

Crossing the Horizon, UFO opera:

Matt Lyons, BUFORA Chairman speaks to U.S. composer Chris Lastovicka. The UFO opera is one of the few musical works that treats the subject with respect and a genuine approach in its portrayal of this subject. The British UFO Research Association welcomes this as an example of what can be produced to reflect the serious aspects of the UFO phenomena.

Hi Chris,

Thank you for speaking to us about your paranormal work, the UFO opera. In my opinion, it is one of the few genuine and sincere works that has taken the subject seriously and used the music to great effective use in portraying witnesses that have perceived abduction experiences.

Can you tell us about your journey through music, including places studied and when you started to play an instrument?

Thank you for your interest in *Crossing the Horizon*. I grew up in a musical family: My mother played several instruments and earned a master's degree in music history. She began teaching me when I was three, and often played recordings of classical music for my brother and me throughout the day and as we fell asleep at night.

When I was nine, I started studying the organ, which became my primary instrument. I was drawn to the repertoire by Bach, Durufle and Messiaen rather than the actual instrument. I travelled a lot during my junior high and high school years, going to organ lessons and workshops led by performers and scholars, competing in competitions, and performing recitals.

I met Bach specialist Roberta Gary when I was a teenager and became enamoured with her Bach playing. I decided to attend the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music to study with her. In college, I double majored in composition and organ performance. One of my composition teachers, Frederick Bianchi, was instrumental in creating the space for me to find my voice and broaden my compositional horizons: We often spent lessons talking about visual arts and architecture rather than music. Many people criticized his unorthodox method of teaching, but for me, it ignited my creativity and desire to learn.

What inspired you to generally compose music?

I started composing when I was a young child. I think the reason for this is that I don't like to talk about what goes on inside of me, but at the same time I have to express it. Writing music is the best way for me to express myself, because I can convey abstract,

visceral ideas without the personal details. I am drawn to composing for completely selfish reasons - which is that I want to hear it. The meditative qualities of repetition and drones, with an under-pinning of tension, with subtle changes which move at a pace that I can handle, within a dramatic arc, are what I want to hear.

In general, I have been drawn to compose when I sense a tension of opposites. I find the combination of despair and hope the most intriguing. *Crossing the Horizon* is an excellent example of this combination: The horror of the experience, the ensuing emotional turmoil of dealing with that horror, and the wisdom of having had the experience are interwoven. Other works I have written include a song cycle with readings by someone living with AIDS, a chamber music piece in honor of victims of terrorism, and an electronic piece for dance inspired by an Andrew Wyeth painting depicting the revelation of a dead body within the melting snows of spring. People's resilience, strength and perseverance through what may seem unthinkable give me great inspiration, and it is that part of our humanity that I want to express in my compositions.

What are your collected works so far?

As for recordings, besides *Crossing the Horizon*, I have a CD of chamber music called *Fortune Has Turned* (Ahari Press). *Incantations and Inspirations* (Classic Concert) includes "Láska", a piece I wrote for baroque oboe and harpsichord. I've also written additional unreleased chamber music that usually includes some combination of strings, horn and piano. I've also written solo piano music, choral works with chamber ensemble, and song cycles for contralto, soprano and tenor. Later in 2011 I will release an album of electronic music on my Ahari Press label.

Who are your greatest influences in any music idioms?

Bach, Vivaldi and movie underscoring are probably the greatest influences on my general musical aesthetic. Baroque-style set-ups and resolutions of dissonances form the backbone of my writing, as well as the baroque idea that certain intervals relate to particular emotions. And the traditional baroque lament – a four-note descending scale – is the essential musical theme of the opera.

I'm usually attracted to music that achieves a sense of otherworldliness. For me, that has included certain works by Bach, Durufle, Jehan Alain, and Arvo Part. I don't think it is any coincidence that these four composers were and are writing from a religious, higher-than-self framework.

As for non-classical music, I've liked a wide variety, ranging from Prince, Rush and Annie Lennox to certain song soundtracks such as Michel Legrand's *Yentl* to the underscoring of movies such as Anne Dudley's work in *The Crying Game*. But probably

the non-classical artists I've listened to the most are the original Massive Attack – I've listened to their “Unfinished Sympathy” from *Blue Lines* hundreds of times.

There must have been a point where you were first attracted to the paranormal and UFO subject. Where did this begin for you?

I've been interested in the paranormal since I was a small child. When I was seven, for a few minutes I felt the odd sensation of non-existence – the void of nothingness. I also had a few minor experiences of knowing things before they happened. It never seemed strange to me that such things would occur. We're only capable of sensing a small fraction of electromagnetic radiation. We're unable to feel the bacteria on our skin. Some people feel things others can't. Our senses are extremely limited, and it is obvious there are things we don't even know we don't know. The discoveries we've made in the last two hundred years are extraordinary and were unimaginable to most people of the 18th century. I feel certain that as long as the value of science continues, the more we will understand about paranormal phenomena.

It was E.M. Lauricella, the writer of the words in *Crossing the Horizon*, who introduced me to the UFO subject. She offered her stand-alone epic poem for me to read, and I became mesmerized and absorbed with the ideas and wanted to do something with it musically. For the next year and a half I spent writing the opera, I lived in this new world. Lauricella taught me most of what I learned about experiences of abductees, and eventually I read books and went to UFO-related meetings in the vicinity of Cincinnati and Yellow Springs, OH. For some reason I felt able to relate closely to people's experiences without having been abducted myself (that I know of...).

There are many songwriters in pop and rock idioms which have dealt with the UFO and abduction phenomena with angles of fantasy, shock, science fiction, parody and various film or musical soundtracks. Was there a realisation that there was very little written from a sincere and informational viewpoint in narratives or musical score?

Yes, I realized this at the time I began working on *Crossing the Horizon*, when I began looking for other musical works dealing with UFO abduction. Much of what I came across seemed superficial and sometimes disrespectful to the actual experiences of so many people. I'm not sure why that is.

What inspired you to write this in an opera format?

When I read Lauricella's epic poem, I thought the piece should have a visual component. I also thought the raw human voice would be the most powerful expression of the ordeal of the abductee. At first, I set some of the words to music, meaning the words were sung. But then I realized the words weren't front-and-center enough. It was

important to me that they be understood at every moment. So I changed what I had written and adopted a format in which all the words are spoken, and all the singing wordless.

I should note while *Crossing the Horizon* has been supported by opera companies such as New York City Opera and Houston's Opera Vista, many people don't think the piece is opera, because while there is operatic singing, the words themselves aren't sung. But the word "opera" means "work", and to me, the format should not be restrained in this way. Opera is serious music's highest dramatic form, and today it is unable to satisfy the average person. Most operas today are anachronistic. It's time for opera to develop an open mind. Companies are still building sets rather than utilizing flexible digital images; slow-moving librettos of little complexity are still being written; opera houses are usually sterile environments in which you're not allowed to even drink a beverage. We've grown up watching mesmerizing movies, yet opera is still stuck in the past and wonders why it's so difficult to find new audiences.

I had hoped *Crossing the Horizon* would help push the genre forward, but so far it has been difficult and only excerpts have been performed. Opera aficionados are troubled by the format, and non-opera goers steer clear of traditional opera. I'm looking forward to the day when our paths finally align...

The music is clearly based on enhancing the feelings and thoughts of witnesses of perceived abductions. How specific was the research into the phenomena. Were any organisations contacted or books related to the phenomena?

E.M. Lauricella's epic poem is based on real experiences of real people. Most of my inspiration came from her work and from conversations with her, because she had been in contact with a number of people in the field, such as David Jacobs and Budd Hopkins. But it was primarily an intuitive connection for me, and I was on board from the beginning after reading Lauricella's work.

After the debut of the UFO opera, are there any other projects that may take a similar pathway, perhaps instrumental or with voice once again?

E.M. Lauricella and I have talked about adding two sequels to *Crossing the Horizon*, but we haven't made any decisions yet.

Do you think the opera has inspired others to compose for the UFO phenomenon?

I don't know, but I hope so. I hope more serious works on UFO-related subjects will be created once *Crossing the Horizon* gets more exposure.

Where can someone buy the CD and how much will it cost?

Crossing the Horizon can be purchased at <http://www.aharipress.com/ufoopera/BUFORA-coupon.html> Readers of this BUFORA article can order the CD for \$7.49 USD (25% discount off the regular price) plus shipping.

Chris, we thank you very much for your time in talking to BUFORA.

Thank you for your interest in *Crossing the Horizon*!

Chris Lastovika, October 2010.

This article is copyright of Chris Lastovika and BUFORA.