

Ben Kraus wrote: 16 October 1997... from Ben Kraus

Ben Kraus: Steve... Thank you for agreeing to answer these questions for me. I know it may seem like a lot of stuff and maybe some of the questions are a little strange but like they say, "The only stupid question is the one that isn't asked." If you'd like, I'll send you a copy of the paper once it's all done and you can tell me what you think of it and make any corrections if I misquote you or say something wrong about you and your music.

Steve: I think that would be helpful, since many times, even an italic on a word will change its intended meaning.

Ben Kraus: I was thinking that if you liked it well enough you could have it posted on the STORMPage where other people could read it and learn more about you. I plan on posting it on my webpage when I'm done with it. Anyway, here are the rest of the questions. Also, please elaborate on your answers as much as you can since I won't be able to ask for clarification on something I might not understand.

In something you wrote, you said something about 3:33pm and related it to a "promise and a prayer" you made on a bridge in Boston. Can I ask what that was?

Steve: This is a long and detailed answer. Let me only say this. At 3:33pm, 20 years ago, I made a promise to myself. I would write a symphony in 3 years and be able to play on all of the instruments at a grade 6 level. Since that time, I have been amidst a preponderance of 33's and 333's, all of which, through sheer probability and statistics escape any hope of calling the recurrences a "coincidence".

Ben Kraus: Also, Dr. Creasap told me that the number 333 has been a recurring number in your life and she told me about the first time she met you at the airport and the record #33 that was in her back seat. What is that all about?

Steve: Here is my answer, which should be quoted. It is not relevant to the Music I pen that people become aware in any great detail about this somewhat strange phenomenon of 33's and 333's, a mathematical oddity which is forever elaborated on in my personal journals. It is, however, interesting to note that as part of the infrastructure in my compositions, there is always something meaningful about measure 33 as it goes to measure 34. The number 34 is the 9th number in the Fibonacci series... (the 3rd - 3rd) and has become symbolic for the number of rebirth. Also, at 3:33 in real time, which is a far greater indication of Conducting Time than the somewhat inaccurate Tempo markings directors often embrace, there is something significant happening. An element of Music is its ability to contain within itself a coded message. There are MANY coded messages in Steve Music.

Ben Kraus: What kind of ensembles are your favorite to write for?

Steve: Whatever I am writing for at the time. Music is too vast to lock into one kind of ensemble. Each time I write, I think of ALL the possibilities for colour. For this reason, the orchestra is where I will always begin. No matter what I write for, I try to get as close to the orchestra as possible.

Ben Kraus: What is meant by "Percussion in Motion"?

Steve: **WINDS and PERCUSSION in MOTION** is Music which I have written specifically for the field... “marching band”, in other words... but the **WORDS** are the issue. I am trying to change our approach to “marching band”. We must first begin with the names we ascribe to what we do. With WPIM, it is my intention to compose works which, while still entertaining a half-time-like crowd, have Musical integrity. As Music Educators, we need to be VERY careful about what we are actively and passively teaching our students with each and every action, choice and lack of choice we make.

Ben Kraus: How many pieces have you now written and/or arranged and are you currently working on anything?

Steve: 843 pieces... (now 880)... My next piece will be **WAIT of the WORLD**, a 24-minute piece commissioned by the Marine Band of the Royal Netherlands Navy. This will be the second to last piece I write in the **STORMWORKS**. I may call **WAIT of the WORLD** a symphony... but I’m still not sure yet. I do not believe that works for band should be called “symphonies”. I think this is a product of my conservatory training. If I do an orchestral version, then yes, IT will become Symphony #3.

Ben Kraus: Of all the pieces of music you’ve written, which is your favorite and why?

Steve: I just got back from Western Michigan State University. I conducted **DAVID, ESCAPE FROM PLATO’S CAVE** and **ERICH!** When I conducted **DAVID**, there was something so special in the air. Tears and joy merged as people went wild in appreciation. But, so it was with **ESCAPE** and so it was with **ERICH!** My favorite piece is the one that’s happening! ALL of the “**STORM**” works have the potential to uplift and excite and infuse Hope. The degree to which that is achieved is solely a function of the CONDUCTOR and the willingness of the Musicians to embrace the conductor’s vision and freely give of themselves.

Ben Kraus: In my first e-mail to you I asked what would you like the world to know about you and you said that everything there is to know and everything you want people to know is “in the music,” so would you consider *Stormworks* your single most defining work or do you feel that you have a defining work?

Steve: Do you mean **THE Stormworks**?... or the piece, **STORMWORKS**. Each work is connected. All are one work. All of the pieces join to each other, like pieces of a puzzle. There is a larger message contained in each of the smaller messages. That’s why the CD’s are Chapter One, Two and Three. It’s all one story, you see.

Ben Kraus: I know you’ve done lots of movie and TV scores, and many of them seem to be for ABC television. Were you under contract with them or did you just happen to be in the right place at the right times?

Steve: I wrote Music which was used arbitrarily. This was not scoring work, but rather general cue writing that was then placed in a library and applied to various scenes or advertisements based on the tastes of film editors. I have simply had Music appear on all of those shows or in ads about those shows. I know this because of ASCAP’s tracking of the cues.

Ben Kraus: What kinds of things did you do for TV and for companies such as Sega and Super Nintendo and such?

Steve: Much! IBM Think Pad Demo, and other computer demos, Rise of the Robots, Super Battle Tank II, Penn and Teller, Home Improvement, Jeopardy... a bunch.

Ben Kraus: Do you have trouble keeping up with commissions for pieces? Your webpage says you have commissions to last you through the next few years.

Steve: I have composed 9 pieces since 1 January... while guest conducting and tending to a great multitude of things that years as a band director has given me the organizational skills to handle. In order to have trouble keeping up with commissions, I would need to be faced with approximately 48 commissions per year. Currently, it runs about 12-16 commissions per year. Of course, I do not advertise beyond word-of-mouth yet. I am preparing for a **STORMWORKS** explosion in the not-too-distant future!

Ben Kraus: I've noticed that every time you sign off on an article or piece of correspondence you put "Godspeed," and you always put IGNA on your music. Does that stand for something like what I believe Handel always put at the bottom of his music that meant something like "IGNA"?

Steve: Yes, I am paying homage to Handel and to Bach and to those who, much greater than I could ever be, were humbled by that which they praised in their Music. This, however, is PERSONAL. I do not want people to be told about IGNA. If they can figure it out for themselves... as you have... great. No preaching. No anything. It's there for ME... not for any other reason.

Ben Kraus: How would you describe yourself?

Steve: I am a 12 year old boy in the body of a man.

Ben Kraus: What do you consider your greatest strengths and weaknesses in life? in music?

Steve: I am DAVID. I am Howard Roark. I am not stoppable. I will not surrender. My faith has been tested and proved and it will endure. I am stubborn and I am not afraid to stand in UTTER, ABSOLUTE DEFIANCE against the Goliaths in our world... the Political Goliaths, the Publishing Goliaths, the Hollywood Goliaths, the Composition Frauds, the contest judges. I am the small child who says... The EMPEROR is NAKED! I am not afraid to tell the Truth. My weaknesses? Those I openly confess in the Music. Just listen.

Ben Kraus: What would you most like to be remembered for?

Steve: Dr. Scagnoli ("Uncle Giuseppe"), for instance, wants to be remembered for being a "Giving" person. When someone has reached the depths of despair... When they are sure they cannot lift themselves up and carry on... When they are certain they are condemned to a life of aloneness, and hurt, and suffering... it is **THEN** that I hope they will find in Music I have composed... *a friend*.

Ben Kraus: What has been your greatest or most memorable moment in music?

Steve: There are MANY... and this is a great opportunity to share some pretty intense stories. Instead, I will say this. Conducting DAVID with the Western Michigan State Symphonic Band 2 days ago was... well, there are no words. It was truly a MUSICAL experience. I wish the whole world could have been there to partake in it! If it were possible for the WHOLE WORLD to have felt what WE all felt... then,

well, we wouldn't need millenniums to inspire us! Maybe I'm just too romantic.

Ben Kraus: I know you do some traveling to perform your works but do you often do guest conducting at high schools and such?

Steve: Yes, all the time!

Ben Kraus: What do you see as your ultimate goal in music, composition, and life?

Steve: I will not make my "living" as a composer, but rather my "dying". I will spend my Life in the cause of sharing Music... and when I have fully exhausted myself and when I have given the last drop of all that there is within me to give, then I will earn my passing on.

Ben Kraus: What do you consider your greatest achievement so far? In life and in music.

Steve: I am still alive. I have made it ALL THE WAY to today! I am still going. I can still draw the next breath and I am ever so grateful.

Ben Kraus: If you could change anything about your life, what would it be?

Steve: I would be talented. But as it goes, it is better that I am not. You see, it is much better that the Music comes from sheer force of Will and Love than that it should come from some kind of "genius".

Ben Kraus: Do you think that you'll ever retire from being a composer or do you feel that this is your life's calling, that you'll compose until you simply can't anymore?

Steve: Well... you've already got the answer to that one.

Thanks and Godspeed!

Steve

16 October 1997... from Ben Kraus

Hello again! It has been a little while but as I promised, here is a copy of my Music History paper on you. Write me back if you get the chance and let me know what you think. It was a real pleasure doing the research and talking to you and learning more about your music. I am looking forward to performing **The Fountainhead** for our Concert Band Clinic this spring here at Morehead State. It should be very exciting. Well anyway, I hope you enjoy reading my paper and let me know what you think. Godspeed! Ben Kraus, Tuba, Morehead State University, *STORMCadet*

Stephen Melillo, Composer

A storm is an event in nature that many people take for granted. Many people enjoy the rain, the darkening clouds, and the lightning that a storm brings and yet others are frightened by it all. Storms bring life and energy to nature and supply much of what is needed for growth. The storm is also much more than that. To some, it is a metaphor for their own lives. It represents more than just the rains that fall and the darkened clouds that blow in from the west. It symbolizes the whirlwind of people, cultures, events, and ideas that are all around us that we sometimes ignore, that we simply don't realize are out there and that we often don't think of to look for. That is the basic philosophy and driving force behind the work of a certain man. That man is Stephen Melillo, Composer.

Stephen Leonard Melillo was born on 23 December 1957 to Bruce and Carmel Melillo. He grew up in Port Chester, New York and attended Greenwich High School in Connecticut. When asked what he would have told someone he wanted to be while growing up, he replied, "A priest," (Melillo, Int.). Even in his first year of college at the University of Connecticut, he started working toward a degree as a physics major but says that he kept asking people about how to write music. In his sophomore year of college, he finally realized that music was really what he wanted to pursue and went on to graduate on the Dean's List with Honors from the Boston Conservatory of Music (Fritzinger, bio.html). He then went on to receive his Master's degree from Columbia University.

Stephen Melillo started out his musical career on the trumpet. However, when he started on the road to completing his musical degree he decided that he should learn to play all the instruments. To help accomplish this goal, he bought one of each instrument and spent much of his time taking lessons to learn to play them all. He also pursued other ways to be a better teacher once he got his first job working with students. In the first edition of his newsletter called the *STORMWatch*, he stated, "I wrote journal after poem after story... and then the words ran out. Only Music could speak the myriad things. I would say, 'If pictures speak a thousand words, then Music must speak a thousand pictures'" (*STORMWatch #1*). With that as his battle cry, Melillo started on a long journey that would take him across the country and abroad. He had unknowingly found his life's calling.

He began composing a piece that would be within the reach of his students. Only it did not stop there. Melillo has gone on to write and arrange over 840 (now 880) musical works for a variety of ensembles and in many different genres. His creative works are not just limited to the band and orchestral music for which he is best known. He has also written texts and designed educational aids, written children's books, (Fritzinger, bio.html), cable and industrial projects, and done commercial soundtracks (Fritzinger, scores.html).

Over the course of his career as a composer, Melillo has used the storm motif on which to base his philosophy. His theme is: "Give to the World by Storm." This was the result of an unplanned event involving the name under which he now self-publishes. A student made a comment to him about his signature at the bottom of all the parts. A student suggested that he use "Signature Sound" as the name under which his works would be published. Instead of just signing them "Sincerely, Stephen Melillo", he decided to start using the name suggested. However, a problem arose when he tried to register his works under that name. The people at ASCAP called him at the time when he was working on the singular piece known as Stormworks. He discovered that the name "Signature Sound" was already in use. Melillo made the decision to use the name of the piece in front of him. *STORMWorks* was born as

the unifying force by which all of his works would come to be known (*STORMWatch #1*).

Melillo's first published piece for band, **The Triumphant** introduced a melodic motive that can be found in almost all of his subsequent works. The "Triumphant motive" can be described, for example, in the key of C major as c' f' g' f' c". Another device he uses frequently in his music is what he terms the "*STORMChord*." In functional harmony, it is made up of a **I** chord that moves to a Phrygian **V** which is the opening chord in *Stormworks*. The Fibonacci series, as well, is evident in his works in a number of ways. In much of his music, bar 34, for example, is where important features can be found. In addition, Melillo has put his name on an innovative variation of a crescendo. The "Mel Swell" can be said to be a Fibonacci based increase in volume. It is not achieved by growing evenly like a normal crescendo but by growing bigger and bigger as it progresses. Even the *STORMWorks* logo is proportioned in the Fibonacci series. Melillo also uses some other sort of musical code in many of his pieces. This is especially evident in the piece **DNA & the DiNO**. He also "strive[s] for a continuous relationship to all other works as if ONE totally interrelated work were being composed one *STORMWork*" (*STORMWatch #1*). Another style characteristic found in his three movement works is that the metaphor of the storm pervades even his structural techniques.

Most of Melillo's three movement works, specifically *Stormworks*, can be compared to three stages of an inescapable storm. The three sections might be interpreted as: (1) the leading edge of the storm, (2) the eye of the storm, and (3) the clarity of mind that comes with charging through the storm and seeking the sun through the clouds once again. The first movement, "Timestorm — A Dance of the Wu Li Master," grabs the attention of the audience. It paints the picture of the encroaching dark clouds by using musical sounds as the palette, on the canvas that is the imagination of the listener. The movement urges the imagination to be engulfed in the storm. The stage is then set for the second movement, "Before the Storm...", which is described as "the 'eye' of the *Stormworks* trilogy." This movement is marked to be played "Slow, with careful, Intrepid Sensitivity" (*Stormworks... Chapter One*). The third movement, "Into the Storm!", represents the struggle between the darkness that surrounds and the light that is just out of reach until the very end.

This musical composition was an important transitional piece for Melillo, even though it was not conceived to be the defining term for all of his works before and since. Melillo's musical works have been composed for many different types of ensembles. Most of which is for concert band. He began writing this kind of music because he wanted to give his students "something special, unique, and challenging within reach!" (*STORMWatch #1*). That goal has certainly been accomplished in the form of *Stormworks*.

Although his band works make up the lesser part of Melillo's contributions to music, he has also given of himself in the form of compositions for a list of other ensembles. Some of his compositions for other ensembles include **Way of the Warrior** for what he calls *Winds & Percussion in Motion*; **Top Secret!** for show choir; and **Jurassic Blues** for jazz band. Orchestra music is also included in the list of works available as **Always the Return**. Currently, Melillo has completed two symphonies for a professional orchestra with the third already commissioned and yet to be fulfilled.

As for other areas in the realm of musical accomplishment, Melillo has done a great deal of work in film and television. In fact, he has been nominated for an Academy Award in the Best Live Action Short category for his work on **12:01 PM** and won an Emmy Nomination for the PBS Teledrama: **Actress**

Works. He has also had music appear on several ABC Television shows or in ads for shows including Home Improvement, General Hospital, 20/20, the American Music Awards and Sunday Night Movie. He has also had excerpts appear on NBC's Night Court and The Fresh Prince (Fritzinger, scores.htm). These were not scored works as such but were selected bits and pieces of works that may have only had the television lifespan of only a few seconds.

In addition to motion pictures and television appearances of his work, Melillo has completed musical projects for such companies as Super Nintendo, Sega, and IBM. These projects included an IBM Think Pad Demo, Super Battle Tank II, Penn and Teller and many others (Melillo, Apr. 14). He has also completed soundtracks for commercial organizations including the New York Nets, Yankees and Giants (Fritzinger, scores.htm).

Another extension of Melillo's obligation to educate comes in the form of four particular educational aids. The first of which are his *Function Chorales*. These aids (*available in text and CD-ROM versions*) are designed to "expand the musical foundation of [a] band program [by allowing] students to experience a beautiful world of musical colors through harmonic progressions designed to immediately open ears to tuning, balance, blend, and intonation," (Lisk). Melillo has also written a film-scoring text that was completed during the same time that he was working on 12:01 PM. That book was *Music To Picture*. He has also authored *MIDIMAST* which was sponsored by the Ford Foundation and allowed him to teach such complex subjects as science and math by way of musical composition (Fritzinger, bio.html).

One of his other educational endeavors has led him to the composition of *STORMQuest*. This work is made up of fifteen 3-4 minute pieces for "young" bands and above. The pieces within the greater work are "designed to be great learning tools while at the same time... being Music" (Fritzinger, SQuest.html). They are set to be released in the fall of this year.

While keeping busy with all of his commissioned works, which average around 12-16 a year, and other projects, Melillo still takes the time to work with high school bands, university band clinics, and even European premieres of his works. This obligation to give to the world by storm has taken him to literally hundreds of cities throughout both the United States and several European nations and allowed him to touch hundreds of thousands of people with his music.

In addition to his musical compositions and educational efforts, Melillo has currently written two books. His creativity is further evidenced in his first book, *Only For Now*. It is a fictional work for young-adults about a young boy. Although the book itself is written as a fictional work, it can also be considered semi-autobiographical (Creasap). His other book, *Nogard & Dragon*, is the first in a series of narrated children's books. He says that he writes books, poetry, and music to "be a good teacher" (Melillo, Int.). He believes that, in order to truly give to the world by storm, he can't deny his own creative ideas from becoming real. He is not concerned with whether or not his works are well received as long as he is true to himself and keeps it coming from the heart. This advice was given to him in a conversation with Dr. Joe Scagnoli during a meeting between them when Melillo asked him how he would like to be remembered. He told that he wants to be known as a "giving person" and Melillo then went on to write the piece *Giving* in his honor based on three notes he had Dr. Scagnoli pick out.

Writing from the heart is what makes his music so uniquely Melillo. It is for this reason that he person-

ally publishes and distributes his music. He has taken it upon himself to insure that his music is accessible, both to the students who ultimately perform the work and to those people who he has called *STORMDirectors* who believe in and support his cause. In his third edition of the *STORMWatch*, Melillo discusses the problems of distributing his music through an outside publisher. He makes several important points clear. A publisher who is in the business is in the business to make money. Therefore, publishing music that isn't as widely accepted, like Melillo's, is not a profitable strategy. This way of thinking is biased against the true nature of musical exploration and creativity. It causes certain music that may only be performed by a select few ensembles in the world to never have the chance at being published. This is a totally unacceptable concept to him.

Music in the 20th Century is another topic that Melillo is not afraid to voice his strong opinions about. His beliefs have brought him to compose the piece **David!** where he sees himself as "stand[ing] in UTTER, ABSOLUTE DEFIANCE against the Goliaths in our world... the Political Goliaths, the Publishing Goliaths, the Hollywood Goliaths, the Composition Frauds, the contest judges. I am the small child who says... The EMPEROR is NAKED! I am not afraid to tell the Truth"(Melillo, Apr. 14). It is also part of the reason for the piece **Erich!** which is an attempt to honor Erich Korngold for his contributions to the world of film music. "There's a prejudice that if it sounds good, there can't be an infrastructure. Einstein said that you can only recognize what you're looking for" (Melillo, Int.). Melillo also believes that a genius will never win a contest because he doesn't write the kind of music that the judges would want to hear. To stay true to the creative flow of ideas, the genius cannot give in to what someone else says is right. Those people who are too blind or too deaf to appreciate the emotions expressed in the music are, "completely and totally ignorant" (Melillo, Int.).

Melillo is never without inspiration. Much like Mozart was depicted in the film *Amadeus*, music is always going through his head. He is constantly surrounded by and filled with music. His thoughts are instantly translated into musical ideas. He is in many ways like Mozart. When he sits down to compose a piece, it is "straight from my head to the transposed parts on the score" (Melillo, Int.). But given that fact, he doesn't believe that makes him any kind of a genius. When asked in a letter what he would like to change about himself he replied, "I would be talented. . . . it is much better that the Music comes from a sheer force of Will and Love than that it should come from some kind of 'genius'" (Melillo, Apr. 14) His only suggestion to discover who he really is, was to consult the program notes that are issued with each of his works. The only way to truly understand the man himself is to know the music. Other sources must be consulted to determine what exists behind the musical code.

Melillo describes himself as a "12 year old boy in the body of a man" (Melillo, Apr. 14). He also says that he is the David and the Roark (*The Fountainhead*), unstoppable. He refuses to surrender because his faith has been tested and proved and it will endure. He says that he is stubborn and not afraid to tell the truth. He has been described as "the most intense individual I've ever met" (Creasap). Other words that have been used to describe him include: innocent, naive, and childlike. Phenomenal is also a good word.

Melillo's music has been described as having a "different color" than anyone else's music because it's in "different keys" (Creasap). People who have watched him conduct describe what they saw as simply powerful. Those who know him say that "he is one of the most intense individuals [they've] ever met" (Creasap). His music conveys numerous emotions. Passion, anger, innocence, and behind it all, the real boy behind the man.

Stormworks has become much more than the single three movement piece for band that it started out to be when it was premiered by the United States Air Force Band of the East on 26 August 1990 (Stormworks... Chapter One). It now lends its name to the great list of works written both before and after. The metaphor of the storm has become a guiding factor in Stephen Melillo's life. From his first piece of creative work whether in the form of a crayon drawing on his parent's refrigerator, a poem, book, or musical composition, to his latest attempt at relating to the rest of the world the ideas that constantly surround him and permeate his heart and mind, Stephen Melillo's life has become a "*STORMWork*".

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