

## Tonal Collaboration

**Sanford Baran:** Although I am the one who is officially scheduled to be the presenter for today's teleconference, it's actually a team of us who have come together, and this coming together has occurred quite organically over the last number of weeks. Joining me as co-presenters this morning are Jack and Brenda Jenkins from 108 Mile Ranch in British Columbia, Canada and Alex Bootzin in Pacifica, California.

It's really been fun working together from our far-flung homes. Our status of working remotely notwithstanding, I've been impressed by what can occur as there is agreement, friendship and a joy to create. Although we are geographically separate, the fact is we are in one place together.

I think you'll find this to be a special time of meditation as we sound the tone—majestic in words, poetry and music. It indeed has been a special treat for us, allowing this to come to fruition.

So, I would pass the focus to Alex. If you look closely, you might even see the Pacific Ocean out the window behind him.

**Alex Bootzin:** Thank you Sanford. It is a semi-typical Pacifica day, with a background of gray behind me. The fog, the overcast, and the reflective ocean are all gray, but you can still see a wash of outside light coming in through the picture window. Perhaps that creates a good atmosphere for the composer that I'm going to be talking about.

Claude Debussy is often classified as an Impressionist composer, and much of his music is likened to the works of the French painters Monet, Cezanne, Renoir, Degas, and others. Very small, thin, and precise brush strokes create an overall effect that is more diffuse than realistic. Debussy was still in his twenties between 1888 and 1891 when he composed two Arabesques for solo piano. I will be playing his Second Arabesque in G Major.

An Arabesque is a decorative piece of music with embellishments that can be reminiscent of Arabic architecture. This architecture often displays a scrolling pattern of spiraling and sinuous lines that intertwine and layer to create an intricate design. Arabesque can also refer to the ballet Arabesque, where the dancer stands on one leg with the other leg turned out and extended way behind the body. The arms, held out straight in front and behind the body, enhance the elegant and seemingly impossible geometry of it all. I think, with a little bit of imagination, I can see the commonality between the architectural and the ballet Arabesque. So, the influence of these varied genres of artistic expression are evident in the musical Arabesque by Claude Debussy that I will play for you now.

[Watch Alex play Debussy's 'Arabesque #2'](#)

**Sanford Baran:** Beautiful Alex, thank you. Looking at the score of this piece, I notice that it is marked *Allegretto scherzando*, which means “lively, playful, merry in an animated manner.” The spirit of your playing certainly brought forth that experience in me and sets a wonderful tone for our time together this hour.

You mentioned that this is a relatively early composition of Debussy’s, and although this is true, we can begin to see the direction Debussy was headed. He was inspired by the impressionistic painters of his day, and he created music that portrays moods, impressions and emotions. In other words, he touched into realms that are more abstract, taking listeners beyond the tangible. Listening to his music evokes an experience of something that is more ethereal, with an ability to touch the listener quite deeply, perhaps in profound ways.

I would like to give some thought to this matter of music and tonal experience. In doing this I’m going to start with a bit of musical theory.

At its core, music itself is vibrational, and much of the way music works and how it impacts us personally has to do with how soundwaves inherently operate in nature. It turns out that all sounds found in nature, be it from musical instruments, the human voice, my knocking on the desk—any sound that is naturally produced—always vibrates at multiple frequencies simultaneously, never just one. It is true that we tend to perceive a particular sound as a single tone; we call this noticeable tone its *fundamental* frequency. But in addition to this fundamental frequency there also are present a wealth of *overtones*, of higher frequencies that vibrate simultaneously at discrete multiples above this fundamental tone. This spectrum of vibration, consisting of a sound’s fundamental and all of its accompanying overtones, is sometimes referred to as the *harmonic series*.

If we closely look at the first couple of overtones in the harmonic series, the first overtone will vibrate at twice the frequency of its fundamental tone. Musically this doubling of frequency creates a pitch an octave higher than its fundamental tone. Likewise, the second overtone will vibrate at three times the frequency of its fundamental. This tripling of frequency creates a pitch that is referred to musically as a *fifth* higher than its fundamental.

Just to give you an idea of what the interval of a fifth sounds like, sing to yourself (if you can) the familiar phrase *do, re, me, fa, sol*. A musical fifth is the interval between the *do* tone and the *sol* tone. It turns out this interval of the fifth is particularly foundational in music, certainly in Western music. And this is because you can start at any particular pitch and then go up a fifth, and then go up a fifth from there, and then go up yet another fifth from there. And if you keep doing this, where does it eventually take you? Back to your original starting pitch, only a number of octaves higher. This adventure of climbing from pitch to pitch in fifths is called *the circle of fifths*.

Have you ever wondered why an octave is divided into twelve pitches? Is this totally arbitrary? Where did these pitches come from anyway? Well, these pitches result from climbing the circle of fifths. If for example, we start at the pitch *C* and go up a fifth we get the pitch *G*. Likewise

a fifth up from the pitch *G* is the pitch *D*. And a fifth up from pitch *D* is the pitch *A*; you get the idea. Going through the entire circle of fifths in this manner you get *C -> G -> D -> A -> E -> B -> F# -> C# -> G# -> D# -> A# -> F -> C*. Voila... the twelve pitches plus the ending pitch *C*, which is basically where we started only a number of octaves higher.

Now that we have our twelve pitches, we can construct scales, which really are just a collection of pitches or notes from the twelve. Scales form the harmonic foundation of musical expression. Two particular scales that are quite prevalent in Western music, scales that will sound familiar to Western ears are what are called *diatonic* scales and *chromatic* scales.

The word *diatonic* is interesting—it consists of the prefix *dia* meaning “through” and *tonic* meaning “of the tone.” In other words, “through the tone.”

But musically, what is a diatonic scale? First of all, it consists of seven specific pitches out of the possible twelve. It turns out that two out of these seven pitches have particular significance. These two tones are known as the *tonic* and the *dominant*. The tonic is the tonal center or focus of a given scale and the *dominant* is that tonic’s complementary pitch of agreement. And not so coincidentally, the tonic and dominant are a *fifth* apart. It is these two pitches, the tonic and the dominant that provide and establish a sense of musical stability, of groundedness and a sense of fulfillment within the diatonic framework. “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” In other words, here is a stable and trustworthy framework for tonal expression, providing a tonal center, a *key* if you will, which establishes a home base from which to musically operate. By the way if you want to hear what a diatonic scale sounds like, sing to yourself *do, re, me, fa sol, la, ti, do*.

Chromatic scales, on the other hand, use all twelve of the pitches and consequently have no real notion of key or tonal focus. The chromatic scale does, however, open up the floodgates of possibility. In a way anything goes. And with this there is the potential for a greatly enlarged field of expression. But some of this new-found expression can seem unfamiliar, confusing, disorienting, maybe even disturbing and unpleasant. Chromaticism, by the way, is useful in other ways: for instance, it aids and abets the transition and transformation from one key to another. It’s all about change and movement; it’s very much about the journey.

In terms of expression, what should it be? Diatonic or chromatic? How about both together?—in other words, the richness of chromatic expressiveness and flexibility, yet all-contained within the stability and groundedness of the diatonic? We can observe that the true masters of Western musical composition—such as Bach, Mozart Beethoven, Debussy, to name a few—did just that. They created a balance between these two forces and used chromatic color and movement to enhance and expand the expressiveness of their work within the context of a stable home base.

Now this has spiritual implications. What I have been describing musically is a metaphor and roadmap of what likely is required of us now: a grounding in the foundational stability of the

tone providing the spiritual scaffolding which would allow us to express what is fresh, original, transformational, bold—in other words, the richness of the chromatic emerging in all aspects of our living.

This is indeed the creative process—being grounded in spirit but not stuck in forms that are embraced merely because they happen to be familiar but to actually become comfortable with the unfamiliar. This is only possible as we are comfortable with who we *actually* are. In other words, to the extent that we ourselves are consciously rooted and identified in the tone, the possibilities of expanded personal and collective expression are vast.

I now want to turn the focus over to Jack and Brenda. Jack will be playing one of his own compositions, a piece entitled “The Silent Power” from the poem “The Silent Power” written by Vicki Hamer. This was originally written as a choral composition. Jack took this choral composition and reworked it for cello and piano.

To begin, Brenda will present Vicki Hamer’s poem, followed by Jack playing the piece live on cello with recorded piano accompaniment played by Maryliz Smith.

***Brenda Jenkins:***

*The Silent Power  
The cool fire  
The burning wisdom  
Of the meteor shower.*

*Blue white light  
Across the sky  
Softly caressing  
Earth’s sleeping face.*

*To be at once  
So full of heat  
Consumed with shining,  
Yet passing still.*

*The meteor sings  
The Song of creation,  
Free fall dancing  
Into brilliant silence,  
Being born and ceasing  
In eternal now.*

*The Silent Power*

[Watch Jack play ‘The Silent Power’](#)

**Sanford Baran:** Beautiful. I asked Jack, “What key this was in?” He explained to me that the notion of key really doesn’t fit here. A better way of describing what’s going on is that this piece starts and ends with the same tonal center. So, is it diatonic? Well, musically, probably not. But it unmistakably is of the tone. It is definitely grounded, but not held in place by the usual musical guard rails of the diatonic. It is grounded on the basis of Jack’s own internal orientation to the universal tonic, through the tone of spirit, providing stability and a launching point for a richer and expanded expressiveness to be known.

As there is groundedness rooted in the tone, there is space in consciousness that accommodates a greater appreciation and clearer understanding of what lies beyond the familiar. Spirit, after all, is always pushing to be born in forms that are relevant and essential now. This, indeed, is the creative process at work.

I have to say it’s been wonderful working together, the four of us. And one of the things that we thought would be cool is if somehow, we could bring it all together as if we were in the same room playing music live in the present moment. Currently this is not technically possible using Zoom. But the fact is that in true friendship and agreement we *already* are together in one place, wherever we happen to be—simultaneously being in the now, grounded in the universal tone. So, we took bits and pieces of audio and video from our various far-flung locations, and it was just a matter of editing and re-syncing—essentially restoring it all back, as if it was performed and recorded in one place in real time.

To conclude our time together I would like to play for you this video. It’s another Jack Jenkins composition entitled, “The Light Between.” It, too, was originally written as a choral piece, from the poem “The Light Between’ by Janet Barocco. This particular version is scored for cello and piano.

Brenda will first present Janet’s poem and it will be followed by Alex and Jack playing the piece together.

***Brenda Jenkins:***

*The deep, rich tones  
of subtle grace  
that dance and play within the space  
of light between,  
often pass unseen  
and leave no residue nor trace,  
except a fragrance  
lingering  
in their place,  
of music never heard before.*

[Watch Alex and Jack play ‘The Light Between’](#)

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**Pre-Service Music**

*She Lives in Golden Sands*

Composed and performed by Neil Cowley