Spatially Oriented Music, Writing For Large Ensembles Of Like Instruments, John Cage and Finding Fun In Composing: An Interview With Wendy Mae Chambers

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Upon first cursory glance, the uninformed might think the music composed by contemporary musician Wendy Mae Chambers is full of humorous musical anecdotes. Chambers has, after all, composed a *Mass For Mass Trombones* (77 trombonists broken into 11 choirs and a soloist), solely employed 100 tympani and bass drums in the first movement of her *Symphony Of The Universe*, and composed her *Music For Choreographed Rowboats* in 1979 for 24 musicians to play while in rowboats oared by members of the Columbia University crew in New York's Central Park Lake. Add that the *New York Times* has called Chambers, "the world's foremost virtuoso of the toy piano," and that she is the inventor of the Car Horn Organ, you would know that not only has Chambers a wide ranging vision, but you might think her tastes as being not far from what many might think of as comical.

Listening to Ms. Chambers music, however, one comes away with a totally different perspective. Utilizing grand sweeping orchestral-sized gestures which are encompassed in her music, Ms. Chambers can be defined as an artist with deep post-post-romantic harmonic leanings combined with a vision of the sonic possibilities inherent, yet still left unexplored here at the beginning of the 21st century, in the various instruments for which she composes. For example, in her piece for 10 grand pianos, *Ten Grand*, the use of unison multi-octave lines demonstrate the instrument's depth of sonority innate in the simple richness of the grand piano's inborn timbre. The piece consistently uses the entire range of the piano, not for show or in a gimmicky manner, but as an integral part of the overall tumbrel/color palette and as a way of bringing musical ideas to full fruition.

Ms. Chambers revolutionary way of expressing and emphasizing the rich sonic possibilities of instruments we have all come to think we understand is not so revolutionary when one understands that John Cage was one of her mentors. Cage, a true visionary who made people redefine their concepts of what constitutes music, also forced us to think about sound and its characteristics. Chambers takes this concept one step further. The size of her musical amalgamations and brilliant compositions for those composites, force us to experience instrumental timbres we think we know. But it's not until having heard her music, however, that we realize we haven't even begun to fully comprehend or appreciate those timbres and the richness within them.

To truly understand Ms. Chambers one must also approach her as an accomplished performer/soloist/instrument inventor. On the toy piano she has performed on CNN, National Public Radio, Nickelodeon's Nick News, in the Guggenheim Museum, the NY Historical Society, at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in Scotland and a toy piano convention in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. On the full size grand piano she is known as a brilliant soloist as seen by her performance on the recent live recording of her own *Antarctica Suite* for solo piano.

Ms. Chambers is also the inventor of the Car Horn Organ. The original inspiration for the instrument was born upon waking up to the noise of traffic in her Brooklyn apartment and noting how the sounds were reminiscent of a Gustav Mahler symphony. The Car Horn Organ plays 25 tuned car horns, which were originally selected with the aid of a pitch pipe and purchased from junkyards, and played through the use of a homemade keyboard powered by a battery charger. Chambers has appeared and performed on this instrument in various locations including the Statue of Liberty Centennial, a benefit at the Guggenheim Museum and The Tonight Show With Jay Leno. In this venue she is best known for her renditions of *New York, New York*, which she played at the opening of the New York City Car Show at the Coliseum for then mayor Ed Koch. Her most recent recording is *A Car Horn Organ Christmas*, as well as a series of commercials for Gunn Automotive in San Antonio, Texas. The seriousness of her work in this area is easily seen in the Smithsonian Magazine's feature on her and the instrument in the April 1999 issue.

Ms. Chambers has also brought her creative talents to television. Her production company, Artmusic, Inc., produced *Videoville*, a television series on WNYC, a Public Broadcasting Service station in New York, which ran for five years. The show was picked up by and run on The Learning Channel (TLC).

Born on January 24, 1953, in New Jersey, Chambers earned a Bachelor's Degree in Music from Barnard College, and a Master's Degree in Music Composition at the State University of New York (SUNY) at Stony Brook in 1977. She has been awarded two National Endowment for the Arts grants, an American Composers Forum Commission Grant, a CAPS grant, and had organizations such as The New York State Council on the Arts, Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust and the Copeland Fund financially assist her projects. Ms. Chambers currently is at work on her musical, *Voodoo On The Bayou*, as well as a series of musical Mandalas and an Endangered Species Song Cycle.

Ms. Chambers is like her music, full of the joy of life with a wry and humorous side, yet serious about living it, and especially serious about having fun as she lives it. Her joy rang through throughout the interview.

Partial List of Compositions

Real Music for 9cars (1978)
Street Music for musicians, boomboxes and coordinated radio broadcast (1978)
Music For Choreographed Rowboats (1979)
One World Percussion for 50 percussionists at the World Trade Center (1981)
Suite For Toy Piano (1983)
Ten Grand for 10 grand pianos and laser lights at the Lincoln Center Fountain (1983)
The Grand Harp Event for 30 harps at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine (1984)
Liberty Overture for Car Horn Organ, 10 synthesizers, percussion and brass (1986)
Marimba! (Commissioned by the Percussive Arts Society) for 26 marimbas at the Kennedy Center (1986)
Quill for six harpsichords and surround-sound bird tapes at Symphony Space (1987)
Symphony Of The Universe for 100 tympani and bass drums, metal percussion, horn soloist, jazz band, choir, organ and tape at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine (1989)
A Mass For Mass Trombones (a requiem in memory of John Michael Chambers, her father) for 77 trombones at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine (1993)
Twelve Squared (in memory of John Cage), a voodoo tone poem for 12 percussionists (1994)
Antarctica Suite for solo piano and performed by Ms. Chambers on the recording (1999)

Do you come from a musical family?
My brother is eight years older than I am, and he was musical. When I was growing up he was always practicing the piano. I think that's probably where I got interested in music. There is also a musical background in my father's family.

From hearing your brother practice did you ask for piano lessons as well?
My school offered free group piano lessons, and then I eventually got private lessons.

Was there a significant early musical teacher that inspired you to seek out music for a career?
I think it was in the listening to music that I became inspired to pursue it. I remember seeing a documentary about Stravinsky on television that covered *The Rite Of Spring* and him sitting at an upright piano on a cruise ship. It was very odd. In the documentary Stravinsky explained things about the music, and that got me really interested in composing. In addition, I've always liked odd things. I remember that even in high school I was messing around with *Musique concrete* sounds.

That's not the type of music you normally associate with high school students.
I think what happened is I was a little lazy about practicing the piano, so instead I would make things up. Then I became interested in composing and happened on the Stravinsky documentary. I did, however, listen to a lot of rock and roll. I really liked The Rolling Stones. I also liked Frank Zappa.

His music is very eclectic.
Absolutely. It was also interesting for me to find out that Zappa was very interested in the music of Edgard Varese.

We need to follow up on that in a little bit. Back on your early history, how did you come to study at Barnard College?
I didn't have enough of a musical background to get into a conservatory, which I would have preferred, so instead I applied to schools in New York City because of all of the wonderful classical music there. I also grew up in a suburb of New York City, Westfield, New Jersey.

Did you go to Barnard as a piano performance major?
No. They just had a straight music major. Columbia University doesn't have any real performance program, so I took a lot of music theory, music history and composition/orchestration classes. A lot of courses like that. I also studied the piano privately with Kenneth Cooper.

How did your development as a composer progress while in college? Were there opportunities for you to compose?
Yes. One of the nice things Columbia University had for students was a series of concerts where we could write music and the compositions would be performed. Those were a lot of fun and very helpful, especially in working out how to produce your own music.

Were there any lessons you learned from those concerts that you carry over into your own work today, and here I'm talking about the production end of the music?
Oh yeah. Once I got going as a composer all of my music became, for the most part, self-produced. I think having the opportunity to put together your own performances and get them on a concert was very instrumental for me in learning how to do it. The college concerts even had a fund from which I was able to receive money to pay people in order to put on the concerts. It wasn't much, but it was something. The Manhattan School of Music was right around the corner, so I used to go up there and post signs looking for performers.

Was there good attendance at the concerts?
Yes. They were really wonderful experiences.

What was the experience at SUNY Stony Brook like?
I went there directly from my undergraduate school. I noticed a number of the students who were getting doctorates at Columbia had come from Stony Brook and they seemed to be quite good. That was what gave me the idea to apply there. The nice thing about Stony Brook was that the school administration had gone to New York and asked a number of the professionals in the city to come out and teach at the University. Arthur Weisberg and Ray DesRoches, the percussionist, were just two examples. Arthur had a contemporary music performance class that was wonderful. He had us take metronome tests. We had to beat certain tempos within a certain percentage. I also learned to do cross-rhythms while there, but I'm not sure whose class it was where I learned that.

Were there inklings, at Stony Brook, of the large ensembles you would later compose for, or did that come about later?
That came later. You know I must add that, oddly enough, I once wrote a piece for two violas.

I'm curious; did the piece for two violas employ the same type of rich sonic textures you compose in today?
Yes. It had a lot of double stops and emphasized the lower part of the instrument's range. I wrote that piece when I was really young. I think I must have been friends with two viola players (laughing).

How did the big large-scale works begin?
I was in Potsdam, New York, and they had a wonderful music department at the SUNY School up there. I became friends with some of the teachers and started to put together some experimental music performances. One of the things I did was a concert for cars, which was a precursor to my Car Horn Organ work. I had the faculty outside with the instructions for my composition on their rearview mirrors. The instructions included a number of different rhythms that were written out. They were also to drive around. I called the piece, *Real Music*, and the local newspaper came to review it. It was very funny (laughing). I also became interested in conceptual art around that time. I became very interested in the music of John Cage, as well as people who were doing odd performance things, and conceptual visual artists such as Andy Warhol and Christo, the artist who wrapped the shores of an entire island in fabric.

It seems to me that one of the more fascinating aspects of your music is the sound possibilities of instruments as they travel, whether stationary as in 10 Grand, or move, as in your piece Music For Choreographed Rowboats, throughout space and come to the listener from different locations.
Yes. The trombone work is particularly spatial. I got interested in surrounding the audience with the music and musicians, and not in the traditional seating arrangement.

The first movement of The Symphony Of The Universe is another spatially oriented work.
Yes. I really liked the idea of drum rolls coming from different locations around and surrounding the audience.

The recording of The Symphony is wonderful, but I'm sure it just can't do justice to having had been there live.
You know that's funny, because I don't even bother to listen to my recordings (laughing). I heard the performance live, so I have no need to listen to the CD. Now I have heard my recordings, because I've edited the tapes, but only for that aspect.

So your first spatial piece was this early car horn work.
Yes, but it wasn't a real big piece. What I noticed and learned, from that experience, was that I could, pretty much, talk anyone into doing just about anything for me. I thought that my being able to get people to do things would be an interesting thing to incorporate into my music. As I started, I found myself doing some odd events that were funny. The first one I did in New York City was called *Street Music*. I got the idea from walking through Washington Square Park, where you could find someone sitting there with his or her boombox. So I wrote a piece for boomboxes with musicians. It also had a coordinated radio broadcast based on *The Theme from Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.

Is this piece similar to the one John Cage wrote for five boomboxes, where the performers carry the boomboxes around the audience and at predetermined times change the frequencies the radios are tuned to?
Well, in my piece the audience actually brought their own boomboxes and the piece was designed to be performed in Washington Square Park. I supplied the musicians and the coordinated radio broadcast. I think the idea was that, and that it would be quite the giggle, if someone was actually in the park with his or her boombox and all of a sudden his or her boombox fit into this piece of music.

What was the immediate audience reaction to the work?
They found it fun. It was just a fun day out in the park. It was an event. My earlier stuff wasn't as strong in the musical department as it became by my biggest work, the trombone piece.

If someone took a cursory look at your music they would see great humor, which is also evident in you as a person, but to listen to your music is a far deeper experience.
I think that what happened in the beginning was that my music wasn't something you'd sit down and listen to. It was something that only meant something to you if you had been there. The next piece I did after the Washington Square work was for the choreographed rowboats. That was a lot of fun to be at, but as a piece of music it wasn't something... well, let's just say it was odd (laughing). In the recording there are sounds of the boat oars, and it becomes this funny thing. As I got more into these works I became more organized and interested in actually writing a really good piece of music. It took a long time to get all aspects of my art together. I think it reached its fullest fruition in the last one, the trombone piece.

It is a wonderful work. I was wondering how the inspiration to compose comes to you. Do you go to hear music by other composers? Do you find things within yourself that are demanding you to put to paper? Composers don't live in a vacuum and are certainly influenced by the work of others, but I was wondering how that worked in your particular circumstance?
I think there were a lot of key elements along the way. One person who was an early inspiration, for me, was John Cage. I went through a whole "noise as art" period. But now, while he is still very interesting to me, I'm more fascinated in the construction of his elements. He was very original and opened up a lot of parameters and different ways of thinking about a number of things.

Can you talk about your relationship with John?
Yes. I produced a couple of big concerts and did a couple of his pieces. The most successful one was a concert where I did the piece for 30 harps at the Cathedral of St. John The Divine in New York.

There we did his *A Postcard From Heaven*. I actually got to know him pretty well then. Four years earlier I had played bridge with him one night as we had mutual friends.

Who, or what other music, was an early influence for you?
One of my other early influences was Edgard Varese's *Ionization*, a percussion ensemble piece in sonata form. It was the first piece ever written without any pitches. I've always loved the modern composers for their orchestrational ideas. The list would include Bartok and Benjamin Britten. I also like Prokofiev a lot, though I've never looked at his stuff like I've looked at Bartok and Britten. I also really like the early works of Stravinsky. You know I got some ideas for my trombone piece from Charles Ives' *Unanswered Question*. There is that part where there is a sudden cutoff and you hear sound underneath. That gave me the idea for the giant suspensions I wrote in my *Mass*.

Walter Hartley's Sonatina for Trumpet and Piano also has a point where, after the trumpet cuts off, the resultant tones ring in the piano.
Bartok also did that. That effect also happens at the very end of my work *10 Grand*, though you can't hear it that well on the recording. The musicians are doing a lot of glissandos and then depress a chord and lift the pedal up, and you're just left with the chord. Another example of that would be Krzysztof Penderecki's string work *to the victims of Hiroshima*, but in a different way. He uses a lot of atonal material and tone clusters throughout and ends up with a C major triad at the end.

You seem to have developed a real affinity for the sounds that are possible to be created within St. John The Divine in New York, and have specifically written for that space on a number of occasions.
I've done three big events there. It's such a wonderful space, not to mention so large. Having started by working outdoors, I had to deal with the fact that you lose sound, but in St. John's Cathedral you actually gain sound. One of my ideas was to find a way to envelope the audience in sound. I was at odds with myself. Here I was creating things to envelope the audience, but I was losing the sound I had created. The first time I went to The Cathedral was for the harp piece in 1984, and I just never left (laughing). I've always tried to go back there whenever I could.

Was there a specific inspiration that led to Music For Choreographed Rowboats?
That was about having a dream with musicians in boats. If anything, I guess that piece didn't have a real strong inspiration coming from a different composer, but if anybody I would have to say Charles Ives. In one of his symphonies he has two marching bands, which are playing, meet each other in the street and then consequently leaving each other. You know, for that work I just had a dream about musicians being in paddleboats. I called up the boathouse in New York's Central Park and they told me they didn't have paddleboats, just rowboats, but they would allow me to use their rowboats.

Finding 77 trombonists for your Mass, finding enough bass drums and tympani for the First Movement of your Symphony, finding enough people to row the rowboats, are unique problems that not every modern composer faces. For you as a composer here at the beginning of the 21st century, what are the difficulties that you have run into?
I guess there are tons of interesting anecdotes. I had been writing a lot of percussion pieces, and I think I should mention this one particular piece I wrote called *One World Percussion*, which I had performed at the World Trade Center. I used 50 percussionists. I have always loved percussion music, which I think started from *Ionization* and John Cage's percussion quartets. I also really love Elliot Carter's piece for solo tympani. Now the *One World Percussion* piece was not as tightly composed as some of my others, but it was interesting none-the-less. That was one outdoor location where the sound was actually amplified instead of lost. I didn't actually get the sense of this, because I was at the concert, but somebody told me they had forgotten about the concert and was at J and R Music World (a few blocks from the World Trade Center) and heard the concert from there. What happened was that the acoustics of the Trade Center actually sent the sound out into the city. The buildings worked like a big band shell. The percussionists were set up by where the fountain was near the big globe. As a result of that piece I had become friends with a lot of percussionists. *Symphony of the Universe* itself actually came about when one percussionist friend, Howard Van Hyning, had just had a baby and he and his wife held a Christening party. It was at that event the idea for the massive percussion piece hatched. Before I started on the piece he told me that he could get me the drums.

That was nice, except once I started to write I realized I would need a lot of piccolo tympani because I thought the higher pitches would bring more definition to the actual notes. It turned out that in the end I was really scrambling to find and get all of the piccolo tympanis I would need. I ended up calling a lot of people I didn't know, who ended up loaning me their instruments.

Have you found most people to be friendly and helpful?
Oh yeah, everybody was very helpful. I never would have been able to pull it off if not for a lot of help. I realized that I had this talent to get people to help me, and thank goodness I realized I had this ability before I went into this line of activity (writing for massive ensembles). I found it quite surprising that I could call someone I didn't know and they would say, "Okay, come pick it up at 2 o'clock." (Laughing) My friend, the percussionist Howard Van Hyning, told me that I might have to substitute roto-toms for some of the piccolo tympani parts, but thank goodness we didn't have to do that. Now for the harp piece there was actually a waiting list of people who wanted to perform it. I didn't think it would be hard to do the trombone work, but a friend of mine said, "Now Wendy, where are you going to get 77 trombone players?" My response was, "There must be 77 trombonists in New York." (Laughing) It was a little harder to find the 77 trombonists than it was to find the 30 harpists. There was quite a jump in the numbers there. I used to see people walking down the street carrying trombone cases and I would follow them (laughing) to find out where they lived or worked. I knew it would be just too weird to go up to them on the street and recruit them. I only actually talked to one person that way, but he was in the Lincoln Center Library at the check out desk, so I didn't feel that was too weird.

Where and how do you hold rehearsals for these amalgamations?
I've had rehearsals in the choir room of the Cathedral at St. John The Divine, and also David Gilbert, the conductor, got me rehearsal space at The Manhattan School of Music. *10 Grand* we rehearsed in the Baldwin rehearsal studio in the basement of their shop. I have also held sectional rehearsals for the works.

Do you always use professionals, or do you use players of lesser ability sometimes?
No, straight professionals.

Are there elements of chance in your music?
When I started out some of my works weren't notated very specifically. It was much more free-form. I came to realize that the free-form stuff works with the small ensemble, but it doesn't work with large ensembles because you really can't even talk to everybody in those large ensembles. By the time I was writing *10 Grand* and *The Symphony*, my music all became specifically notated, that way nobody should have a question.

The idea for Quill and the use of surrounding the audience with bird sounds is truly unique. What was your inspiration there?
That's a funny piece. I wanted to do a harpsichord piece because I had studied with Kenneth Cooper, who is a great harpsichord player. You know, I just don't know how I got the idea for using bird sounds.

How does the compositional process work for you?
First comes the ensemble and knowing what type and size of ensemble I'm going to write for. Then I'll do an outline. I'll figure out what it is I want to say, how long the piece is going to be and in how many movements. *Ten Grand* was a little different in that I didn't know how many movements I was going to have ahead of time. The *Mass*, on the other hand, was modeled on the 13th century *Mass For The Dead*. I knew I was going to have that number of movements. Then I figured out which movements would be longer and the fact that in every other movement I would employ the solo trombone. That musician doesn't perform in the even numbered movements. Things of that nature are all worked out in advance. Even in that piece the only movement that doesn't have a direct quote from the chant is the opening movement.

So would you say you construct music in the same way authors lay out books and novels?
Yes. I get a general picture and then go into the specifics from there. When I first started composing I did it measure by measure, but not anymore. I think it's a lot faster to compose this way as well. One reason Mozart was able to crank out as music as he did was that he probably had the whole outline in his head. A lot of the decisions were already made before he started to jot stuff down. A lot of the speed in composing is in making the decisions. If you get bogged down in making decisions you can be stuck forever.

I'd love to talk about your piano playing. Your playing on the recording of your recently composed Antarctica Suite is incredible.
I practiced a lot, but now I don't play as much. That's one thing I wish I did more of. I do play if I'm working on something, so I played a lot when I was writing the *Antarctica Suite*. I also played a lot when I was composing *Ten Grand*. I played through many of the parts of that work as well as a lot of other piano works that year. I will go through long periods when I don't play the instrument, but I really like it when I am playing. When I was doing the Antarctica piece I was really playing away every day (laughing).

Are there certain things that helped you to perform the Antarctica Suite?
I memorized a lot of the work. It really goes over the entire range of the piano. I also prefer to play from memory if I have the time. I find you can get more into the music.

Can you tell me about some of your new music?
What I'm writing now is a voodoo musical. It's called *Voodoo On The Bayou*. This is fun for me because I've never had my hands in popular music. For me, it would be very hard to play the stupid keyboard parts in a rock band (laughing). I've spent a lot of time in New Orleans and become interested in a lot of the New Orleans funk sound. My musical is fun because I'm doing it backwards. I've been writing some lyrics and then singing a melody, and then I'll work out the chord changes and the music part later. I've been writing the play and the lyrics first. Sometimes I'll just sing the lyrics into a cassette recorder and write the tune that way. The plot concerns Marie Laveau, who was a voodoo queen who lived in New Orleans and died, at a very old age, in 1881. For a while I had a house on St. Ann Street in New Orleans, and she had had a house just a block away on the same street. I would hear all of these French Quarter walking tours going by and listened to what the tour guides said. The material was so fascinating that there was just no way you could make that stuff up.

From that I became interested in her life. It was even before then, long ago, when I toured the city with my father and we visited the voodoo museum. My father is also from Louisiana, so that connection was going on as well. I even met someone who claimed to be a direct descendent of Marie Laveau and they thought that was really cool. Well, my play is about her, but even more fascinating is that she was so famous and notorious, but there is little fact remaining about her. There are, however, a lot of stories and superstitions surrounding her. What I'm doing is modeling my musical after *Bring In 'Da Noise Bring In 'Da Funk*. That musical is a series of vignettes about black history told through tap dancing, and my musical is stories about Marie Laveau all done in vignettes. I think the real fun thing is that my musical will never really explain who she is. Some of the stories I'll tell I'm sure are true, and I'm just as sure some of my stories are not true. I'll also incorporate voodoo deities in it, such as Guedehs that live in graveyards. These are deities who you contact if you want to get in touch with a dead ancestor. They are devilish, funny and naughty.

Judging by your past work, where you've been able to realize sonic possibilities of instruments in a totally new and fresh way, I was wondering if you're going to approach the musical in that manner or in the traditional way?
I want to have some interesting stuff going on. For me this new project is fun because I'm going about composing in a different way from what I've done in the past. The *Twelve Squared* piece has some material that I composed in a different way.

You've called that piece a voodoo tone poem.
Right. What I did was do a reading with the New Orleans Voodoo Tarot Cards. I dealt out 11 cards, knowing ahead of time that the piece was in memory of John Cage and scored for 12 percussionists and that each of the movements would depict the meaning of the tarot card for that movement. That was fun, and I felt like I was getting in touch with the "other side." (Laughing) Cage had a piece I played in once where instead of the conductor conducting the work, the conductor was actually a big clock. What happens is that the conductor's arms go around like a clock. The right arm starts up on 12 and rotates down to 6, and then the left arm starts at 6 and rotates up to 12. The interesting thing is that everybody knows when it's 12, 3, 6 and 9, but nobody's really sure, for example, when it's 10 or 11. That was really interesting because the parts were scored out so that people were kind of playing together, but they're really not. There is a sort of synchronicity that happens sometimes, but sometimes it doesn't. That concept was really interesting, so I used that in the seventh and eleventh movements of my tone poem.

How did the toy piano playing begin?

I was asked to play in George Crumb's *Ancient Voices of Children*, and at one point the piano part calls for a toy piano. At the time I was up at SUNY Potsdam and they didn't have one, but I said, "That's okay, I want one so I'll buy my own." I ended up mail ordering one from J.C. Penny for $32. You know later on I began to get other toy pianos, but they were never as good as that first one. Then I decided to write my own piece for toy piano, which I performed at art openings for some friends of mine who owned a gallery. Since they didn't have a real piano I wrote my things for toy piano and brought mine along. After my first piece, I decided I should learn the piece Cage wrote for toy piano, because, let's face it, what else is there to learn for toy piano? (Laughing) Then I got an idea to do a solo debut recital on toy piano, which I did in 1990 at The Knitting Factory in New York. It was really fun and the *New York Times* came to review it. What I did was get a bunch of composer friends to write music for me. From there it burgeoned. Every once in a while I would go ahead and do another toy piano recital, and continued to search for new toy piano pieces. Since then I've had a number of pieces written for me from people in New Orleans, who wrote me some jazz pieces, as well as a lot of composer friends who have written even more for me. What's been fun about all of this is that I've met up with a number of composers I normally wouldn't have met because of this and have gotten to know them. So I've now got a big pile of toy piano music. The last concert I gave was in 1996.

Are you seeking to one day go back and perform some more on the toy piano?

Well what happened was that Schoenhut, a toy piano manufacturer, went out of business, but has since come back, and they've make an incredible new toy piano and gave me one. Now that I have this new piano I'm sure I'll be doing a new recording of some of that music. I'm more interested, right now, in getting the voodoo musical going. It's just so much fun.

Author's Biography

Dr. Thomas R. Erdmann

Hailed as "The Master" by *Saxophone Journal* magazine and whose articles are described as "always insightful" by the *ITG Journal*, Dr. Thomas R. Erdmann is Director of the Elon University Symphony Orchestra. He is recognized as the most non-self-published collegiate music professor in the United States by ecampus.com. His publications currently stand at over 175 articles published in al wide variety of scholarly journals, numerous music reviews for journals and newspapers, and five published books.

Among the many journals Dr. Erdmann has had articles published in include *The Journal of the Conductors Guild*, *Saxophone Journal*, *Women of Note Quarterly*, *WomenArts Quarterly*, *International Trumpet Guild Journal*, *Saxophone Journal*, and *Currents In Musical Thought*.

Dr. Erdmann is the author of three books (the first, *An Annotated Bibliography and Guide To The Published Trumpet Music Of Sigmund Hering*, was published in 1997, his second, *Problems and Solutions in Band Conducting*, was published in 2001, and his third, *How Jazz Trumpeters Understand Their Music: Twenty-Seven Interviews*, was published in 2010) and the editor of two new books of posthumously published trumpet etudes by Sigmund Hering published by Carl Fischer Inc. in 2004 (*Double and Triple Tonguing, A Complete Approach for the Trumpet*, and *Studies on Ornamentation for Trumpet*).

Currently Dr. Erdmann writes front cover articles for *Saxophone Journal*, is on the staff of *JazzReview.Com*, serves as the Jazz Editor of the *International Trumpet Guild Journal* and is on the Editorial Board for *WomenArts Quarterly*. Dr. Erdmann held the position of Principal Trumpet with the Illinois Symphony and Second Trumpet with the Vermont Symphony. He is also the only two-time Chair of the International Trumpet Guild Jazz Improvisation Competition. As a pianist he has worked with artists such as Phyllis Diller and Mark Preston.