

*Leslie Bassett on Orchestration, Et Cetera.
In Discussion with James Aikman*

JA It's a privilege to be here and to discuss orchestration with a master.

LB Thank you.

JA How do you define orchestration? It's such an interesting phenomenon, much like composition, in which mixing, blending, matching, and contrasting musical densities, colors and textures all takes place. That's what were faced with: coming up with sonorities that not only work at the moment, but that work in continuity with what has gone on before and with what comes after in any piece of music. It's a very complex issue to sit here and discuss, but that's why we need to do it!

LB This is, of course, all off the cuff, yet it would seem to me that orchestration is inflation of a simple, original musical idea. Let's say you have a piano piece, an unaccompanied piece by Bach, or an organ piece by Bach, something that probably began in a simpler manner. It's going to end up as a piece for orchestra. So in a way you're inflating an idea, and how you inflate it is where the art is implied. We both know of ways that work and of ways that aren't so successful. For instance, in marching band, say you have 5 lines. Each of these is simply dispersed as appropriate to anybody who can play it. Everybody is thus playing all the time because you need all the sound you can get out on a football field. You don't want anybody doing resting at all! Whereas most of the time in scoring, one likes to point out the goodies: the beauties of the individual instruments; the contrast of one group against another; the contrast of thick and thin, of low and high, of low and middle, of low and moody, etc. You have all of these options, which didn't exist when the piece began. In a way, we make new entities when we orchestrate.

There's another side to it. There are some composers whom I know, have known, who start with a 30 or 40 staff page in front of them and compose right onto it. I don't know very many people who complete a piece that way. Very often one gets a very good first page, maybe a second page and maybe you aren't quite too sure what happens after that. So, one needs to plot the logistics of the piece and solve the real problems of what it's going to do, and then put it in its proper orchestral guise.

JA Do you do any pre-compositional planning with regard to the orchestral structure and architecture? Do you map out, for instance, sections of the orchestra or your own unique instrumental combinations that you want to feature here and there? Do you make lists of combined orchestral textures, mixed colors, etc.?

LB Those are a few ways of doing it. Every piece is different. It's all possible, you know. When you're lying in bed at night ready for sleep, dreaming of this great piece of music that you're going to write, you don't have time to worry about pitches. Forget pitches! But you're going to begin with this mammoth chord, a 16th-note, fortississimo,

let's say. That is your first gesture. What are you going to do after that? Well, maybe there's a residue of that, now muted strings in a high cluster of twenty-eight notes.

JA As an echo almost.....

LB As an echo. And it just sits there for a while. Well, what does it do? It can't sit there forever, so it moves! It goes up, or it goes down, or it goes up and then down in glissando or whatever. Now we're composing a piece by the 40-stave method.

JA Almost a range diagram....

LB Yes! And we can plot a certain amount of this in that way in which you're not committed to melody, you're not committed to harmony; you're not committed to percussive rhythms. You can get away with this quite a while (and some get away with it longer than they should). Eventually you're going to have to come to more substantial means of moving us as listeners, but that's a good way to start; and in fact, not a bad way for people who are good composers who have written for orchestra to think about their orchestra piece. Rather than to think, "Let's see, I have C natural, D-Flat, B natural, B-Flat, and so on. I have all those pitches and now I have to work out a rhythm for them...." That's one way to do it. But it's possible, from our orchestrational point of view, to do it the other way: in which you conceive the orchestral fabric and the orchestral events and you know they're going to work. They're so delicious in their own right. You can string together a certain number of those, given you're a good composer in the first place, and it can be very exciting.

JA So there is a multi-dimensional approach to orchestration. There is the short-score method, in which the piece is sketched from start to finish as best it can be on four staves and later transferred to orchestra.

LB. Piano reduction.

JA And then there's the graphical method where we go through and plot things out, as they occur over time, verbally, descriptively in terms of range and composite sounds. Each of these methods we can use at any particular time during the course of a piece of music for each produces its own result.

LB Any piece that we write, whether it's for orchestra or for one instrument, that first sound one hears has to be fascinating! It has to grab us as listeners and make us really *quite* interested in what's going to follow. I once had a student who was having problems coming up with something. He was in a block. He couldn't get something started, didn't know how to get started. So I said, "Try G#!" You take G# and you have to make it an event that is fascinating. Whether you're doing it for piano solo or for full orchestra, it can be done; and once you've done that, you have a start on your piece. You need other things to follow, but you have convinced your audience.

JA That brings to mind John Corigliano's Symphony and how he starts around the pitch A, shapes "A" timbrally, and the piece takes flight from there.

LB Sure. Xenakis has a piece, I forget its title. What is it? "Pithiprakta," something like this. It begins on G. All the strings are on the G. They can all play it, of course. It begins in unison, then fans out, via glissandi, to a chord and progresses similarly using just the unison, glissandi and chords in different dispersion. And it's fascinating to see how a unison note has become other things as it unfolds. This is, in a way, similar to what you've just mentioned in John Corigliano's work. Many a piece has begun with just one note, and not just contemporary music. You begin with one note, make it potent, and it can go ahead.

JA Now, can we consider the issue of color? I've been giving this quite some thought. Context really does determine what is colorful. For instance, a muted trumpet is usually considered colorful. But within the context of an arsenal of muted brass, it is not so. In that case, a solo clarinet would be colorful. In addition to range and all the other things we have to regard, do you keep in mind the various waveshapes and overtone series of the different instruments when you're featuring them as a solo, prominent line?

LB No, I don't think of waveshape at all, I'm too ignorant of it all to have any scientific basis there. I began as an arranger. I began by learning all the instruments in my undergraduate work in school. I played and I did a lot of arranging in military bands and for orchestras. So I began from the instruments out, and for me, each instrument has its personality. In fact, I could describe, almost, the kind of guy (*with Aikman*) "who plays the instrument." (*both chuckle*) I know the personalities of oboe players as opposed to flutists and bassoonists. I know how trombone players, since I used to be one, are different from trumpet players, and certainly, are different from horn players. And I have a visual image, inaccurate of course, of what these guys are, and how they look, and how they play, and the enthusiasms they have for new music, and for old music, and so on. I know that second violinists are very different from first violinists. Second violinists don't always want to be there. First violinists do want to be there. But you write a different kind of part for a second violin section, or individual, than you do for the first violins. And this is fundamental, for me. Absolutely fundamental!

JA The psychology of the performer in addition to the timbre of the instrument...

LB The psychology of the performer, his enthusiasm for the orchestra, his sense of being a soloist or not, the kinds of sounds, of course, that you get from his personality. So then, beyond that, you have the color of the instruments. How many types of sounds can you get out of an instrument? Can you mute them? If so, what kinds of mutes? What do they sound like when they're playing long notes as opposed to short notes, runs as opposed to zigzag lines, quiet in the low area as opposed to loud in the low area, etc.

JA Crescendi...

LB Yes! Exactly! Do they make a good crescendo or does it end up a dud? You can't put much of a crescendo on a low flute, for instance, if it's in an orchestra. If it's a solo in an orchestra, then you *can* do it. But all of these things are fundamental to writing, and a person who is trying to write for orchestra who doesn't know any of these things is going to probably do, at best, a C+ job.

(*with particular wit*) It's hard to ruin an orchestra, actually. It used to be said that you could do anything you want, as long as you have four horns playing a chord. I'm not sure this is true, but it tends to cover a multitude of sins. You've hung the piece together by that glue in the middle.

JA Michael Schelle told me that it was Richard Strauss who said, speaking of sins, that the horn is the prostitute of the orchestra because it goes so well with anybody!
(*both laugh*)

LB Well, I think all of these things excite us as composers and we just love the fact that these instruments sound the way they do and can be made into such *lovely* sounds.

JA Absolutely. So it is much more than abstracting melodic, harmonic and rhythmic roles, just considering the range and color of instruments. You have to consider the personality of the performer, the sections, and the impact, *the effect*, at any given point in your composition.

LB Early in my years at Michigan, I taught orchestration. I had the beginning orchestration class, and I realized that I did a wretched job, just wretched. For what I ended up doing was teaching hack arranging: the first violins are doubled an octave below by the second violins; the violas simply go back and forth to common chord tones; the cellos and basses are all in octaves. I mean, it's just ghastly. If you're doing a hack job in the first place and have to do it fast, it's ok. But this is actually very poor orchestration. I misled, I believe, a lot of young people. I hope they've forgiven me by now. (*Aikman laughs*) A lot of orchestration texts used to suggest such things. But a hack job is a curse of this business.

JA Speaking of early years, I know you studied with Honegger. His orchestration, for instance, in the middle movement of his Third Symphony, beautifully dovetails orchestral sections and mixed instrumental combinations effortlessly yielding such a long line to the entire piece. Brilliant is his use of the timpani as a fable ending to each of the movements of his Fifth Symphony. Did he have a profound effect on you in terms of your orchestration?

LB Yes. I worked with him in 1950-51. That was a long time back and he was ill. He had heart trouble and had another major heart attack during the year while I was there, so we missed a lot of his wisdom. But he was a wonderful man. He had just written and published that wonderful volume, "Je Suis Compositeur."¹ It's very despondent, in a

¹ Editions du Conquistador, Paris, 1951.

way, very sour grapes about the place of contemporary music in our society. And he was not too charitable about conductors who refuse to perform new works and rely only on the past. He grew up as a violinist. He was a conductor, and he thought, always, from the orchestra out. He would have certain plans in advance, his fifth symphony, “Di tre re,” for instance, the three D’s. And then, he was working on another one, in which across the top of his page, he had made a great big wedge beginning with forte, and then a huge crescendo. And that’s the plan! Of course, you have to save something at the beginning forte, so that you can make these crescendos all the way. I thought this was a wonderful way to plan a piece: just the dramatic thrust of it, instead of, necessarily, the pitches that start it. Obviously, he found plenty of pitches and he used all of those things. But his main idea was that thrust, which would raise his audiences out of their seats by the time that thing was finished. I was very impressed with this kind of planning of a work, and I think it has affected me over the good many years. It helped me in looking at, for instance, “The Rite of Spring,” in which every section is a crescendo section all the way through. You realize that a crescendo will, again, cover a multitude of sins if you wish. But a thrust like that is *very* powerful, and I think that a lot of composers have discovered it, and if they haven’t.... they won’t go very far.

JA They will now.
(both laugh)

LB I valued very much his (Honegger’s) emphasis on structure, as he perceived structure in a different way than we might have thought of it in the past.

JA Everyone talks of his polytonality. But the way he orchestrated polytonality made it singular! Say, at the beginning of the Fifth Symphony, where he has major chords alternating back and forth on the outer edges. That’s what it boils down to anyway. But the way it’s scored is so incredibly rich, and it sounds as one.

LB If you want to look at a piece for orchestration, look at, “Pacific 231.”

JA There it is!

LB Here you have something where you’re imitating a railroad train, a railroad steam engine. How do you do this with an orchestra? *There* is a lesson in orchestration, and it’s a marvelous piece.

JA A lesson in composition as well. You can just sense the orchestral engine churning and gaining momentum and motion.

LB Absolutely! That’s good for us.

JA King David (*Le Roi David*) is one of my favorite Honegger works.

LB And the oratorio, *Jeanne d’Arc au Bucher* (Joan of Arc at the Stake), is very effective. We saw it beautifully staged in Paris and it’s just marvelous. The counterpoint

of events with this choir of children singing here, these soloists there, this orchestra down here, these priests and townspeople over here... I mean the presentation of events in the work, the counterpoint of events, is superb! That's orchestration, in a way.

JA It is. It *is* the counterpoint of events in these works that makes them so compelling! He was thinking spatially.

LB Event against event, sound against sound, color against color, dramatic things against less dramatic things, etc. That *is* orchestration!

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JA I sense a distant role of jazz in your work. I suggest this hesitantly but I sense a very strong, American sound, unique in its vibrancy. There's an improvisatory character too about your music that seems effortless.

LB Our concept of jazz is, at least, a generation apart, if not more, since I'm two or three generations older than you. (*both laugh*) So, my jazz was in the forties. I was drafted into the army during World War II and I served almost four years in an army band. I played jazz a lot. I did jazz arranging. I had done some before. It's a shock when you're trained classically, of course, to realize how jazz musicians *cheat* on rhythm. I mean, you have to learn how to cheat, and after you learn how to cheat, you're all right. But in my first job, I had trouble. I was on the second trombone part filling in for somebody. But by the end of the night, I caught on how to do this.

JA It's notational shorthand, really. Instead of writing out the triplets, jazz rhythms are usually just written out "square" (as eighth notes).

LB Right, right! And I think that sense of freedom within rhythms; freedom from quite specific, literal precision was interesting to me.

I did a lot of jazz arranging, I did a lot of jazz playing. In my army band, I was Tommy Dorsey. I played all the Tommy Dorsey solos and the theme song many, many, many, many, many times. So, I was into that. Actually, by the time I was discharged from the Army, thank goodness, I'd pretty much burned the jazz out of myself. I really had just over done it. But it sneaks back in, you're right.

My *Concerto Lyrico* for Trombone and Orchestra is actually an homage to Tommy Dorsey. It doesn't quote but it obviously is built on "I'm Getting Sentimental Over You," his theme song. It's with a trombonist who has a slide vibrato and it's in the key of "D," as his theme song was. It goes up to C#, and so on. Also, occasionally, I will have a lick within common time where accented, dotted quarter notes overlap with the regular, four-beat measure, which is very much jazz.

Maybe that's too historical for anyone alive now to enjoy.

JA Are you kidding?

LB In those days, you had blues of 12 bars or you had a piece of 32 measures which could be cut into half, 16 + 16, or could be cut into 8 + 8, now a bridge of 8, and a return to the 8 from the beginning. So, you had those three options, let's say. There was a lot of wonderful music composed at that time. The blues really became nationally known and much appreciated, as did improvisation, and proper attention to our history of African American music took place.

JA When I first arrived at the University of Michigan as a Fellow, I was assigned the former office of the Pulitzer Prize winning composer, Ross Lee Finney. I know he was your teacher and that you were friends as well as colleagues. Could you share a bit of his impact on your music and career?

LB Well, he was a wonderful man. As you said, I was very fond of him. He was a substitute father to me, a musical father, and he was always very frank with me, very supportive and very encouraging. That was except for the first lesson! (*Aikman laughs*) I had had a piece played by the Minnesota Orchestra. I had been up to Minneapolis for a composer's symposium where they read through scads of pieces, buckets of them, for three or four days. Then, they chose six or seven of them to do on their final concert and my piece was on that. They did quite well and I had a tape that I brought back to my first lesson with Ross. He wanted to hear it. So, he heard it, and he tore me apart. (*Aikman laughs again*) I mean, he pointed out things that were not all that great. He was absolutely right, of course, but a young composer's sensitivities are very, very delicate to say the least.

JA Exactly.

LB And to be torn to shreds on first exposure to the master is very hard going. I was furious, absolutely furious. And, of course, for my next lesson a week later, I brought in some newly composed music that I played for him. He replied, "Well, that's not bad! You're really getting going all right!" Subsequently, things went well.

JA First impressions are not always correct.

LB Well, he called that process "the shock treatment," and he pulled that on practically everybody else who ever worked with him, I found out. I'm not sure that is a good teaching method. I would disagree with him on that. But he had a perceptive quality, and his sense of how to move ahead yet retain things from the past, the verities of the past, was, I think, unique. He was tremendously supportive, nominating me for this and that, and I did well because of him. He had been a pupil of Nadia Boulanger, and he suggested that I apply for a Fulbright and go over there and study with her, and I did. I got it, went over there, it turned out to be nice, and one thing leads to another...

In the last part of his life, in Ann Arbor when his kids were away, Anita and I were able to be of some help to him. Wonderful man.

JA Yes he was...

Nadia Boulanger! How was your experience there? It seems the most notable of American composers worked with her.

LB That is very true, I mean the list is legion.

JA It's incredible.

LB Practically everybody under the sun, including Ross Lee. We all know that Aaron Copland was over there, so was Walter Piston. The list is enormous. I was over there in the fall of 1950. After I had heard that I had won the Fulbright, I had corresponded with her and had asked her if she would accept me as a pupil. This was the second year that Fulbrights were given to Paris, and I got a nice letter back from her saying that she would accept me. She wished me well.

When we got over there, the Fulbright Commission would not let me study with her because she did not officially teach composition. She taught Piano Accompaniment which was a misnomer if you've ever heard one. It was *total* musicianship at the piano! I am not the world's best pianist, so I was gun shy about being put into a piano class and asked to do everything under the sun with my rather rudimentary skill at the piano.

So, I asked her if she would take me as a private student, instead of as a pianist, while my wife Anita took her piano course. Of course, Anita improvises, and she can play anything and did fine in Nadia's class.

I worked with her primarily because, as I mentioned earlier, shortly after we arrived in Paris, Arthur Honegger became ill and I was suddenly without him. So I worked with her. When he came back, I worked with both of them until the end of the term.

She was very perceptive, a *wonderful* musician, an *incredible* musician. That, I think was her value. She could be equally valuable to a pianist, a percussionist, a singer, anyone else, a conductor...

She represented the history of music as far as I was concerned. You name the piece; she could sit down and play it for you. I was writing a string quartet, thought it was going pretty well and I played it for her. She gave me some pointers about it and she played, as an example, a Mozart quartet. It just knocked me out. The way she played it was so beautiful. You know, it's very humbling to be compared to Mozart. She was able and was very demanding of people.

In a way, Ross Lee Finney's teaching style was parallel to hers. She would put her finger on, say, this note. "This F# doesn't sound fresh like it should because it's turning the way of your harmony into something else. This has to be an important note. But you've used it over here, (*pointing to the left page*) which kills its value over here, (*pointing to the right page*). Now, if you manage to dilute the potency or duration of the note when it first appears, then this time when you elongate it or do something else to flag it, then it will make the piece turn and do the things you want it to do." That was, of course, valuable.

That was what Ross would also have said to me. So, it was not new. Whereas the Honneger approach, which I just mentioned a while ago, *was* new and *ultimately* more valuable.

JA You mentioned harmony. With regard to harmony and its role in orchestration, how do you approach scoring musical lines which are not foreground, principal material?

LB That's a tough question, because, as you know, harmony as a major factor in music of seventy-five to one hundred years ago is *not* around to a great extent in this day and age unless we are referring to an earlier period. Or else it is as in Messiaen, for instance, where it becomes a color factor. You have a five- or six-note chord and it gradually progresses uphill and becomes celestial. It's color.

JA It's sonority.

LB It's not a functioning harmony as we teach and study harmony. So in that regard, harmony is a good question at this point. I find it fascinating.

JA It is one of those intuitive elements that come about during the course of your writing.

LB Well, you can't write counterpoint endlessly. I mean, sooner or later, unless you're careful, counterpoint becomes thin and then you need something that's the antidote. On occasion, I've written five-note chords. I like five-note chords because they're slightly cluster-ish. There's enough mystery in them, as opposed to three-note chords, that you can't nail it down on your first moment of hearing it. I've done harmonic progressions in which you choose five notes by ear. You like them because they sound great.

JA Exactly.

LB And now you progress them by smooth progression to another 5-note chord, which has, of course, five different notes than those of the first chord. You've now used up ten notes. There are two left over. You fold them over into the third chord. You choose three from the first chord and mix them in, always rotating as such with subsequent chords. If your ear is always telling you what to do, not your brain but your ear, you can do this to good effect. That would be a progression that could be placed

against a line that could be way up high, or two lines way up high, or plunk, plunk, plunk, plunk underneath, or just some color percussion against it. This could be all in muted brass, five trumpets, let's say, with straight mutes or harmon mutes, and so on. Now you color it up any way you wish. These could be pizzicato notes in the strings against some drone that is present up above, and so on. Now your orchestration art comes in to make music out of this original harmonic progression. It was just a harmonic progression, but now it's going to be a lot better once you decide what to do with it!

Also, you have to decide whether it's going to stay in the double octave above middle "C." Does it go, actually, an octave above that, or a fifth above that? Is it actually down two octaves below middle "C" where it's just kind of a grubby, miserable sound under many situations, but can be fantastic if you have it in five muted cellos, let's say. So, again, your orchestration can call it into being in dozens of different ways to make it interesting.

JA Absolutely, and all of the details that go into that are endless and a good orchestrator takes great care with all the details.

LB Right! Apparently, Walter Piston said, when he was teaching orchestration, that every note has to have not only a pitch, but also some indication as to how it is to be played. It needs an accent of this kind, it needs a tenuto, it needs a dot, it may need a crescendo mark, a diminuendo mark, and so on. It's not a bad bit of advice. The general idea is, how is this note to be played? Where does it go? How is it attacked? Good advice.

JA That brings us to attacks of pitches in your music. I know in *Colors and Contours* (for Symphonic Band) and also in your *Variations for Orchestra*, within any contrapuntal section, there will be a multi-layered, initial attack to prominent musical lines. In addition to, say, a main string line that is to be played, there will be an additional initial attack. Perhaps one note on the piano, or another note on the harp or on the celeste. And each new instrumental entrance has its initial pitch brought out by one of these: harp, celeste, piano or another member of the percussion family. What this does, of course, is to draw our ear toward that entrance in a way that it wouldn't be drawn by the string lines alone. It is similar to the way we would play the subject on a piano if we were playing a Bach fugue. I notice this happens very often in your scoring and leads a layered approach to each single line. We hear the fading sound of the first pitch followed by the line itself developing from that.

LB That's very true. In Messiaen and in Boulez, for instance, you can have a whole grade of dynamics, of articulations. If you have a dozen pitches, you have a dozen different articulations, different dynamic levels, and so on. (*Aikman laughs*) That, of course, goes overboard... but is not a bad idea.

Also, I was involved in the early days of electronic music, as it were, in tape studios. The problem with electronic music then was that the sound itself becomes boring so quickly. Within a second or so, you need another sound to overcome the fact that your

initial sound has flat-lined. If you just have a sine tone of some sort and turn it on: “BAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!!” It’s miserable! But if, at 15 ips, you cut a quarter-inch of heavily saturated, brilliant texture and stick it on the start of that sine tone, then you have something. It becomes interesting for a fraction of a second, at least, at the start. If you now turn up the gain and create a crescendo, then cut that off into silence or do something else, you can cover up for the fact that the sound itself is fundamentally uninteresting!

So you’re camouflaging the problem of tedium, which is what I think composing is in a way, camouflaging tedium. You have to do something. It’s like talking, as well. You just can’t say the same word over and over and over and over and over and over. It has to progress so that there is rhyme and reason to what you are doing. I think we can do that in electronic music and my example was with that saturated quarter-inch at the start, it made the sound interesting from the beginning. But that doesn’t guarantee that it’s interesting for very long, but for while, it’s interesting.

That led me to the idea of making orchestral sounds interesting. If you have a sustained, quiet note in the first violin section (the low G) and at the same time there’s a pizzicato in the cellos and the violas on the same note, maybe loud, whereas the violin note is muted, *you’ve made that event essentially more interesting.*

JA Absolutely, then there are layers to the activity. The more we have to process, the more interesting sounds are, in essence.

LB Well, in speech, after all, every word has an initial kind of sound. It has a following kind of sound and it has a closing kind of sound. That’s what contributes to meaning when you say a word. The word, “word,” for instance, has a certain type of sound as it begins. It has the “r” sound as it continues and that “duh” on the end. So there is a shape to that small event which is meaningful for us. I think, therefore by analogy, the same thing happens in music, *can* happen in music, *should* happen in music.

JA Speaking of meaningful events, I love the use of mobiles in your orchestrations. I mean, these sound collections and sonorities are so beautiful that you arrive at, for instance, in *Colors and Contours* and also in *Echoes From An Invisible World* (for orchestra). These are never used as a gimmick or as an effect, but as a natural outgrowth of the music at hand. The mobiles seamlessly become inevitable within the music that precedes and that which follows. Can you mention a little bit about that?

LB This is a set, a certain amount of notes, which are repeatable, endlessly repeatable, or repeatable for a while anyway. They’re chosen, of course, because I like the sound of them. They will decay quickly as soon as we catch on to the fact that this is a wheel going on. So, we need to disguise the fact or to withdraw the interest of the listener to something else. In *Echoes From An Invisible World*, for instance and some other pieces, there’s a point at which this type of texture emerges. It’s usually following a climactic section where this use of mobiles is sort of a spin-off, a memory if you wish. A line starts up. Very quickly the conductor cues another one, cues another one, cues another

one. *Conductors love this, by the way.* And finally, you can go out into 10 or 15 different entrances. Gradually, the earlier ones disappear, maybe, or in another piece of mine, they all are there until at some point, the conductor gives another signal and they all gradually descend in their own way and fizzle out. This can end up at nothing or at a low pitch, which just sits there. This can be, I think, a fascinating thing. I've done it many times. Usually, I do it differently each time. I think it's a different kind of music than orchestras are used to playing. And it certainly is different from the kind of music orchestral audiences are used to hearing.

The beauty of this is that it is simple. You don't even have to rehearse it. It just is automatic. The players in the orchestra love it. It's a gift, a gift in a way.

JA I consider it a current day Alberti bass configuration. (*both laugh*)

Some scoring issues... About a third of the way through *From A Source Evolving*, the full orchestra is building and building and building to a climactic section featuring a held chord. After this loud held chord comes an echo in the strings, similar to what we spoke of earlier. This is a beautiful, beautiful moment where the strings are held long enough so that we perceive it as an echo. But it also is an elision to that which follows in the string line itself (which grows from this echo). I find these transitions truly fascinating in your music.

LB Well, I think there is the idea of reverb! Reverb is a wonderful idea. We never thought about reverberation hardly at all until electronic music came along. We know that it's an element in concert halls which everybody cherishes. But the idea of sustaining it a little longer than can be heard in a hall, I think, is a wonderful idea.

JA It is a wonderful idea.

LB Say you have a climactic crescendo, which has been working up toward its full head of steam for a long time. It happens and then is cut off. Remaining behind that, pianissimo, is this string chord that is divided into all the notes of the climax. It is such a lovely sound. This can go on for some time, but usually, you have to do something against it in order to make it sustainable.

The concept of reverb is behind this idea of a loud attack followed by a quiet follow-through of any instrument or group of instruments... and I like that!

JA It later happens in *From A Source Evolving* where the string section itself is fanning out, building in intensity to a climactic sonority which is echoed by articulations of the harp as reverb.

LB This actually comes from orchestration. Orchestration is *the source* of these things. It's the goodies that you can do with an orchestra. *It's astounding!!!* I think that if a person imagines himself as the conductor, you aren't conducting but you just say, "All right, you guys back here, you do this while these people over here do this. Then

we'll cut you off and leave them here. And now we're going to bring these people in," and so on. I mean, that's what we're doing as composers writing for orchestra. And I think that's the way Richard Strauss must have thought of it because he was a wonderful conductor. He did that kind of thing in his pieces, as did Honegger as you mentioned.

JA Well, we have to wind down. On behalf of everyone who will read this, thank you, Leslie, for your extraordinary insight, contagious enthusiasm and timeless wisdom.

LB Thank *you!*