

'*Nimmst du auf?*' (Are you recording?)

'No, Thomas. It doesn't matter when I start recording. We should just speak the way we always do.'

'And then you're going to edit my words?' asked Thomas in his Austrian accent.

'No. I prefer to keep our conversation completely authentic,' I confirmed.

'What about the mistakes?'

'Well, it's not as if you sound like Arnold Schwarzenegger in *Hercules*. It would be fun to dub you with a parrot but I prefer to hear your voice, to feel your words.'

'Wait a minute. Wait a minute,' he repeated himself like a stuck record, 'Did you say you watch Schwarzenegger?' Thomas laughed.

'No! Yes. I mean they played that film on the television when I was seven years old,' I defended myself.

'As punishment for doing what?' Thomas quipped.

'As punishment for watching television,' I retorted. 'Anyway, let's not lose track of what we're talking about here, Thomas.'

'I am on track. You said you're not going to edit my mistakes.'

'Yes. No editing. Mistakes are interesting. I mean, this is not a revelation from God.'

'It's not a voice of God commentary either,' added Thomas.

'Yes,' I continued with my point. 'There's no need to make the ideas rhyme. Some things happen for no particular reason at all. *Das ist die Realität* (That's reality).'

'You're talking to me about reality?' Thomas was pulling my leg.

'Why? Is that funny?' I grinned.

'Maybe if we look closer at everything that happens to us, we might discover a hidden rhyme scheme. Perhaps certain patterns are beyond our understanding.'

'Is that what your recordings are all about? Always searching for the elusive pattern?' I pushed Thomas.

'Is that what *this* recording is all about?' Thomas turned the table.

When engaged in deep conversation, I lose sense of my surroundings, which dissolve into my coffee and I never seem to reach the bottom of the cup. In most countries such conversations would be shaken at least three times by a waitress pleading for the return of her cup. By which time, the coffee would have fallen out of existence. In Vienna, in any case, the waitresses never seemed to exist.

There was, however, twenty-four-year-old Thomas who preferred to spend the warm summer evenings out in the open air. He sat in the Turkish market square in Brunnenmarkt, drinking his third glass of wine. I'd be on my first cup of Austrian coffee, Melange. Thomas and I understood one another completely. I always knew from the beginning the point he would be making in his monologues. Listening to him was like listening to myself. We were both able to talk and listen to one another until sunrise.

I pressed the record button. 'I'm still searching for the pattern,' Thomas answered.

'Sometimes you have to stop searching, so that you can find the rent,' I offered.

'Sometimes I feel I am close.'

'Hold that thought!' I instructed Thomas while placing my hand on his forehead.

'What?'

'Hold that thought. I'm going to read your mind,' I stated as a matter of fact while Thomas closed his eyes.

'Okay.'

'Do not be afraid Thomas. Remember to be able to read your mind I will also need your help. Do you understand me?'

'Yes. I understand.'

I paid attention to Thomas' Beethovenian hairstyle and estimated the number of days he hadn't shaved. 'You're a creative type.' Thomas shifted his position on the chair. 'An artist!' I proclaimed as he opened his eyes. 'Wait!' I held onto Thomas while he self-consciously tapped his fingers as if playing an instrument. I paused for effect, as he anxiously changed his posture again. Thomas leaned forward. I covered his eyes with my hands, 'You are a musician,' I concluded. I removed my hands to reveal Thomas' exaggerated expression of astonishment.

'How did you know?' Thomas played along.

'In Vienna if you throw a stone outside you're bound to hit a musician.' Actually this was not accurate. It was more like, if I threw a stone in Vienna, I'd be bound to hit a musician.

'And the fact that you already know me,' Thomas smiled.

'Do I really *know* you?'

'Uhm... yes?' he grinned. Thomas didn't like to call himself a musician. 'I'm not a musician. I'm only playing with instruments,' he would often tell fellow students after his underground concerts.

If one wanted to experience music in Vienna one might prefer Ludwig van Beethoven, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Joseph Haydn, Franz Schubert, Johann Strauss Senior, Johann Strauss Junior, Arnold Schönberg and Ernst Krenek. Tourist might also have been interested in buying holy relics at the Mozart gift shop. Alternately, one might follow the rebellious children who turned away from the religion of the concert houses to follow Thomas the Pied Piper.

'So, Thomas, even though you've never believed you're a musician, I made you think you are one.'

'Well, that depends on which perspective we are looking at.'

'And I've momentarily changed your perspective, suspended your sense of belief.' I gazed at Thomas' finger which was missing a wedding ring even though he was married. 'I'm sorry Thomas.'

'About what?'

'Your wife,' I answered sensitively.

'What about her?'

'It's complicated,' I stated with a mark of respect. I paused until sensing that he allowed me to move on. 'You're about to make a big decision, to turn over a new leaf, a fresh start. You want to be independent.' What I didn't mention was that most people make big decisions all the time. Well, until time stops spinning and they turn into stone.

'Yes. That's the thought you told me to hold onto,' Thomas' eyes lit up. 'Sometimes I feel I am close. Then my wife comes home a few hours earlier than expected. This is why I need a studio for my silence, to lock myself away, to be free and able to do what I want.'

'So, you want to lock yourself away *and* be free. I see,' I was

teasing. 'But this decision is not just up to you.'

'You're right. This also depends on her.'

'She's afraid and you want to be independent.'

'Yes, from the time I was a little boy I wanted to be alone,' Thomas drifted deep in thought.

'Yes, that's right. And you've been thinking about this for some time.'

'That is correct.'

'And you fell?' I seemed to predict.

'Fell?' Thomas was confused.

'You fell down on your knees,' I could have meant this literally or as a metaphor.

'Yes. I fell and hurt myself,' Thomas couldn't believe it even though most people have fallen from one time or another.

'You still have that scar?'

'Yes! Yes, I do,' Thomas smiled and rubbed his knees as if he had been bitten by a mosquito. I momentarily hit a dead-end but picked up the thread.

'And this is why you want to be alone.'

'I wanted to be alone because it's the only way to hear the music inside of me.'

'That's right, and you liked to listen to the circulation of your blood,' I smiled confidently.

'Yes, as we learnt from the Orientals,' Thomas continued as if moving on a tangent but he was actually making the same point, 'music is all around and inside of us. It never stops. The heart is always beating, so there's no such thing as silence. It is only we who turn away from the music. So when I realized this truth I started to remove the bars which held me back from myself, removing all forms of structure in music. I don't have anything against the trash we hear on the radio.'

'Yes, you don't have anything against the trash on the radio,' I laughed.

'I really don't,' Thomas was adamant. 'You see, I realized everything around me is musical.'

'Of course it is,' I confirmed.

'I wanted to be a part of everything. What you call harmony is structured like a house in the city. Now if you walk out into the nature, there's a different story deep in the woods. In the forest

there are endless...' Thomas searched for the word.

'Possibilities?' I offered.

'Yes, possibilities. That's what I was meaning to say. This English is so chaotic! Can we please speak in Chinese instead?'

'If you want to lose me,' I pointed out.

'I already lost myself.'

'So you're saying speaking Chinese is your idea of harmony?' I attempted to tie his ideas together. Thomas didn't follow so I dropped it. 'Perhaps we're mixing too many metaphors. Let's get back on track. You were speaking about the sound of the forest.'

'Yes. This sound cannot be copied into a mathematical structure. What you hear is the inner truth of an organic being - which you can connect yourself to.'

'So your calling is in nature but you're focusing your recording in the city.' I made a mental note of his Turkish coat.

'Yes,' Thomas confirmed.

'But you're not fascinated by a Western European city. You're thinking about a city which is either European or Asian.' I could have hit the nail on the head with Istanbul, which was part European and Asian. I narrowed the odds.

'Aleppo,' said Thomas.

'Aleppo, that's right. The Syrian city in the Middle East between Europe and Asia,' I mapped the city as if Thomas confirmed my prediction. 'Moreover, you're taking the sound you recorded in Aleppo and manipulating it to fit into the rest of your composition. Isn't there a contradiction there?'

'A contradiction? Well, I'm also interested in machines because people interact with them. I think this is part of a new reality in Syria. For example I recorded the muezzin, the same call to prayer which echoed around the town five times a day for the last fourteen centuries. At the same time I moved into a nearby home where the television is running and here we find the contradiction.'

'Exactly - go on.'

'Yes. I just filter a bit of the harsh sounds. Otherwise I don't like to manipulate the recording. The microphone, you see, is also an instrument and you have to open your ears to catch the sound in the right space, at the right time. Sometimes I'm recording a lot of trash and in other moments you know you just heard

music which nobody could compose any better.'

'Not even if all men and jinn backed one another up?' I smiled. I knew Thomas was aware of this line, a challenge from the Qur'an to create a written work of a similar standard. According to the Qur'an the Jinn were created before human beings. The Arabs believe these creatures are also present in the world but are beyond human perception.

'That's correct. The Muslims are strictly against idols,' Thomas picked up on my point. 'After the Renaissance we Europeans wanted to play God. We walk around with these big egos and call ourselves artists but we're creating nothing.'

'Depends what you mean by creating,' I offered.

'Most listeners want to hear their classical music again and again,' Thomas explained. 'You're moving into an imaginary state and it isn't real anymore. There's nobody left to listen, I mean, to *really* listen, because they're still replaying the old state of mind.'

"They're still replaying the old state of mind", I repeated after him. 'Thomas!'

'What?'

'That is it.'

'What?' Thomas didn't follow.

'That's what I'm talking about,' I confirmed enthusiastically, 'the purpose of recording and composition. You ask yourself what's the point if you're against playback?'

'I'm not fundamentally against playing music.'

'You're not fundamentally against playing music. Yes, that's right but what's the point?' I covered myself by repeating his words as if they were mine.

'The point is the listener must not shut himself away with his head phones. He must open himself and his ears to all manner of sounds. Otherwise we will not be able to appreciate the sounds of nature anymore. When I'm writing music I do not animate sounds from mathematical structures. When I pick up my pen I have no idea which direction the musical notes will flow. What I do is I tune my senses to the rhythm of the natural world around me and my music becomes the product of this organic process. When I'm recording everything fits and I realized that this is what I was meant to do,' said Thomas.

I held the pause button for a few seconds and then let it go. 'And, that is the point. Exactly,' I remarked, knowing I couldn't have said it better myself. Then I added, 'Of course John Cage or any knowledgeable musician in India might tell you that the purpose of music is to quiet the senses.'

'Yes, then look at the European romantic composers who were hiding certain musical states within the structure of harmonies and melodies. Those composers were smart because the people didn't realize it was there. But, you know there is a single state in a composition which can last only a few seconds at times. This is more powerful than a hundred symphonies.'

'And you're attempting to create this powerful mental state even though the word 'create' is strictly forbidden here,' I grinned.

Thomas and I already knew one another inside out. We had decided together that I should play the illusionist so as to document the art of cold reading, a technique that convinces laymen that one can read minds or communicate with the spirit world. Even though Thomas understood all the tricks of the trade, he never ruled out the existence of potential paranormal forces. I, on the other hand, was the ultimate sceptic. We detested mind reading frauds, so our experiment was meant to push the envelope and test our opposing theories.

I pressed the stop button on the recorder. We broke out of the illusion. 'But what about this mental state, Thomas? Isn't this just another illusion?' I tested him.

'Okay, *warte eine Minute* (wait a minute). The next time you go into the forest take note of the way sound reflects against a tree, amongst the leaves and the grass. I assure you this is not an illusion. True art helps us tap into nature. Never to escape reality. You see, it is the artists after the Renaissance period that confused the relationship between art and reality, as if they were two separate concepts. They wanted to create harmony, but only managed to create disharmony between nature and man's own creations. Programmed music is closing our ears so we need to open our consciousness. Sometimes this can be a rude awakening. If the people are not ready then it's like trying to shake someone from a deep sleep. They do not want to wake up and

can get very angry.'

'It was also like this when Beethoven's string quartet the *Grosse Fuge* was first performed,' I pointed out. 'The people grew restless and created their own noise by talking over the music. It's funny because I was walking in the outskirts of the city yesterday.'

'Where was that?' asked Thomas.

'I can't remember exactly.'

'I thought you'd know your way around Vienna by now.'

'I do. Sort of. Oh, wait it was two stops from where you live.'

'That's Hütteldorfer Strasse,' Thomas confirmed.

'Yes, yes Hütteldorfer Strasse. Anyway, what was I saying?'

'*Grosse Fuge*'

'Oh yes. I exited the U-Bahn station and there was this homeless man playing the *Grosse Fuge*, one of the most complex works in existence. I mean there was this beggar...'

'What about the people around him?'

'The people just walked passed him as if he wasn't there.'

'They might have noticed him if he played John Cage's silent piece.'

'The so-called silent piece.'

'Yes, then they would be able to hear themselves. You didn't think it was Beethoven himself, now?' Thomas laughed. 'Ludwig also dressed like a beggar in those later years you know.'

'Well, you have your Beethoven imitators while the Americans have Elvis. Since Beethoven wasn't fully appreciated for the *Grosse Fuge* he attempted to redeem himself by playing with four hands like Lakshmi the Hindu Goddess.'

We both laughed.

'European musicians are still playing God,' Thomas' eyes lit up brighter than ever before. 'Look closer at Oriental musicians. In Indian tradition the purpose of music isn't to just communicate. Music can be used to tune the senses and take the mind to a higher state. It isn't about manipulating sounds but to simply let the sounds be. And so the mind of the listener opens. The Oriental musicians loved to improvise. They tried to channel the energies flowing in the room. There are various techniques but you must realize it is not you who is playing this music but an open mind. Okay, you speak of Beethoven. Ludwig tapped

into a rhythm which could only be born out of a spontaneous breath of emotion inside of him. Even though he went deaf, he could still feel the music inside and compose to near perfection. But I believe these compositions were later misunderstood and abused.'

'I was one of those who misunderstood,' I admitted. 'A year ago I hardly knew anything about Beethoven. I didn't even know he composed a ballet. Then I was struck by the fourth movement...'

'*Allegro Molto* the finale,' the *Third Symphony Eroica*,' Thomas completed my sentence for me.

'Yes. I closed my eyes and allowed the movement to lead the direction of my brainstorm. As I began writing my book I didn't want to mention Beethoven or his music. Well, the reason I was listening to Beethoven's music in the first place is because I heard he was the pioneer of romantic music in Western civilization.'

'Forever the romantic realist,' Thomas teased me.

'If you want you could say my story was romantic but it wasn't about Beethoven or his music. It was about a ballerina. So I aimed to hide the symphony behind the pages in a hidden dimension, as you might put it. That is where I assumed one couldn't hear the music by simply reading words in a book. When the story was complete I felt the music of Beethoven was at the book's heart. Then I started to research Beethoven and I noticed parallels.'

'Parallels to your life or the character?' asked Thomas.

'The character I created. So I was motivated to look deeper into the creation of his music and was astonished to find that Beethoven's themes were exactly the same as the themes in my book.'

Thomas laughed.

'Then I learnt Beethoven actually did create a ballet named *The Creatures of Prometheus*,' I continued. 'I telephoned the music library to find more information about the ballet but the surprised staff never even heard of a Beethoven ballet.'

'Really? Which library was that?'

'Oh, just this music library in Cape Town. There was only a short overture named *The Creatures of Prometheus*. I found that a significant part of his original ballet composition was used in one

of his symphonies.'

'Which one?'

'Take a guess.'

'Well, looking at the rhyme scheme I would guess it is the same *Allegro Molto* in *Eroica*.'

'You got it.'

'But the *Third Symphony* isn't the only one with dance-like rhythms.'

'Exactly. Some coincidence.'

'There's no such thing as a coincidence,' Thomas preached.

'Well, you know I am always sceptical.'

'I guess Nietzsche is more famous than Beethoven in South Africa. Despite what you think - when you playback that recording tonight you will notice a lack of harmony in our conversation,' he stressed.

'That's your idea of chaos,' I pointed out.

'Well, never mind the recording. What did you find out about Beethoven and your chaos theory?'

'I was coming to that,' I smiled. 'At first there was nothing. I mean the details of the ballet scenes for the *Creatures of Prometheus* were lost.'

'Lost? You mean the South African libraries had no information?' Thomas queried.

'No, no. Nobody could find it anywhere. Not even in Vienna.'

'Beethoven's lost ballet,' Thomas pondered. 'It can't be lost. There has to be some information about it.'

'There is a small outline from the original theatre bill where he played the premier at the Burgtheater in 1801,' I revealed.

'So, what is it about?'

'There's a copy of the outline on the Internet. Let's just say that the scenario matched my story in such detail that in a matter of days I flew up here to Vienna.'

'In nature you're patient and calculating, but sometimes you're impulsive.'

'You're using the rainbow ruse,' I laughed. The rainbow ruse is a mind reading trick which offers two opposing answers so that the illusionist is never wrong. It's like flipping a coin with two heads.

'Yes. This is the rainbow ruse but it's also true. You're rational and irrational. Some might say you're two-face like the mythological Roman god Janus but in essence you only have one face.'

'And what do you see?' I asked as if it was his turn to play the Prophet.

'You came here to look for the lost ballet.'

'That is correct, but...'

'But how are you going to find it if nobody here could?' Thomas interrupted.

'I'm not just looking for the lost ballet,' I finished my sentence.

'You're trying to disprove the coincidence,' Thomas filled in the spaces.

'Thomas, is it possible for a musician to transmit ideas from one person to another through the use of his music?'

'Of course. What are you up to?' asked Thomas curiously.

'No, I don't mean merely communicating the language of music.'

'I know what you meant. Again, yes, it is possible.'

'I doubt it.'

'Forever the sceptic,' Thomas smiled.

'Well, I don't just jump to conclusions without looking at all possibilities.'

'Ja, ja, ja. Are you sure you're not German?'

'I'm sure,' I smiled for only a second before straightening my face, 'You see it was only when I arrived here in Vienna that I read up on the mythology of Pygmalion, Orpheus and Prometheus. I must have heard about them at some point during my life in South Africa. Maybe it only registered on a subconscious level, like how some mythical figure stole fire from the Gods.'

'Prometheus.'

'Yes. He was the first to teach the arts in this world.'

'So they say.'

'After researching them it all sounded very familiar. Some people might call it déjà vu but there's a simple explanation. You see, from the original myth you get a world of artists creating their own versions. Over the centuries the number of references multiplied and spread out like a never ending spider web.'

'World wide web,' Thomas made the connection.

The Flight of the Wooden Dancer

'Even in our lifetime there are artists creating counterfeits out of counterfeits out of counterfeits until these mirror images recur like an endless hall of mirrors. I've seen parts of these stories in children's cartoons, television series, films, scriptures and a library of fiction and non-fiction books. All these elements connected personally. They may be made up of thousands of little experiences throughout my life, all adding up to the original mythologies. And Beethoven is just one piece in this string I'm talking about, which extends all the way back to Prometheus.'

'Ja. This is possible. But, it is also possible that Beethoven's ideas transported directly to you through the music. Remember he said, "It is the power of music to carry one directly into the mental state of the composer. The listener has no choice. It is like hypnotism." You could have written about any other part of these myths but how else could the exact same scenario come through to you from his lost ballet?'

'I've obviously thought about this,' I answered, 'but when you take into account that all these ideas have been used before...'

'And there must have been so many people out there like us who'd already spoken about these exact details,' Thomas continued as if we were speaking on the same wavelength.

'And it is already in our minds whether it is through collective consciousness or the constant pumping of these ideas through the media. They can be born in different shapes and sizes but inevitably all these puzzle pieces fit together to reveal the same full picture.'

'Also, *welche Geheimnisse hast du herausgefunden* (So what secrets did you find out) about the lost ballet?' enquired Thomas.

'I don't know.'

'You don't know? You've been here for six months already!'

'I didn't go to the library.'

'Did you speak to any professors?'

'No. I didn't even visit the Burgtheater.'

'So what have you been doing all this time?'

'Something more important.'