

Email from Ryan Nowlin re Jessie's Well

From: [Ryan Nowlin](#)

To: [Ralph Hultgren](#)

Sent: Saturday, July 19, 2008 2:51 AM

Subject: How are you?

G'Day, my friend,

It has been too long since I have written, and it has been my fault.

While my tail is a bit between my legs for as long as it has taken me to read your journals, I didn't want to say anything until I got to spend some real time with your writings, musings, and process. Likewise, I couldn't allow myself to hear your piece until I went through the notes with the score to identify (or try to identify) the causes for your actions.

Let me say - thank you. Having read, listened, (and even took notes!) I realize how lucky I am that you have let me into this part of your process. Before I go there, let me say that *Jessie's Well* is filled with passion, and gratitude, and honestly communicate an extended sigh of resolution. Having read about you friend, the rift, the placemat, and the innocence/truth of young eyes, I feel as if I felt your intentions. Not pain as much as misunderstanding, or unawareness of your friend's feelings transformed into a sadness/regret through your reconciliation with Christian anger.

The pay off at 60, the complete melody, brass choir to start, and then everyone gets a good cry, was wonderful. Perfectly paced to the point where it would feel great to play, conduct, and listen to. (Speaking of which, I loved the recording ensemble - was that yours? The quality was fantastic - the richness of individual parts made it feel like there were individual microphones all over the ensemble. The richness of the bassoon, the tenor sax ...

I'm just going to write for a little while now, please forgive me if my thoughts are scattered -

Your comments on orchestration were of most interest to me, as attempt to find and exploit different colors. Actually, in my teaching - I do much with color (and flavor). You speak of the timbre of the tenor voice - I've called it the golden thread as it weaves within the grand staff needs to be uncovered as it is the most natural register for humankind. Okay, that was dramatic, but the instruments I feel speak the closest to all people are horn (I am biased perhaps), cello, and tenor/alto voices. There is something earth, pure, and able to connect with all listeners. Finding the different shades of this earthiness in horn, low clarinet, upper trombone, tenor sax, etc. opens up a palette of human colors that can be highlighted or underscored by the other registers.

Your statements on scoring "cause and effect" (e.g. double this, get that) were right on point. And, I feel, have set the stage for the conflict (that's not the right word, but hang in there...) have set the stage for the conflict of craft (your word to describe listening to your voice) and mathematics (your word to describe the concrete decisions one makes in communicating one's voice.)

This was the biggest "aha" moment I've had in a while.

I found that your entries (upon a re-reading) were filled with confidence and joy when letting the "craft" take over. Then, upon looking at what came out, you seemed to attribute concrete rationale -- even though there may not have been concrete rationale to begin with. While you state the bag of "mathematical" tricks you have at the ready, you seem to only allow your subconscious to employ them. And isn't that the "gift" bestowed on you?

In analysis, when you are playing, working with, or just listening to your music with a close friend or loved one: do you ever speak of the intense emotion portrayed in a single phrase? I'm not explaining this well - it may be an interval, or a quote, or a recap that makes you say "this is why that is there." For example, in my *Elegy*, the last chord played in the piano crosses the thumbs. From a practical stand point, it appears as a misprint (or idiocy on my part.) When I first sent this to Anne when the ink was wet 4 years ish ago, she brought that up. I took out the score, played it again, and said - oh, but that's right. She asked why, and without a beat I said, the horn player is gone, and you are left alone sitting at the piano with your hands folded. She misted up and said "yeah." And then proceeded to write about the heart that we are forced to put in every note.

Now, while that paragraph ended up about me, and believe you me I do not even claim to me in the same ballpark as you and Anne McGinty, it stemmed for a question. When the subconscious makes it's appearance, why can we not account for this as deliberate decisions, or as you put it, "mathematics."?

There seems to be a constant struggle of heart and head: what you mean versus the "mathematics" on how to tangibly accomplish the intangible.

Well, I believe I've rambled on enough, but after spending *quality time* with you (through your writings, and my analysis of your composition) I look forward to the next several hours as I start to pen some of the "brewed" ideas for my next project. I will approach it differently, simply because you have activated my "grey matter" on this seeming conflict of what one is about to say, and when the air hits the voice box. Are those two entities far removed?

Best to you and your family. When you said you were off to share a glass of wine with the love of your life, I grinned ear to ear - and kissed my bride.

Thank you, Ralph.

Best to you,
Ryan

P.S. The piece didn't sound American!! (ha ha)