

A Composer Looks at Music, Ethics, and Aesthetics: An Interview with Edward Green

ICONI: *I'd like to start this interview in a surprising way. Your music has been performed in many countries — the United States, of course. But also Portugal, Japan, Australia, Panama, Argentina, and others. Romania, too, I think — yes?*

Edward Green: True. Also, I'm glad to say, in Russia: my Saxophone Concerto was performed by the Chamber Orchestra Kremlin, with Dale Underwood as soloist, and that live performance was later included in a CD of contemporary saxophone music released by Arizona University Recordings.

ICONI: *And I read recently that last year you won a major compositional award in Paraguay for your Symphony in C. Also that Bridge Records is coming out next year with a CD of your chamber music. So you're quite active as a composer.*

Meanwhile — and this is what I meant by “surprising,” since the interview is supposed to be about you as a composer — my impression is that here in Russia you are, at the moment, better known as a musicologist. I'm thinking of your essays in Problemy muzykal'noj nauki/ Music Scholarship — essays on Stravinsky, Mozart, Beethoven, and John Lennon. Our readers, especially those who keep up with musicology in English, probably have encountered other instances of your wide-ranging scholarly work, including important books on Duke Ellington, and contemporary Chinese music. I imagine we ought to talk a bit about all this even as we focus on your work as a composer. Is that OK?

Edward Green: Certainly. I feel tremendously fortunate that those two aspects of my musical life — the scholarly and the creative — have a common foundation, as does my teaching of music. What made



Photo 1. Dr. Edward Green

me feel there could be a deep continuity among these three things was my study of Aesthetic Realism.

When I was in my mid-20s, I had the enormous honor of studying with Eli Siegel, the founder of this great philosophy. He was one of the 20th century's true poets, and, in my opinion, the profoundest critic of the arts in history. I think anyone who compares what he achieved to the work of other great thinkers will see what I mean. He succeeded at defining beauty, and he explained how what happens technically in art is a practical guide to the happiness of our lives. The principle is this: “All beauty is a making one of opposites, and the making one of opposites is what we are going after in ourselves.” I'll say more about this in a moment.

ICONI: *Yes, please do.*

Edward Green: But first I want to add that studying with him — which I did from 1974 to 1978 — was a double inspiration: meeting the sheer greatness of his ideas, and also the inspiration that came from the example he set of unbroken honesty and kindness.

A crucial thing I learned from Eli Siegel is that the deepest desire of every person is to like the world on an honest basis. That's

why the principle I quoted a moment ago is so important. We cannot like the world unless we are honestly able to see beautiful meaning in it. And we cannot like the world if we feel deeply divided within ourselves, and see no answer to those divisions.

The glory of art is that it embodies the answers we are looking for. Art is the evidence, he explained — evidence gathered from all the centuries and from everywhere on the globe — that there's a correspondence between the depths of ourselves and what outside reality truly is.

And the correspondence is a beautiful one. "The world, art, and self explain each other: each is the aesthetic oneness of opposites." That is another key principle of his great philosophy. So I imagine you can see how, with ideas like these to inspire me, I came to see there was no need to choose between art and scholarship. For that matter, teaching, as well. I feel equally expressed all three ways.

ICONI: *Thank you; this is an exciting start to the interview. I see what you mean by the "common foundation" to these aspects of your musical life.*



Photo 2. Robert Young Performs Edward Green's Saxophone Concerto at the 2018 World Saxophone Congress, Zagreb

Edward Green: Yes! And as a teacher, it has been a joy to encourage the study and love of music through the principles of Aesthetic Realism. Last year, I was in Paraguay giving a series of Fulbright-sponsored lectures on music. What I saw there, I've also seen lecturing in Italy, Argentina, England, Croatia, and elsewhere — including in my work these 35 years as a professor at Manhattan School of Music: the sense of surprise, and also profound recognition, in young musicians,

as they hear that their lives, the world, and music can be understood through a common principle. Seeing how the opposites connect all three makes for an integrity of mind you simply can't have any other way.

I've tested the "Siegel Theory of Opposites" for well over 40 years, and I've never seen an exception to it. It's true about every instance of music we spontaneously think is beautiful: no matter what century, in what genre, or from where the music came

geographically. In fact, the criterion for beauty — the oneness of opposites — proves its truth even as we think about instances of music which disappoint us.

ICONI: *How is that?*

Edward Green: Because we use the same unconscious standard. As we listen to music, we always hope, through the sounds we are encountering, to meet integrity. We are yearning to experience opposites working as one. Anything else is lop-sided, or incomplete. Anything else is not truthful: not an accurate picture of what reality is, or who we are — including in our most private thoughts. So whether we're pleased, or disappointed, the criterion never changes.

ICONI: *That is an exciting thought. Can you give some specific examples of how the making one of opposites makes for the power of music? Perhaps one from another composer, and then one from yourself?*

An Example from Stravinsky

Edward Green: Sure. Let's start with Stravinsky since you mentioned my essay about him. I believe the thrill of *The Rite of Spring* — a thrill which has lasted longer than a century — arises from how the opposites of reality are honored in it. That music is so intense! Yet it's also tightly organized. It is wild; but it's also controlled. It's got passion; it's likewise got clear and convincing form. Isn't that what people want? Don't we want to have all the energy possible in our lives, and likewise all the clear-thinking we can get? Don't we want large emotion, and also solid logic? We do! And Stravinsky gives you both. All good composers do this, each in his or her own unique way. Certainly a world in which it is possible for opposites beautifully to work together — and all true music shows it's possible — is a world we can like on an honest basis.

ICONI: *And it shows technically?*

Edward Green: Yes. Take Stravinsky's rhythms. They have symmetry as well as surprise. The way *The Rite of Spring* unfolds,

the composer's has you on the edge of your seat. He makes you ask: "When will the next unexpected syncopation occur?" But he also has you aware of a large, over-arching design. In this superb early ballet, the music is dynamic, yet — because of those grand arches of sonic design — the music, on another level, is calm. Architectural. In this great composition as sounds change, change, change, they also cohere, cohere, cohere! The fact that we feel change and coherence together is a central reason we feel *The Rite of Spring* is beautiful.

Now, this is where Aesthetic Realism is new. Culturally avant-garde. Because it says that what makes Stravinsky's music beautiful is exactly what will make us happy; let alone make it possible for us honestly to make sense of ourselves and the world. It's what Eli Siegel once called "aesthetic good sense." After all, isn't the oneness of excitement and coherence, thrill and integrity, what people want for our lives? Don't we want to be adventurous and also secure? Calmly planning ahead over large spans of time, yet eager for surprising new experience?

ICONI: *I recognize what you are saying. It's true.*

Edward Green: And then there's the other aspect: the connection which he showed is not only between music and ourselves, but between music and reality, just so. The philosophic connection. When you think about hearing *The Rite of Spring* — or Beethoven's *Eroica*, or Bach's *Art of the Fugue*, or one of Duke Ellington's short masterpieces (for example, *Concerto for Cootie* or *Harlem Airshaft*) — when we try to describe, as clearly as we can, just what happened to us as we listened to these great works, opposites will come spontaneously to our minds. Unity and diversity; intensity and calm; roughness and smoothness; the expected and the unexpected; weight and lightness. And that is the point: words that describe music likewise describe the world.

ICONI: *How is that so?*

Edward Green: Well, let me at this point read you one of my favorite passages from Eli Siegel's early philosophic masterpiece, *Self and World*. It's one that, as I thought of this interview, I knew I wanted to include. He wrote the book largely in the early 1940s. This is from a chapter titled "The Aesthetic Method in Self-Conflict":

"Is not reality confused and orderly at once? Does it not have storms and crystals? Are there not jungles and ordered grass? Isn't the body of an animal organized and changeable? Isn't the sky both fixed and moody? Don't events occur both by law and with unpredictability? Isn't the world limited and unlimited? Doesn't mind go by cause and effect, and yet strangely? Isn't everything in reality both strange and definite, existent yet endless?"

Every one of those questions has its relation to music. As Aesthetic Realism sees it, it's the permanent aesthetics of the world — its structure of opposites — which music aims to express and embody. It's true whatever the style of the music is. The title of an important essay Eli Siegel wrote on the subject is "Music Tells What the World Is Like."

ICONI: *You think about this consciously as you compose?*

Edward Green: Yes! Art has always been a coming together of conscious and unconscious thought — of careful planning and spontaneous emotional impulsion. But to be conscious of the very purpose of music, that is a new thing. It is something Aesthetic Realism has made possible for all composers. It's hard to overstate how important this fact is, and how hopeful for the future of music.

So, as I work I do think of how to show — without putting aside the difficulties, the confusions, the pain the world has in it — that reality nevertheless has an aesthetic structure that can be sincerely liked and be the cause of honest pleasure. For example, in

the Saxophone Concerto I mentioned earlier, I gave a lot of thought to various divisions people feel in themselves and in the world. Divisions which often make people feel they have a right to give way to depression about life — or even to hate the world. I'm talking specifically about the way the sweetness, smoothness, buoyancy of life can seem not to cohere with its bitterness and roughness, and the sense of being weighed down by things. I tried to have these opposites join. Also the opposites Eli Siegel was pointing to in the great passage I just quoted: the world as orderly and yet surprising. That performance from Moscow, by the way, is on my website¹.

What All World Music Has in Common?

ICONI: *Thank you. So are you saying that there is a single criterion for all the music of the world? That's surprising, given how much diversity music has.*

Edward Green: Well, every style of world music is uniquely itself. A symphony is not a raga. Nor a blues from America's deep South the same thing as an aria by Charpentier or Lully written for the court of Louis XIV. But the fact of uniqueness in no way contradicts its opposite: namely, that every instance of music which ever was, or ever will be, is an attempt to truly present — through the language of abstract sound in time — the permanent structure of the world.

The impulsion to like the world through music, though it's universal, has so far been a subconscious force. It was not articulated before Aesthetic Realism. But that's true for all scientific discoveries: things go on deeply in the world and in ourselves which we didn't yet know about. And when someone enables us to see better what goes on, that person is a friend. Eli Siegel was, in my opinion, the greatest friend composers have ever had. Let alone, a friend to all people and to world culture.

¹ See Audio Link to Concerto: <http://www.edgreenmusic.org/1-compositions-orchestra.htm>

I learned from him that how important, how enduring, how great an instance of music is, will be in exact proportion to how much we can feel the truth about the world through it: how deeply that truth is present; how richly.

ICONI: *This is very different, isn't it, from how ethnomusicology is generally taught now-a-days?*

Edward Green: Yes, it is! It's one of the big ways Aesthetic Realism is needed in schools of music on every continent — to clear up the confusion on this matter: the feeling that we have to choose between honoring the uniqueness of an instance of music, or a musical culture, and its universal, or representative quality. We *don't* have to choose; both are present at once.



Photo 3. Wang Guowei and Sun Li, performers of Edward Green's Zhou

The other large reason Aesthetic Realism is needed in the world of music education, I've already indicated: the need young musicians have to learn that there's a solid, technical relation between what they love in music and what they are hoping for in the everyday moments of their lives. Eli Siegel put it this way in a lecture he gave in 1951 — the year of my birth, by the way: a lecture titled "Aesthetic Realism and Music." "There is not one thing that music does which does not say something about how a person

should organize himself too." I love that statement!

If we had the time, I could talk about this in relation to many other kinds of music. For example, jazz at its best shows we can make a one of spontaneity and plan; jazz shows that uncertainty and confidence can go well together. In a good improvised jazz solo we can't predict just what the melody will do next. Yet at the very same time, there might be a solid "groove" underneath in the rhythm section, and a chord progression we can count on. Maybe the Blues; maybe "Rhythm Changes."

Likewise the music of India. I mentioned raga before. At its best, raga shows how we can be subtle and straight-forward at the same moment; sophisticated and elemental. Just think of the almost constantly bending microtones in Hindu melody joined to the never changing, unmistakable, no-nonsense quality of the drone. How sophisticated, yet how primal, elemental is that combination! For that matter, Hindustani music often is a deep experience in the oneness of abstraction and sensuality. The mathematics of the underlying talas, rhythmic cycles — and the cross-rhythmic patterns created by a master of the tabla against those talas—all this is complex, abstract, mentally daunting. At the very same time, how sensually appealing this music is! At its best, it satisfies the whole person: mind and body. Simultaneously.

And then there's the matter of beautiful tone. Whether it's vocal or instrumental, a beautiful tone always puts together the opposites of focus and resonance: what is concentrated and what expands. A good tone is rich, yet also direct. It has something rounded, complete, and also — in a good way — something edgy. Think about it: we need the oneness of these opposites for the happiness of our lives. Focus, without resonance, is obsession. Smoothness, without edge, without a good kind of direct energy, is dishonest. And a certain kind of ugly smoothness is flattery — which isn't yet a crime, but ought to be!



ICONI: *That's true! Earlier, you talked about specific opposites you were thinking of as you created your Saxophone Concerto. As you see it, are there certain opposites that in a general way you've been engaged with across your career? That is, opposites that are important, pretty much, in all your work?*

Edward Green: I do think so. And they are opposites which have a relation to what I was just talking about. I hope to be an honest person, and also a kind person. You have to admit; often in life people feel these two things can't be simultaneous.

ICONI: *I do think most often that is what people feel.*

Edward Green: There's the feeling if you are entirely honest, you'll be cruel. So the tendency is to "smooth things over."

ICONI: *Right.*

Edward Green: Well, all good music says not only *can* these opposites work together, but that they have to do so — or the music won't be as beautiful. The best harmonies, I've come to see, put together something demanding, dissonant with something rightly soothing and sweet. The best musical textures are rough *and* smooth. The best rhythms and dynamics are that way, too. Without critical edge, the music is limp. But if music lacks roundedness, it can indicate dislike of the world — something lacking poise, something wrongly, disproportionately angry.

When I'm looking at a blank page of score paper, and putting notes down on it, I ask: Am I creating sounds that are friendly enough to each other? But I also ask: is it direct enough, even stern enough? Do the sounds counter each other adequately? Do they oppose complacency, something wrongly smooth? Making a one of honesty and kindness, in other words, is a conscious technical goal. And also thanks to Aesthetic Realism, it's a conscious purpose in my life: as a friend, a teacher, a husband.

ICONI: *Can you mention one or more of your pieces in which you feel you achieved something valuable in terms of these opposites?*

Edward Green: I think my Trumpet Concerto is one of the more successful things I've done. It's on my website².

That webpage has links to several instances of my orchestral and large ensemble music. Two of my symphonies are posted there, including the Symphony in C, which won the Paraguayan award you mentioned earlier. I haven't yet been able to post a recording of my most recent symphony — a Symphony in One Movement. But I hope to. All-in-all, which may be the best work I've done so far. Incidentally, it's designed as a musical portrait of 24 hours in the country: beginning just after dawn, through the growing energy of the day, to the beauty of the sunset, the evening, and the night, on to the glory of the sunrise, and then, once again, reaching the calm and loveliness of the early morning hours.

ICONI: *I look forward to hearing it! Perhaps a live performance in Russia.*

Edward Green: From your mouth to God's ear!

What Is a Concerto?

ICONI: *I also see that you've written a Piano Concertino.*

Edward Green: Yes. It happens that a large pleasure in my life has been the many opportunities I've had over the years to accompany on piano the great flutist Barbara Allen in performances of the Mozart concerti. When we perform, we also comment in detail, including technically, on the meaning of these wonderful pieces. The central thing about all concerti, we've seen, has to do with what Eli Siegel explains is the most critical aesthetic — and ethical — situation in the

² See Audio Link to Concerto: <http://www.edgreenmusic.org/1-compositions-orchestra.htm>

life of every person: how he or she sees the relation of Self and World.

The solo instrument stands for the individual; the orchestra stands for the world and I get to be, in effect, the orchestra as I perform the piano reduction. A good concerto — in contrast to a society whose government is not beautifully organized — makes for an honest harmony of Self and World. There's a feeling that the individual and society as a whole assist each other. Too often, in our political and economic lives, these opposites are pitted against each other. There can be a squelching of the individual. But there can also be a false and ugly assertion by an individual of his or her "right" to do whatever they please, no matter what impact they may have on many, many other people. That happens when people give themselves the "right" to exploit others as a way to make profit for themselves. There is no such right! It's a very ugly state of mind, and it's a misuse of the true idea of freedom.

ICONI: *Are you saying that your work with Barbara Allen — and the thought you both have given to concerti as putting together, in a beautiful way, the opposites of Self and World — are you saying this inspired your own concerti?*

Edward Green: Exactly. I'll say more in a minute about that. But I should mention that I did a long interview with Barbara Allen a few years back which was published in *The Hellenic Journal of Music, Education, and Culture*. Perhaps your readers might like to take a look at it. It includes us performing. A reading of the interview, which we filmed more recently, is online³.

So, to get back to my concerti: another way Eli Siegel explained the essential relation of Art and Life is this: "The resolution of conflict in self is like the making one of opposites in art." I had this in mind as I composed my various concerti.

For example — and here I'll be happily self-critical and talk about some conflicts in

my own life: I didn't feel that blending in with other people and being deeply affected by them, gave me as much pleasure, as much of a sense of self-importance, as asserting my own opinions, impressing people with myself. I was more interested in that than in being impressed by *them*. There was a division — an ugly combat — in my mind between Self and World. I didn't feel other peoples' lives mattered as much as my own.

ICONI: *It's pretty brave to say that.*

Edward Green: Well, I'm hardly alone. I think many, if not most people have similar criticisms of themselves. Ethical criticisms. And Aesthetic Realism does show that it is not only an ethical matter, it is likewise an aesthetic one. So since it interests and concerns me very much in my life, I also try to deal with it in my music. And learn — for my life — as I do.

Now, every concerto, from one point-of-view, is a sustained conversation. A dialogue between a soloist and other players, other individuals. Or, put another way, a dialogue between a soloist and his or her society. Joseph Kerman, as perhaps you know, wrote a book touching upon this matter — though without the clear ethical parallels which Aesthetic Realism shows are there. It was titled *Concerto Conversations*.

ICONI: *Yes, I know the book. I like Kerman, including his book on the Beethoven String Quartets.*

Edward Green: I do, too. He's one of the best recent writers on music. Along with Deryck Cooke, Wilfred Mellers, Victor Zuckerkandl, Charles Rosen, and Martha Baird — who was the wife of Eli Siegel, and a pioneering scholar of the Aesthetic Realism perspective on music. Earlier writers I care for are Donald Tovey, Curt Sachs, and Alfred Einstein. Among the Russians, Boris Asafiev.

ICONI: *He's read in America?*

Edward Green: Yes, but not as much as I hope someday he will be. But returning to

³ See Video Link to Interview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mdjXPPTU3m4>



the matter of how ethics and aesthetics are inseparable in the concept of the concerto: one way the ethical problem I described before has shown in my life, is that in conversations, I often talked too much, and listened too little. Ego disproportion! You'd think, wouldn't you, that anything that interferes with listening can't be good for a musician — right?

ICONI: *True!*

Edward Green: Well, I never knew there was any relation between how I listened to people and my work as a composer. It never occurred to me that limiting my field of listening — snobbishly restricting it only to circumstances I thought were “worthy” of me — would hurt me as a composer. But it did. In fact, I had a great deal of trouble when I was college-age about this, and for awhile my ability to compose came to a halt. I'm sure I would not have regained my art if I hadn't learned from Aesthetic Realism how to become a better, and more courageous critic of myself. To see where, in terms of my everyday life, I was thinking in a way antithetical to the meaning of music.

Learning about Art and Life

I began to learn about this, actually, before I was in classes with Eli Siegel: I had consultations with a trio of teachers at the Aesthetic Realism Foundation in New York — one of whom, I'm grateful to say, was Barbara Allen. Those kind and probing consultations opened my eyes to, among other things, the altogether unnecessary division in my mind about asserting myself and being affected by other people and things. That division hurt both my life and my music.

I was, at that time, a student at Oberlin. Like all young conservatory students I took classes in ear-training, and worked hard to hear music as precisely as I could. I focused; I paid attention; I listened hard to get the value of the sounds coming my way. But music was an isolated realm in my mind; I

simply didn't listen to other people with the same level of respect.

My consultants explained that my attitude was the antithesis of the artistic way of mind. Art, they said, arises from respect: the hope to find more meaning and beauty in the world, and in people. What I was doing, as I competed with other people, and acted as if the only person really worth listening to was me, was indulging a very hurtful and contemptuous state of mind. They then told me that Eli Siegel had defined contempt — and I think you'll see in this definition why the contempt way of mind is the most anti-art thing possible. He said, “Contempt is the disposition in every person to think we will be for ourselves by making less of the outside world.”

ICONI: *This is the kind of connection between Art and Life I've noticed you make in your scholarly writings. I'm grateful you do that. In fact, it's surprising how rare — really, how exceedingly rare — such connections are made in academic writings. Most authors, it seems to me, make a big separation between the music they are writing about and their own lives.*

Edward Green: I would never have learned to write that way, or teach with this in mind, had I not studied Aesthetic Realism. It has to do with the core principle I mentioned earlier: that everyone's deepest desire is to like the world. Hiding from the world as you write “scholarly” things — for that matter, when you compose music or when you teach — is pretty obviously a sign that you don't like the world enough. That you don't trust other people enough. And I've come to see that as we hide from people, there's contempt present — as if one's own feelings are of such a high and fine and superior quality that other people just wouldn't have the intelligence or depth to be fair to them!

ICONI: *Yes, I see that.*

Edward Green: And once a composer starts restricting the size of the feeling he or she is willing to have about the world



and other people, and is willing to show — and instead covers up lack of feeling with “impressive” technique — music has to suffer. Eli Siegel talked to me about that, encouraging me not to be a “feeling adjuster” — but to do all I could, in my music and in my life, to have my feelings come into their true strength.

And he said this wonderful thing: “If you go into music, if you are really fortunate, the notes tell *you* what to do!” In other words, I was trying to be a “master” of music, without wanting music to master me. I wanted to be “in control,” and that attitude towards the world limited me. I had separated the opposites of having an effect on others and being affected myself by them. Being affected, he was teaching me, had to come first: you can’t fully express yourself unless reality first has *impressed* you. And in a big way.

ICONI: *That is very important. The relation of big emotion and big technique. Does this have to do with something I noticed: how melodic your music is?*

Edward Green: Yes, I think so. In fact, Ellen Reiss, the Chairman of Education at the Aesthetic Realism Foundation — where I am on the faculty — once gave a class in which there was a sustained discussion with me about just this matter. At another time, I’d like to talk about that wonderful class in detail, and also say more about the magnificent scholarship and kindness of Ellen Reiss, who has continued Eli Siegel’s ground-breaking work.

The upshot of the class was this: while I had shown, in some of my music, a feeling for melody, I didn’t value it enough. In fact, I was afraid of it. I had a strong tendency to interrupt my melodies, to interfere with them in some way by accompanying them with too complex a maze of counterpoint, or with harmonies which fought the melody in a bad way. In other words, I was afraid to let melody come through in its full power. She asked me whether it had to do hiding from people: with the feeling that no one was “good enough” to show my feelings to — deeply,

directly. Melody, she explained, has to do with sincerity. When there’s true melody, feeling is shown with directness and depth. You can hide behind a complex musical texture, but a melody either communicates with immediacy, or it doesn’t. The more one is affected by the world, the larger one’s emotion will be, and the deeper the impact of the melody. I am grateful to say that in the last decade or so, since that class discussion, my ability to sustain melody, and have it express larger, deeper, wider emotion, has increased.

ICONI: *I’m glad to know this. I’ve gotten a lot of pleasure from your melodies, so I’m thankful to Ellen Reiss. Since melody is very apparent in the concerti you posted online, can you briefly tell us a bit more about them?*

More About Concerti

Edward Green: Sure. The earliest of the three was the Piano Concertino. It’s in one movement and my idea was to represent the Self experiencing the changes in Nature over the four seasons. The piano is the Self. The orchestra is Nature. The piece begins in, late Autumn. It progresses gradually to Winter in its two basic moods: the playful invigorating aspect of Winter, and the way Winter also can symbolize the coldness of death. Then, on to the Spring, which I gave a Caribbean rhythmic underpinning. Somehow, that seemed right to me. Then, on to the intensity of Summer, and finally we circle back to Autumn. The piece ends just as Autumn is about to turn, once again, to Winter.

ICONI: *You’re not afraid of the programmatic, then?*

Edward Green: Hardly. I don’t see any reason music can’t be good in an abstract and absolute way and simultaneously evocative of specific, earthy reality. I’m backed up, I believe, by Bach, Beethoven, Duke Ellington — and, for that matter, all of traditional Chinese music. It’s also the goal of any serious film composer: to meet

the immediate situation on screen with justice, yet also to create a score that has independent artistic merit. I'm grateful I've had the opportunity to work in film with the important Emmy Award-winning director Ken Kimmelman. One of the films we did together — a short public service film titled, "What Does a Person Deserve?" — is on my homepage⁴.

The film was made to draw public attention to the terrible problem of hunger and homelessness in America. I was moved by its beautiful ethical purpose.

So, to return directly to your question: Yes, there's nearly always a programmatic aspect to my music. Often, I don't indicate it, and let the music speak for itself. But the images are there helping me as I compose.



Photo 4. Caption: Edward Green's Trumpet Concerto, performed in Portugal with Paul Neebe, soloist

ICONI: *And the Trumpet Concerto? The Sax Concerto?*

Edward Green: The Trumpet Concerto has an interesting history. Two of the three movements are actually "Songs Without Words." Here's what I mean: the first movement of the concerto is based on Eli Siegel's great poem "It and Beauty," which begins with the lines:

A kind of beauty is our quest
Allied to comeliness of insect leaping,
Or of steel by dull pond.

The second movement is a setting of his magnificently moving poem "The Dark That Was Is Here." It relates the confusions and hopes of a girl in ancient Greece to a girl in

contemporary Idaho. If you follow the poem syllable by syllable, you'll see the trumpet melody in the second movement of my concerto parallels it, note by note⁵.

The third movement, however, isn't based on a poem. Instead, it's a freely evolving, high-spirited rondo.

ICONI: *A rondo in the classic sense? And tonal?*

Edward Green: Yes, to both questions. I've always been a tonal composer, except when I was a conservatory student. 12-tone music was "de rigueur" in those days. Everybody studied and imitated Webern! So, yes, tonality appeals to me deeply, though

⁴ See Video Link to Film: <http://www.edgreenmusic.org/>

⁵ See Link to Poem: <https://aestheticrealism.net/poetry/The-dark.htm>



I do hope I use tonality in an honestly imaginative and original way. Sometimes my music is quite dissonant. But it's still tonal. For example, my *Genesis: Variations for Solo Guitar* is in the key of A, even though there's not a standard harmonic progression to be found anywhere in it. The superb guitarist David Starobin just released a performance of that piece on a CD for Bridge Records, *New Music for Guitar, Volume 12*.

Genesis is an early piece. I wrote it in 1974. But the possibility of reconciling intense dissonance with clear tonality remains something I often attempt because — as I explained before — it's so important for people to feel that the confusions and difficulties of the world can make an honest one with its clarity and friendliness. For example, people may want to listen to a live performance of my Sextet for Piano and Strings, which I wrote in 2014. I have a webpage with several instances of my chamber music, and that Sextet is on it⁶.

That opening movement, as I'm sure you'll hear, is quite dissonant. But it's clearly grounded in the tonality of C#. Classically so, since I begin and end in that key. Other music of mine uses what the English composer and critic Robert Simpson called "Progressive Tonality." That is, it begins with one tonal center, but evolves in such a way that, while it ends with another center, you are convinced that the change is right. I suppose the first really marvelous example of that was Mahler's Fourth Symphony: from G to E. Convincingly.

Thoughts about Tonality

ICONI: *Yes, a beautiful piece. And Shostakovich, as you know, loved Mahler.*

Edward Green: He sure did! Well, I think there are lots of surprises left in the world of tonality, lots of new ways to express large emotion through it. It's not a matter

of imitating Shostakovich, or Mahler, or Stravinsky, or Bartok. There are *new* challenges — challenges worth taking on for any composer early in our new century. My Sextet for Alto Saxophone and Brass, for example, is a long-range study in the "gravitational" relation of G and B as tonal centers: what I've called "elliptical tonality" — tonality with two gravitational foci, just as the geometric form of the ellipse has two centers. I talked about the idea of double tonal centers in the Beethoven essay you mentioned early on in the interview.

ICONI: *The one in Problemy muzykal'noj nauki/Music Scholarship?*

Edward Green: Yes. I also explored the idea of elliptical tonality in my Brass Quintet. There, it's the drama of F (major and minor) and D major that creates the dynamic thrust of the piece. Recordings of those two pieces can be found on the same webpage of my Chamber Music⁷.

Maybe the most challenging thing I did in this field was with my Concerto for Saxophone and Strings. I mentioned before that the idea of division — and how to overcome it, while still honestly acknowledging it — was the central idea in that piece. It's reflected, as well, in its tonal structure: it's in two movements: divided right down the middle. The first movement is in G, the second in F. My hope was that despite the odd, truly contradictory relation between these tonal centers, a work would emerge which listeners would hear as nevertheless a coherent whole.

Incidentally, if you hear some influence of Prokofiev, Haydn, and Gershwin in the concerto, that would be right. I love these composers, and am proud to learn from them. At my desk, in fact, I have pictures of two of them: Haydn and Prokofiev — each a master of seriousness and humor, heaviness and lightness. I think about those opposites a great deal as I compose.

⁶ See Audio Link to Sextet: <http://www.edgreenmusic.org/1-compositions-chamber.htm>

⁷ See Audio Link to Sextet: <http://www.edgreenmusic.org/1-compositions-chamber.htm>



ICONI: *I said at the top of the interview that your scholarship is wide-ranging. Is that also the case as to your compositional influences?*

Edward Green: Yes. I just mentioned three composers who affected me as to the Saxophone Concerto. The “four seasons” idea of the Piano Concerto was obviously affected by Vivaldi. The idea, not the actual music. On the other hand, a place where there is a clear musical debt to another composer is in the second movement of my Trumpet Concerto. If you know Ellington’s *Concerto for Cootie*, you’ll hear what I mean. Especially, the contrast of muted and open trumpet; and the lyrical use of several different kinds of mute. Incidentally, I talk about Ellington at length in a recent interview about him, titled “Delighting in the Duke,” which appeared online on the website *All About Jazz*. Here’s the URL to it⁸:

Personally, I’ve found it very advantageous to be teaching music history and having gotten my PhD in the field: you keep investigating new composers, and finding more and more people to admire and learn from.

ICONI: *And your doctoral thesis?*

Edward Green: It was titled “Chromatic Completion in the Late Vocal Music of Haydn and Mozart: a Technical, Philosophic, and Historical Study.”

ICONI: *“Chromatic Completion” — what do you mean by that?*

Edward Green: In essence, it was the discovery that Haydn and Mozart — and, to a degree before them Bach and Gluck — consciously composed music on the basis of gradually unfolding all 12 notes of the chromatic aggregate, and placing the arrival of the 12th note, the “completing” note, at a moment that wasn’t at all arbitrary, but instead was structurally and emotionally crucial to the music.

I chose to focus on their vocal music because the presence of words made it easier to illustrate the emotional aspect — and therefore easier to prove that the technique was used consciously. Yet their late instrumental music is just as illustrative of the technique.

It was very surprising to find, in the 18th century, something akin to — though hardly the same as — the way Schönberg thought in the 20th century. The difference, of course, is that while Schönberg unfolded the 12 tones in strict serial succession, and would not repeat a tone until all 12 had appeared, Haydn and Mozart wrote with a diatonic background, and often repeated tones along the way.

ICONI: *Since you said earlier that you haven’t composed anything 12-tone since your student days decades back, this discovery as to Haydn and Mozart must have been very surprising.*

Edward Green: It absolutely was! In fact, it was so surprising, so stunningly unexpected, I tried to do what any good scientist does: I tried to disprove my hypothesis. But the more I examined their music, the more the truth became inescapable: they not only employed the technique, there was solid evidence they used it consciously.

Incidentally, I don’t want to give the impression that my own turning away from 12-tone composition implies any dislike of composers who have done beautiful work using that technique. I think it’s wrong to prejudge music by its style, genre, or the particular technique it happens to use. A composer should be free to do whatever honesty requires. The criterion for beauty isn’t style-dependent. It’s the universal criterion of the opposites.

So, there is much serial music by Schönberg I care for. Also Webern, Boulez, late Stravinsky, and others. I often make use, in my works, of the concept Schönberg made

⁸ See Link to Interview: <https://www.allaboutjazz.com/edward-green-delighting-in-the-duke-duke-ellington-by-douglas-groothuis.php>

so much of: that any melodic idea exists in four primary forms — the original form, the inversion, the retrograde inversion, and the retrograde. And so, for example, my *Symphony in Eb for Concert Wind Ensemble*, which is in four movements, actually has only one primary melody. The melodies which begin the second, third, and fourth movements are forms of the “original” melody with which the symphony begins. If anyone wants to examine this, they can listen to a MIDI of the piece⁹.

ICONI: *Why a MIDI? I had the impression this piece had been played a great deal over the years.*

Edward Green: Yes, indeed. It was a consortium commission from thirteen of America’s leading Concert Wind Ensembles. And I learned from every performance; so I kept revising it. The last revision — which I have a good feeling about — has not yet had its world premiere.

ICONI: *Maybe Russia will do so.*

Edward Green: I hope so!

ICONI: *Did I give you the chance to say everything you wanted to say about the diversity of your compositional influences. Are there other people to mention?*

Edward Green: Sure. Bach and Beethoven, naturally. Mozart, of course. Palestrina and Brahms, Verdi and Debussy, Wagner, Bartok and Varese. Messaien, too. You get the idea: If I started to list everyone, it would be hard to know where to stop! The Beatles, let alone Richard Rodgers, Irving Berlin, and Bernard Herrmann — the film composer. Many aspects of World Music, also. For example, my *Sextet for Alto Saxophone and Brass* — which I wrote in the aftermath of 9/11—was meant to create a deeply friendly meeting-ground of Western and Islamic musical elements. I had a very serious purpose writing it: I wanted to fight war-hysteria.

I wanted to give the lie to the terrible idea (being perpetrated on both sides, I must say) that these two great cultures, Western and Islamic, inevitably had to be at war with each other.

ICONI: *A kind, and necessary purpose.*

Edward Green: Yes, I think so. For example, the second movement of the *Sextet* is a strict fugue — a very classical Western form, though with jazz inflections! But throughout, it’s in an Islamic rhythmic mode: a 10/8 which internally is divided 2+3+3+2. It’s on my Chamber Music page¹⁰.

And I’ve written music for Chinese instruments; also Japanese. I likewise love earlier epochs in European music. The last movement of my *Quartet for Guitars*, for instance, uses the famous “Landini Cadence” of the 14th century, but in a highly syncopated way. The meter is 7+5. I’ve jokingly called the result “Monastery Rag!” That piece, by the way, was included a few years back on a CD titled *Taut*, put out on Albany Records by the Corona Guitar Quartet. They’re a Scandinavian ensemble.

While we’re talking about earlier periods in Western music, I suppose I should say that my most popular orchestral piece has been *Music for Shakespeare* — and in it I tried to make a one of contemporary music and earlier dance forms. That, too, has to do with like of the world: very often people see themselves as either “conservative” or “avant-garde.” But making a division between what’s old and what’s new is both foolish and unnecessary — in life as well as in music. Why can’t we like both? One of the movements, for example, is a Gigue. But it’s a Gigue in 11/8 time! That’s on the “Orchestral Music” webpage, too¹¹.

The opening movement to *Music for Shakespeare* has, I think, one of my best melodies. It’s titled “Love Music.” I wrote it about my wife, Carrie Wilson, who is a

⁹ See Audio Link to *Symphony*: <http://www.edgreenmusic.org/1-compositions-orchestra.htm>

¹⁰ See Audio Link to *Sextet*: <http://www.edgreenmusic.org/1-compositions-chamber.htm>

¹¹ See Audio Link to *Orchestral Suite*: <http://www.edgreenmusic.org/1-compositions-orchestra.htm>

magnificent singer, a consultant to women on the faculty of the Aesthetic Realism Foundation, a teacher there of both singing and the visual arts and — so importantly to me — a tremendous friend to my life. I have counted on her to be a critic of my sincerity, and she has made me a better man, and a better composer. The reason “Love Music” belongs in a Shakespeare composition has to do with its history. Carrie is also a deep and moving actress; I wrote that music one evening after seeing her perform the role of Desdemona as part of a dramatic event at the Aesthetic Realism Foundation. So, I suppose, my feeling about Carrie and Desdemona join in it.

ICONI: *I assume, since you spoke of your being accompanist to Barbara Allen, that you’ve also concertized with your wife?*

Edward Green: Yes. In New York, but likewise in England and Argentina. The music of Elgar in England, and a more wide-ranging program of British and American songs — Classical, Folk, and Broadway — in Argentina.

ICONI: *So, to round out this wonderful and very informative interview, may I ask you what you are composing now-a-days?*

Edward Green: The two most important pieces I’m in the midst of are a Trio for Flute, Violin, and Piano; and a Symphony — the dimensions of which I’m still trying to determine — which was commissioned by the Orquesta Camara de Cascais in Portugal. They’ve named me their “Featured



Photo 5. Carrie Wilson and Edward Green after a recital in Rosario, Argentina

Composer” for 2021, and the honor includes an orchestral concert featuring my music, as well as a separate chamber concert. Part of the plan for my short residency there is for me to give a series of lectures and masterclasses about music from the Aesthetic Realism point-of-view.

ICONI: *It sounds like something that fits you perfectly: the different aspects of your musical career all coming together.*

Edward Green: I think so, yes. And thank you for this engaging and extensive interview. You really gave me the opportunity to express myself with fullness about Aesthetic Realism, and the various aspects of my life and work. I very much appreciate that.

ICONI: *You are most welcome!*

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