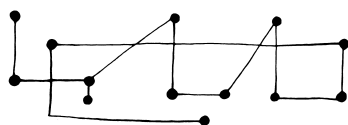


ELAINE, THE SPACE SHE MADE



BENJAMIN BORETZ

AFTER 74 YEARS, THE CONVERSATION IS SUDDENLY QUIET. It actually began with Billy, my summer campmate; his big sister Elaine got into it because of the sound of Beethoven's *Pathétique* Sonata wafting from my practice space in the camp theater. And resumed a few years later in odd serendipities—having the same piano teacher in college, playing in the same concert of her students, discovering then that we were both about to go to the same graduate school—I even met George at around the same time as she did, and had a close separate friendship with him from that time forward. The conversation, continuous ever since, was my access to the person, the work, the worlds that we explored and exchanged, the family—it's how I mostly know Victor, Jesse, Gabriel, Janna, Amaya, Travis, the extended family in Las Vegas and Colorado—and how we formed a core through which we came to know and interact together with many of each others' people—the students at Michigan and UCLA, and at Princeton and Bard—and of course *Perspectives* and *Open Space*—as we pursued and created ideas and projects together. The conversation had no bounds, and was never going to stop, and its reverberations will not subside. . . .

Thinking of Elaine, and being mindful of her presence in all the consequential aspects of my life, has been a constant and pervasive

piece of my earthly existence. But this week, so soon after she has gone, I could only bring her presence into mindview by listening, to her voice within my memory, to the music of hers I have loved, to the music we absorbed and engaged together. Specifically, it was in listening to Claudio Abbado's performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony that I was able to mentalize, within the deafening silence of the cosmos-sized space of her absence, a tiny thread of language in which an image of her could somehow begin to re-emerge to my senses.

What it was about Beethoven in particular for us—that he perceived every implication of every configuration—and he saw how to pursue and unfold it to its totality, to its exhaustion.

But whatever it was, that was the model for serious composition in our world, as much for Milton Babbitt as for Aaron Copland, the essential spirit of composition in the music-intellectual world that Elaine and I—and Jim Randall—grew up in. Arthur Berger and Harold Shapero were our teachers and we came to them as total acolytes of that Beethoven image—seekers of the serious and important in music beyond the institutionalized idioms of high-culture posture—Elaine was even finding significant expressive resonance in idiomatic musical theater, backing up from esoterics like Berg and Stravinsky all the way to the likes of Leonard Bernstein and Lin-Manuel Miranda.

For context, in Elaine's own work, I would play you "Song for Sarah," or the five dark-and-light-side collages, and also suggest you just listen to what she and I are struggling for in our duo improvisation piece called "Twine." But in those pieces you can also feel how the oppressive strain of maintaining the Olympian posture ultimately demanded liberation—we all groped for it, but Elaine's breakout was characteristically contrarian—she went to ancient and modern popular song as one of her ways out, in consequence of which we have her strange and fascinating opera *De Amore* and her puckish Dickinson songs. And also she went down the exogenous cultural escape hatches (Alice was one of her lifelong role models) through a series of aesthetic and geographical self-displacements, first through aboriginal-touching cultures in Australia and New Zealand, then eventually immersing in the strenuous practice of Balinese gamelan both as a music and as a way of life. In the soundworks that materialized out of these experiences you can share her happy declaration of independence from the German-solemnity ethos, against—really—the maleness that subversively pressed down from the supposed tradition of "serious," extorting allegiance as well as submission. And from the chiaroscuro of Elaine's collages and the innocent counter-Germanism of her opera and the amazing

Gamélange, you can ultimately understand that that particular liberation is as much an issue of gender as of the affirmation of a shared post-positivist awareness. But there was nothing generic or simple about Elaine—she sometimes seemed to enact the simultaneity of all the contradictory and competing sides of her issues, so that the compositional residue is sometimes like a slightly off-center sidelong grin-grimace of gently nihilistic whimsy—a complex—perhaps complexly gendered—way of creating depth by cultivating its contrary—or, really, its refraction, like a counterdepth that lets you see what is absurd and self-important in the fog of conspicuous compositional hyperextension, whether in the density of Milton or the rarefaction of Morton. Fun, for Elaine, could be as sharp as some serpentess's tooth, but she's not going to be caught doing the biting, and it's not you that's going to get bit. As I wrote about the end of her String Quartet:

A second episode (epicide?) (second movement: Variations) superimposing its multiple contradictories, temporally adjacent antonyms becoming evermore starkly dialectical simultaneities, songs of ever-higher aspiration abruptly by jagged setpieces, renegade rowshards, mudvolcanic microruptions bopblopping, actually devolving itself into a final wide-eyed catwary equilibrium. And such an innocent little outmove to end, you're not going to believe and aren't supposed to.

But the reality of her presence, in music, in writing, and of course totally in person, is ineradicable and permanently incandescent.