

# Interview with Laurence Crane

by Tim Parkinson - 16th May 1999 (Side 1)

## Side one

L: (talking about his Sextet No.2 composed in the Autumn of 1983) I think the main thing is that it sounded atonal, although not atonal in a sort of er Colin Matthews sense. But the following month I wrote, in the January of 84, I then wrote my flute melodies, which as you know are sort of melodic, um, but sometimes the piano part sort of veers into atonality, but it was an attempt to find a sort of tonality for myself, and the thing that that hinged upon was writing melodies.

T: But did you also write that kind of focus on one idea type of piece?

L: Yes. Yes, I think so, yes I've always done that. Erm, yeah, that's a good point actually. Erm, yeah I would say that's common to my music. There's no, there's no argument. There's no um....there's no thematic discourse. I mean I don't like thematic development. I hate- I hate the development sections in classical music, you know, it makes such a horrible noise, and um the music I admire most is that which hones in on a single idea, and then reduces everything to some aspect which it then sees through. That's very important. But if you ask me, Tim, whereas have I always written the same sort of music, in the sense that I've always worked on essentially single idea pieces, then the answer would be yes. But in the sense that the sort of music I write now is fundamentally sort of tonal miniatures with a sort of basically static harmonic rhythm, then the tonal element only really came in in 1984, so there's sort of two answers to that question really.

T: But your tonality has got more and more sort of strong, concrete, elementary maybe through the years. I mean the flute and piano melodies I don't really- I don't think of them that much as tonal pieces, they're sort of quite consonant in that way, but not in the same way that say your piano duets, which are just kind of- with the rigid triadic business.

L: Triadic yeah yeah that's true, the melodies are not triadic. Nor are my Five Preludes for cello and piano which I wrote in 1985, and they're not triadic either, they're a similar sort of... fairly sort of... crunchy harmony I suppose. It's not er...yeah, you're right.

T: So when did the triad make a comeback? I mean, is it fair to talk about it like that? That your music has sort of slowly condensed towards that?

L: Yes, I think it's absolutely fair, yeah. The stuff I'm doing at the moment is nowhere- it's almost like a world away from the melodies, taking the melodies as a sort of benchmark. The melodies seem almost traditional in a way. I suppose the triadic thing came first... um....er... I suppose Jurgen Hip, the piece for cello and piano, I just used that sort of bald triad in the piano part. It's the first time the triad thing really manifested itself really strongly. That's 1989.

T: But what about the "Air" ?

L: "Air".

T: Which is what eighty...seven?

L: 86. Yeah, well I suppose that's yeah that's fairly triadic as well isn't it. Yeah, I mean it's slowly sort of crept in.

T: So what role does tonality play for you?

L: Before I answer that, Tim, the most extreme piece I've ever done with triads was a Piano Circus commission from 1990 called "3 Pieces for 6 pianos" and the entire material, it was an eighteen minute piece, three...sort of three movements, the entire material is triads. It never moves from actual...triads. Ask me the other question again.

T: What was it, "what role does tonality play for you"? Or what role does it have for you?

L: Yeah, it's not a functional tonality obviously.

T: I mean your use of triads in those piano duets are kind of almost arbitrary in a way because it's taking it as a sound, the triad, and it moves around in you know fairly linear way...go on, talk about it.

L: Well. I er- but that's really difficult because I mean I could like I write but not use tonal material, but it seems to me perfectly natural to use tonal material.

T: Well I mean because your triads in the piano duets don't really function in any kind of tonal sense, I'm thinking of the first one for example...it's still quite kind of jarring as well, it doesn't arrive at a kind of harmonic consonance, well, I dunno that's just my impression...

L: I find that really difficult to answer, "what role does tonality play for me", I mean it doesn't obviously- tonality does not move functionally like conventional tonality might. Er, I think it's just because I've chosen to use tonal...tonal material I suppose, and I can't really say anything more than that.

T: Well, that's fine. Well, a lot of your pieces sound like they start off with a kind of found material, a received material, you know like a triad is a sort of block which you've almost cut out from somewhere else, especially in those piano duets, where you've just cut this thing out and just placed it in various positions like a Terry Gilliam cartoon, and I just wonder whether you use found objects or received material in that way because, you know, it sort of has resonances but you never actually sort of quote...

L: Yeah. I mean, they are my own, and there's only a couple of occasions where I've actually used other people's material in the context of my own work. I mean in general, the material will be entirely my own but you're right to say they're found objects in the sense that they have resonances elsewhere, you know, they're triads or erm.... whatever. Erm, sorry what was the question?

T: I've forgotten. I mean, like the second piano duet or something, or even, you know, "Hugo Pine", which is almost like you've got some traditional structure and reduced it so much to just a tonic-dominant structure...so that's why it almost hints at found objectness.

L: Yeah, it does.

T: Well, that's just the reason for me asking the question.

L: I mean if I were not to use tonal material then it wouldn't so much would it, because what you

mean by found object is something that has resonance elsewhere, or from history, whereas if I used atonal material... well, it would have resonances wouldn't it...

T: Well, yes and no, I mean the thing is- the thing about tonal material is it's less abstract, you know, so that's why it hints at a sort of broad range of things whereas if you were to use atonal stuff it would be more hinting at um...you know...flights of emotional fancy or expressionistic dark terrors or something... I mean that's- I'm curious as to why tonality as opposed to atonality.

L: I think, well... so the question is why tonality as opposed to atonality, ermmmmmm....

T: Just take it away and think about it. (laughs)

L: Well, ok this is my attempt to answer the question. I think that there's something about tonal material that I find more pure than atonal material, something with more clarity about it, there's more simplicity about it. A purity. It's purity I think. Um, so that's the first thing. Um... The second thing is I suppose, I mean it's linked to the first thing, the second thing is that um I think it's probably erm...I find it more...attractive, and therefore beautiful to listen to. I don't want to be abrasive. That's not in my interest at the moment, it's not in my interest to be abrasive but I want to create something that's beautiful. And I think tonal material... you see, I say um... Feldman obviously was creating many many things of beauty, um, his material is on the whole not tonal which is interesting, but I find tonality for myself a more natural harmonic language although I'm not obviously using it in a sort of Beethovenian sense obviously.

T: Well I think maybe that's where it lies because the old use of dissonance being a sort of tension which needs to be resolved, your music is very clear of tension completely. And I think, um, there are pieces where the chords are more tense than others obviously if you want to follow that argument, but obviously otherwise they're all quite flat, or calm or whatever. Like the "Trio" for bass flute, clarinet and piano. I mean there are tiny moments of tension maybe you know but not in any sort of functional sense, no resolution business, in the Beethovenian sense.

L: There's not a dialectic going on. So does that answer the question in a way? What was the first question, maybe I could have another go at answering the first.

T: Oh, "describe the sort of music you write". (laughs) We could keep coming back to that.

L: Actually, do another question.

T: How do you approach writing a new piece? Any piece. Where do you start?

L: I suppose first of all I think about practical things, instrumentation, where it's gonna be played, who's playing it, will it be played again which is very important, um...

T: We will play your pieces again.

L: (laughs) All that information is very important. Andrew Sparling, I was talking to him recently about it and he said that he thought that my body of work as a whole er dealt in archetypes. There are certain types of pieces, and you can sort of group my pieces roughly into different types of pieces. For example the first movement of "Weirdi" is very much like the piece "Hugo Pine". And they use fairly similar material but not identical. And there are other examples of that, and I recycle material in different contexts as well, so I suppose I would take all the practical considerations into account and then I would try to decide what sort of piece I was gonna write, what type of piece.

T: Does that depend on venue and performers and everything as well?

L: It depends to a certain extent on that, yeah, and certainly instrumentation is important there. And I may or may not take some material from another context to rework in the context of the new piece. It depends. Um, another example of that is some pieces I wrote for Annie Parker's flute trio but they were augmented by another flautist; It's called "Four Pieces for alto and bass flutes" and it's four pieces for two alto flutes and two bass flutes, performed by the Flute House Trio, and the first movement of that is based on the second piano duet. Second piano duet came first, but I used that rising theme from the second piano duet as the basis for that first piece in that. So I do things like that.

T: Why?

L: I like to explore material in different contexts, it sounds different, it's not an arrangement of the same piece, but I'll rework it in some way, extend it maybe. I find it fascinating to rework material in a different context really. That's all I can say about that.

T: So the instrumentation is as much a deciding factor.

L: Yeah. I suppose I like to think I'm quite economical with material, I mean there's a danger I might over-use materials sometimes, I think I may have done that on a couple of occasions.

T: Oh yeah? Which?

L: Possibly a set of pieces that started out as guitar pieces, they're called "Three Pieces for guitar" from 1987, and two of them were reworked as piano pieces first of all which I've since chucked out, then after that they became solo pizzicato cello pieces, and then two of them turned up in an ensemble context in 1992 as "Five pieces for five instruments", and possibly I reworked them one or two many times, I dunno.

T: You exhausted it?

L: Possibly, I mean, there's a danger it can look as if er I'm just short of ideas, I'm bereft of ideas, but I don't see it like that obviously.

T: No, sure, it's something that other people do, so I just wanted your take on it, obviously it comes from a sort of economic stance. Recontextual.

L: I suppose I like to view a raw material from all sorts of angles in a sort of art object type way, so er (laughs) if that doesn't sound too wanky...

T: (laughs) But you do do that in individual pieces, though. It's like you have one, you take one thing or whatever and you put it, the way I described it is you take whatever, a phrase or thing or image or whatever, gesture and you put it in a museum case, and then you look at it in a new context, and you've talked about this non-developmental thing, you never develop it, it's development by reiteration if anything, but it's this decontextualising thing in the first place, like the very beginning of "Hugo Pine", that tiny chunk which is the repetition... You know, somebody said to me that it's like a stuck record, but something's made out of it. It's just one tiny thing you're really focusing in on and looking at. So it's this out-of-contextness as well cos if that was in the context of a larger piece it would be nothing, but because you've taken it away in isolation it becomes sort of special.

L: Sure, that's true, that's all true, and I think er... yeah, that's another aspect of er isolating material um... I've run out of things to say.

T: Sometimes you know you take things one stage too far, like in in individual pieces you know this business of of exaggeration like the second piano duet and the first movement of "Weirdi" you know where there's that bit at the end you don't know whether it's finished and then it does it again. You know some of your things are very very carefully balanced, well they all are, and then you balance it but then you sort of put this little extra thing in to sort of exaggerate it.

L: Yeah there's a moment like that in "Air". It slips into 2/4 after being steadily in 3/4. It prolongs all the notes. But you're right though, I mean the thing in the first movement of "Weirdi" is that I write out eight empty bars at the end of the piece, and it's an attempt to inject a little humour into things I suppose.

T: But there we are this is- now we move on to a whole new area. (laughs) The element of humour in your music. Talk about that. "How important is the role of humour?"

L: Well, it's very important, I mean I hope it's another facet, humour, um....yeah, it's very important. Um, I mean not every piece is meant to be humorous obviously, but it is certainly one of my aims to try and erm...you know, I'm very keen to entertain, errrrr, I am. Yeah, I am. And um I think- I think music's too serious quite a lot of the time, er, and I like, it's it's- I like to hear music that's er that's really funny sometimes, um, and my- I suppose the humour- the humour when people do find it funny is in things like that stopping and starting in "Weirdi" or in things like, you know, the texts to "Weirdi" are supposed to be funny, and sometimes when the music's slightly ridiculous in a way, slightly sort of um just taking the piss out of itself really I suppose, um...yeah that's it really, it's just a sort of um... just not really taking itself very seriously, it's slightly debunking, self-mockery I suppose, yeah. I mean the material sort of mocks itself at times. Um...something like the piece "Jurgen Hip", um, at the end you get the descending- the descending bass with the A-flat chord that has come earlier in the work, at the end it's played eight times but the cello is silent for seven of those and then plays at the end, and it's kind of meant to be a cello and piano piece- well, it is a cello and piano piece, but it's very piano-centric and er, I think it's meant to be funny, whether it is funny or not is not for me to say but I think it's funny. I think it's funny that er you know there's an eightfold repetition of this descending bass line with the chord- syncopated chord, erm, and then the cello comes in on the eighth time after being silent for seven of them.

T: It's quite hypnotic that piece. But it's interesting that though as an example because you're messing around with structure in a way that um...er...you know, there's an imbalance in the ending for example it cuts off just when you don't expect it, so that's a sort of subversion in a way.

L: Yeah. I mean it is er...yeah it is...it is my aim to make a humorous point sometimes, I think it's all to do with um, it's not meant to be obvious it's just meant to be gently mocking I suppose. Um, just gently pulling around with the absurdity of the music.

T: Maybe it's similar to what Andrew Sparling was saying about- as I see it, your music from what I've heard and especially from what you've sent me on the tape, um, move between two sort of poles, in a way. On the one hand there's the sort of outwardly humorous pieces, like much of "Weirdi", and the other extreme there are the sort of more introverted you know subjective things like um, you know, like "The Swim" like the "Trio not for Ros and Peter"...

L: Just "Trio".

T: And um, and er "Riis" as well. Which is quite sort of abstract as well. So those- those are the two

extremes and there are sort of things in between. You know like "The Swim" has that element but on the other hand it's er... that sort of organ sound, I don't know if it's specified in the piece but it's very..you know, sort of very "Sale of the Century" sound.

L: Um, yeah yeah, "Sale of the Century" very fair to say that, yeah.

T: It deliberately courts that kind of cliché in a sort of a way, you know. So that's how I see it, two sort of poles of things, I don't know if that's fair or whether there are others...

L: Well, no, I think that's I think that's, you've probably hit on it there, yeah that's good ummmm

T: Things like "Hugo Pine" which- So much of the humour in "Weirdi" is very um, it's quite- quite sort of attacking as well in a way, I mean "New Music Weirdo" and so on, or caustic.

L: Caustic, yeah.

T: And yet something like "Hugo Pine" you get this much more gentler thing, you know... Well that's the way I feel. (pause - loud background shouting) so as long as that's fair.

L: I think that's fair, yeah. I mean I suppose er um yeah, my most abstract pieces would probably be erm like "Riis" and erm "Cello Piece for Michael Parsons", um, "Trio", um...

T: Although you see the "Trio" its much more sort of er, it's very melancholy, you know, I wondered whether that was intentional or not, or whether it as just the material you ended up with and that's a sort of a by-product. I don't want to get into sort of boring biographical details but it comes up in "Events" as well, the music is very, intentionally or not, it's very almost melancholy..

L: Yeah, there's no sort of... there's no relation to anything to do with my life, no, um, just the way things turned out I suppose, but I mean (indecipherable)

T: Yeah I just mean about the life thing in the sense that because you're not that sort of romantic expressing expressive composer, angst-ridden...and so it's just curious that some of your pieces are quite sort of melancholy, very grey English afternoons type (laughs)

L: Right, yeah yeah , right...

T: I mean "Sparling" as well, downcast...

L: That's a very abstract piece as well.

T: Yeah, so I'm just curious to see whether- the humour is intentional, the melancholy is not.

L: No, no, I wouldn't say that, it's you know, I intend to write what I write so um...I never thought of it as melancholic particularly...

T: Well maybe it's just my interpretation.

L: No that's fine you know that's valid I think that's valid. Um, but... You're right, maybe it is...sounds melancholic yeah, it doesn't sound happy, I mean, it doesn't sound happy.

T: I suppose maybe it's just cos it's the flat material and if you just so happen to be using minor tonalities then it's going to come out like that.

L: Sure, sure, yeah. My principal aim er is to create something that's um sort of beautiful I think so if it comes out melancholic er that's why I suppose. Yeah I mean don't get me wrong Tim it's- if it sounds melancholic then it is melancholic because I don't- I'm absolutely opposed to the idea of expressing oneself through music and if you in listening to it find that melancholic that's as valid as any other interpretation for me. Um. My concerns in writing it are as I say to create something that's beautiful, er, or to create something that's humorous and to articulate a structure which is something of clarity, um, that's very important, to create something that's er um you know, crystal clear.

T: Mia - the violinist I played "Hugo Pine" with - she said something like she said that it was like um a church you know hymn harmonium type church hymn stuck record.

L: yeah yeah

T: Just the very beginning. So that's the business of found material, you know it's more of a sort of illusion.

L: Yeah, no that's that's absolutely valid, that's fine yeah, that's fine yeah yeah. I don't think I'm very good at talking about my own music actually

T: I know the feeling.

L: I think that er your your um....everything that you've read in it is correct in the way you say it, erm...

T: Alright um-

## **Interview with Laurence Crane contd. (Side 2)**

### **Side two**

L: Have you asked me all the questions, Tim?

T: No, maybe I should ask you some more, very quickly.

L: Ok.

T: I've lost train of thought, but whatever.

L: What were we talking about? I was talking about- I think I was talking about the fact that um it's not...the melancholic music...you know, er, finding it melancholic is not a problem.

T: I've lost my train of questions...

L: It doesn't have any bearing on my emotional state. It's not meant to be er- structure? Articulating a structure?

T: What about it?

L: I can't remember.

T: That's a point though, you've talked quite adequately about that already, the clarity of structure.

L: Clarity of structure, yeah

T: Because a word that's often thrown to your work and work like you, in your general direction is "simplicity", and I wonder whether that's a misuse of word, cos I think I prefer the word "clarity" to "simplicity", you know. I don't know...

L: Yeah well "simplicity" is a term, you know like the "New Simplicity"... There's the "New Complexity" and the "New Simplicity".

T: I mean a misnomer.

L: Yeah, it's a misnomer. I mean they're all misnomers - minimal music, postmodern music, er...

T: yeah did you see- I was described and I suppose you as well as a postminimalist.

L: Postminimalist, yeah...

T: And I don't know what that is.

L: I mean, it's a valid as any other term, I mean all these- if you say postminimalist then you roughly know what it means.

T: Generally.

L: Well I would take that to mean composers who have taken so much from minimalism but not a sort of er blanket sort of um...

T: I wanted to talk about your Englishness. Perhaps it's a very bad idea. Your music's very English, and I don't know what that means.

L: Yeah, well, oh God, um...

T: Well, firstly does it have a response when I say that to you?

L: Yeah, no no I would say it was very English yeah

T: Positive or negative?

L: Um...positive I think, um, cos I find it difficult to define what Englishness is.

T: Like your um your understatement. L :Yeah. I think that's true, I think that's true of someone like Howard Skempton as well. Um..

T: And the er er the humour to a degree, the English irony...

L: Yeah, yeah you wouldn't find a German writing that.

T: Exactly, I was listening to your music and I could not imagine a French person writing this, or a German or American or whatever. Where do you- what does the English tradition mean to you?



L: Well it's very important, I mean I think that um

T: Do you reject it or embrace it wholeheartedly?

L: er, neither I think I just er.. It's an old cliché but you're just a product of your environment and er...

T: It's inevitable?

L: Yeah. Um...it's inevitable that one...you know, one is English and comes from in a certain cultural context and um...(inaudible)...quite a long time by the English experimental composers that clustered around Cardew in the sixties and seventies, and they all have that quality as well, so, I think it's inevitable really, so I don't er...I don't want to sort of hide from it and nor do I want particularly to um make a big thing of it really.

T: So would you say- would you say that those were your predecessors in a way, the English experimental school.

L: Yeah definitely I mean, Howard Skempton's been a huge er erm influence on me.

T: You studied with him?

L: No, I've never studied with him, I've worked with him in concerts quite a lot, used to do concerts with him. Um, just his- just the impact of- the impact of his work was immense no me in sort of nineteen- early nineteen eighties when I discovered it, cos I'd never encountered anything like it before, er...

T: Was it a sort of road to Damascus type conversion?

L: It was, yeah, it was, it sort of- it sort of gave a sort of permission if you like to- to be able to write like that.

T: Did you not- did you know of any Cage and Feldman...

L: I discovered them all at the same time. I discovered them all at university, all round the same time

T: It took a while to become apparent in your music?

L: Yes it did, it did yeah yeah, there wasn't- wasn't an abrupt- although there is in my if you follow my you know thing I was talking about earlier, the transition from the sextet that I wrote up to the Three Melodies, I mean that's quite that's quite abrupt. But in terms of discovering the music at university, er, it didn't immediately make sort of make my music different, no. But what I wanted to say about Howard's music was I thought it was extraordinary cos I'd been- I'd discovered twentieth century music by sort of you know listening to the influence of Stravinsky, Bartok, people, and then moving on listening to you know Boulez Stockhausen and Birtwistle Maxwell Davies...

T: Did you ever feel any um affinity with any of those...the heavy modernists, Stockhausen... did you try and write stuff similar?

L: I suppose I must have done I mean certainly none of the pieces I can trace to being influenced by

certain people, um...I mean I thought...I assume...I assume...I suppose I assume that I wrote I assumed that people wrote in a modernist way and then I realised that you know that in fact things I suppose things were in the eighties starting to stylistically diverge a bit I mean, people like Steve Reich were becoming more accepted and things, and I suppose I just followed that in a way.

T: Was there anyone that you um- I mean finding affinity with Howard Skempton, was there anyone that you really sort of reacted against, cos it's curious, people like Howard or sort of you know the Cologne thing with Kevin Volans and Walter Zimmermann the very anti-Stockhausen thing. Cos they were forbidden from writing octaves and all that...(inaudible)

L: Well I suppose I would just say that I'm influenced by Howard in the sense that I- it was his work initially that encouraged me I suppose to make the step to writing essentially tonal music. I suppose, although I don't think my music sounds like his in many ways, but it was his music that alerted me to the possibility of writing in the way that I do I think. So I think by that in that by that measure he's an influence. But by identifying myself- by identifying er myself with them one's automatically er aligning oneself against pure modernism.

T: Sure. It's just interesting what came first. But, um, how- following on from that though, how has your music changed in all those years since?

L: In the fifteen years? Well I think it's got less melodic and more...more harmonic. Er.

T: Vertical?

L: More...it was always fairly vertical...it was always fairly vertical but yeah it's got very much it's got more... even more paired down I think, and hopefully more clear.

T: Where do you see your music going?

L: Abso- absolutely no idea. I've...honestly Tim I've...I've no idea, cos er I've never really had a plan, I've just followed my instincts I think, and um, I suppose right at this moment I would be happy to carry on writing you know exactly like I write now for quite a while, but what else is within that...

T: It's really interesting though because your music being- I do think that it's very sort of um of-its-time and um...and you know I'd hate to see it becoming, not that it's likely to, a victim of you know a victim of fashion in the way that so many sort of other people have become but I don't think it will do cos you're not quite that sort of so forefront... But I'm curious to see how it will develop in the next ten years.

L: Yeah, so am I. Yeah. It may stay exactly the same. That's a possibility.

T: I'm gonna ask some more- pack in some questions before the tape runs out. What criticisms would you- What criticisms have been made of your music? I mean there has- you do court controversy.

L: Yeah...

T: What criticisms have been made about your music? That you feel either are- whatever...

L: Well I just suppose it's- yeah I'm aware that people don't like it sometimes. Um, er because they don't because it doesn't er I suppose because it doesn't do things. Er, and because it's

not ...complicated I suppose. It doesn't...it might seem to them as banal or sort of possibly because it um... because it seems as taking the piss a bit, but I don't- I don't know you see I'm just trying to think of ... I mean I know people don't like it sometime, I would expect people not to like- some people not to like it.

T: Does it bother you?

L: No, it bothers me, er...my aim is that people should like it, but...you know I have to write what I want to write, cos it'd be dishonest not to do that.

T: I mean for example the um I'm curious probably from a gossip point of view, the "New Music Weirdo" did the subject of that appreciate it or whatever, took it in the spirit of the thing.?

L: Well at the time at the time when I wrote it he seemed to take it in the spirit of the thing, um...I didn't know him when I wrote it, and I subsequently met him, he seemed to take it in the spirit of the thing, but I'm not quite sure if he does any more.

T: Really. Now he's a big shot?

L: That's unofficial.

T: It's all unofficial.

L: I can't- it's all unofficial, yeah, I can't think of anything, any specific criticism other than the general things I've mentioned there might- yeah you're right I mean it might very may well irritate people, I can quite see that yeah, or people just don't get it really I suppose. That's fair enough, you know, they don't have to. You know, it's not...if people don't like it then they're at liberty not to like it. The only specific criticism I can think of was um... the composer Peter Dickinson who was Professor of music at Goldsmiths, I dunno if he still is, er, at the first performance of "Weirdi" and he refused to clap and he apparently said to someone "If that had been submitted to me as an undergraduate piece I would have failed it outright." Now I dunno what his- I dunno if that's a huge compliment...

T: Yeah well, that's the position you occupy.

L: Yeah yeah well, I dunno what his- you know, he just didn't like it. I mean people don't like it- if people don't like it because it's er...you know maybe too simple or too banal they might think or...um...doesn't take itself too seriously- too ser- doesn't take itself seriously enough...

T: Well it's the people who you're poking fun at I suppose in in, well, I mean I made the um allusion that I'm not going to do in this article that you for example, you know it's the figuration after abstraction sort of routine like Pop Art for example after the whole um abstract expressionism, you know there's the same thing, in terms of figuration, the lack total- the sort of abandonment of any sort of clever over-romantic expressive painstaking stuff, you know well there you go, the economy and the repetition, the irony, all this sort of business I mean it's- I'm not gonna talk about that in the article because it's inaccurate because whatever analogy you draw is always inaccurate. But I find that very interesting, I mean the same people who would take refuge in the former which would take offence at the present sort of business.

L: Right yeah yeah

T: Well, general- now we've run- we're onto general questions.

L: Ok.

T: Just about the state of contemporary music in Britain.

L: Oh I think it's

T: You see I- I just envisaged this conversation as moving from the specific to the general.

L: Right.

T: Now we're onto the general. (someone in the pub starts singing "You'll Never Walk Alone")

L: Onto the general. Um, I think er...contemporary music it's very healthy in Britain I think um I don't I don't have any sort of axe to grind about who gets performances or who gets commissions or anything. I completely accept that the music I write is never gonna appeal to a huge amount of people, um...

T: Do you not think it should be represented more?

L: Yes I do, but I've no time to do anything about that.

T: Well, you can- you can think it though.

L: Well, yeah- no I suppose I do think that yeah um...but on the other hand...sometimes when people do get more exposure they don't necessarily end up producing their best work. I mean I also have no desire to earn a living as a composer, because...I mean I'm very fortunate I think in that I've found something that I enjoy doing that is related to music but not actually composing, and I think that gives me a sort of er licence to be artistically totally free, but on the other hand there's always sorts of things- they don't commission me obviously... I mean I suppose if you ask me what criticisms I have of my own music it would be that um there's not enough in my catalogue so to speak, there's not a wide enough- not a wide enough um range of genres.

T: You never- you never write any fast music.

L: Er yeah, I see that as a virtue. Fast music for me is totally inappropriate, I mean I don't write- I don't write in a- you know I don't write- my harmonic rhythm doesn't move- I can't I can't write fast music because I don't want the harmony to move...the harmonic rhythm is slow, static, it doesn't lend itself to fast music. If truth be told I've never wanted to write fast music. I like a good slow metronome mark. But...erm...I suppose that would be a criticism I would level at my own music that there's no wide range of genres and that's simply because I don't write just for the sake of it, I only write when people ask me to write. It's a combination of the fact that I have a number of musicians who, including yourself, who who want to play my music and therefore I intend to write for them. I'll never write a piece... no I don't think I do ever write a piece where I was just writing for the sake of it, or writing for a competition or something.

T: Have you ever entered any competitions?

L: Yeah I have yeah, I mean I've always lost.

T: No compromise.

L: Oh no, in my own style yeah. The thing is I wouldn't er it's gotta be you know- I've got to have a... I've got to have a practical reason for writing a piece it's got to be you know, someone's asked me for a piece, you know, there's no point in writing music otherwise I think. Music's got to be performed.

T: No , I appreciate that very much.

L: So that- I feel passionately about that. But to go back to your question about the richness of- the state of contemporary music, I mean it's obviously weighted in favour of certain music, and it's obvious that my music is not-

T: More so?

L: No, the same I think, but i just don't see it in terms of something to get worked up about. People do get worked up about it, I really can't be bothered to get worked up about it. It would be great- I would like obviously um if group came along and- you know like say the Sinfonietta and said er we'd like you to write a piece, that would be great because you know I would get a performance. Maybe I wouldn't get a good performance cos maybe there's plusses and minuses really um, the people who do my music tend to do it very well cos they're committed to it, and you know if I got played by the Sinfonietta then then...you know they may not play it as well cos it would just be another piece, you know so there's pluses and minuses really and er I've really no interest in arguing about it. But no when you ask me what the state of contemporary music is in Britain I think it's healthy cos there's you know there's a because we live in London there's a fair amount of it to go to.

T: Do you go to concerts much?

L: I try to yeah, and there's a plurality of music. I mean ok there's I mean probably the thing is weighted in favour of the mainstream sort of Knussen type of composer if I can say there's such a thing, which there is obviously, um, it's weighted in favour of that, my opinion is so what, I mean ok, there's lots of other stuff going on and it it obviously some of it you know should be more supported and some of the other stuff not mentioning any names shouldn't be so supported but-

T: But I feel for example that the BBC once upon a time used to be more catholic in- in its representation.

L: I think in the sixties it was.

T: Well even in- even vaguely in the eighties.

L: Well, maybe. I agree though, in the sixties, but it seems to have just declined in the years when market forces possibly have taken over. I mean it is a different world now, so...but I still can't sort of get too worked up about it.

T: And what about um...I was gonna say...BBC, Proms, that's the same kettle of fish, and music coming out of young composers, sort of the academic-

L: Yeah I mean there's- there's hardly anyone in their twenties that's interesting I don't think, apart from yourself of course and er Bryn, he's thirty now though isn't he...? Is he, ok. I mean none of this sort of official sort of composers are interesting I don't think.

T: People who are exposed too young.

L: Not very interesting, but that- you know, that's just my opinion really.

T: And finally...

L: "And finally..."

T: "Words of advice for young composers".

L: Oh do something else. Get a job.

T: What qualities do you look for in other music?

L: I think single-mindedness. And clarity. And knowing when to stop.