were doing more contemporary works, younger people would be more interested. They would feel it connected more to the here and now.

BETTY FREEMAN: That's a good suggestion. Where should I take them?

FRANK J. OTERI: (laughs) That's the problem.

BETTY FREEMAN: It is a problem.

FRANK J. OTERI: We don't have larger scale institutions that are devoted exclusively to contemporary work

BETTY FREEMAN: No, but I'm don't mind the way things are. I'd be suspicious if everybody liked contemporary music. There's no reason why they should. I can't believe, and I know it wasn't true, that everybody liked Beethoven when it was first performed. Everybody didn't like [Berlioz](#) when it was first performed. I know that the [Troyens](#) was never performed in his lifetime. They didn't like [contemporary art](#) when it first came out in the 40s in America. It doesn't bother me.

FRANK J. OTERI: But interesting enough, if there's a [Jackson Pollock retrospective](#) or a [Mondrian retrospective](#) in New York, there are lines around the block.

BETTY FREEMAN: Yeah, but that's today. That's work from 50 years ago.

FRANK J. OTERI: Yeah, but the same thing hasn't happened to music. You don't have lines around the block for [Schoenberg](#).

BETTY FREEMAN: But you will in 50 years.

FRANK J. OTERI: So you think 50 years from now Schoenberg will be standard repertoire.

BETTY FREEMAN: Not Schoenberg because I don't care for Schoenberg personally. I admire him, I respect him, but I don't love him. So I wouldn't say Schoenberg. But there are other names today that there's no question that they're the names that will last 50 years, that people will listen to. Want me to name them?

FRANK J. OTERI: Sure.

BETTY FREEMAN: Well, it's all the people I like. People like [Thomas Adès](#), [Boulez](#), there's a huge list, [George Benjamin](#), [Kaija Saariaho](#), [Magnus Lindberg](#), [Harrison Birtwistle](#), [Mark-Anthony Turnage](#).

FRANK J. OTERI: So, you really feel people will be attending Harrison Birtwistle in the future in the way people are attending Beethoven.

BETTY FREEMAN: Yes, I have no doubts. I absolutely have no doubts about it.

3. Music & Visual Art

FRANK J. OTERI: To continue what we were saying about the art world versus the music world. It's interesting because the art world has a very different economy than the music world.

BETTY FREEMAN: That's right. They have an object.

FRANK J. OTERI: And we don't.

BETTY FREEMAN: They have objects they can put on their walls. That's right, we don't. That's where it stops.

FRANK J. OTERI: And it sort of makes things tricky because in music you're lucky if you get someone, a person, or an organization to commission something, but they commission it before they've heard it.

BETTY FREEMAN: I know.

FRANK J. OTERI: As opposed to a painting, which they can buy once they've seen.

BETTY FREEMAN: There's no connection really.

FRANK J. OTERI: And you commission it, but it's not really yours. You get to hear it but then it belongs to the world.

BETTY FREEMAN: That's the way I like it.

FRANK J. OTERI: Right, because it is something the entire world can appreciate.

BETTY FREEMAN: The economy depends on other purposes. For the people who are art collectors, it's important socially.

FRANK J. OTERI: Right.

BETTY FREEMAN: I don't see any connection personally between the two economies.

FRANK J. OTERI: I wonder, because I think in some ways the audience should be the same.

BETTY FREEMAN: Why? I don't find that it is.

FRANK J. OTERI: It isn't. It's interesting that it isn't...

BETTY FREEMAN: They are different attractions. The art world is based on money. I used to be in the art world so I know a bit about it. The art world is based on money, and prestige, and power. And contemporary music is based on passion, and intelligence...

FRANK J. OTERI: So you don't see that in the art world at all, the passion and intelligence.

BETTY FREEMAN: No because the basis of it is power, social and financial. But it's certainly not the basis of music, for me anyway, from my experience.

FRANK J. OTERI: It's interesting because so many painters were influenced by composers, and so many composers were influenced by painters. The visual arts is so important to [Morton Feldman](#), he was friends with so many painters.

BETTY FREEMAN: I know [Guston](#) primarily. I know all about [that](#).

FRANK J. OTERI: And I know a lot of painters now who will paint listening to Morton Feldman recordings. It's inspires them to listen to this music.

BETTY FREEMAN: Yeah, that's right. It still doesn't make any special connection as far as I'm concerned.

FRANK J. OTERI: And certainly when the [minimalist composers](#) came to prominence in New York in the '70s were giving concerts in art galleries... The art world supported [Glass](#) and [Reich](#).

BETTY FREEMAN: That's right.

FRANK J. OTERI: And they themselves made connections between their work and the artworks of [Frank Stella](#), [Kenneth Noland](#), [Sol LeWitt](#), [Donald Judd](#)....

BETTY FREEMAN: That's right. They were presented by and supported by artists.

FRANK J. OTERI: So given that history...

BETTY FREEMAN: But artists also like movies, I don't know if there's a movie connection, artists like reading. Artists go out in other directions. And not all artists like music.

FRANK J. OTERI: Right, and obviously not all composers are enamored of painting and sculpture.

BETTY FREEMAN: No. And I'm always surprised when they are, like Birtwistle's crazy about the English one who made the [screaming Popes](#)...

FRANK J. OTERI: [Francis Bacon](#)?

BETTY FREEMAN: Bacon. He's crazy about Francis Bacon; I'm not.

FRANK J. OTERI: (laughs) What painters are you excited by?

BETTY FREEMAN: You mean what artists? What have I collected?

FRANK J. OTERI: Yes.

BETTY FREEMAN: Oh, well I've collected for so long. I don't collect any more. Who did I collect when I started in [the '50s](#)?

FRANK J. OTERI: Yes.

BETTY FREEMAN: I collected [Clyfford Still](#), [Franz Kline](#), [de Kooning](#), [Gorky](#), [Guston](#)... That was the '50s. Then I changed my collection in the '60s and I started collecting [Lichtenstein](#), whom I liked the best, [Bruce Naumann](#), [Oldenberg](#), [Dan Flavin](#)...

FRANK J. OTERI: Now there's definitely a connection between a lot of these artists, these maverick artists, and a lot of the maverick composers that America has produced.

BETTY FREEMAN: I don't know. I really don't know.

4. American Music vs. European Music Today

FRANK J. OTERI: Do you feel our music community, our contemporary music community is in a better or worse place than the contemporary music communities abroad that you've experienced?

BETTY FREEMAN: Well, I'm sorry to say it, but I think it's American music that's in the worse place; I haven't seen anything very interesting in American music for the last 15 years.

FRANK J. OTERI: In terms of new works?

BETTY FREEMAN: In terms of new composers. The older composers are still writing wonderfully like [Steve Reich](#), [Milton Babbitt](#), [Terry Riley](#), [Lou Harrison](#), [John Adams](#)... They're still writing, the ones who are still alive of course, they are still writing wonderfully. But the younger composers, that is under 40, more or less, there's nobody that I find compelling. And I'm not the only one. I've talked with many people and none of them could come up with a name of someone 40 or under, in other words the new generation.

FRANK J. OTERI: Have you attended any of the [Bang On A Can](#) concerts?

BETTY FREEMAN: Well, I don't know their music, and I don't care for their music. That's what I'm talking about, that whole group except [Steve Schick](#) who's a dear friend of mine who's a percussionist but he doesn't compose. It's not music that grabs me in any way. It's synthetic for me. I usually can tell a piece from the opening, I mean this is wild, but I can usually tell my reaction from the opening measure or phrase. But I don't find anything convincing in contemporary American music for the last at least 15 years among younger composers. It's competent, it's catchy, but for me it's not compelling.

FRANK J. OTERI: It's interesting because I'm very excited by so much of that music.

BETTY FREEMAN: Well, you asked me, so I have different ideas. For me it doesn't hold up for what it is, and for what music means to me. No passion and in fact I have very little interest even anymore.

FRANK J. OTERI: So do you feel there are great composers who are 40 and under in [European countries](#)?

BETTY FREEMAN: Oh absolutely. And they are composers I'm aiding, and who I have been aiding for the last 15 years. Want some names?

FRANK J. OTERI: Yeah.

BETTY FREEMAN: [Thomas Adès](#), [George Benjamin](#), [Magnus Lindberg](#). Magnus is [Finnish](#), and Ades and Benjamin are [British](#). [Kaija Saariaho](#)...

FRANK J. OTERI: ...a wonderful composer.

BETTY FREEMAN: She's Finnish. [Mark-Anthony Turnage](#), he's English.

FRANK J. OTERI: Any composers in [France](#) or in [Germany](#)?

BETTY FREEMAN: Germany, [Matthias Pintscher](#).

FRANK J. OTERI: I haven't heard his music.

BETTY FREEMAN: No, but you do in Europe hear it a lot. I like [Brett Dean](#) from [Australia](#) very much.

FRANK J. OTERI: I haven't heard his music either.

BETTY FREEMAN: Brand new.

FRANK J. OTERI: There's a composer from the [Caucasus](#) who now lives in Australia who's music I like a lot... [Elena Kats-Chernin](#).

BETTY FREEMAN: You know I haven't heard a piece of hers.

FRANK J. OTERI: Very interesting composer. [Boosey & Hawkes](#) recently [signed her](#).

BETTY FREEMAN: I'll look for her.

FRANK J. OTERI: There's a really interesting piece called "Clocks" which has sort of a post-Lindberg, metrical sensibility.

BETTY FREEMAN: Where did you hear it?

FRANK J. OTERI: There's a CD that the [Australian Broadcasting Company](#) put out which unfortunately isn't very well distributed here, but it surfaces from time to time.

BETTY FREEMAN: Oh, why don't you send me one?

FRANK J. OTERI: I'll try to track another one down and I'll get it in the mail to you... But to get back to Americans, there are so many composers under 40. There are so many

names that keep popping up to the surface. We constantly hear the names of the Bang On A Can composers; [Aaron Jay Kernis](#) and [Michael Torke](#) get performed a great deal.

BETTY FREEMAN: I know. Sometimes Kernis can be interesting. I agree with that. But there's no one that really does it for me.

FRANK J. OTERI: Wow. O.K., I don't know where else to go with that.

BETTY FREEMAN: There isn't. Things have shifted. They shifted at least 15, definitely about 10 years ago. The real serious interest in contemporary, and great contemporary music has shifted. It shifted not only to the young people, but to the older people as well: [Boulez](#), [Birtwistle](#)...

FRANK J. OTERI: Now, why do you think that happened? What in the last 15 years has changed?

BETTY FREEMAN: What happened in the last 10 years? I think that probably the [Schoenberg influence](#) got watered down, and they just became more masters of their own styles. Certainly that's true with Birtwistle, and Boulez, [Berio](#), my favorite [Lachenmann](#). There's are all men in their 60's. [Stockhausen](#), [Kurtag](#)... I mean Kurtag is a master, an absolute master. [Ligeti](#)...there's no question that these men will be heard in 50 years. They are writing, for me, music that is completely convincing.

FRANK J. OTERI: Now the question is what happened in the United States?

BETTY FREEMAN: Everything has shifts. The [Renaissance shifted from Italy](#), [Impressionism shifted from France](#). Everything shifts, the style in sculpture and art.

FRANK J. OTERI: Is there a political change?

BETTY FREEMAN: Sea change, everything shifts by nature.

FRANK J. OTERI: So you don't think there's any larger explanation.

BETTY FREEMAN: It's natural to change.

5. Great American Composers

FRANK J. OTERI: You've had very close friendships with some of the most significant American composers over the years, [Harry Partch](#)...

BETTY FREEMAN: Oh yes. I've just been listening to Partch again. He's just so wonderful.

FRANK J. OTERI: One of my favorite composers. Completely unique, and completely devoid of any influence of [Arnold Schoenberg](#), to bring back the name Schoenberg.

BETTY FREEMAN: Yes. If you want to read something that dears your heart, read that book [Bitter Music](#). He was so angry. Well anyway.

FRANK J. OTERI: Talk about somebody who really created music on his own terms without being influenced by any other music, older European music or newer European music.

BETTY FREEMAN: That's true.

FRANK J. OTERI: And I think to myself, you put a piece of Harry Partch's on a program with [Mozart](#) and [Mahler](#), you're really doing a disservice to all three.

BETTY FREEMAN: Well first of all you can't because you don't have [the instruments](#).

FRANK J. OTERI: Right.

BETTY FREEMAN: But you're right, you can't.

FRANK J. OTERI: It really needs to be it's own thing.

BETTY FREEMAN: That's right.

FRANK J. OTERI: And some of these other composers too, [Lou Harrison](#)... His output is so extremely varied, but so much of his music is about non-Western concerns.

BETTY FREEMAN: I went up to [San Francisco](#) for his [concert](#) a few weeks ago. I was blown away. There was a concert for him. I was blown away by his Organ Concerto. It's jazzy, and sharp, and brilliant. [Michael Tilson Thomas](#) had a full orchestra and a real organ. It was marvelous, an absolutely astonishing piece.

FRANK J. OTERI: I'm a big fan of the [Piano Concerto](#) that he wrote for [Keith Jarrett](#).

BETTY FREEMAN: Yeah, I commissioned that.

FRANK J. OTERI: It's a great piece.

BETTY FREEMAN: That is my commission.

FRANK J. OTERI: ...The way he uses [Kirnberger tuning system](#)... the intervals are subtly different from the intervals that we're used to. It's a slight difference, but it's like adding a small dash of some exotic spice to a familiar dish; it can change the whole contour of the meal.

BETTY FREEMAN: Yeah, and somebody else is starting to play it.

FRANK J. OTERI: Oh great!

BETTY FREEMAN: I can't remember whether it was [Ursula](#). I saw it listed someplace. It hasn't had too many performances.

FRANK J. OTERI: I can't imagine there are a lot of people who know how to tune the piano to that scale.

BETTY FREEMAN: That's true.

FRANK J. OTERI: There's another Lou Harrison Piano Concerto that I just stumbled upon maybe in the last year or so.

BETTY FREEMAN: Oh?

FRANK J. OTERI: It's a concerto for piano and [gamelan](#). The piano is retuned to the [slendro and pelog tunings](#) of the gamelan. It's also quite wonderful.

BETTY FREEMAN: Oh! Is it on a record?

FRANK J. OTERI: It's on a CD that was issued by the [Leonardo Music Journal](#) called [*Interaction: New Music for Gamelan*](#).

BETTY FREEMAN: And it's with a re-tuned piano?

FRANK J. OTERI: Yes, it's a re-tuned microtonal piano with gamelan. It's an later piece, he wrote it in 1987.

BETTY FREEMAN: He's going to have a performance at [Lincoln Center](#) I think next summer.

FRANK J. OTERI: So he's going to be the composer focus?

BETTY FREEMAN: They're doing an opera.

FRANK J. OTERI: [Rapunzel](#)?

BETTY FREEMAN: No, I think it's going to be *The Young Caesar*.

FRANK J. OTERI: Oh yes.

BETTY FREEMAN: I think it's going to be next year.

FRANK J. OTERI: He's certainly still at the top of his form. Of course it's so sad that he lost [Bill Colvig](#) earlier this year. I don't know how much music he's written since then.

BETTY FREEMAN: Oh he's fine. I was just with him. He's fine.

FRANK J. OTERI: Some of the composers you mentioned admiring earlier we think of as being in opposite camps from each other. You mentioned [Steve Reich](#), but then in the same breath you mentioned [Milton Babbitt](#). They are about as far from each other as can be....

BETTY FREEMAN: You're right.

FRANK J. OTERI: But you see value in both of them.

BETTY FREEMAN: Of course I do and I see value in [Cage](#), who's different.

FRANK J. OTERI: ...Who's completely different from either one of them!

BETTY FREEMAN: Yes, I see value in [Feldman](#) and he's completely different. [Robert Ashley](#) I love and he is completely different from all of them. And [La Monte](#)...

FRANK J. OTERI: Yes, yes, he's different from everybody.

BETTY FREEMAN: That's right. They are all different, and that's what makes them fascinating for me. And [Nancarrow](#), and that's another one of my passions.

FRANK J. OTERI: La Monte Young has never really gotten a fair hearing in some ways, in this country or anywhere else.

BETTY FREEMAN: No he has, Frank. He really has. He was in [Europe](#). There was a big thing of his in [Venice](#) not too long ago. Everyone, I think, pretty much knows about his existence.

FRANK J. OTERI: But they don't really know about his music.

BETTY FREEMAN: They don't hear Cage's music much either.

FRANK J. OTERI: Although all the recordings that have come out of Cage's music recently - it's devastating. Every time I turn around and another package arrives with yet another recording. There are multiple recordings of pieces.

BETTY FREEMAN: Really? I didn't know that.

FRANK J. OTERI: And Feldman. It blows my mind. There are now six different recordings of *Triadic Memories* and three versions of *For Philip Guston* and that piece lasts over 4 hours. It boggles the senses! He's becoming standard repertoire.

BETTY FREEMAN: That's what I mean about 50 years.

FRANK J. OTERI: Well, it's becoming standard repertoire for [small independent record labels](#). But the major orchestras and the major chamber presenters around this country are still ignoring this work.

BETTY FREEMAN: Sure.

FRANK J. OTERI: It's interesting the one piece, the Cage piece that keeps getting recorded over and over again more than any others is the *Sonatas and Interludes for Prepared Piano*.

BETTY FREEMAN: That's true. And would you believe that [Robert Wilson](#) right now is staging in [Valencia](#), the *Freeman Etudes*. He's finalizing it this week. I don't know what he's doing with it, but there it is.

FRANK J. OTERI: Talking about the music that the older American composers have written in recent years, the music that Cage wrote in the last 5 years of his life after Feldman died, for me is some of the most stunning music ever written. I'm thinking of the [Number Pieces](#).

BETTY FREEMAN: Oh wonderful.

FRANK J. OTERI: And now, finally, people are recording this music.

BETTY FREEMAN: I'm glad to hear it.

FRANK J. OTERI: It's treasure. Now a lot of these recordings are being done by European ensembles, more so than by Americans.

BETTY FREEMAN: That's right. You are absolutely right. Germans especially.

FRANK J. OTERI: We sort of ignore our own, and other people are taking up the slack.

BETTY FREEMAN: That's right.

FRANK J. OTERI: There are clearly exceptions like the [California EAR Unit](#) did [one of the recordings](#) of *For Philip Guston*.

BETTY FREEMAN: Yeah, that's the nature to... you know I seldom go to a restaurant that's around the corner, even though it's good, I go a few miles away. I don't know why.

FRANK J. OTERI: Yeah, same here. I rarely eat in the neighborhood although there's [a great Chinese restaurant](#) that I now eat at rather frequently because it is so good. They serve [Chinese food](#) from the [Sichuan province](#).

BETTY FREEMAN: Oh, well, you'll have to take me when I come to [New York](#).

6. Audiences & Exposure, Here & Abroad

FRANK J. OTERI: Getting back to your comment about the emerging American composers of the past 15 years and your feeling that the shift has gone back to [Europe](#). I already said that I don't agree with you about this.

BETTY FREEMAN: Oh, no, no, I wouldn't want that.

FRANK J. OTERI: But I think it's interesting that you feel that way and I'm trying to figure out if there's a larger reason behind it.

BETTY FREEMAN: Oh well there's a larger audience for it. There's a larger interest in it.

FRANK J. OTERI: I was just in [Hungary](#) last month. I was attending the conference of the [International Association of Music Information Centres](#), an organization that the [American Music Center](#) belongs to along with the other national music information centers in countries all over the world. They hold their conference in a different country every year and this year it was in Hungary.

BETTY FREEMAN: In Budapest?

FRANK J. OTERI: Yes. Beautiful city! During the conference, they invited all of us to attend a concert that was being done live on [Hungarian radio](#), and it was all contemporary Hungarian music, and I thought, to myself well you know...

BETTY FREEMAN: Yeah, we wouldn't do that.

FRANK J. OTERI: We wouldn't do that. [Radio stations here](#) are so terrified of live music on the air to begin with since it's something you can't always predict, and here they were broadcasting live living music from local composers! Every year I go to the conference of the [American Music Personnel in Public Radio](#), and so [many stations are afraid](#) of playing any substantial amount of contemporary music.

BETTY FREEMAN: That's right. They don't play it.

FRANK J. OTERI: It's tragic. And that's one of the reasons I feel that this stuff isn't getting exposure. In European countries they play this music on the radio.

BETTY FREEMAN: That's right, because the radios are state supported.

FRANK J. OTERI: Yes.

BETTY FREEMAN: That's a big difference.

FRANK J. OTERI: That's gets back to the first kernel.

BETTY FREEMAN: They don't have to get commercial sponsors.

FRANK J. OTERI: Or listeners who will only give money to the station if they play [Mozart](#) and [Vivaldi](#) over and over or so they think...

BETTY FREEMAN: It's the system. The American system is against the proliferation of difficult music.

FRANK J. OTERI: How do we get around that?

BETTY FREEMAN: Well we don't. We can't. How can we if that's the system?

FRANK J. OTERI: But that means we'll never have a healthy new music environment.

BETTY FREEMAN: Like we had in the '40s, '50s and '60s, that's true. That's right. But that doesn't bother me. I think that's provincial thinking, actually. I mean music belongs to the world; it doesn't belong to America.

FRANK J. OTERI: But I still somehow feel that if we can't do things to encourage our own music culture, A) we can't contribute to the world's music culture, and B) we'll never get people here to appreciate music in a really profound way. If people don't appreciate the music that we ourselves are creating, they are not going to appreciate any music.

BETTY FREEMAN: You mean any contemporary music?

FRANK J. OTERI: Yeah.

BETTY FREEMAN: Well, that's it.

FRANK J. OTERI: Well, this is going to sound rather heavy handed, but until people can appreciate the music of [Cage](#), [Babbitt](#) and [Reich](#), you're not going to be able to give them [Birtwistle](#). You're not going to be able to give them [Thomas Adès](#). It's not going to mean anything.

BETTY FREEMAN: That's right. That doesn't bother me. All of my friends are crazy about this particular contemporary music area. All my personal friends. I mean they're not a lot of people, I don't know that many people, but all of us keep the little flame inside, and it keeps going, and there's no reason why it should go out just because it doesn't reach the majority of the people.

FRANK J. OTERI: But how could we reach more people?

BETTY FREEMAN: Why should we? I don't see any point to it. I don't see any point to force feeding. The people who I know who love it just come to it naturally. You don't get passions for things because someone tells you about it. Everyone I know just finds it for themselves. I don't like the idea of feeding things to people. You can expose them. You can play records for them or take them to concerts.

FRANK J. OTERI: But the concerts need to be there and the records need to be there. How do you make sure that they will be?

BETTY FREEMAN: How do you do that? Well, it's very tough. [Los Angeles](#) lost its [last classical music station](#). All they play is old music. So I've stopped supporting any of the local stations. I write letters which don't even get noticed. I'm stopping to support them because they don't do any contemporary music. But I just know that the people that I know will find their way to it. It's some sort of magnet. They buy records, CDs... There are little groups that do concerts; we have little groups at the [Museum](#) all the time. And we have a wonderful series here called [Green Umbrella](#) which had 5 concerts a season, it's now 7, it's all contemporary music and very good and they're hugely attended.

FRANK J. OTERI: Well, it's interesting because on the one hand the larger institutions are not doing as much as they used to, but there are these small institutions that are doing a great deal.

BETTY FREEMAN: Like in the ['60s in New York](#).

FRANK J. OTERI: Think of record labels. The major labels, like [EMI](#), [BMG](#), [Sony](#), [Deutsche Grammophon](#) only rarely issue recordings of contemporary music. But there are all of these little [independent labels](#) both in the States and in Europe that are doing fabulous things.

BETTY FREEMAN: That's healthy.

FRANK J. OTERI: Fabulous things. Here in the States you have labels like [CRI](#) and [New Albion](#), [New World](#), [Bridge](#), [Mode](#), or [Nonesuch](#), although they're a special case because they're independent even though they're part of [Time Warner](#), and in Europe labels like [HatART](#) and [col legno](#). HatART has put out so many recordings of [Feldman](#) and [Cage](#), and now they're doing recordings of [James Tenney's](#) music... It's remarkable. But once again looking at European countries versus here, coming back from Hungary and this conference, [Hungaroton](#) puts out so many recordings of contemporary Hungarian music. And the [Swedish Music Information Centre](#) puts out tons of contemporary Swedish music on [Phono Suecia](#). [Donemus](#) does the same with their [Composers' Voice](#) CDs in the [Netherlands](#). Countries like [Finland](#) have very strong labels devoted to local

contemporary composers like [Ondine](#). It's really strange that we don't have the same resources here even though we are the richest and biggest country. Even tiny, recently independent countries in [Eastern Europe](#) like [Croatia](#), [Lithuania](#) and [Estonia](#) are getting behind their composers in a big way...

BETTY FREEMAN: But there isn't a big audience for it here.

FRANK J. OTERI: Well there isn't a that big audience for it there either, but there are resources and different cultural perceptions. I mean, there's definitely a bigger audience, but I think there's a sense in these countries that this is something that you should care about. Even if you don't care about it, you should care about it. Whereas here I think there's a sense that if it isn't something that makes money it doesn't really matter.

BETTY FREEMAN: So are you thinking about changing [the American system](#)?

FRANK J. OTERI: (laughs)

BETTY FREEMAN: Good luck. I don't worry about things like that. I think that the few people that really respond are just going to continue responding to those few people. There aren't that many great composers at any time, just like there aren't a great number of artists at any one time, and the ones that are good are for the ages, as far as I'm concerned, and whether or not they are played a lot people who love it somehow find their way to it. It's like the Pied Piper.

7. Salzburg

BETTY FREEMAN: For 9 years now, I've been supporting [Gérard Mortier's program](#) at [Salzburg](#). It's been for me the liveliest and most attractive contemporary program, contemporary staging of operas, and contemporary music. They have a parallel contemporary emphasis there. This year they're having 6 concerts that [Wolfgang Rihm](#) is doing, for example. So I support Mortier. While he's at Salzburg I'll support him, and there's one more year, so I'll continue my support through 2001. In 2001 he leaves. And that's when I probably won't support Salzburg.

FRANK J. OTERI: Because of the [Haider](#) regime?

BETTY FREEMAN: Nope. Just because Mortier's going to be replaced and I support him.

FRANK J. OTERI: But if there's somebody else who comes in who does equally adventurous programming...

BETTY FREEMAN: Then it's open. It seems to be stronger to stay there, and use it as a pulpit to register your displeasure, than it is to resign.

FRANK J. OTERI: Absolutely.

BETTY FREEMAN: [George Benjamin](#), who's a dear friend of mine, resigned. And he's only one of 3 people who've resigned. The [other](#) is, the pianist...

FRANK J. OTERI: [Andras Schiff](#)...

BETTY FREEMAN: And [Mortier rescinded his decision](#). He's back there until the end of his contract which is 2001. It's better to continue to have the program for the 78% of the people who didn't vote for Haider, than it is to just walk away because Haider and the [Freedom Party](#) couldn't care less if you resign...

FRANK J. OTERI: If anything they'd be thrilled.

BETTY FREEMAN: They'd be thrilled - one Jew less. So you're not accomplishing anything by walking away. So I think it's stronger to stay there, and I'll stay there through the summer of course, and then I've already commissioned an opera for Salzburg for next year, but it looks like it's being put off by [Matthias Pintscher](#).

FRANK J. OTERI: I have to hear some of his music. Are there recordings?

BETTY FREEMAN: No. No there aren't. But I've commissioned his opera and it's been done, but there's a hold up. But hopefully, the [Lachenmann](#) opera is going to be done in Salzburg next summer, and so that's would be a big thing that I'd support if it is going to be done because it's fantastic. I'm supporting the program through the end of Mortier's day. Then it's open what happens.

8. Newport Classics

FRANK J. OTERI: Recordings are one of the best ways to disseminate new music. I know that a number of years ago you were involved with [Newport Classic](#).

BETTY FREEMAN: Yeah. I think they closed or something.

FRANK J. OTERI: Well they're still going but they discontinued the new music series. And that was a fabulous series.

BETTY FREEMAN: Yeah, you know what [he](#) did, he sold it to [Sony](#).

FRANK J. OTERI: Yeah, then they put it all out of print.

BETTY FREEMAN: Yeah, that's right. And I'm trying to get my 10 records back.

FRANK J. OTERI: Those are great records. The [Henry Brant](#) record is amazing. [Steve Mackey](#), [Cage](#)... And I love the recording of [Feldman's](#) *For Samuel Beckett*.

BETTY FREEMAN: I've tried, I've written four letters to Sony. Then I had a lucky break and Thomas Frost whom I knew years, and years, and years ago through [Partch](#) called me and said that he would help me. He's the Senior Producer there. So there's a possibility now that I'll get them back. Depends on what they charge me to get them back.

FRANK J. OTERI: Would you have them released on another label?

BETTY FREEMAN: Well, I asked [CRI](#) and they were interested. We'll see...

FRANK J. OTERI: Those are recordings that should be available to people. They are important recordings.

BETTY FREEMAN: Yeah, well thank you, I'll let you know what happens.

9. The Internet

FRANK J. OTERI: You said before we began this whole thing that you haven't really dealt with the Internet at all.

BETTY FREEMAN: I haven't even seen it.

FRANK J. OTERI: Wow, well we have to take care of that at some point.

BETTY FREEMAN: Well my granddaughters have one.

FRANK J. OTERI: I'm so excited about the Internet because I see this thing as the perfect information vehicle to spread the word about new music. And it really doesn't take much. All you need is a computer in someone's home, and [bingo](#), that information is there. It's even easier than getting someone to hear a CD or to go to a concert. If somebody wants to find the information, it's there.

BETTY FREEMAN: Does everybody you know have one?

FRANK J. OTERI: No, but the majority do. And that's changed in the last I would even say, 2-3 years ago, maybe half the people I knew had it and now it's more like 80-90%. I can count on my hand the people I know who still don't have Internet access.

BETTY FREEMAN: Oh? Really?

FRANK J. OTERI: And that's been the remarkable change in American culture in, let's say, the past 5 years. You talked before about this 15 year thing, which I think is interesting because I was just reading [an article](#) about electronic music by [Kyle Gann](#) in the [New York Times](#) the other day. He was saying that there was a cultural sea change that happened in the early 1980s and that was the advent of people having computers, and having [MIDI-based electronic musical instruments](#), digital interfaces for electronic instruments, and that forever changed the way we create things. The Internet has been around for over a generation now, but it has only become part of the general culture in the last 5 years. And I think if anything, the energy that you feel has left may shift back to America because of it. Right now, [more than half the people on the Internet are in the United States](#).

BETTY FREEMAN: Well. Yes, O.K.

FRANK J. OTERI: Think of the potential for music.

BETTY FREEMAN: You can't hear the music?

FRANK J. OTERI: Yes, you can hear music.

BETTY FREEMAN: They'll hear the music?

FRANK J. OTERI: Yes, you can play sound files. It's interesting, you can have images of paintings, you can have recordings of music, you can even have video running of a concert or an opera, or a motion picture.

BETTY FREEMAN: With the sound?

FRANK J. OTERI: Yeah, it's remarkable. And, it's like television. In April, we started using videos on the Web magazine with the interviews that we do. Unfortunately we're not able to do that with you because we're talking on the telephone. But [the first one](#) we did it with was [Meredith Monk](#), the video shows her talking about music. It's almost like watching her television. And, if it's on a monitor in a room, people are inevitably drawn to it, just like a TV set.

BETTY FREEMAN: Oh, good.

FRANK J. OTERI: For me, the future of music is on the Internet.

10. A More Intimate Future for Music

FRANK J. OTERI: What do you see as the future of music?

BETTY FREEMAN: That it goes back into small groups. It's what [Boulez](#) has been saying, and [Ernest Fleischmann](#). But it has to break down into smaller groups as it was before. Smaller halls, smaller audiences... And that's really better; it strengthens it. First of all a lot of these composers aren't writing for full orchestra.

FRANK J. OTERI: I know that [Steve Reich](#) isn't writing for orchestra anymore.

BETTY FREEMAN: There's every advantage to smaller places, smaller venues. I think concerts in nightclubs are wonderful. I heard a [Cage](#) concert in a nightclub that was completely successful. Also [Gavin Bryars'](#) *The Sinking of the Titanic*... I heard an opera in a movie house. And it was a wonderful place to hear it. If you move the venue away from the stuffy music halls, into places where younger people like to go, casually, and where's there's food.

FRANK J. OTERI: Right.

BETTY FREEMAN: That's one thing that they're skipping here that they do in [Europe](#).

FRANK J. OTERI: Which is a good part of the experience... Most rock concerts and jazz concerts are interactive, the music is a part of the environment, not just an isolated ritual thing.

BETTY FREEMAN: True, true. That's a good way of putting it.

11. Beyond Contemporary Music

FRANK J. OTERI: Well, let's talk a little bit about other music genres. We talked at the very beginning of this conversation about the encroachment of popular culture, and rock music on classical music. Is there anything in rock or jazz that you find interesting as a listener?

BETTY FREEMAN: No. I really don't know it. I don't listen to it.

FRANK J. OTERI: Not jazz either?

BETTY FREEMAN: I don't like jazz. It's very mechanical for me. One instrument plays, everybody applauds, the next instrument plays, everybody applauds, etc., then they all play together, then it finishes. It's very predetermined for me; it's very strict. Anyway, that's what I hear in jazz.

FRANK J. OTERI: That's interesting because for me, the composers that we've talked about are so different from each other. [Reich](#), [Cage](#), and [Babbitt](#) just to name three. Their music is diametrically opposed to each other in some ways, yet you love all three.

BETTY FREEMAN: Well, it's all compelling.

FRANK J. OTERI: So it doesn't really matter how it's put together?

BETTY FREEMAN: No, the system it's based on doesn't matter at all. In fact, [Birtwistle](#)'s music is based on a completely different way of writing music.

FRANK J. OTERI: You mentioned [Lou Harrison](#), and [Harry Partch](#) whose music has almost nothing with Western classical tradition. Do you listen to world music, music outside the Western classical tradition at all?

BETTY FREEMAN: No. I've decided I have enough to do, I haven't listened to everything in the European music yet.

FRANK J. OTERI: But you do listen to older European music?

BETTY FREEMAN: No.

FRANK J. OTERI: You go to the opera, you went to [Rigoletto](#).

BETTY FREEMAN: Oh, that's occasionally. But I don't listen at home.

FRANK J. OTERI: Only to contemporary music.

BETTY FREEMAN: That's right. I have hundreds of CDs. And I don't like CDs; they have nothing to do with performance, absolutely nothing. They're like what a print is to a painting; they're removed from the original.

FRANK J. OTERI: Yet some pieces of music actually sound better on recordings than they do live.

BETTY FREEMAN: They do?

FRANK J. OTERI: I mean for me. I think [Feldman](#)'s music sounds better on recording than it does live.

BETTY FREEMAN: Really?

FRANK J. OTERI: At a concert hall I'm so busy hearing other people making noises and his music is so quiet, it's for me to pay attention. In fact I'm a big LP collector but I think Feldman's music sounds better on [CDs](#) than on LP because the surface on CDs is quieter.

BETTY FREEMAN: Oh, really.

12. Photography

FRANK J. OTERI: You have done so many remarkable photos of composers.

BETTY FREEMAN: Outside of grandchildren, I photograph almost exclusively composers because I consider them the most important people in the world, much more important than any politician.

FRANK J. OTERI:(laughs) That's great. When did you start doing photography?

BETTY FREEMAN: 1972, when I started making the [Partch](#) film...

FRANK J. OTERI: ...[The Dreamer That Remains](#)...

BETTY FREEMAN: Then I studied twice with [Ansel Adams](#) at his school. And later with [Fred Picker](#) for a week in [Vermont](#), and then, I forget the name, I studied two weeks in [Italy](#) with a color photographer, I forgot his name.

FRANK J. OTERI: What was it like working with Ansel Adams?

BETTY FREEMAN: In one session during the two weeks he took the class of 14 into his darkroom, and he asked everybody to bring a negative. So everybody brought in a negative. He choose one from one of the students, of a father, mother and a child sitting on the grass in front of a bush. And for the next 4 hours, he proceeded to print just that one negative, and I learned from watching, what it means to be a great printer and photographer. He went over, and over, always with big paper 16 by 20, dodging and burning and trying this and trying this and different developers. Finally after 4 hours he came up with a print he liked.

FRANK J. OTERI: Wow.

BETTY FREEMAN: That lesson stayed with me for the rest of my life. Attention to detail.

FRANK J. OTERI: Well, I love the photographs of yours that I've seen. They have a liveliness to them that's rare in photos of composers. You bring their inner souls to life,.

BETTY FREEMAN: Oh, thank you. And the more I like their music the better the photograph.

FRANK J. OTERI:I bet that's true.

BETTY FREEMAN: It is true. It's strange the camera is not a mechanical tool. Very strange. It's an extension...

13. Personal Music Background

FRANK J. OTERI: How did you get interested in music initially?

BETTY FREEMAN: Well, it's very easy. There's no escaping it. It's there. And it is always there.

FRANK J. OTERI: You studied music.

BETTY FREEMAN: Well, I just think you're born that way. You're born like - I have friends who like the water, for example. I don't like the water. I think you're born liking music. I've decided that.

FRANK J. OTERI: But you've also studied music when you were in college.

BETTY FREEMAN: Oh, very seriously.

FRANK J. OTERI: What did you study?

BETTY FREEMAN: Hmm. [Theory](#), [harmony](#), [counterpoint](#), [music history](#)...

FRANK J. OTERI: Did you write any music?

BETTY FREEMAN: No, I didn't have to write any music, except just examples. I minored in music, but I studied piano with David Barnett for 4 years. Then when I left school, I studied with Beveridge Webster.

FRANK J. OTERI: I have his recordings of [Stravinsky](#)'s piano music. They're wonderful.

BETTY FREEMAN: Then I studied with [Johana Harris](#) at [Juilliard](#).

FRANK J. OTERI: Wow.

BETTY FREEMAN: I rented a piano or a [spinnet](#) whenever I moved, and I moved a lot because it was [war time](#). I studied in [New England Conservatory](#) when I lived in [Boston](#).

FRANK J. OTERI: Did you give recitals?

BETTY FREEMAN: To friends, yes. Not in public.

FRANK J. OTERI: Now was it all new music, or was it old and new?

BETTY FREEMAN: Oh no, it was all old music. It was all classical music then. New music wasn't taught in those days. I mean this goes back to, well let's see, I'm 79 now, when I started I was 15. That goes way back to the '30s.

FRANK J. OTERI: So you never actively played contemporary music?

BETTY FREEMAN: No, but I loved contemporary music, and I went by myself, I remember, to [Tanglewood](#) when [Koussevitzky](#) was there, and of course when I went to [Wellesley](#), I went to the Friday Afternoon Rush Concerts every Friday and heard Koussevitzky. That's when I really heard contemporary music.

FRANK J. OTERI: Now what grabbed you about contemporary music?

BETTY FREEMAN: Oh, Frank. It's the music of my time.

FRANK J. OTERI: Now you say that, and I say that, but lots of classical music fans would say that we're crazy.

BETTY FREEMAN: I like contemporary clothes; I like [Armani](#), [Prada](#), [Gucci](#)... Oh no, my goodness this is music of my times. My music.

FRANK J. OTERI: I wish more people felt that way.

BETTY FREEMAN: The other is like living in a [14th Century house](#).

FRANK J. OTERI: Yet so many other people think that the music of the past is their music and that the music of now is not for them.

BETTY FREEMAN: I don't even think about those people. And one of them is one of my best friends. He only likes old music. We're friends. I mean, I can still be friends with people who don't like it.

14. Encouraging Music Philanthropy

FRANK J. OTERI: What can we do now to encourage younger people to listen to this music and to support it? How do we get younger people to support philanthropic interests in music?

BETTY FREEMAN: Well you see, I don't believe in proselytizing, I really don't. Everyone I feel should support what they believe in. I have a daughter who believes only in [animal rights](#), and she supports [anti-vivisection](#), and that's fine. I have friends who only support [AIDS](#) research because they have AIDS. I think that's right, they support what they're involved in, what they believe in. I have other friends who support [cancer groups](#) because their children have cancer. Everyone should be free to support what they believe in. I just happen to believe that contemporary music is a very vital part of my life. And without it, life would not be so wonderful, and so rich, and thrilling in every new piece and adventure.

FRANK J. OTERI: Well, I'm very happy that you've been able, through your support, to bring into my life a number of pieces that I love dearly, and to support so many composers whose music I treasure very highly.

BETTY FREEMAN: That's the nicest thing that anyone has ever said to me.