

Art Lives - Farkas.mp3

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SPEAKERS

Scott Farkas, Elizabeth DeLamater

- E** Elizabeth DeLamater 00:09
Hello welcome to art lives, a series of interviews with artists of all media. My name is elizabeth DeLamater and I am a musician. That means that I study, play, and teach music in many different places... including concert halls, classrooms, and forests, and beaches...It's a unique experience that no other artists has, because art is unique. Our society enjoys and utilizes art in myriad ways. On this podcast we will talk with artists one on one about their art, their lives, and how they navigate the world. This episode features a chat with Scott Farkas, who introduces himself as an educator, maker, and a performer. As you will hear, Scott first trained for a very specific music performance career and now has become an artist in a much broader sense. Scott encourages and nurtures creativity in others. And he has helped to create a rich artistic community in Idaho, where he lives. He is also a very delightful person, and I hope you enjoy this conversation as much as I did. Here is Scott Farkas. So my first question is: How is art in your life?
- S** Scott Farkas 01:46
How is art in my life? Art is like a savior in my life.
- E** Elizabeth DeLamater 01:51
Okay.

S Scott Farkas 01:53
There's... there's like, I made this mistake when I was 17 of wanting to get good at music.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 02:01
(Laughs)

S Scott Farkas 02:03
Right? And I had this idea about what that meant. And I went down this road and dug, dug in really deep. And there was this really dark period of my life where I got really burned out and I wasn't playing anymore. And it sucked. And there were all these like road signs along the way... that I was heading towards this dark place. And I let people talk me out of them. Do you know what I mean? I told people, "I think I'm going to stop school for a while, I think I'm going to quit playing" or something. And people would be like, "No, don't do that. That's a mistake." And I let that happen. And I kept going down that road, to where music was not something I wanted to be a part of for a while.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 02:49
Wow.

S Scott Farkas 02:50
And I had all this professional training and that was really the only thing in the world I was qualified to make money doing. And I just didn't want to do it. And, at the time, I was a freelance musician. So this was when I was living in Ohio, right? So I had this crummy old apartment out there, and I was making no money, and I couldn't afford heat... You know there's a thing where you can't afford to have friends like, your friends call, they call you to like, "let's go get a beer" and you're like, "not only can I not afford a beer, I cannot afford the gasoline to drive to the bar to hang out." You know what I mean? So eventually people stop calling. So it was dark times. And so this is the story- it's gonna it's gonna get brighter! - So the story is, that I had this huge apartment for some reason. It was massive! It was like an entire house, but it was super cheap because it was in a crummy neighborhood. And the walls were completely white.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 03:23
Right. Of course!

- S** Scott Farkas 03:41
And... I was losing my mind. I wanted to buy some art to put on the walls. And so I started talking to artists I knew and I just didn't want to insult their work by asking them to cut me a deal. I couldn't afford their art.
- E** Elizabeth DeLamater 04:03
Right.
- S** Scott Farkas 04:03
And so... I talked to a friend of mine who was like, "You should go out and buy some canvas panels that are real cheap, buy some cheap paint and brushes and just make something and if it sucks, you can throw it away." So with all of this free time I had, from not having friends and from not wanting to gig and whatever, I started painting every day. Like, I painted. I painted for hours and hours- So all these paintings? (Gestures behind him.)
- E** Elizabeth DeLamater 04:30
Yeah! I've seen your work. I when I met you, you were already painting. I thought that was something you just done all your life.
- S** Scott Farkas 04:41
No when you met me, I just started painting. (Scott and Elizabeth laugh) And these aren't - like - they're not good! But I put them on the wall. And I tell my students, these are like a reminder about how that thing was here and it had to get out. And as soon as I started putting it out in a context where I wasn't trying to be great, where I wasn't upset if I wasn't a professional or whatever, I started putting it out a safer context... that brought me back into the into the life, you know.
- E** Elizabeth DeLamater 05:13
Yeah
- S** Scott Farkas 05:15
So in a sense, painting saved my life. It's like painting and music to me are all kind of the

same. I just didn't go down that road with painting like I did with music, right?

E Elizabeth DeLamater 05:27
So somebody just suggested it and you went, "Okay."

S Scott Farkas 05:32
Yeah, I was like "Well alright, I'll spend \$20 on some paints and canvas and some brushes and I'll do it."

E Elizabeth DeLamater 05:37
That is cool. Do you do you remember who that specifically is?

S Scott Farkas 05:42
Yeah, Yes. My friend Julie from New Jersey.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 05:44
Does Julie know?

S Scott Farkas 05:46
Yeah!

E Elizabeth DeLamater 05:48
So we're video chatting right now and I can see those beautiful colors behind you. Does Julie know the "monster" she has created?

S Scott Farkas 05:58
Yeah, so she was like, "You should sell your paintings" and I was like No, I don't want it to become that... what I like about it is that I'm not trying to sell them." But I was at the same time a broke freelance musician, so I guess I'll try. So for a long time she was like my publicist, and would be like, "Hey you need to put more things on your Etsy store," or, "You haven't posted on Twitter in two days. You need to get on there, or whatever." So I had this

persona that was Farkspot." The idea was, it was like all one spot, for art, and music, and teaching, and whatever; You come to the Farkspot. She helped me put all that together, and so she knew what was going on there. And then I came out here and she's like, "Farkspot died!" and I'm like, "Yeah, I have a job now!" (laughs)

E Elizabeth DeLamater 06:49
I had no idea. Wow. So she's like, your Artistic Angel.

S Scott Farkas 06:55
Yeah. Lots of people are, though. It's not ever just one person.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 07:00
No.

S Scott Farkas 07:02
Right?

E Elizabeth DeLamater 07:03
Never. Not for me, but... I like I said, I had no idea that you hadn't always done that.

S Scott Farkas 07:13
Yeah.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 07:14
That's wonderful. So now you say you have this job. But to me, it's not a job. When we talk about what you do, we talk about you helping people create. One of the reasons why I wanted to talk to you for this podcast is; the different people you encounter in this job, and the ways - the many different ways - you help people create. And you mentioned to me that it doesn't have to be a highfalutin, high cost thing. And that's kind of one of your missions.

S Scott Farkas 07:55
Yeah, so, right. So then you're freelancing, and you're applying for everything. And I got the gig in Idaho, right? So I teach at the College of Southern Idaho, it's a community college in Twin Falls, Idaho. It's a kind of a cool, interesting place. And you have an idea of what it's going to be to teach at to college. And it's totally not that. At all. (laughs) And there are a lot of different ways you can confront that: you can be frustrated with the students who come, and try to force them into the mold that you went through school in, or you can say, "What's the value that I can create here?" So, a big part of my life as a teacher is like the John Cage Rule No. 1: Find a place you trust and then try trusting it for a while?

E Elizabeth DeLamater 08:45
Yeah.

S Scott Farkas 08:47
So if the student has given me their trust, then I have kind of a solemn obligation to create value for them. And there is value I can create, even if they cannot play a four-mallet "ripple roll."

E Elizabeth DeLamater 09:00
Right.

S Scott Farkas 09:01
Or read an eighth note, or whatever, you know? We can work on all those things. It's school. It's for learning. And we can make really satisfying high-level music, without having to deal with all of that stuff on the level that you do on some of the composed, written out, measure-for-measure music that we all learned in our college setting.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 09:24
Right?

S Scott Farkas 09:24
You know what I mean?

- E** Elizabeth DeLamater 09:26
Yeah. What you just said was so, well, you said many important things. But the thing you said about the mold that you went through school. I just had this conversation with one of my colleagues at the university today, that we, we go through school and then we get out and we teach, and we expect to have the students that we were, and then we expect to recreate the school that we think we had, or the education we think we had, and that's that's not possible and that's not reality.
- S** Scott Farkas 09:59
Right. And that's not saying, "Man, there was this great thing, and now there's this terrible thing, and I have to make it work." No! It's saying, "Your life is different than my life, and to be a good teacher I have to recognize you're a different person and find the thing that is going to be valuable to you."
- E** Elizabeth DeLamater 10:18
Right.
- S** Scott Farkas 10:18
This situation in Idaho is different than the situation in New York where I went to school. And so I have to find the value here. And that's a wonderful, beautiful process to go through. You know? I just did an exercise with a bunch of my faculty where we were talking about values. We're trying to define our values as an arts department.
- E** Elizabeth DeLamater 10:42
Wow.
- S** Scott Farkas 10:45
Our number one value came out to be: More People Should Make Art.
- E** Elizabeth DeLamater 10:50
That's beautiful.

S Scott Farkas 10:52
And if that's where you're starting from, more people should make art? Well, then everyone's welcome in the room.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 11:00
Riiiiight.

S Scott Farkas 11:00
When you come in, it makes planning harder. I can't plan the repertoire in advance, right? But when you come in I'm going to say, "Here you are, what do you want to learn, what do you want to do? What's your ambition?" and then let's figure out a way to get there. So you start from the outcome, and then you figure out the things that you can plug in to get to that outcome.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 11:22
Yeah!

S Scott Farkas 11:24
And that's how you construct it. So you're making really meaningful stuff.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 11:31
Beautiful.

S Scott Farkas 11:32
And maybe not teaching the things you thought you were going to teach.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 11:38
Is that okay with you?

S Scott Farkas 11:41
I love it. I love it. I start my semester by asking my students what they want to learn.

Instead of starting by saying, "This is what we're going to do", I say, "what do you want to learn, and how can we go from there?" and then, I mean, I don't want to seem like the the kids are running the candy store, right. So we start with: "What do you want to learn?" And then I'll say, "This is what I hope you'll learn..."

E Elizabeth DeLamater 12:04

Yeah. Okay.

S Scott Farkas 12:06

Then: "This is what the college hopes you'll learn, and this is what you hope you'll learn. And let's put those three things together and chart a path." And we're going to do that by making things. Not necessarily by doing a particular piece of repertoire - although sometimes we do that - but we're going to make stuff.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 12:30

And so then... what do you do personally now? When you - how do you personally make art? Is that by helping others make art? Do you still paint on the side? Do you still perform on the side?

S Scott Farkas 12:47

Hang on look over here: This pile on my desk, of un-filled-out thank you notes. (laughs) So these are like my Thank You Note paintings, right? I paint thank you notes to people, and I try...you're always trying to think about the people who inspired you as an artist. And so - I'm sorry, I'm talking and I'm not near the camera! So Jim Tenney inspires me a lot. James Tenney. And so I started thinking, I'm writing thank you notes to people who aren't necessarily musicians, or who are all different kinds of musicians, and I want to give them a piece of music. And how can I do that? So I started, like, on the backs of them, composing these little pieces that they can play.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 13:02

Whoaaa! Beautiful. Cool!

S Scott Farkas 13:35

Right, so they get a painting and they get a piece of music and a thank you note, and so

that's the way that I still paint. But, you know, I feel like my class, my students in that ensemble, we make the music that I wish I was making.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 13:55
Yeah, great. That's marvelous.

S Scott Farkas 13:59
You know? Yeah. (laughs)

E Elizabeth DeLamater 14:00
I mean, it just sounds like a dream. So what are you thinking about next? The words near and far, whatever that means to you... what's the next thing you'd like to try? Either with your students or alone. And then do you have a longer term project that you're thinking about that will be different? Or are you working on hanging with this beautiful thing that you're doing right now?

S Scott Farkas 14:44
So, I have things on the calendar because I'm addicted to putting things on the calendar. Okay. So in November, I'm going to premiere a new concerto for glockenspiel and orchestra.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 14:57
Wow!

S Scott Farkas 14:58
Which is going to be cool, yeah. If I ever practice! Yeah, that'll be, that'll be fun.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 15:03
Is that your piece?

S Scott Farkas 15:06

No. Do you know James Romig?

E Elizabeth DeLamater 15:08
Yes, I do.

S Scott Farkas 15:09
Composer at Western Illinois? He composed it.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 15:13
Did you commission it from him? That's fantastic.

S Scott Farkas 15:18
Yeah, it's a it's a strange story. Actually, I commissioned it three years ago for a symphony to remain nameless. And yeah, we we got to the performance date and they didn't want to play it. They like they literally backed out of the performance maybe two weeks before the show. And I spent the last few years shopping it around looking for someone else to premiere it and the little community orchestra not far from here that wants to do it.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 15:37
Oh, no! So cool. You commission a lot of pieces. You ask other people to write pieces of music for you. So then does it feel personal like when the orchestra said, "No, we don't want to play it." Do you have personal emotions tied to these pieces?

S Scott Farkas 16:07
I was really upset..

E Elizabeth DeLamater 16:12
Yeah. I mean, sometimes I feel like I'm irrationally emotionally tied to music or pieces or events.

S Scott Farkas 16:22

I don't know, I think I was really tired.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 16:24
Yeah. (laughs)

S Scott Farkas 16:26
You know, like, the push towards the premiere performance was a lot of late night practicing. And you know, all that stuff.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 16:32
Yeah.

S Scott Farkas 16:33
So I was really tired and I was just upset that I'd put all this work in. But I don't think there's value in being upset like that, you know. They have to give the performance that's meaningful to them. And in some way, you can imagine, if we had gone through a contentious rehearsal process and given an unmeaningful premiere, then we all would have walked away with a bad taste in our mouth, and that piece would have been brought into the world in a negative way. So, there's value in finding someone who wants to be a part of it.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 17:11
That's for sure.

S Scott Farkas 17:12
You know what I mean? Like I think... it's.... it's so difficult but like, I really feel like there's when you're angry at something, or someone, or whatever, that impacts you and not them.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 17:25
Yes.

- S** Scott Farkas 17:26
So you should try to release that... but it's so hard.
- E** Elizabeth DeLamater 17:30
I know! You seem to be so stable now, Scott. Please give me lessons!
- S** Scott Farkas 17:37
Well, this is years after it happened - You should have seen me that night! (laughs)
- E** Elizabeth DeLamater 17:46
So do you get upset about things now? You found yourself in this place where you have figured out how to create, with all of these people that you get to teach. And I know you're in a beautiful place; you love the nature that you're (surrounded) in Idaho. Are you uncontented or or dissatisfied right now at something?
- S** Scott Farkas 18:18
There's always frustration, there. I wish more kids would come to school.
- E** Elizabeth DeLamater 18:23
Yes
- S** Scott Farkas 18:24
You know, not just kids, I should stop using that word. I wish more people would come make stuff with me. Like, this is a community college. And a big piece of the value is that we're here for the community, right? Come make stuff with us. And a lot of people do, and it's really great. And I just, I always wish there was more... so you know, there is that... I don't know, like, I think things are going alright. You can always play that game in your head: "If only I had a doctorate... If only I had this job...if only..." But like, you'll drive yourself crazy doing that.
- E** Elizabeth DeLamater 18:57
Yeah.

S Scott Farkas 18:57
I think it's it's something to try to be really thankful for the opportunities you've been given. And to try to do really well with them, and understand that you can create beauty anywhere, right? And I try to do that.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 19:13
So what what is your life like now, compared to what you thought it was going to be like? And I know that's hilarious question!

S Scott Farkas 19:28
What frame of reference do we want to use? Seventeen year-old Scotty who thought he was going to be in the New York Philharmonic? (Laughs)

E Elizabeth DeLamater 19:36
That's exactly it! That's, that's like the favorite question, right? Right before you graduated from high school, what did you think success was going to be?

S Scott Farkas 19:46
Yeah, I thought I was going to be in the New York Philharmonic or an orchestra like that, and I was going to be composing for big orchestras. Big, symphonic pieces for big orchestras, right?

E Elizabeth DeLamater 19:57
Awesome.

S Scott Farkas 20:00
That's totally not where I am. And it's also totally not a fallback or a backup, right? You just learn the diversity and intricacy of options that are available to you, and you start following whatever complex path you follow.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 20:15
That's beautiful. So what inspires you? What would you do if you had the day off

tomorrow? What would you do, or read, or look at? How do you find inspiration?

S Scott Farkas 20:34
Do you mean like in creating art?

E Elizabeth DeLamater 20:36
Sure.

S Scott Farkas 20:38
So honestly, right now, I'm thinking a lot about my - it's called percussion ensemble, but I kind of call it experimental music - class. We're not always hitting things.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 20:52
Yes.

S Scott Farkas 20:54
So I've been thinking about that class. So there's, there's seven of us. I include myself in the class this semester. And we've been given access to an abandoned department building/ department store.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 21:11
What! Wow!

S Scott Farkas 21:12
So we're going to do a performance experience in there before they tear it down, which is in November. So we're going to do it in October, it's coming up, right?

E Elizabeth DeLamater 21:22
Super cool.

S

Scott Farkas 21:23

And I told them at the beginning of the semester, "Rather than play a bunch of other people's music, I want us to create the whole event." And so we're dealing with, "How do you write and learn an hour of music, when you're an inexperienced musician, and give a convincing performance that involves your audience, all in a month and a half?"

E

Elizabeth DeLamater 21:47

Oh, my gosh. When did you come up with this idea?

S

Scott Farkas 21:52

I kind of was working on it through most of the summer, because I knew I had the space. And I knew kind of what I wanted to do. And I started looking at repertoire materials, and thought, you know what, if we're going to talk about making things we should make something.

E

Elizabeth DeLamater 22:06

What I do is take the repertoire that I'm looking at and use it as examples of creative process. Okay.

S

Scott Farkas 22:12

So when students say "Okay, so, you know, an hour of music is like, 150 (written musical pages) and I couldn't possibly write and learn those in a month." I agree, "You can't."

E

Elizabeth DeLamater 22:27

Yeah.

S

Scott Farkas 22:28

So how do we how do we solve that problem? And the answer is, "A lot of people have solved that problem. Lots of different ways. Let's look at some examples." So we get to look at Frederic Rzewski, building an entire evening length piece, one note at a time, one, two, then three, then four. And all you have to do is learn one short melody. And you've got so much material. Or someone develops a system of rules, and then you play out the rules. You can learn the piece in 30 seconds, and have lots of material that you can go

deeper and deeper and deeper and deeper into. So you give a convincing performance day one, but you can give a deeper performance every day you work on it. There's instant success.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 23:18
Yes.

S Scott Farkas 23:20
And instead artistic gratification, and you work from there to get even deeper. There's never the, "It sounds like crap but the concerts tomorrow!"

E Elizabeth DeLamater 23:29
What have you done already? You are in your week three of your semester, right?

S Scott Farkas 23:34
Yeah, they've got about 40 minutes of music ready to go.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 23:37
Holy cow!

S Scott Farkas 23:38
Yeah! That's pretty cool. (laughs) So we're doing things like: Everyone has a random number generator. And you generate a number between 15 and 200. And then you count silently to that number. And then you play a drone while counting silently to that number. And then you play another drone while counting out loud to that number, and then you count out loud without the drone.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 24:11
Nice.

S Scott Farkas 24:12

So this is this is symphonic form, right? It's four parts: A, B, A prime, B prime. And it takes up a bunch of time, and it's really rich and complex counterpoint. And we played it within a few minutes of having come up with the idea as a group. But then we can go back and rehearse and talk about, "Okay, so if our ears are really turned on, (I will) realize I'm counting at the same rate as the person to my right. Is that something you want to cultivate or something you want to move away from?"

E Elizabeth DeLamater 24:46
Right!

S Scott Farkas 24:47
Or, realize we have options in terms of dynamic here: "Do I want to adjust dynamics as people enter?" Or, "do I want them to be impacted by entrance and exit? To what kinds of sounds do I want? Complimentary or opposing sounds?" Do you see what I'm saying?

E Elizabeth DeLamater 25:02
I love it, I love that.

S Scott Farkas 25:04
So we're tying music making to our ears. And all this, and we can talk about form, we can talk about counterpoint, we can talk about creativity, and all this stuff. But I don't need to teach you really complex individual measures of 5 over 10 over 9 over 7 to get there. Even though we're getting things that sound kind of like that.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 25:25
I've been doing these kinds of pieces with my elementary or middle school groups in summer camps. For the same reason, I used to try to find somehow a piece or two we could play in a week and then play for our parents. And you know, then students might either have a really boring part, or they might have very difficult part that they're trying to learn with written music. But if we play a piece, like what you're talking about, then right away, we can all be talking and discussing about what we're hearing and contributing, making decisions and trying things out. And it's so much more fulfilling, and also participatory, and creative. And they're super excited at the end of the week! And then they - I hope - talk to their parents about it all the way home, but they always have a ton of things to say about it. And that's been much more fulfilling. And the feedback I've

gotten after camps, and I hear from these kids now during the year and I never used to when we were doing, you know, like, I don't know, I don't want to say the name of an actual piece-

S

Scott Farkas 26:43

Yeah yeah I get what you're saying!

E

Elizabeth DeLamater 26:44

But yeah, I used to try to find pieces that somebody published and no, yeah, I let go of that too.

S

Scott Farkas 26:51

Do you know, Danny Clay?

E

Elizabeth DeLamater 26:56

Not personally, but I know the name.

S

Scott Farkas 26:58

Yeah. Danny - I just met him last year. We did a bunch of his music last year.

E

Elizabeth DeLamater 27:03

Wonderful. Okay.

S

Scott Farkas 27:04

He's, he's a great composer, but he's an elementary school music teacher. I said "but." I don't mean but. AND he's an elementary school music teacher. And he writes for these big deal groups, you know, So Percussion, Third Coast Percussion, these kinds of guys, and the music he writes for them, is the music he makes with his elementary students. So it's games, like you learn the game, and you play the game. And that's the piece. And so, Third Coast Percussion does it and it sounds different than when seven year-olds do it. But there is just as much music when the seven year-old does it, there's just as much joy and community, and understanding. And it's beautiful, It's just beautiful stuff.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 27:53
Nice. Okay. He's my inspiration these days. My musical inspiration. Yeah, that's nice. Are you reading books?

S Scott Farkas 28:05
Reading books? Yeah, so...reading is a challenge for me. Because I always joke; I say, "I'm the college professor who doesn't know how to read." Because, I'm dyslexic, and like a lot of musicians, I process a lot (of information) using auditory processing instead of visual processing. And so I have this weird relationship with reading where it's a real struggle for me. To read and comprehend and process it. So something that might take you an evening to read might take me a week. And it's not enjoyable. Like, it's really difficult. So I listen to a lot of books, and that's really nice for me. I try to listen to novels a lot, because I want to kind of get away from work... but at work I'm now in this leadership thing. We're learning about leadership. And so I have to listen to these leadership books.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 28:41
Oh, wow.

S Scott Farkas 28:46
That's, that's what I'm listening to at the moment.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 29:17
During the semester, do you have time to listen to whatever you want, or play whatever you want? Do you have any time like that?

S Scott Farkas 29:27
Well okay, so a lot of the music I want to play, a lot of it I get to do in my classes. I do the music that Bernard taught me from Ghana in one class right now. In percussion ensemble, we're making that long experimental thing. But we're also doing traditional Mexican marimba music.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 29:40
Fantastic! Yeah.

- S** Scott Farkas 29:43
And we're also doing samba music. So like, the rehearsal is two hours. And we do one hour of of "What If?" I call it. I call it "What If?" hour?
- E** Elizabeth DeLamater 29:56
Nice. Beautiful!
- S** Scott Farkas 29:57
We do "What If" and one hour of traditional music from somewhere. And the idea is, like, you should also learn how to dance, and you should learn how to sing, and they should all be part of community-based music making, right?
- E** Elizabeth DeLamater 30:11
Yes.
- S** Scott Farkas 30:12
And so we're going to do that through Brazilian music, through African music through Mexican music through even traditional American rope drumming and things like that, you know?
- E** Elizabeth DeLamater 30:20
Cool.
- S** Scott Farkas 30:22
So, we do all that. So that's all music that I really love making, and I get to make it as part of my job.
- E** Elizabeth DeLamater 30:31
And it doesn't feel like work.
- S** Scott Farkas 30:33

Sometimes it does... (laughs) on Thursday afternoon when you're pretty tired.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 30:39
Yeah, sure.

S Scott Farkas 30:41
You know, I teach percussion ensemble and then African drumming, back to back. And it's like, five hours of just straight teaching. And every time I get to the second class, every time I get to the African drumming class, it starts at five and it goes seven. And every time I'm like, "I should just cancel class tonight. I'm so tired" Every time at the end of class. I'm like, "I'm so glad I did that! That was awesome! "

E Elizabeth DeLamater 31:09
Yeah, right!

S Scott Farkas 31:13
So, there are parts I feel like work and there are parts that don't. I try to listen to music still...I don't know, what are you listening to? What should I be listening to?

E Elizabeth DeLamater 31:24
Oh, I don't know if you ask me that, because now I'm teaching a different popular music class. I'm teaching a rock class for the first time in a couple years. And so I'm trying to cram some of the more popular stuff I haven't listened to lately.

S Scott Farkas 31:44
I love pop music! So have I told you my pop music quality theory?

E Elizabeth DeLamater 31:48
Oh, please tell me. Yeah.

S Scott Farkas 31:50

Okay. So this is this is the theory I have and Podcast Universe: Disagree, It's fine. So here's the theory: the theory is, and I'm gonna I'm gonna mash this up a little bit, but; in different musical eras, the creators tend to be focusing on one element or another at a time, right? So like, Bach is working a lot on counterpoint. And it gets really complex. And, like Mozart is like "Form. It's all about clarifying form!" So like, harmony gets real simple, counterpoint gets real simple, it's just melody and chords. And they're like "I-V-I-V. And we're going to figure out the form." And then like, in the Romantic era, they're like, "Harmony, harmony, harmony, harmony, harmony, right?" And so like, we fall back into the classical forms, and it's like, all about the harmony. And then for some reason, we got stuck there! And we decided that harmony was the only indicator of quality. And so, the complaint about pop music is that it's not harmonically complex enough, right? But here's my theory. The harmony got simple. The forms got simple, the melodic content got simple, because what are we playing with? We're playing with TIMBRE. All the computers, and the electronic drums and the auto tune and all that is playing with timbre, and we just don't have the music theory vocabulary to precisely describe the experiments with timbre that are going on in pop music, but that's where the quality is happening. And that's why everything else simplified, so that we could spend a few decades messing around with timbre.

E

Elizabeth DeLamater 33:30

And that then goes to texture. I mean, the texture that seems simple, you take a part or split apart all those digital - I want to say digital atoms - I was listening to, as I said, the radio for my class. I ended up listening to Billy Idol. And I thought, "Oh, my gosh I never realized how many different instruments are playing in this last chorus. This is a really, really dense orchestration." And all I knew at the time was, I thought he was super annoying. You know, I thought his hair was dumb (laughs).

S

Scott Farkas 34:19

Or go back; I was just on a road trip this weekend. And that song by America came on, "The horse with no name?" And like, everyone knows it, right? (sings the chorus) and you get the melody in your head? Well, what you don't realize, is that there's a final orchestration, that you add a thing add a thing add a thing. And the last piece is a counter melody that starts on tonic and rises through the verse to end an octave higher on tonic. So you get like, like, in the Bach Cello Suite (sings the penultimate phrase) to the chorus, right?

E

Elizabeth DeLamater 34:57

Yeah!

S

Scott Farkas 34:57

So that happens in this thing, and you're like, "This is why this is such a timeless song. It's so good. It's using all of the stuff that I love about Bach. And all of the stuff that I love about Beethoven is in this America tune! We repeat the melody, but the orchestration changes and the harmonization changes. And you know what I mean? Like, that's wonderful.

E

Elizabeth DeLamater 35:17

Yeah. And the all these, you have all this music, and people now; these great - they call them producers, but they're arrangers and composers

S

Scott Farkas 35:27

They are composers!

E

Elizabeth DeLamater 35:28

They are just picking from this amazing buffet. And they know how to put this stuff together, literally. And some of it is incredible. And like you said, there are so many songs that will come on, and I've said, "Ugh, this old thing," and then I realized, "Oh, wait, this has that descant that I love to sing along to!" or "This has that bass line!"

S

Scott Farkas 35:52

Yeah if you go into the studio and say, "I really liked that descant that you wrote there" they would be like, "What??" (laughing)

E

Elizabeth DeLamater 35:56

Yeah right! (Laughing)

S

Scott Farkas 35:58

I read a great interview with Lars Ulrich talking, I think about "Master of Puppets."

- E** Elizabeth DeLamater 36:02
Haha Okay
- S** Scott Farkas 36:04
And he said, "Some musician came up to us and asked, 'There's a measure of 5/8 or something. What did you think about, how did you go into the decision to make that measure 5/8 there?'" He goes, "I think someone just said, 'Let's try it shorter this time.'"
- E** Elizabeth DeLamater 36:20
(laughing)
- S** Scott Farkas 36:20
You know, right? It's, it's exactly right. You don't have to have all of the like, fancy words, and all the... what's good is still good. Do it twice and then do it different the third time.
- E** Elizabeth DeLamater 36:40
There you go.
- S** Scott Farkas 36:41
That's still going to be good. No matter how you do it.
- E** Elizabeth DeLamater 36:44
Yup. Bring it back at the very end again, do it one more time.
- S** Scott Farkas 36:49
Exactly. Yeah, exactly.
- E** Elizabeth DeLamater 36:51
Yeah. Form is form. That's another thing. Anyway... I can tell I'm at the beginning of these pop classes, because I'm thinking about all of these universal artistic things. I'm looking architecture right now. I'm going, "Oh, yeah, there's a Stevie Wonder tune in that building."

S Scott Farkas 37:15
That's why I don't want - in Scott's ideal world there's no music major. There's no art major. There's no dance major. It's just Make. No major, just make art. But, you know, I guess that doesn't get you a job.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 37:30
Well...

S Scott Farkas 37:32
It should. I think it should. But...

E Elizabeth DeLamater 37:36
Yeah, but you got one. You got a job doing something you never thought you would do or you didn't know existed.

S Scott Farkas 37:44
Do you know what? This is what I find myself saying to lots of young artists sitting in my office. I'm sure - you're a professor - you've had this conversation 100 times; The student who comes in and they're like, "I'm a business major, but I want to play in your percussion ensemble," and then they play. And then a semester later they're like, "Man, I really hate this accounting class." And then, like a semester later, they're like, "I'm thinking about dropping out of school." And then all of a sudden, you're talking to them (and they are asking), "It's stupid to be a music major, right? Like, there's no money, I shouldn't do it." And I find myself invariably saying, I can't tell you that you're going to have a career as a musician. There's no way to know that. And like you said, there's no way 17 year-old Scott could have known. He's teaching at a community college in Idaho. Like, if you would have asked me when I was 17, I would have said, "There's a lot of things in the world that I'll do. But one thing I will never do is be a teacher. It's ever going to happen!"

E Elizabeth DeLamater 38:36
Amazing.

S Scott Farkas 38:38

Ha! Because teaching was like the family job, and I hated it. I didn't want to do it and whatever. And so, but here I am, and I love it. And so what I say to the student is, "There's no way to know what you're going to do. A major doesn't make you do something or not do something. But here's what I do know: Whatever you do, whatever it is, you will be better at it because you studied Art.Period.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 39:03
Yes. Amen.

S Scott Farkas 39:05
You may become an accountant. And you will be a better accountant. Because you studied art.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 39:11
Amen.

S Scott Farkas 39:12
That's it.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 39:16
That's beautiful. Well, I think that I need to have a chat with you every week, because then I think that would be good for my soul.

S Scott Farkas 39:29
(Laughs)Maybe. It's always fulfilling and wonderful to talk with you.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 39:35
Aww, thank you. Alright, to finish this wonderful, amazing conversation. Can you please recommend three...anythings. Anything at all that you would like to point people towards? And it could be a poem or a painting or a book or a financial seminar?

S Scott Farkas 40:07
(Laughing) You want three things.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 40:17
Scott's three things. That you are into right now.

S Scott Farkas 40:19
Okay, so listen, my first one is going to be wacky, and then I'll try to come back with normal. So my first thing is, Make Something With Someone. We don't do it, it's not a part of our ethos. It's not a part of our lives, and we're afraid of it, and we shouldn't be. So go out. Either either. Find the person that's asking you to make something and don't let yourself say no. Or just find someone and make something. And the second level if you are already a pro at making things with people, find someone you don't get along with and make something and it's going to help you get along with them better.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 41:02
Right. Yes.

S Scott Farkas 41:03
Because you're making something together. Okay, that's I guess my first thing. Man, now I have to pick... Okay, so I'm really into the wonderfully simple and beautifully complex music of Sarah Hennies.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 41:23
A ha.

S Scott Farkas 41:25
Do you know her stuff?

E Elizabeth DeLamater 41:26
Yes I do!

- S** Scott Farkas 41:29
I just learned about it last year and dug in deep. And it's great. I'm actually going to make a music video out of one of her pieces next month with my friend John over at ISU. And it's - all of it is like one really simple idea for a long time. And there's so much depth. So if you're into like, that kind of thing. Sarah Hennies' music, check it out.
- E** Elizabeth DeLamater 42:00
Beautiful.
- S** Scott Farkas 42:01
Okay, I need a third thing.
- E** Elizabeth DeLamater 42:03
Yup!
- S** Scott Farkas 42:08
Man, Elizabeth, you're making me think tonight. So we're making something, we're listening to Sarah Hennies. And okay, so you should check out the ceramic work of an artist named John Toki. He's a ceramicist, who makes sculpture. So he's not making a lot of vessels and things, though he doesn't make some. And it's just gorgeous. It's like these totem pole looking things that are full of color, and life. But like he goes and makes them in places. So they're impacted by the people who are there. And he often asks people to make them with him.
- E** Elizabeth DeLamater 42:53
Oh neat.
- S** Scott Farkas 42:54
So there's like, amateur creation and professional creation put together into a thing. And it's like, it's beautiful stuff.
- E** Elizabeth DeLamater 43:03

Where do you see that? Where do you...do you just see that online? Is he near you?

- S** Scott Farkas 43:10
Okay, he's in San Francisco. And the story is when I got here, I went to the pottery professor and said, "You know, there's this great piece by Frederic Rzewski named "To the Earth", played on pots. And how cool would it be if I had pots that not only sounded great, but look great. Will you make me some?"
- E** Elizabeth DeLamater 43:29
Right!
- S** Scott Farkas 43:30
And he said, "I'll make you pots, but not to play someone else's music."
- E** Elizabeth DeLamater 43:33
Heyyyyy!
- S** Scott Farkas 43:35
So we're gonna make a piece together, right? So he and I wrote an hour long (piece), he made a gallery of pots. And then I made electronic music out of them and then wrote a performance track that goes with the electronics, we did an hour long thing. And I played on the gallery. So people are milling about the gallery and then play the pots, right? So the process of this, right, this goes back to number one, Make Something With Someone.
- E** Elizabeth DeLamater 43:59
Yup!
- S** Scott Farkas 44:00
Yeah, the process of this really joined us together as creative souls. And so now we work together a lot. We hang out, we talk about art, we do all that stuff. So he brought John Toki into work with his students last year. And he and John and I, like went out and hung out and had dinner and made art. And he and his students made this beautiful piece of

sculpture together. And so I started looking into his work. And it's just gorgeous stuff, man. Actually some of our students just went out. And he made the ceramic poles that are like six feet tall. And they're just like this. And then the students painted them. And they installed them in San Francisco, out there at an art gallery. It is really cool. A cool thing.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 44:47
You are truly doing some beautiful stuff out there.

S Scott Farkas 44:51
Well, I mean, this was the work of my colleague, right, I shouldn't take credit for that.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 44:57
I mean, it sounds like an amazing community. Sounds like a wonderful place to be.

S Scott Farkas 45:02
Yeah we're trying to do good stuff. A friend of mine from a long time ago always talks about the gig triangle. There's three parts: there's the money, the I'll call it the content, he would say the money, the music and the people, but I would say the money, the content and the people... You need two of the three to take the gig. But what I'll take it further to say is, you want to try to make all three as good as you can. So: Build the community, Figure out the money as you go, and Make whatever you can, as as great as you can, while you're doing it. And it's gonna be awesome.

E Elizabeth DeLamater 45:37
Beautiful.

S Scott Farkas 45:37
Right?

E Elizabeth DeLamater 45:41
Yeah.

- S** Scott Farkas 45:42
That was inadvertently a cadence, right?
- E** Elizabeth DeLamater 45:43
That was -
- S** Scott Farkas 45:44
Nice! (Laughing)
- E** Elizabeth DeLamater 45:46
I know! I think I'm gonna cut here - yeah! Don't say anything else! (laughing)
- S** Scott Farkas 45:55
Yeah, uh-huh. (laughing)
- E** Elizabeth DeLamater 45:56
Thank you so much.
- S** Scott Farkas 45:57
It was a lot of fun.
- E** Elizabeth DeLamater 46:12
You have been listening to the Art Lives Podcast. Thanks so much to Scott Farkas for talking with me. You can find Scott's work online at Scott Farkas dot com, which is spelled S C O T T F A R K A S dot com and also via his college, which is the College of Southern Idaho, which is C S I dot edu. I've posted links to those sites plus links to Sarah Hennies and John Toki on the Art Lives page of my website, which is Elizabeth de la mater dot com. My deep gratitude to Bill Sallak for his expert production advice for this episode, and special thanks to composer Nicholas Meyers for the use of his music. Nick and Ken Jimenez performed this track. Thank you so much for listening to Art Lives.