

## A FOURTH APPROACH TO PERFORMING MUSIC

Joan Jeanrenaud talks with *NewMusicBox* editor Frank J. Oteri at her home in San Francisco CA about her unusual post-Kronos career

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## 1. The Role of the Performer

FRANK J. OTERI: I was snooping around while you were making tea, and I must say I am very, very envious of your collection of *Source* magazines.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Somebody loaned those to me. They are not mine. But they've left them here for a very long time.

FRANK J. OTERI: I noticed *Source*, and I noticed the Schubert Quintet on the chair, and then I noticed Haydn, then all these contemporary discs, like the Annie Gosfield CD on Tzadik that I love.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: She's great.

FRANK J. OTERI: As a performer who for years has been in the public eye as a chamber musician in one of the most important American string quartets, and now establishing a significant career as a soloist, what do you feel the role of the performer is towards contemporary music, what should the role of the performer be?

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Well I can only speak for what my role I think should be as a performer in relation to contemporary music, and of course for me it's very tied up with my history. Spending 20 years in the Kronos Quartet had a huge influence, and I would not be doing what I do now for sure had it not been for that experience. On the other hand, before I joined the Kronos I was also involved in contemporary music.

FRANK J. OTERI: You were part of the Contemporary Music Ensemble at Indiana University...

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Well, I was one of the founding members of it. I was studying composition with Fred Fox and he started the ensemble specifically to play Peter Maxwell Davies's *Eight Songs for a Mad King*.

FRANK J. OTERI: Oh that's a great piece.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: It is a great piece. I think that was one of the first pieces we played on that concert with some other compositions, which were very interesting because at that time I was fairly new to notation that was not conventional notation. I was certainly exposed to a lot of things early on. Even growing up in Memphis I did pieces by composer who were at Memphis State University which is where I went to take my cello lessons. So early on people realized that I was very open to new experiences and trying things, so of course you get all these composers coming up to you saying, "Oh, play my piece." It's hard for them to find performers sometimes.

FRANK J. OTERI: I find it interesting that you say you studied composition. That already puts you in a different place than a lot of performers.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Well I studied composition, I wasn't very good at it I don't think, and it's interesting now because I'm starting compose only for myself really at this point, but I do play in this

group with Larry Ochs and Miya Masaoka and so hopefully at some point I'll be brave enough to compose something for the three of us.

FRANK J. OTERI: And is there a lot of improvisation in this group?

JOAN JEANRENAUD: There is. I also studied improvisation when I moved to Indiana University - David Baker was there...

FRANK J. OTERI: He's amazing.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: He is and that was a terrific experience. And I was very involved with the whole classical approach of learning how to play the cello at that time. So even though I took improvisation from David, at the same time I realized what a huge world that was and I felt like I didn't have time to completely devote myself to learn.

FRANK J. OTERI: And the cello is only now starting to really be seen as an improvisatory instrument. I know that in the 50s Ron Carter played jazz on the cello and that was one of the first times it had been done. Well, before that Oscar Pettiford did a jazz cello thing, but he played pizzicato so he was really treating the cello like a high bass. It wasn't really a cello. But Ron Carter sounds like a saxophone and it really showed that the instrument had a lot more versatility than people might have thought before that.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: I do think the cello does have a lot of versatility and part of it is because the range is really pretty extreme. Because you can play low, you can play like a bass, at the same time you can play really beautiful melodies up high.

FRANK J. OTERI: The high G is wonderful, and it's got such a unique tone because the string is so taut up there, so it's a really, really nice sound.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Yeah, I agree.

(both laugh)

## 2. The Electric Cello

JOAN JEANRENAUD: And now that I'm starting to get into electronics, and that whole world, you realize there are even more possibilities there. I'm using with my Zeta Electric cello, I'm using a Lexicon guitar processor which is sitting back there, I haven't unpacked it from a gig yet.

FRANK J. OTERI: I'm looking at it...

JOAN JEANRENAUD: It looks good, but you see I put it on a stand but they don't really come this way. This is the first Zeta cello ever made too.

FRANK J. OTERI: Wow!

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Kronos had a set of Zeta instruments made, but we never really used them very much, just in a couple of pieces. There are ensemble problems, you know trying to play exactly together like Kronos does, but now I'm using it and I'm realizing there are a lot of possibilities, and I find that I can do things on my electric cello that I can't do on my acoustic cello, and visa versa. I mean this cello will never get the sound that my acoustic cello does which is really beautiful.

FRANK J. OTERI: Now you also use a pick-up on the acoustic cello too.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: I do, that's true.

FRANK J. OTERI: Which is another whole weird mixed world of sound.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: That's true. So yeah, there are all these combination of things. I'm having this young guy in France, Frederick Coe, who's making me an electro-acoustic cello. And who knows when he'll be finished with it, but I think that's real exciting. He had a prototype that he had made and I was very impressed with it, I liked it a lot, and I felt it was very much in between my solid body and my acoustic. It was also just another possibility and so hopefully we'll finish that within the next six months.

FRANK J. OTERI: Do you ever play a five-string instrument?

JOAN JEANRENAUD: I haven't, but I think that would be a really interesting thing to try.

### 3. Standard Cello Repertoire and String Quartet Repertoire

FRANK J. OTERI: So getting back to beginnings, getting back to Memphis, you decided to a musician, to play the cello, and clearly there's a lot of really, really great repertoire for the cello in the western classical tradition: Beethoven sonatas, Brahms sonatas, the Dvorak concerto... I mean there's really a lot of fabulous, fabulous music. But you never really went in that direction which I'm really grateful for!

(both laugh)

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Well actually, that was my focus from when I started playing the cello through when I joined Kronos. I did other things always, I was interested in other things, but I was very classically trained. I had really great teachers. That's one of the reasons I started the cello, and I continued playing the cello, because I had a great teacher in Memphis. Then he sent me to Indiana University to study with his teacher, then I went to studies with Pierre Fournier for a year in Switzerland.

FRANK J. OTERI: One of the great cellists of the 20th century...

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Yeah, so all that time I learned all that repertoire. Now it's actually really exciting because I have a fourteen-year-old student who is such a wiz, and she's studying all that repertoire.

FRANK J. OTERI: There's such pull from managers and concert presenters who say: "If you want to be the next Jacqueline Du Pre, you've got to play the Dvorak concerto. You can't play new music and sell out a hall." And clearly Kronos proved them wrong. You said, "Well, we're not doing anything before 1900." And you sold-out halls. You were getting a new audience, and all the managers and concert presenters were scratching their heads saying, "Wait a second, this isn't supposed to happen."

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Well, that took a long time. You know when I first joined the Kronos, not many people had heard of the group, and it had been in existence for five years, but there had been a lot of membership changes, and Kronos had always, even before I joined, concentrated on contemporary music, but they didn't do it exclusively.

FRANK J. OTERI: Oh really?

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Yeah, and after I had been in the group two years, I realized that on a program we were playing one classical piece, and the rest would be contemporary works, which is about the opposite of what groups usually do. But then I felt like by that time, we had been pretty well established in California. We were getting gigs in California, so we were making a living. And we all talked about it, and we thought, "Well, we should do what we really like to do, and what we're really good at is all the contemporary music." Why should we play one Brahms quartet if we're really concentrating on this other piece, and we're not going to do that piece as well as someone who's done that for 20 years. It's not where Kronos's interest was focused. So two years after being at Kronos that's the decision we made that we were just going to do contemporary music. And you're right, pieces from 1900 on. And by this time it was also clear that we weren't we weren't going to have any standard

management to represent us, because you're right, they have this formula - they think: this is what the audience wants to hear, so this is what we want our artists to play. It became a very privileged position, actually, that we decided, well O.K., we're going to play what we really want to play, and we're going to do everything ourselves in order to enable that to happen. But actually, that was the best thing to happen because then, we really were free to do what we wanted to do, we didn't have pressure from anybody else, we could do whatever it was we wanted. And we found, especially after those first two years, that people would hire us, and we would do one standard work, and then they realized, "Oh, well we really liked all those other pieces, so yeah, come back and do whatever you want." So gradually that happened even more. Then there a period of time when we played all the 20th century classical works, all the Bartók's, the Shostokovich, Webern, Berg, all that, and I think that was really good for us as a group, and also that sort of helped people who if they weren't so familiar with us they might be familiar the name like Bartók. So gradually, and this took a long period of time, and now of course Kronos only plays commissioned works, primarily, so this was a wonderful evolvment over that 20 year period. But you can't say that when I first joined the group - you know we were getting 50 people at a concert.

FRANK J. OTERI: Well, it was an investment.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Yeah.

FRANK J. OTERI: Well it's so interesting because you look at before Kronos, and post-Kronos in the contemporary music scene. There were 2 things going on. Composers weren't really writing much for string quartet anymore, and now all of a sudden the string quartet is one of the liveliest forms for so many composers. And on the flip side it, now there are all these quartets all over the country that play mostly contemporary works. Whether it's the Lark Quartet or the Cuarteto Latinoamericano... There are many fantastic groups that are really dedicated to contemporary repertoire. It's made them better groups and it's made the music that's being written for quartet better music. A string quartet won a Pulitzer Prize a couple years ago and that was largely because of the dedication of players who commissioned that piece after he had already written a quartet for them. And you say we can never compete with a quartet that's played Brahms for 30 years, this is the problem that contemporary music faces in total, you get three rehearsals, then the piece gets played, half the time the performance doesn't reflect the piece.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Exactly.

FRANK J. OTERI: By playing only contemporary music and taking it on the road when you're touring it, and playing it over, and over, and over again before it gets recorded, and before it you play it in substantial venues, you're guaranteeing that those pieces are nurtured and loved. And I think audiences can hear that. I think that a lot of the time when people say that audiences don't like contemporary music, I think it's that audiences don't like bad performances.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: I think that you are absolutely right. And I think that's exactly what was the case when I first joined Kronos. People simply didn't give new works enough attention just like they would a piece, even a piece that they had known by ear, say a Mozart quartet or something else, they would give that much more attention than a piece that they've never heard, and I totally agree with you

that a lot of the problem with audiences not responding to contemporary music is because of bad performances.

FRANK J. OTERI: I think what's interesting now is you have a situation where the standard classical repertoire isn't necessarily the center of repertoire for a whole generation of listeners. There is no center. And Kronos managed to attract a whole other audience for whom the string quartet didn't really mean a whole lot before that. These aren't people who are going to care about the intonation of the second violin in the Grosse Fugue. They're more inclined to care about something more chronologically connected to them, and more geographically connected to them.

#### 4. A Collaboration-Oriented "Solo" Career

FRANK J. OTERI: Since leaving Kronos, you've really focused on cutting edge repertoire, on really, really exciting collaborations with people, and things that are relevant to people beyond the classical music ghetto.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Right. Well you know I'm choosing to work with musicians and composers that are relevant to me, actually, and of course at the beginning of when I first stepped away from Kronos, I tried a lot of different things, but it became very clear to me very soon that really I was very interested in the direction of contemporary music, and that I was very interested in learning. So I wanted to have experiences that I had not had before, or that I had been exposed to but hadn't really delved into. So, for instance improvisation, or electronics... Both of those really interest me because I really can learn something. I felt to a certain degree that I knew what I was doing with Kronos and I could do it really well, but was it enough of a challenge to commit that time? I don't think it was. It could be for somebody else, but for me I felt like I needed some kind of change to light a fire under me or something. I wanted to be a little bit uncomfortable, a little bit challenged. So now I'm really much more into not only improvisation and electronics, but sort of a mixed media idea of a concert, also I've been researching Charlotte Moorman and Fluxus which is why I have all these *Source* magazines because I became very interested in the Fluxus movement. So the whole idea of, if you want to call it, performance art or installation or any of that sort of genre interests me too.

FRANK J. OTERI: It's interesting because in a way it's a unique way to approach a "solo career," because it's not really solo oriented.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: No it's not.

FRANK J. OTERI: It's collaboration oriented. And in a way it comes out of a chamber music sensibility. It seems that if you're a musician going to a conservatory, there are three paths. You can join an orchestra, be part of a chamber group, or become a soloist. And those are three very different attitudes towards music making, different ego approaches, different approaches to what you'd feel you want from music. And you've created a fourth path here.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Oh, that's really nice. I realize that I'm not really doing so much of a solo thing because I have all these collaborators, but I thought that made a lot of sense. If I had to pick one of those paths I'd pick being a chamber musician. I've always felt that I was somebody who enjoyed that experience of sitting down and playing music with somebody else. And even in working with someone like Terry Riley who's writing a piece for me - I almost said 'string quartet' - who's writing a piece for me, yeah, it's really exciting, I'm going up there next week to work to work with him again on it... It's really a great collaborative process because I feel like I can experience it in a different way even in the past because it's more of a one-on-one thing, even though I had this group that had those experiences, but now I really feel like it's my relationship with Terry that's involved with this piece. And that's really exciting.

FRANK J. OTERI: It's really a collaboration!

JOAN JEANRENAUD: It really is. It's great. And when we work together at his house it's really wonderful because he'll write something and I'll go and practice it, I come back and play it for him, and he hears it and goes back and writes some more. It's really great. I'm getting so that my relationships with people are really, really satisfying because it is a much more individual kind of a relationship than it had been in the past.

FRANK J. OTERI: Who are some of the other composers you've been working with recently?

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Well Hamza el Din... All these guys--I feel like I should say gals too, guys and gals--they are all really teaching me a lot! With Hamza, of course, I knew him through Kronos playing his piece "Escalay," and then I became interested in him when I started getting interested in all this looping stuff that I'm doing. I thought, I bet you I could play that piece by myself.

FRANK J. OTERI: You did a transcription of it?

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Right. And then the great thing was that instead of having this piece of music that I read and that's the end of it, I had to get into that piece - I listened to it a lot, I worked with Hamza a lot, I heard Hamza play it a lot, I became more familiar with the way he works, the way he thinks, the whole structure of his music - the rhythmic aspect of it - so I felt like I really got much more into the piece than I had before. And it's kind of nice that I had known the piece on one level, but then it was great to discover all these other levels. And I think my whole interest in improvisation and certainly Hamza has really opened that all up to me. So now we're talking about doing more stuff together.

## 5. Non-Western Music and Thinking Beyond Notation

FRANK J. OTERI: I knew "Escalay" before the Kronos recording on *Pieces of Africa* from a solo performance by Hamza on an old Nonesuch Explorer recording. What I found so interesting about *Pieces of Africa* was that you got the inflections of the microtonal intervals in the Arabic pieces, and you captured the flavor of the Southern African choral structures in the harmonies in those pieces, and I thought this is amazing because this isn't something you can get from notation alone. It really requires working with these musicians. And that's exactly what's happening in your work with Terry Riley, and no one can do that with Beethoven or Brahms. You have the whole period instrument movement saying, it isn't really the way we thought it was, it really is this way, and the standard rep people fighting them - it's a stalemate. We never can know.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Right, and the thing is, and this was a big Kronos position which I totally agree with: quartets playing in Brahms' day worked with Brahms. So really what Kronos is doing is pretty traditional when you look at it that way, it's more traditional than people playing works of composers who are no longer alive. People worked with composers back then. And I think with Kronos, when we did the *Pieces of Africa* album, we felt it was exactly the same way as working with so-called Western composers coming out of that tradition. Even those people like Carter or John Cage, both of whom we worked with, you can't write down everything. You have to work with the composer, I find, to really figure out what they intend with the music. So I think Kronos carried that over to music that was based beyond the Western tradition. So they just approached it as, well, they have it written down but what does that really mean.

FRANK J. OTERI: Now this idea of having African string quartets by people like Dumisani Maraire or Obo Addy, and all these very, very different people who normally don't work with a bowed string sound. How were they initially approached?

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Well, you know at first that whole process started when Kevin Volans's wrote his quartet *White Man Sleeps*.

FRANK J. OTERI: That's an amazing piece.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: That is an amazing piece. Now originally it was for harpsichords and David Harrington of Kronos had him transcribe that for string quartet. And that was kind of our entry to that kind of sensibility - what I found from that experience was that it was not like a traditional string quartet where you think of the melody on top and the bass on the bottom. It was all four parts that were equally important. You couldn't take one of them away and have it make any sense, they all had to be there. So I think from that point, then Kronos's interest in that music because very evident and then we talked to someone like Terry Riley who said, oh you should talk to Hamza. So then Kronos was going over to Japan where Hamza was living at the time, and we got together with Hamza. And I think all these composers were excited to have other instruments and other interpretations of their music because I do feel that people like Hamza El Din even if they're taking a tradition, they're not really doing it in a strict traditional way.

FRANK J. OTERI: No, in fact, many of the people you worked with... Foday Musa Suso had already collaborated with Herbie Hancock and did that amazing work in the late 70s with Adam Rudolph in the Mandingo Griot Society. I have an old Verna Gillis field recording of Foday before he was anybody recorded 30 years ago, and he was already doing things outside of Gambian sensibility, there's a whole song about the Apollo mission. Because the Apollo mission – people just landed on the moon – and it's wonderful listening back to that to hear to where he came from, that he was always stretching the boundaries.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Yeah, always.

FRANK J. OTERI: Same with Dumisani who died recently...

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Yeah, that's very sad, he wasn't that old.

## 6. Working with Composers and Improvisation

FRANK J. OTERI: Some of the other composers who you've been working with recently – there's that incredible Lou Harrison CD on New Albion...

JOAN JEANRENAUD: It was wonderful for me to have the opportunity to work with him again after working on his String Quartet Set back in the 1980s. He is such a vibrant presence and consummate musician that it was a pleasure to play his music again and receive his feedback.

FRANK J. OTERI: I know you also did a Paul Drescher piece recently. He's a composer I find really, really interesting.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Well actually, I'm just working with Paul just now. There's going to be a new piece by Paul and Anthony Davis, both for cello and the Paul Drescher Ensemble. So that's really exciting because it's a fairly small electro-acoustic ensemble; there are six people in the group. And I'm really excited about the piece. I was just over there a couple of days ago and actually the music on the stand here is from Paul, and so he's worked on one movement.

FRANK J. OTERI: Anthony Davis is another really interesting figure because he straddles the boundaries – on one hand he writes operas and chamber pieces, on the other he's a great jazz pianist, he's done a number of recordings with his ensemble Episteme and it's often hard to tell at any given moment if it's a worked-out notated composition or if it's a very sophisticated work of improvisation and I think he loves blurring those lines. That's what his music is all about. Now the piece he's working on of yours, is there going to be a lot of improvisation?

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Well, I'm really not sure at this point, but that's one of the reasons why I was excited about working with him, and I've never worked with him before. Again, we've met, and we've talked, and we've agreed to play but this will be the first time we've worked together. But I'm very excited about that possibility of that blur between written out music and improvisation because that is something I'm more interested in now.

FRANK J. OTERI: And certainly over the years with Kronos you did recordings of music by Thelonious Monk, and Bill Evans. There's definitely an interest in jazz.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Definitely, I've always been a huge jazz fan, and after taking lessons from David Baker I also took some lessons from Joe Henderson when I first moved here, then this last year I took lessons from Hal Stein who's a saxophone player over in Oakland. He had me do a lot of transcriptions of Oscar Pettiford. He really helped me start to think about listening and then playing instead of reading all the time which is what I do, or had done so much of in the past. You know I related to music in a much different way, so him getting me to transcribe stuff is now something that I do more and more, and it's really good training for me.

FRANK J. OTERI: I studied ethnomusicology in graduate school and would do transcriptions and it helped me as a composer, and also helped me as a listener, and it shows you the limits of what you can get on the page in terms of the notation. It was really interesting talking to Pauline Oliveros because that

has certainly been her issue for 50 years. How do you get performers to be themselves, to create their own music, and to listen to each other?

JOAN JEANRENAUD: You listen to each other in a different way when you don't have a piece of paper there.

FRANK J. OTERI: Reading a score is a very different activity than listening and playing back something to replicate it. It's not necessarily about recreating something perfectly as it was on paper, but responding to it emotionally, and ideally the best performances of Western classical music are a combination of an emotional response to something written down having an accurate version of what that piece is.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Ideally you're right. But it doesn't always come together that way.

## 7. The Rock Music Perspective

FRANK J. OTERI: Within the classical music community, Kronos was perceived as the classical music world's rock band to some extent because of the way you all dressed, the shades... I think it shows a real lack of understanding of what rock music is in the classical music establishment, but you certainly did cross over to some of the alternative rock music audience. I've often said that the rock audience music should be the audience for contemporary music. And Sonic Youth proved that last year when they did that album with pieces by Pauline Oliveros and Christian Wolff, and Cage number pieces, and David Byrne wrote a string quartet for the Balanescu. There's a lot of possibility for intersection with that world. Do you work with any rock players?

JOAN JEANRENAUD: I can't say that I do right now, but I'm certainly very open to that. I think that whole thing about Kronos's image and all that, I mean we were all born in the 50s or essentially grew up starting in the 50s, and the 60s was a very important time in the United States and it had a huge impact on youth, and so we were all influence by that. I'm sure I listened to much more rock and roll music than I did classical music. I'm the only musician in my family, so it wasn't like I came from a family that was in this classical music tradition where everybody in the family played a musical instrument. It wasn't that way at all, and that's the same with everybody in Kronos. I think that we were just naturally influence by that whole world because that rock and roll music was much more prevalent in society than classical music.

FRANK J. OTERI: Well it's interesting because in the late 60s there were all these rock bands doing things that involved string quartet. You know the Beatles had several string quartet songs, and Traffic had a string quartet song...

JOAN JEANRENAUD: And it was good writing for a string quartet.

FRANK J. OTERI: Yeah!

JOAN JEANRENAUD: I sort of feel that Kronos in our photographs, and because, I mentioned, that we could do whatever we wanted to do, so we could have photographs that we felt more comfortable with. We felt more comfortable in addressing the way we dress. Why should the guys wear tuxedos that were uncomfortable and I wear some long gown that I never wear? Why don't we wear what makes sense to us, something that we would normally wear? So all of that, I think you're right, it was misperceived. People thought, "Oh, well they did it as a conscious thing for their image," but really it wasn't that conscious at all. It was a way of interpreting the way we were at the time. I think also there are a lot of composers, like Steve Mackey, he started out playing guitar in a rock band. I'm even a huge advocate of kids starting to play a solid body electric cello when they learn to play the instrument because then they can play with their buddies who play in a band. And they can really have a good time. I mean why should they be segregated into this other world, I think it's very natural, it makes a lot of sense for kids to start on an electric cello because it's cheaper, it's not this huge precious investment, they can play with their friend and get exposed to playing music and I think that's the most important thing.

FRANK J. OTERI: One of the things that people in the classical world don't always realize is that rock bands are creating music together. They largely write their own materials, and they are collaborating

together to create their own material. So there's a real sense of listening, and give and take. Skeptics may say, "Well, it isn't very sophisticated, it's only a few chords," but you listen to some of these bands out there and they are pretty sophisticated. The new Radiohead album is really out there.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Yeah, a lot of those guys are really incredible musicians. And even some of the old guys are really good – they've been doing it for a long time. I always felt that Queen was a really great group. They knew what they were doing; they were really great musicians. But a lot of people out there are incredible. Do you know the Flaming Lips?

FRANK J. OTERI: No I don't.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: I really like them right now. The thing that I was first turned on to by them, they have this 4-CD set, Zaireeka and you play the CDs simultaneously.

FRANK J. OTERI: Oh cool! So you need 4 different players.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Part of the whole concept I thought was really cool is that you have to get 4 people together. It becomes a social event. Then you can place them so that you can sit in the middle. It's really made me question the whole setup of a concert format of the stage, and the audience. They've done a bunch of stuff where they would have people come to a parking lot, and give everyone a cassette and put it in their car radio and turn it on ...

FRANK J. OTERI: Oh wow! Interesting!

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Yeah, really interesting stuff. And I heard a live not too long ago and they had this great video of Leonard Bernstein actually, and they cut all these takes together, you know, of him giving these down beats, so it was a whole bunch of segments together, and it was brilliantly edited, I thought, and went exactly with the music. It was really fantastic.

FRANK J. OTERI: This sort of sounds like it's along the same lines as work of a New York City-based composer Phil Kline who works with radio boom-boxes. Every year at Christmas time people show up at Washington Square Park and walk to Tompkins Square Park. Anybody who shows up gets a boom box and a tape, and then you walk to create an ambient Christmas piece.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: What's his first name?

FRANK J. OTERI: Phil. He's got a disc on CRI on the Emergency Music Series that's really neat.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: I'm really fascinated with that whole thing. It's the same thing with the Fluxus movement. Not a lot of those guys were doing that kind of stuff at that time.

## 8. Performance as a Physical Process

FRANK J. OTERI: You said that you took a movement class this morning. One of the things that we tend to be so hush-hush about in music is its physical nature. We say music is artistic, and we often don't look at it as a physical process and in many it's analogous to Olympic level athletics. You can't win a piano competition from just interpretive skill; you also need the physical stamina to go through that process. Certainly you were involved with playing probably the most physically grueling pieces of music ever written, the Feldman Second String Quartet. What was that like?

JOAN JEANRENAUD: You know it was a great experience because of Morton. Kronos knew Morton pretty well because we had played his First String Quartet, which was only 90 minutes long! We worked with him on it. So then when his Second String Quartet came along, he called us up and said, and apparently there was a group that was going to play it and they broke up over trying to learn this piece. So Morton said, "Oh there's this piece that would be interesting if you'd guys would play it, it's a little longer than the last one." So Morton sends us the score, and it's 124 pages. So we started looking at it, and was Morton's music, and seemed really beautiful. Then one day we said, "You know, this seems a lot longer than a couple hours. Why don't we play 20 pages and time it and see how long it is. It was an hour long. So then we realized this piece was going to be 4-5 hours long, and we called Morton and told him that. And I think Morton probably knew all along, but the initial performance of that piece was in Canada, and was being broadcast on CBC, and the concert started at 8, and the national anthem was going to go on at midnight no matter what, so we said to Morton, unless you want your piece cut off by the national anthem, we should make sure it's going to be 4 hours. So Morton made a bunch of cuts, which were basically repeats that he took out. So for the first performance it was just under 4 hours. But Hank and I had timers on our stands so we knew how we were doing so we could speed it up sometimes. So it worked out really well, and we played it that way and called it our 4-hour version. There was a performance that was more than 4 hours, probably 5 or 4 1/2 or something like that. But then, when we first did that piece, we were pretty young, we were in our 20s. It came up again a few years ago...

FRANK J. OTERI: Yeah, for the Lincoln Center Festival, I was going to go to that...

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Well they came up and they asked us to do it and there was a big discussion in the group because Hank has the hardest time, and it makes sense. He's got the heaviest instrument to hold up.

FRANK J. OTERI: You never remove the bow.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: You never even have a chance to put the instrument down. That's the problem. And it's really, really soft, so you can't relax into your instrument, you have to hold the bow up. For me it's probably the easiest just because I think it is an easier position. So there was a big discussion about whether we should do it or not, but then we said O.K. We'll try it. And then we started rehearsing it, and I think it became really clear to everyone that we could have substantial damage as far as things like tendonitis. Then of course if you get tendonitis it takes a whole year to recover, and you can't play at all. So then it didn't seem like the right thing to do at that time. But I think we probably could have done it when we were younger, but there were other circumstances.

FRANK J. OTERI: I know the Flux Quartet finally did a New York performance, which I unfortunately wasn't able to attend, so I've never heard this thing.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: I never found out how long their performance was.

FRANK J. OTERI: Apparently it was a zany free-for-all with people walking in and out, and it was at Cooper Union where every sound you make, even a pin drop, you can hear, which really destroys the sanctity of quiet music like his.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Even though that always happened when we played that piece, the people come and go which I always kind of like because you know, there could be somebody in the front row and after a couple of hours they might get up and leave, and then somebody else would come down and sit in the front row. People would go, and they'd come back.

FRANK J. OTERI: It's interesting because his music is really made more for recordings than concerts.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: I think it's the best way to hear it.

FRANK J. OTERI: It really is because it's so quiet. And I'd even go as far as to say, and I'm a vinyl junkie, it's music for CDs. It really really is.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Because you can make it sound beautiful.

FRANK J. OTERI: The reason why I bought a CD player was to hear *Piano and String Quartet*.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Yeah, it's a great piece.

FRANK J. OTERI: I had a collection of about 25 CDs at this point in my office but I didn't have a CD player at home. I was a vinyl nut. Finally, I couldn't listen this piece in the office, I really needed to be home to experience this, so I went out and bought a CD player for this piece.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: That was the piece to do it for!

FRANK J. OTERI: I think so. And it still is one of my favorite pieces of his. I know that there are plans to record the Second String Quartet, I think a quartet based in Germany is doing it.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: I always thought that would be a great idea.

FRANK J. OTERI: But you guys never recorded it.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: No, and I was really sorry that we didn't. I always wanted to record that piece. But you know Kronos has a lot of material, and there's no way you can record it all. I mean finally there was so much material coming in that there was no way we could perform it all. So you have to make some sort of choice, and it doesn't really mean that, it's not making a judgment on a piece whether we

play or not, or whether we record it or not, it's a matter of setting priorities sometimes. That's one of the things we talked about but never got done, and I'm sorry it didn't happen.

FRANK J. OTERI: This brings us back to what we were saying earlier, this whole notion of collaborating with the composer, in a weird kind of way, and not to knock down Feldman, this is the kind of piece that really wasn't created with any sense of what the performers need to do.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Oh no.

FRANK J. OTERI: It's the kind of thing where you wonder what would have happened if the performers were working closely with the composer. Maybe it would be a different situation.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Um, I don't know.

FRANK J. OTERI: Yeah, because he might have done what he wanted to do no matter what. I'm thinking of the Reich Octet which is now called *Eight Lines* because he realized that it was physically impossible for just eight people to maintain that. There are now other people waiting in the wings to take over...

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Exactly.

FRANK J. OTERI: And maybe that's the way to do the Feldman String Quartet, with eight people, and change off so you don't have that carpal tunnel potential.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Yeah. That may be. We were even trying to figure out, you know, if we could have bungee cords hanging that would be attached to your arms so you wouldn't be holding up as much. We thought of things like that. But then, that makes it a really big project so it never got to that point. But trading off performers, there's something of Reich's, oh *18 Musicians*...

FRANK J. OTERI: Oh that's amazing to watch.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: It is. And I thought it's so wonderful visually and of course musically it makes a lot of sense. But of course I'm kind of a purist when I think of a quartet, and I thought well, you'd be able to hear the difference in sound.

FRANK J. OTERI: Although with Reich, the two pieces he's written for quartet thus far are really triple quartets.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Yeah, then that's different. It's like the bigger you get, in some ways it actually can get better if you have different players because those little difference make it sound better.

FRANK J. OTERI: I recently heard a performance of Vermont Counterpoint live with 11 flutists which was really cool. It was hard for them to stay together at times, it was not conducted, but it was really great anyway. I have a whole new appreciation for that piece. I've always loved it, but seeing the physical process and hearing what could happen was magical.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Exactly, even though you hear it and it's an interesting experience on CD, really there's so much stuff that it's really great when the whole experience is there. But I guess that's kind of what I'm interested in now, even the whole multi-media thing is really just so that it creates this total experience instead of just a sonic one, it's visual, it's everything, hopefully.

## 9. The Internet

FRANK J. OTERI: What's your take on the Internet as a means of making music with people? What do you think of all the things that are happening with music on the Internet as a new means of reaching out to audiences, and to finding new audiences, and spreading the word and the sounds of contemporary music?

JOAN JEANRENAUD: I think it's great. I think music should be adaptable and changing with what's going on. I think music will always exist, I think that's a very John Cage concept too that music is always present. The sound of music is always happening. So I think it's only natural that it would be adaptive to whatever forms are out there.

FRANK J. OTERI: And do you have music that's out there on the Web at all, recordings of music?

JOAN JEANRENAUD: You know, I don't really know.

FRANK J. OTERI: So you don't spend much time on the Web.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: You know I can't say that I really have at this point, and that's something that I'd really like to get into. I use my computer a lot, but it's mostly just the e-mail communications. I do most of my business that way like everybody else. But I can't say that I spend much time on the Web. I would like to more, but I seem to be doing other things all the time.

FRANK J. OTERI: You're doing some great things; please keep doing what you're doing!!!

JOAN JEANRENAUD: But maybe I should spend a little time everyday...

## 10. Ice Cello

FRANK J. OTERI: Aside from music, you live in this great city of San Francisco, what else do you do?

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Lately, it's nice because I'm hear more - when I was with Kronos we were on the road 6 months of the year. Now I can say I'm on the road about 3 months of the year, and it's much different. For scheduling it's much nicer, I tend to stay in one place for longer period of time, I tend to go to really great places like New York, I was in Hawaii for a good project that I did. So I'm here more which gives me more opportunity to really check out the scene more. I play with a lot of people now who are living here, like Larry Ochs, Pamela Z, then of course Terry lives really close, and Hamza lives close, so there's a great group of artists and musicians who live here, and I think through them I go to a lot of different things now, I have time to attend events and see what's going on. Tonight I'm going to the circus at the Yerba Buena Center, I'm artist-in-residence there. This year has been really great and they're doing a lot of interesting things there. They have a lot of kinds of things going on there in the arts and theater.

FRANK J. OTERI: I know that you worked with Molissa Fenley, Stephen Vitiello.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Yeah, Stephen - you know hopefully we're going to work on this piece that Charlotte Moorman performed and it was by the conceptual artist Jim McWilliams who now lives in San Diego which is great. He's still alive. He's in great shape, and I've been down to meet with him. So we're basically going to recreate this piece called *Ice Cello* and it's a cello made out of ice, and I play it but the only sound is ice melting on to trays beneath the cello that are miked. That's the perfect piece for Stephen.

FRANK J. OTERI: One of the biggest mind-blowing experiences for me when I was a high-school student was attending a Music for Homemade Instruments concert on the Bowery, and one of the pieces on the program was scored for dried ice and three frying pans.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Oh cool.

FRANK J. OTERI: I heard a major triad melt into a minor triad, and it was the most amazing thing! It was over a Bunsen burner.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: That sounds really great.

FRANK J. OTERI: It was really cool. I'll have to find out one of these days whose piece that is! But once again this is yet another example, *Ice Cello* is another example, you can hear it on a CD or on tape, but you really would be missing part of what it's about. The extra musical things that are going on are really as much a part of it. It's really a piece of performance art.

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Definitely. To me I really like that right now. I like that idea that you have to be there to experience it.

FRANK J. OTERI: I think Quicktime video on the Web could be helpful here...

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Yeah, and there has been talk of trying to video it, even having simultaneous video production, which has been Jim's idea and it's great. Here's the guy who has conceived this piece and now he's thinking of it again in a different time and in a different context, and what he can do now, he can do all these things.

FRANK J. OTERI: But of course then you get into the whole notion that you can't really re-create the acoustics. Composers like La Monte Young are so concerned with the acoustics because they are as much a part of the piece as the notes...

JOAN JEANRENAUD: Yeah, and I really feel like being there has a lot to do with it too. I've always felt that even with CDs and recordings, they're fantastic too, but it's just a different format, so this would be the same thing. I'm sure it would be documented, but it would be a different thing than the actual performance itself. I always thought Kronos was really good about that. They treated a performance as one thing, and a recording as a different thing, it's just like what I was saying about my cellos, you can do different things with different instruments, with different formats. And you can use that instrument or it's format to it's fullest, which is really exciting, but you can't necessarily cross over that all the time.

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