>> Bob: From WXXI News it's 1370 Connection.

[Music]

>> Bob: I'm Bob Smith and it's time now to take a journey inside a creative process the process of creative mind. Meet composer David Liptak who was to speak to Z at RIT Engel Auditorium as part of the Gannet [assumed spelling] Lecture Series; that lecture has been rescheduled to 8 PM March 22nd, the same place, RIT Engle Auditorium, and he'll be there, of course, delayed by the same process that caused a lot of other weather related postponements around the area but he is here in our studios today, nonetheless. The look ahead to the presentation which he'll be making together with pianist Suzanna Shawchek [assumed spelling] about how today's music is composed and how that has changed from the past. And David Liptak is here right now in the studio. David, thank you very much for joining us we appreciate it.

>> David: My pleasure.

>> Bob: Now, to begin with I've heard pop music composers tell me sometimes they'll start with just a word maybe a phrase of lyric maybe a little bit of a melodic hook and they can build from there. When you're dealing with serious or kestrel works how is it built? Same thing a phrase, a few notes in sequence, or some other process that has little or nothing to do with what a pop song entails?

>> David: Well, that is a very large question. I think there are lots of ways that composers use to approach writing their work. I guess I should say first of all the kind of music that I'm talking about here is music which engages me as a composer and a listener at certain levels. There's lots and lots of music in the world and I'm only talking about a subset of music; that lots and lots of music contains things I enjoy listening to and I really, you know, have a broad interest in the kind of music that I'm interested in listening to in various occasions, during various occasions. However, the kind of music I'm speaking about as a composer is music which is -- has a certain step structure which is integral and partner to the substance of the music. It's something which is more than improvisation because it's music that's put together through a considered and carefully regulated way of thinking about the music and that is hand in hand with structure. And it's music which is has a connections to older music in ways which is quite significant. The kind of music I'm interested in as a composer has -- I work in a field in which there's an enormous history of music that we have to either try to understand or engage in some ways we write our new music, and that's a big difference from pop music where the history goes back relatively few years, perhaps, 50 years. Now, you can trace things back in various ways a little bit further but I'm dealing with music in which we have a history of literally hundreds of years of activity.

>> Bob: Let's talk about that history and which part of it resonates with you the most. You must have, like everybody else does who's involved in the music field, a favorite composer, a favorite era of music, maybe a favorite series of composers one related to the other in some way or another that influence you or just maybe inspire you, stimulate your thinking to go on your own way. Who are those people?

>> David: You'll have to believe me when I say I don't. I'm not very faithful to one composer or one kind of musical style from the past or for that matter from the present I'm really interested in lots of different things. If pressed, you know, I will go back to certain composers because they seem endlessly interesting and fascinating. From the past certainly J.S. Bach is one of those composers, and as, you know, someone who studied piano from since I was a small child and also went to school and got a performance degree in piano playing, you know, I played all of this music and it's something which is part of, you know, how I feel music is that's really important. I say that under duress a little bit because there is so much music I really enjoy. I was listening to some folk music yesterday, Georgian singing folk music, which I think is just extraordinary and it reminds me a lot of the kind of music I heard when I was very young and going to the Russian Orthodox Church with my grandparents. It was something which is very important to me and the way I think about music so I say it now. Lots of new music I hear I really get engaged in for the moment I listen to it I move on to what interests me next. Some of my pieces are built from connections to older music and one of the pieces I was going to talk about tonight at the lecture and I'll include it in the lecture that I give in March is a piece called Jovenae Vodka Inocenti [phonetic spelling]; that rather awkward title was taken from the first line of text set in a 14th century vocal piece by Francesco Landini [phonetic spelling]. And when I wrote this piece first I wrote this piece in 1996 although an earlier version existed some 10 years before so it's been with me for a while. I took the music that Landini wrote and I tried to refract it in the context of music that I would compose around it which was entirely different, and in some ways I obscured the music and in other ways that music becomes connected to the new music I write in a linear way and I was going to try to suggest some of the things that I was doing with that in my talk tonight.

>> Bob: There are, of course, all kinds of musical trends that have popped up over the last 400 years of European orchestral music especially. I'd be curious to know you mentioned Bach are there others that strike a particular chord that resonate with you and maybe even resonate in ways that might find themselves expressed in your composer's pen or do you just enjoy them for their own sake?

>> David: Well both, I enjoy them for their own sake certainly. I mean I try to listen to these pieces. When I listen to a piece of older music I try to listen to it as if I have never heard it before, which is often not that easy to do because you know the piece so well you know what's coming up you start judging the performance in a way more than you really try to evaluate the music you're hearing because you know the piece so well it's become kind of a set thing. So I think that, you know, that means that if you're listening in a very careful way sometimes you're listening for differences in the performance of how different ensembles may have played this music from what you have heard before. I mean my current work is also an interesting -- there's an interesting relationship between older music which is specific and the piece that I have just finished; this is a -- I've just written a rather large set of piano pieces called constellations; this was written for Suzanna Chefsick [phonetic spelling] who was going to play some of it for me at the talk tonight. She'll be performing the whole thing later this month, February 16th. The 9 pieces have relationships to each other which are thematic. 3 sets of 3 pieces are the organization of this set and each one of those sets has a piece which has a very tiny quote from the piano music of Robert Shuman [phonetic spelling] and I considered that to be a kind of a foot note to my thinking about how I wrote these pieces. Robert Shuman was, of course, a mid 19th century composer, early 19th century composer

who wrote music in a certain kind of very established tonal way. My pieces are not like that but what interested me about Robert Shuman's music was this intricate interrelationship between how the hands moved so that inside voices sometimes became really really important and this beautiful type of texture gave rise to a multitude of possibilities for a counterpoint between melodic lines.

>> Bob: In a way to move it up to the modern date when you talk about the intricacy and the interplay of the fingering, the hands, and everything else a lot of people who think of the music of Jimmy Hendrix will hear in the way he played his guitar the same thing that you're describing about in the way Shuman orchestrated his piano works.

>> David: Absolutely, absolutely it is not related to composers or styles it's related to a way of thinking. Music of all sorts has this kind of intricacy, I think. And going back to that Georgian folk song recording that I was listening to last night. I mean the way the voices interplayed with each other produced harmonies but they were so complicated that they were the kinds of harmonies that you might consider a constantan but the voices move so fluidly that there were also these very dissonant kinds of sound. I don't want to say dissonant so I'm going to retract that word. That very sort of sharp kind of sound which unfolded itself into something which was smoother.

>> Bob: A sound with an edge to it.

>> David: That's right.

>> Bob: Interesting you mention that too because, again, that's very modern and some would say even contemporary music, contemporary pop music tries to go for that. And going back to Hendrix people have struggled for the last 40 years to duplicate what he did on record and in live performance. Do sometimes composers really challenge the performer and maybe dare the performer to get it done the way they had it in their hands?

>> David: More than sometimes. I think that composers who are working like I am are -- another thing that we try to do is to as we connect to the music that we know and as we sort of engage it in some argument which either endorses it rejects it to some extent. We try to create something which is an individual statement. We speak a lot about what is new in any art form what makes something new and I think that, you know, this is a very large topic but I think that one of the things that makes it new is a seeking out of something which is a special statement, a unique statement, something personal. And often that means trying out some things technically which are challenging the performers. There are performers who are jumping at a challenge like this. There are performers who are less easy with it but we often write for the performers that are jumping for the challenge.

>> Bob: Well, let's talk a little bit about that with regard to the entire orchestra. Is it possible to put a challenge to an entire orchestra and have it successfully meet the challenge with a difficult piece, with a lot of interplay in terms of harmony, tone, rhythm, everything else and get them to make it happen the way you and your mind's eye and ear think it should.

>> David: Sure but let me say that one of -- first let me say that I haven't -- I'm not -- I haven't written that much music for orchestra most of my music is for smaller ensembles so I'm thinking about my colleagues also as I try to

answer this question, although it has to with my own work as well. When you write for an orchestra you have to understand you're writing for a large number of people. And one other thing which is very important is that there's limited rehearsal time. It's simply too expensive for professional orchestras to devote significant amount of times to learning new works so you have to keep this in mind if you're working as a composer and you want the music to be sounding well. In general things which are very, very difficult for the orchestra takes more time to rehearse so they're less certain to come off exactly the way you want in limited rehearsal time; that's really, I think, the biggest issue. Another issue in writing for the orchestra is there are lots and lots of players doing lots and lots of things at the same time. It cannot be thought of in the same way as you can if you're writing for a group of 2 or 3 players. My students and I talked about this a lot. So you have to understand that in order to make it all work and to make it all clear you have to think orchestrationally, you have to think of this ensemble as a collection of things which are not going to necessarily move as precisely. 30 violinists may not necessarily move as precisely as 1.

>> Bob: So you're thinking more in terms most of the time of what will be most interesting for a small group of people to play. Do you prefer a small chamber group say a string quartet or some other group like a brass quartet or anything like that? Which is the kind of group you like most to compose for?

>> David: Well, I didn't say I didn't like to write for orchestra and do.

>> Bob: Right.

>> David: I do. In fact, I welcome that challenge that I just described. I think it's an interesting thing to think about. I don't know I mean I've written string quartets and I've written ensemble music which includes traditional instruments. I've written for nontraditional instruments. I have a set for violin and Japanese koto [phonetic spelling] which I'm very pleased with and I've written a lot of percussion. I have written music often for instruments which don't have huge repertories behind them like the saxophone and percussion instruments that I spoke about, but, you know, I get engaged in the -- I guess what -- I do have something I'd like to say about that which is I get more interested in not repeating myself with the kind of group I write for but rather to try something new each time.

>> Bob: And you talk about writing music for saxophone, of course, that's something, that's an instrument that while it's been around in the orchestral realm for a long time people have a tendency to associate it mostly with jazz and pop.

>> David: That's true.

>> Bob: So when you're writing something for a saxophone do you have to deal with the expectations that when they see somebody with a sax on stage they're going to hear a pop piece or a jazz piece or some improvisational music with a beat.

>> David: That would be an interesting expectation to deal with for me. I mean I would like to play with that. I'd like to make a piece in which there is some sort of connection to that expectation and then something happens either it's fulfilled, it's frustrated, it's delayed, something happens; that would make a

piece of music interesting for me. Jazz players, by the way, can do extraordinary things on the saxophone that classically trained players sometimes have to, I don't want to say just saxophone, sometimes have to really work out extremes that register different kinds of sounds are things which I'm thinking about here. But classical players for saxophone have developed such a remarkable technique over the past especially last 20 years that, you know, it's a remarkable instrument.

>> Bob: And there, of course, have been some who have done both and done both extremely well Wit Marsalis [phonetic spelling] comes to mind immediately as a guy who is both a virtuoso and jazz and virtuoso at classical. And he has said at times that jazz is both more difficult and more liberating for him but classical is more demanding and more precise and tougher. And it's interesting to hear him talk about both since he walks back and forth so easily in both worlds. Have you ever thought of since you're known for doing serious orchestral works unconventional, perhaps, but serious of doing, trying your hand at something more of a jazz improvisational realm.

>> David: Yeah, I've thought about that and I've written pieces which are jazzy. I have always written it down though I've not written pieces -- I have not written a notation to create an improvisation, and it's not my field. I don't feel like I'm a specialist in that. And I haven't played jazz since I was in college when I put myself through college partly by playing in a band. So it's not something that I've, you know, I defer to those who know better about how to do that. However, I'd like to capture that sound of jazz in certain kinds of ways that I write. Sometimes that's rhythmical, sometimes it's more stylistically quotation of that kind of music.

>> Bob: Do you sometimes create something with a particular performer in mind?

>> David: Always, almost always anyway. Another new piece that I have written is, indeed, for a saxophone and rumba and the performer that I wrote it for, the performers I wrote it for are the saxophonist Chentwon Lin [phonetic spelling] and percussionist Michael Burrett [phonetic spelling] and both of them are my colleagues at the Eastman School. This is my first piece for Michael but I have written -- and I have written for Chentwon before and he's played my music and recorded it and he's an extraordinary player.

>> Bob: Composer David Liptak is here with us right now. We're looking ahead to a program in the Gannet Lecture Series which he's going to be presenting on March 22nd at the RIT campus in Engle Auditorium. It was originally supposed to happen tonight but because of the apprehension concern and weather conditions at the time it was postponed to make sure that it would be able to reach the largest possible audience so he will be in performance on March 22nd, he'll be talking about the music, he'll be presenting the music along with pianist Suzanna Shawchek and he's talking with us about it right now here on 1370 Connection. I'm Bob Smith and your number to call is 263-WXXI or write into us Ask Talk at WXXI.org. Let us know what you're thinking and if you've got any question concerning the process of creating a piece of music a fascinating process, indeed, as we're finding out this hour, write them to us, talk to us about them, call in about them and you'll hear the full story from our guest of the hour, David Liptak. I want to ask as well about how you create either a melodic phrase or a whole theme, harmony, everything else? It seems like such a complex process to put notes together in a way that speak, that make sense. Is

it like composing a sentence of pro's? Is it like composing a verse of poetry? What is it like?

>> David: It's like both of those things sometimes to some degree. I don't follow a specific method when I write which I duplicate from music from piece to piece, although there are certain relations between the way I work in one project to others, and I can sense that in how I go. But I always start with an idea of some sorts quite often it's a musical idea, it may be a few pitches, a few notes that I hear like a melody, it may be a sound that I hear which is a chord which fascinates me, it may be a sound which is not something I can describe so easily but this is how I start with thinking about that idea and that often comes in conjunction with some sort of metaphor which is either visual or a poetic line of poetry is often an inspiration for me in that sense. I just in a recent piece that I finished this is the piece for saxophone and rumba one of the pieces sort of sprung to me as I was reading a novel by John Benfield which is called The Sea and in that there was a remarkable 3 word sentence which was looks call rawly, and I thought that would be really, you know, that's such an interesting sentence because of the way the syllables sound and so that sort of gave rise to how I wanted to think about some of the music.

>> Bob: And it creates a visual image, well, of birds by the sea calling out rawly, I guess, it would be his way of talking about it, but I'm thinking it's middle of the day, it's sunshine, it's by the sea, it's in the Caribbean, and, of course, saxophone and marimba I'm thinking Caribbean too.

>> David: Yeah, except this was at the Scottish coastline in cold weather.

>> Bob: Okay, so change the place -- that changes the whole mood of the piece then.

>> David: Yeah, I think so. I mean but I, you know, I don't think about these things necessarily as precise images which I translate in the music but rather as kind of a stimulus to how I imagine sound to be. Sound for me is a thing which is physical, you know, I feel it around me, you know, I can touch it when I see it and this is the way I work. And then from there, I mean I follow a series of processes where I write and rewrite and rewrite again. And in my work room at home I have basically 3 stations where I work. I have a piano and I use the piano to check my ideas and to improvise a little bit. I have a writing desk where I put the ideas down in notation and then finally I have my computer where the only thing I do is put the final notation in place.

>> Bob: And then when you hit the save key there it is.

>> David: Well, sort of, but then I find I'm always changing things and I'm thinking about changing things. Even after pieces have been done I imagine it can be done another way.

>> Bob: Well, I going to play a piece right now that you originally did for the Rochester Philharmonic Youth Orchestra and we're going to hear the recording of it that was portrayed during their European tour, and I understand you're working on it for a possible changes again.

>> David: Right.

>> Bob: It's a piece called Rush played by the Rochester Philharmonic Youth Orchestra back about 10 years ago initially during their European tour and this is how it sounded then.

[Music]

>> Bob: That is a taste of the piece Rush which actually is an 8 minute orchestral piece done by the Rochester Philharmonic Youth Orchestra and David Liptak its composer is here with us right now and I guess it's going to be revised considerably maybe at the ending when it is performed again by the RPYO in March. Tell me a little bit about the changes that you're putting it through.

>> David: Well, it is only the ending. I'm satisfied with the piece until the end but in repeated listenings to it -- well, the piece I should describe is very much concerned with what it might be like to be a youth. It's filled with the enthusiasm of youth but also the tumultuous ideas about what -- I'm sorry tumultuous feelings that often accompany youthful persons who are probably the same age as those who are playing in the RPYO, so the title Rush comes from that. It's the rush of feeling, the rush of energy, the rush of emotion. Now, I wrote the piece and the ending is very strong it's a bang up, you know, fast ending and over the years especially I've been dissatisfied with that conclusion it's not the right answer it's almost too easy, so I rewrote the ending so it has a totally different character. We get to the end and suddenly it bursts and almost disappears into very soft and light sounds and it's very short when that happens. So it's as if the piece had gotten to the point where it simply it was too filled with things to end properly and it burst.

>> Bob: You know what in a way that sounds like either an avocation of a sleepless night or dare I say it a nightmare.

>> David: Yeah, sure, I think that's right. I think I'd buy that.

>> Bob: And when you wake up, well, of course, the light streaming down, it's morning and you're coming down from something very intense and I guess you do come down from it kind of that way don't you?

>> David: Yeah, that's right and I think that, you know, and you don't really know what's going on when it's happening. You're carried along with the dream, the nightmare and you're not in control and then it's gone.

>> Bob: When I heard it for the first time I thought of it as almost the first thing I thought of is this is what a sleepless night sounds like musically or this is what a very difficult troubled sleep sounds like musically.

>> David: Yeah.

>> Bob: And I guess I got it right without even knowing that it was tied to any particular generational experience.

>> David: Yeah, of course, there's no way -- I mean it's not proper to say getting it right or getting it wrong is what's going on here but certainly I'm very happy, Bob, that you got something from it and it matched, you know, very nicely with the sorts of things I was thinking about.

>> Bob: Was there a particular story or a particular person behind it, a particular experience that you heard or heard described to you or is it just evoking something from your own teen ages?

>> David: No, I don't think it evoked anything from my own teenaged years which I can't remember that well anyway. But that sensation, you the abstraction of it is the thing which interested me in some of the musical sense of how things went. Now, when I was writing it I'm not sure I was even thinking about it that way once I got the idea it sort of got me going but then as a composer my job was to think about things in a very specific and technical way to make the piece go. So if I think about something like this is a rush of energy that translates into certain rhythms and pitch collections, melodies, if you will, and a certain kind of harmony and then from that point that's my language I don't think about the abstract.

>> Bob: And the young people who are playing it how do they react? I'm curious to know about that for its own sake and also how typical is it of the feedback you get from the people who take your compositions and translate them into sound?

>> David: That ranges all over the map. I think that -- well, about this piece I have met in the past, you know, in the recent past those performers who are played in the original performances 10 years ago some of them are still here some of them are music students, other are elsewhere and every so often I hear their experience from it and as they think about it from their memory they tell me what they think, and, you know, it's been positive in every way. When I remember going to the rehearsals for this piece 10 years ago these, you know, the players are younger, they're kind of shy, and they're afraid of saying things which are wrong to me so I don't hear that so directly. But the orchestra responded well to it and I think they did a really fine performance.

>> Bob: Are you expecting something different the next time around? I mean will this group of people now 10 years on approach it totally differently?

>> David: That's interesting; I don't know. Maybe. I haven't been to a rehearsal yet so I'll be looking forward to seeing about that.

>> Bob: Meanwhile, of course, that's not the only thing that you're doing. You mentioned to me that you are rolling out a concert of new works at Kilburn Hall on the 16th, 2 weeks from today.

>> David: That's right. It's Wednesday night and what I wanted to do we often make presentations, those of us on the faculty at the Eastman School of Music, give faculty recitals or concerts. I had done this before not too frequently. What I wanted to do this time though was entirely different from anything I've ever done, which was to write an entire evening's worth of music. It isn't that I decided to do this a year ago I had ideas for writing pieces which stretch back often a decade or more which never really came to be for any number of reasons including time, circumstance, other jobs that I might have had, maybe commissions that took time away from my other creative work, but I felt it was something I really wanted to do. So I wanted to -- the centerpiece of the program was a large piano piece called Constellations, is a large piano piece called Constellations. 9 movements, I described it earlier in our talk, and each one of the movements is titled -- the title is taken from 1 of the 88 constellations which appear in the sky. I did not use the zodiac constellations

but others that were less well known. I had thought about writing a piece like this back in 2002 and it didn't work out but I've been carrying the idea with me. When Suzanna asked if I'd write her something this seemed like to fit. Then the other pieces are a set of preludes, as I mentioned earlier, for a saxophone and rumba for my friends Jen Conlin and Michael Burrett [phonetic spelling]. Michael asked about this when he came to join the faculty a few years ago, and so this is the result of that. And then the 3rd piece is a setting for soprano, violin, and percussion of texts by Maria Mitchell [phonetic spelling] who was one of the earliest American professional astronomers. As you can tell I have an interest in at least an amateurs interest in the sky and starlight and stars and constellations and astronomy. She was one of the original faculty members at -- I forget what college -- in Poukipsee -- Vassar, Vassar College and when they opened their doors during the Civil War and as she earned international recognition about 20 years before that by discovering a comet which was named after her. In any case I came upon her text as a footnote in a book by Andrea Barrett [phonetic spelling] who was my neighbor on Harbor Street for many years. The book was called Lucid Stars and the quotation is what I use as text for this song. This is something that I've had ever since I used this quotation as part of a program note for a piece I wrote for the Rochester Philharmonic back in 1996, I think.

>> Bob: 263-WXXI is our number. We have Keith on the line with us and hi, Keith, welcome, you're on the air with us. Go ahead, Keith. Are you there? Well, Keith is evidentially not there immediately we'll try to pick him up a little bit later on, and we will also reach into our Internet mail bag and take a look at what's being written at Ask Talk at WXXI.org and I have this letter coming in and one writer, as a matter of fact, says I'm astounded the full half hour into this program I haven't heard the words emotion or feeling involved with the process. Well, maybe after hearing Rush they might, perhaps, revise that opinion because that's what it's all about, but anyway. He says I think music is a language of the emotions able to express subtle feelings without the use of words. I keep hearing about one thinks about music and what one is interested in. Well, does, for example, a piece like Rush kind of take you in the other direction since that's what it's about. Since Rush is about emotions especially the turbulent emotions of people who are young and troubled.

>> David: Yeah, well, yes, I want to respond generally though not only Rush but in my music I feel like everything that I write touches some sort of emotional or sense core which is something words can't capture; this is why I do it; this is what happens. The act of writing the music involves a certain amount of language skills that is making the music so it can be written down and understood, but what everything that's behind the music is something which eludes words and is a sort of a feeling or an emotion or a sense or a vision or something which can not be described that way.

>> Bob: Is music another language then?

>> David: Music is many languages, I believe, it depends on if you know the grammar. I mean I think that there's nothing really to -- you can't really expect to hear all music exactly the same way. If you're unfamiliar with it it's a language which is something which you haven't really, you know, had a chance to learn yet. You have to learn the grammar, you have to learn how language works in this sense in order to really be sure you'll understand some of the things that are trying to be expressed.

>> Bob: And we have Keith back on the line. Hello, Keith, you're on the air welcome.

>> Keith: Sorry, Bob, it was just a technical problems with streaming zoomy for my grandson and my wife was freaking out.

>> Bob: [laughing] Well, speaking of emotions I guess here we are.

>> Keith: Hey, I got to compliment your guest. I'm the type I have an iPod I listen to anything that I like I don't care if it's classical, show tunes, I have a couple heavy metal but I like it, but the only thing that my mind was trying to do was match it up with something but the piece reminded me of something that would be playing in a movie during a confrontation, during a chase scene, during an event it wasn't transitional music it was background -- to me it was background music or something that would be happening on the screen. I thought it was very good. It's not something --.

>> Bob: I was feeling it as foreground music basically.

>> Keith: Well, I was listening to it as not something I'd listen to to fall asleep but I like the way it started. There's a piece I have on my iPod it's by, I believe, an artist named Pear Ginst [phonetic spelling] and it runs about 2 1/2 minutes long and it starts very low very slow and then it builds to a huge crescendo and it's one that you put the top down and crank up the music and, you know, I can't sing if I don't have to sing but now I've seen it appear in several commercials and most noticeably it was in the movie Rat Race which was a comedy sort of a take-off on Mad Mad Mad Mad Mad Mad Mad World. But I enjoyed the piece but I'd like to see it put to something visual too. Now, will this piece be available through iTunes because I bought other RPL stuff off of iTunes?

>> David: Yeah, this one is not the one that you've heard and, first of all, let me thank you for your comments and everything you said was really interesting to me and I would say about listening to all kinds of music I'm just like you I'm on the same page. Now, it isn't available yet and I'm not sure it will be. There are a number of issues involved with that including the expense of recording large orchestral pieces.

>> Bob: Okay, I do thank you very much though, Keith, for calling in appreciate the call. Speaking of which is it more of a challenge to get pieces heard today by a large number of people if they don't fit into the easy categories of especially pop or hip hop or rock or everything that's played on most contemporary radio stations these days? How do you build an audience for a different kind of orchestral serious music than most of the radio stations play?

>> David: Of course this is an issue that we spend a lot of time thinking about. All of us as composers feel as if we're doing something which is very human which makes connection. We are also interested in being experimental in trying things which haven't been done before. Going back to the idea of language we're creating languages which are challenging and not comforting rather because it takes some effort to understand what most of us are trying to do. Now, there are all degrees in that. I think it is true that orchestral music is being played today lots of orchestral music by new orchestral music by composers, but it's difficult to sort of stretch the stylistic, the experimental, and the other boundaries associated in writing music and writing for orchestra and have your

music played. Most often the music that is played is a more conservative kind of music. There are exceptions and I will take, you know, and I will -- and there are many, many fine pieces which are not this way which do get played. An audience is something which we want we want listeners, we want connection that way, but what I do is to write music which quite frankly is only a small percentage of even classical music and classical music is a very small percentage of the entire realm of people of what music people listen to. I understand the place that puts me in. I'm working in a very small place and I'm trying to create something which speaks to others who want to hear it and my way of doing that is trying to think about the audience as individuals, as individuals out there that I don't know but I only want one person to really understand what I'm doing and I feel like I'm doing my job, and in that way I sort of trick myself into writing pieces which are very communicative in my view and yet still satisfies my understanding of what I ought to be doing.

>> Bob: In the same sense, of course, do you see yourself as doing something significantly different and reaching out to a very different audience from what a pop star will try to do?

>> David: Yeah, interestingly I'm not sure if that's the case. I think that actually more younger people who are really normally listening to other things going to clubs, for example, are listening to the kind of music I write than even some audiences who are more traditional and go to orchestral and J music concerts and they want to hear the great pieces of literature that they know.

>> Bob: It's interesting that the pop piece that triggers some of the same chords of understanding and understanding the experience that Rush does is probably Eminem's Lose Yourself, the theme from 8 Mile.

>> David: Right.

>> Bob: In a lot of ways it talks about pressure, it talks about storms of emotion, the feeling of a need to succeed to overcome, it sounds like a lot of the same kind of message.

>> David: I won't argue with that I think you're right.

>> Bob: Does that kind of modern music influence you in mood and subject matter at all?

>> David: Well, I know it but the kind of pop music that I know really well comes from my own teenage years. I mean the Beatles are -- I mean I know everything about the Beatles and I love the songs and that's the music of my youth, that's what I listen to so I'm really excited when I listen to that stuff.

>> Bob: Are there others that turn you off that you say I don't think they have anything to say to me?

>> David: Sure, not only with popular music but throughout the spectrum of what I listen to there are things I make discriminations and things have, you know, either for reasons that I think that what they're saying has not meaning or, for me, or in some ways is done so inadequately that it has somehow corrupted the music that could be there. I'm not going to say any specifics but, yes, that's true it has to be done well.

>> Bob: And what's the hallmark of something that really hits the mark that's done well if somebody that we all know like John Lennon gets it right? What is it that he does right that you try to get right as well?

>> David: This is hard. I believe it's the success in creating something which makes connection but yet is so individual that it exists on its own as something which simply has to be or music has been corrupted.

>> Bob: So it's either right or it's wrong.

>> David: Yeah.

>> Bob: It's either honest or it falls short.

>> David: That's right.

>> Bob: Is honest what you're always looking for?

>> David: Absolutely, yeah, absolutely, and I must tell you, I mean composers are very idealistic people and I think that most composers I've met speak about this but many do not but we're all trying to do something which is very honest and which is something very true to us, and, you know, why would we do this otherwise?

>> Bob: Of course, that poses one question because serious composers of known and of reputation often do accept commissions where people will come to them and ask you to put forward a piece of music that will answer a specific time and place and maybe event. Is that tougher to do than something that just comes completely out of your own experience, your own mind.

>> David: Actually I don't think so at all and I don't think the two are in -- the two ways of imagining creating new works are incompatible. In fact, having a commission sort of starts you on that path toward connection which is one of the requirements that I like to seek when I write music. When you're asked to do a commission that sets you in a kind of a relationship with a problem or a project or an issue that you can address and specifically address. I think all of the pieces that I've imagined which haven't been on commission have been in relation to something though. I mean the piano piece I just finished I've been thinking about for 10 years was something that I originally thought about as a purposeful piece, something to create an evening's worth of music, it turned out to be not that long, but something which had a purpose and could have been a commission which never happened.

>> Bob: Is a commission something you seek or is it something that just happens to come over the transfer. I mean how do you get them?

>> David: Yeah, yeah, that's a good question. They usually come unbitten in surprising ways at least for me. I have sought some, I have sought some if I have a project that I'm really interested in pursuing and then I make plans to do. There are not many ways of getting public commissions they never really happen, actually, not many at all. One of the things that we try to do all of us is to seek out commissions in connection with a project that we have in mind. IF we want to, for example, if we were really engaged with a certain music ensemble and we want to produce music for them and they're interested in having us write for them it's expensive, you've got to make the materials, you seek commissions

from, oh, maybe a half dozen organizations which have competitive offerings every year like, for example, the Fromm Foundation at Harvard University; this is very academic and I don't mean it to be always that way. But I've also written private commissions for birthdays, for special occasions. I wrote a piece, a string trio for someone's birthday once a commission that was offered to me by the husband of the person who was having the birthday. I'm happy to do that and I don't see any incompatibility with writing music for these kinds of occasions to what I might want to do otherwise.

>> Bob: Incidentally did you have to meet the person who was the subject of it beforehand or did you basically rely on the husband's description or the husband's evocation of the feelings of this person inspired in him?

>> David: Well, both, actually, I met the person and also, you know, I've written pieces like this where I, you know, I have not, where I know the commissioner, perhaps.

>> Bob: And I wonder how it's done because I can't think of a composer of popular music that hasn't written a song about somebody that he or she knows or loves or just inspired that feeling in that individual. I wonder how you do that especially if you're not necessarily familiar with the person him or herself but just get second-hand the feelings that that person inspires in somebody else.

>> David: Well, we all have our experiences we can transpose on to this and we all have, you know, loved ones who have birthdays so that helps.

>> Bob: So you just sort of draw in from a little bit of your own experience too.

>> David: Sure.

>> Bob: It's a tough life. In a way it's a challenging life isn't it?

>> David: It's a great life. I can't imagine doing anything else that I do now. Of course, I'm lucky because I also teach at the Eastman School of Music and this, you know, pays the bills mostly and enables me to eat good meals every so often and eating is good. And so far as my composing goes it also provides me a connection and I can work from there.

>> Bob: Well, thank you for sharing your work with us today and thank you for sharing your work again and again with us. My thanks to composer and Eastman School faculty member David Liptak for giving us an inside look at the process of composing serious music. He'll be talking on March 22nd at 8 pm at RIT Engle's Auditorium about that very subject in a presentation of the Gannett Lecture Series which was originally supposed to happen tonight until it was postponed because of apprehension about the weather. Our thanks to him, our thanks to all of you for checking in on this hour of 1370 Connection from WXXI Rochester I'm Bob Smith. And for Dave Campo our technical director of the WXXI crew it's been a pleasure.