

michael dulin

Interview with Kathy Parsons July 2008

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KP: It's hard to believe that it's been more than four years since we did your first interview! At that time, you had released three CDs of original music plus two classical CDs, and now you've just recently released "Follow the River," which is your eighth CD. What was the idea behind "Follow the River"?

Dulin: The original inspiration for "Follow the River" came from the view that you see on the front cover of the CD. I was sitting on a rock, looking down at the river, and wondering where it went. That set me to thinking about how much the journey of life is like the river. The main melody from the title track came to me on that very spot, and I whipped out a page of folded manuscript paper (I always carry one) and wrote down the first theme, and above it, the words "follow the river."

KP: Several of the pieces on the CD have Biblical references. Let's talk about some of those. First, let's talk a bit about "Nimrod" so fans don't get confused about the title!

Dulin: OK, OK, it was probably a mistake to name the song "Nimrod." I was definitely not aware that the word "nimrod" is sometimes used to denote a person who is perceived to be foolish or silly! In the book of Genesis, Nimrod is mentioned as a mighty warrior and hunter who founded the city of Babylon. I imagined the journeys of that great hunter as I wrote the music for this song.

KP: How about "Family Bible" and "Promised Land"? What inspired those?

Dulin: My mom has a very large, very old Bible in which all of the important family events of the last 100 years are recorded. Although the family history fascinates me, it is the faith that has been passed down from generation to generation that is the real inspiration for this song. "Promised Land" is just the happy end of my life's journey - a great reason to celebrate with a joyous song!

KP: "Chasing the Wind" was dedicated to the memory of pianist/composer Laurie Z., who died of lung cancer in 2006. Laurie was a good friend of mine, so I'm curious to know what inspired you to compose a piece in her honor. She was a wonderful person!

Dulin: I came to know Laurie Z. through Janet Cucinotti. Janet is doing Laurie's memory a great service in her unselfish devotion to continuing her legacy. Laurie's work was cut tragically short by her early death, but her music captured my heart with its joy. I learned that Laurie often improvised complete songs, from beginning to end. That doesn't often happen to me, but the song "Chasing the Wind" happened very much like that. I was setting up the piano for a studio session. The record button was on, the piano sounded wonderful that day, and I was in the spirit. This song popped out, almost just as you hear it on the CD. This is a free, happy song and it made me think of Laurie Z.

KP: You have become a very active artist with Whisperings Solo Piano Radio. How has that affected your musical career?

Dulin: David Nevue and I have become good friends, and through him I have come to know a lot of other artists whom I admire - David Lanz, Greg Maroney, Jeff Bjorck. New friendships, internet exposure, live performances, CD and download sales have all greatly increased because of David's wonderful idea of founding Solo Piano Radio.

KP: Are you hosting most of the Whisperings concerts that David Nevue doesn't attend?

Dulin: I host some of the concerts on the East Coast, yes. I guess David just selected the biggest ham east of the Mississippi, and gave me the job!

KP: Do you have any concerts coming up?

Dulin: I'm very excited to be performing a joint concert with David Lanz in October. We are appearing together in Birmingham, Alabama, which is my home. I also am playing a Solo Piano Radio showcase in Nashville in September, with Joseph Akins, Philip Wesley, and Catherine-Marie Charlton. That should be a lot of fun. Greg Maroney and I are planning some concerts together, and I would like to do some joint concerts with Jace Vek.

KP: Why did you start the tradition of including a lullaby on each of your recordings?

Dulin: I love the barcarolle-like rhythm of a lullaby. Although I have never had any kids, I love kids, so I decided to write lullabies that are a bit more sophisticated than the ones you normally hear. Hey, smart kids have to sleep too!

KP: Will your next release be "Timeless II"? Have you chosen any of the music for that album?

Dulin: I have recorded two pieces for it already! "Timeless II" will feature the music of Chopin, Rachmaninoff, Bach, Saint-Saens, and Mussorgsky for sure. Other "maybes" are Grieg, Beethoven, Ravel, and Debussy.

KP: Do you have any idea of when that will be released? Do you plan to make it your next release?

Dulin: As of right now, "Timeless II" will be my next album, but I haven't set a release date yet. I'm a deadline-driven person, so when I set the release date, I'll finish the album! I'm guessing that it will be an early-spring 2009 release.

KP: How did you go from being one of the top classical pianists in the country to one of the top so-called new age pianists?

Dulin: On one of our vacations, I noticed that many gift shops played and sold solo piano CDs. I thought, "I can do that." So I went back to the studio, and four months later my first CD, "The One I Waited For" was finished.

I had "on the job" training, learning as I went along. One thing just seemed to lead to another. I found Ed Bonk of Lazz Promotions. Thanks to his wonderful radio promotion skills, that first CD was #1 on the World Airplay charts

for three months. Since then, new opportunities have continued to arise. That's the story!

KP: How is working in the contemporary music business different from working in the classical field?

Dulin: Contemporary music is far and away the more demanding of the two, because for me it involves performing plus writing. The audience for my original music is much wider and diverse than the classical music audience, so the opportunities are greater and there is a lot more marketing work to do. I have recently hired an assistant to help with some of the business and marketing responsibilities, because they have become overwhelming.

KP: Who are some of the other contemporary pianists that you especially admire?

Dulin: I think Philip Aaberg is terrific. David Lanz, Keiko Matsui, Clara Ponty, and Greg Maroney are a few of the artists that I admire.

KP: Although you are generally classified as a new age artist, I think I'd go with "contemporary classical" for the structure of most of your music as well as the complexity of so much of it. How do you feel about that?

Dulin: As I have progressed, I think that the classical structure imposes itself more and more on my music. This is obviously true in a lot of the music from "Follow the River," even though I think that this latest CD is the most "commercial" of all my CDs. The "tools" of classical music are at my disposal, so they naturally have become a part of my musical language, just as Appalachian music and jazz elements are also present.

KP: That's really interesting, because I thought "Follow the River" was the least commercial of your CDs! I always thought adding the synth sounds on your earlier albums was a bit more commercial, and on the new album, you seem less concerned about going over people's heads with a more classical approach.

Dulin: I do think that "Follow the River" will reach a wider audience than my previous CDs. It might take a little longer to find its niche, because it's a bit harder to classify than my earlier CDs. We'll just have to watch what happens. I hope that everyone who reads this will go directly to amazon.com and buy "Follow the River" just to prove Kathy wrong!

KP: Don't get me wrong about this. By "least commercial" I meant more artistic rather than just looking for popularity. "Follow the River" is my favorite of your albums and I really think it's your best work to date. So yeah folks, head on over to Amazon! You won't be disappointed!

KP: Are you still playing with the group of "jazz legends"?

Dulin: Nope, sadly, that is history. The problem with living legends is that they get older and retire!

KP: Do you play much jazz for your own enjoyment, or do you usually practice classical music?

Dulin: I practice mostly classical music, because there is still so much great music that I want to learn!

KP: You mentioned some time ago that you were working on a smooth jazz album. Is that going to happen? I love the upbeat jazz pieces that are on some of your albums - "Gone Fishin'" on the new CD is a blast!

Dulin: I am definitely planning to do the smooth jazz album! My hope is to finish "Timeless II," then do the Smooth Jazz CD, then another Christmas CD.

KP: You are one of the most impressive and versatile pianists I've encountered. I think a lot of people would be surprised to know how much you still practice. Do you play every day? How long are most of your practice sessions? What do you play?

Dulin: I try to play every day, because if I don't, I get awfully cranky! My sessions last anywhere from an hour to as much as four hours at a time, but I usually work in one hour segments, with each hour devoted to a single goal. I spend an hour every day on a group of Chopin etudes. Right now I am spending an hour on the music for "Timeless II." Another hour is devoted to keeping in my mind and fingers the music that I already know; one day I work on my original music, the next day on classical music that I already know, just to keep it all performance-ready. I like to spend an hour memorizing new music, and I try to do some sight-reading every day.

KP: Take note of that, piano students! The best musicians are great because they have talent, but they also really have to work to stay on top! That never ends.

KP: You are a partner in the PSI (Polymusic Studios Inc.) recording studio. Along with recording your own music, what kinds of things do you do there?

Dulin: We record a lot of voiceovers at the studio. We also record acoustic, alternative, Contemporary Christian, and some gospel music. My primary functions are producing, digital editing, and mastering.

KP: How is the companion sheet music book to "Follow the River" going? Will the music also be available as digital downloads?

Dulin: It's coming along well, I think. All of the music is written, and I am reviewing it before sending it to my editor for proofing. For those who don't know, my editor happens to be Kathy Parsons, who is the world's greatest music editor and proofreader! She has golden ears and eagle eyes combined. If correct and readable sheet music is required, you can rest assured that no mistakes slip past Kathy!

KP: Why thank you! And you also transcribe a lot of other people's music into sheet music form. Does that keep you pretty busy?

Dulin: Really busy! I could give up my other work and just do transcriptions for a living. I am having a lot of fun right now transcribing the music from Robin Spielberg's latest CD, "A New Kind of Love." Once again, you are part of that effort.

KP: That promises to be a great book. The music is somewhat easier to play than some of Robin's earlier sheet music books, and the songs are all wonderful!

Dulin: There are some truly wonderful songs on Robin's latest CD! It may very well be her best ever.

KP: I think so, too. What have been some of your most memorable musical moments?

Dulin: One of the highlights was playing Chopin in Warsaw, Poland. Another was playing in the band with Dennis Edwards and the Temptations Review! Really, any time that I am so into the music that I forget where I am, or even that there is an audience, is a peak experience that I can't describe. It is akin to what athletes would call being "in the zone."

KP: What's up next for you?

Dulin: More and more music... The projects we've been talking about will keep me occupied well into 2009, so I'd better get going! Thanks, Kathy. It's been great talking to you.

(Note: Because of his father-in-law's extended illness, Michael's put all performance and recording on hold for 18 months. Michael's father-in-law died September 29, 2009.)