

Episode 05: Getting the Song Out with Vivian Fung - Transcript

Elizabeth McDonald:

Hello everyone and welcome to the GETTING THE SONG OUT podcast! We are WOMEN ON THE VERGE

I'm Elizabeth!

Emily Martin:

I'm Emily!

Kathryn Tremills:

I'm Kathryn!

During COVID-19 we realized that we needed to keep the art song world at the forefront of the conversation. We had been talking about this project for a long time and Quarantine was the perfect time to connect with new and old friends across the country - incredible Canadian female composers ...

Kathryn Tremills:

Thanks for joining us again. This week we are talking to Vivian Fung, and the piece we've just heard, "Mix a Pancake" is from her cycle *Songs of Childhood*, performed by soprano Alexandra Smither and pianist Trevor Chartrand .

I discovered Vivian's music while searching the Canadian Music Centre listing of women composers and was excited to find her songs prism-like in their kaleidoscopic array of colours. They shimmer and sparkle. Named "one of today's most eclectic composers" by NPR, she is deeply committed to research and exploration of cultures that has taken her to Cambodia, Southwest China and Bali. She is also a devoted advocate for the next generation. Here is our interview with Vivian, recorded earlier this summer.

All:

Hello!

Emily Martin:

How are you?

Vivian Fung:

Hi, good how are you?

Emily Martin:

We're good, thank you. Thank you so much for doing this today.

Vivan Fung:

Absolutely. I was just my - my son woke up really late, so he got pushed back.

Elizabeth McDonald:

That's a good thing. Is he suddenly a teenager?

Vivan Fung:

He just turned five.

Elizabeth McDonald:

So almost a teenager.

Vivian Fung:

Yes, he just turned five. And so everything is different now.

Emily Martin:

Yeah. We all have kids between us of different ages, so we totally understand.

Vivan Fung:

Oh yeah.

Emily Martin:

Yeah, I have a two and a nine year old.

Vivan Fung:

Oh, wow.

Emily Martin:

Yeah. Elizabeth, you -

Elizabeth McDonald:

I have a 16 and a 19 year old.

Vivan Fung:

Oh, are they, are they at home?

Elizabeth McDonald:

Oh yeah., as of March 13th...

Kathryn Tremills:

And mine turns six tomorrow. So the last month has been -

Vivan Fung:

Yes for everybody.

Emily Martin:

So how else are you doing during the coronavirus?

Vivan Fung:

Well, it's been a ride. I mean, I've actually been working, which is a real blessing. I don't know if you have been tuning in, on the CBC, but there was just a huge release of my piece - I should send you the link. It was released on Canada day on Wednesday, and it was a really special project. I got a phone call back in March about it. There's an executive producer who called me at the CBC and said that she's putting together an orchestra of 30- 36 musicians representing 28 orchestras across Canada. And would I be willing to write a piece for that virtual orchestra? So I had to compose it, like in like a matter of seven to ten days I had to compose it, and they just aired it two days ago.

Emily Martin:

Oh fun.

Elizabeth McDonald:

Is it called *The Prayer*?

Vivan Fung:

Yeah, it was a big deal because it was just, I don't know how they put it together. So they recorded each of the 36 musicians separately and put it all together and yeah. It was like, you know, things have been going on like this before, but nothing that's a new thing.

Elizabeth McDonald:

That's really cool.

Emily Martin:

Oh, my that's a wonderful idea.

Vivan Fung:

It is a great idea. And so I wanted to do it, but you know, as you know, with a child at home, it was really difficult. We managed fine. I mean, you know, I have a really wonderful partner that was able to take over.

Emily Martin:

One article we were really loving is your writing about motherhood, that's on your site. And so this idea of truly having to rethink how you compose once you have a child. So what you just said is really interesting, right? It's like, you know, you have 15 different ways of making your child busy while you do all this.

Vivan Fung:

And also, I think just as far as the time, you know, pre child, I would sit around for two hours and know, get the juices flowing, have my fifth cup of coffee, and now it's like 90 minutes is gold. Like, you know, if I had 90 minutes, I could, I could write a whole symphony.

Emily Martin:

[Laughing] It's amazing how fast you can get good at things in 20 minute increments.

Vivan Fung:

Exactly.

Emily Martin:

Yeah. Totally agree.

Elizabeth McDonald:

Well, it's funny because as we were discussing that article, I was saying, you know, Kate and Emily had their kids a little bit later than I did. I was still in my twenties when I had my children. And so, you know, there's that thing about, you still haven't really got your life sorted out. You haven't got your, your discipline perhaps, or your day to day or your, you know, all of those things. And I remember I had just graduated from grad school and I had gotten married and I'd started working professionally and then had a baby. And it was like a whole bunch of new things happened at the same time. So it was really, I feel like for those of you, who've had children after your careers have been established and you've had this time to sort of settle into a routine. I'm curious how that worked for you perhaps differently, because that was not my experience at all. It was just like let's light every single major life event off in the same year and go.

Vivan Fung:

Wow! Well I think for me, I never intended to have children or to have a child. So I'll have to tell you a story that kind of put it into perspective. So I went to school in New York and probably hence the, you know, I lived in New York, over 30 years. I went to school in New York. I graduated in New York from Newark and I got married in New York. So New York has, was my home for a long time. And I had a mentor, you know, I went there very, very young. I came fresh out of Edmonton and, you know, all starry eyed and went into New York. And my mentor was a closeted - well, he was closeted for a while, but then he was quite openly gay. And he was by

the time I arrived to have lessons with him, he was like in his late seventies, early eighties. And he helped me a lot. I mean, he gave me my first big break, but I can remember my New York debut. It was with the New York Chamber Symphony and he was on stage and I was 19 at the time. He was on stage with me in a pre-concert talk moderated by the manager of the orchestra. And he basically, you know, after just out of the blue, he said, "Now, look Vivian, you're going to have to decide: either you're going to have a career as a composer, or you're going to make babies." And you know, it left an impression because of the shock of listening to that in front of a whole audience full of people, in public and uncensored like that. And not even like, just, you know, as an aside or in private, but it was in front of all these people and it just left an indelible impression on me.

Elizabeth McDonald:

No kidding.

Vivan Fung:

I mean, it was, it was sort of like, I was like in shock and the manager was like livid because, you know, it was like, how dare you do something like that in front of everybody. But I mean, because he was my mentor, and I didn't really have female mentors that I could talk to. I mean I had masterclasses with, with female composers, but it wasn't really like at a level where I could really talk to someone. And so for a long, long time I said, no, I'm not going to have children, I can't do it because I want my career. So I can't have children. It's like, I can't. And then things change, you know, you find your partner and, you know, things change.

And I didn't have my child till I was 40, so it was one of those things that, and that's why I think, you know, for me, mentoring has been so important because I wish I was there for me when I was in my twenties, and hope that it doesn't repeat itself again. So yeah, I guess I had the opposite experience from you. I mean, I wish I didn't have that sort of, idea injected into me, but unfortunately I did.

Elizabeth McDonald:

But I don't always think that those things - I mean, that's terrible that someone, anybody can feel that they can say something that personal in public, especially, especially now as we, as we are in 2020 to think that's what women have experienced forever. That people just feel like they can say they want to you, with respect to something so private. But I also think that oftentimes those kinds of experiences are what mobilize you to then discern. And you've obviously very carefully discerned and decided and made those choices - you know what I mean? And that it's really influenced, how you go about your life and your day and the choices you make and you've written so beautifully about it. I think that's really important.

Vivan Fung:

Yeah, I think it's given me fuel, but it's also given me a lot of hours of, you know, questioning and a lot of hours of anguish of, should I do this? Shouldn't I do this. And, you know, I mean, if I had someone to talk to then, I mean, I look now on a lot of women composers now, and then they wouldn't even think twice about it. So it's not even an issue.

Emily Martin:

Right. I mean, I had the same thing. I had people that were in my life saying you either have a career or you have a baby. And I had my first one at 37 and my second at 43. So I totally understand where you're coming from. And then it makes us think so much more about that mentorship, right? So this person, this man had not thought how important his words felt and how important his words, the weight of his words, even in public or private, I never had it in public, so I can't even imagine. But now we understand those words, right. As a mentor and how important they are. So -

Vivan Fung:

And at that time, I didn't even think that it would be so important. But now that I think back it's, you know, that little thing and that, you know, you have to be careful what you say, because you know, you don't, you never know how you're going to impress on somebody and for him, he didn't even realize that he was doing it because he -

Emily Martin:

Well, and that's the problem, right? My mentors were women that said this and they didn't realize they had never even, they had not had children. Right. So singers, when I was young, didn't have children, teachers didn't have children, you know, and so they don't realize they're doing it, but what a gift that we now understand how important it is to say certain things and to support women in a way that's really important.

Vivan Fung:

Yeah, I mean, or even men for that matter. I mean, as far as you know, there's still is the stigma that, Oh, if you have a family, then you somehow are, you know, someone who realizes that you have a family. I don't think that is true maybe of this generation, but in the past, it certainly was. So that if you had a family that meant somehow that meant that you were less serious musician or whatever.

Kathryn Tremills:

So is that something that you feel you would like to pass on? Are you mentoring women composers?

Vivan Fung:

Well, I'm not telling everybody to go have a child, that's for them to decide, but just to open that conversation to allow permission to even, you know, have that conversation about life decisions. You know, and that anything you decide is fine. You know, if that calling is loud enough, it'll

happen. You know? And in fact, if you delay certain life decisions, it may come back to haunt you someday, you know?

Emily Martin:

Should we skip a little bit to some of your composing, because we really are excited.

Vivan Fung:

Yes!

Emily Martin:

I mean, these topics - we actually already had them on our list of things to talk with you about. So, you know, we're really excited that we get to talk to you and probably we'll revisit them. But let's talk a little bit about how you write for the voice. So we love all of your pieces and are especially interested in some of the influences that you have for writing for the voice. So, one thing I know you mentioned is that you were invited to a residency in Tuscany where you wrote your Songs for Childhood. Can you talk a little bit about your journey, just writing for voice in general, maybe that one in particular, and sort of plans for more in the future?

Vivan Fung:

So I think I was quite fortunate in the sense that, you know, and this is something that I don't know if this has changed or not, but when I was coming through the ranks as a student, vocal music was never really taught as a composer. You know, you go to your class and orchestration, you have harmony and counterpoint exercises and, you know, you learn all about the craft of constructing a piece, but vocal music is something different. I think in the sense that it still requires a lot of what I just mentioned, but in addition, it really requires a more intimate knowledge of someone's voice. And I think there were two really important events that happened that made me really - and it's centered around both Songs of Childhood and Six Haiku, that really shaped my knowledge of writing for voice and the first ones are centered around Songs of Childhood.

Vivan Fung:

So I was invited to a residency in Tuscany. That was, it was great, except for the fact that I think we were placed in the sort of, there was a Villa that we stayed in and it was the principal mentors that were staying in the Villa and we stayed in the outhouse. You know, all of us students stayed in, you know, a little -

Emily Martin:

It wasn't quite as romantic as it sounds.

Vivan Fung:

No, I mean, we're like, you know, sharing, you know, five to a room or something.

Emily Martin:

But not ideal for composing.

Vivan Fung:

Yes, of course. But you know, what I gleaned from that was that, you know, there were daily workshops on the piece and working - so they invited six composers and six vocalists to go to this residency. So it was . where I had written the draft of the piece and, you know, you go there to workshop a piece to fine tune it, to really find out about, you know, who you're writing for.

So, um, Karen Karen Holvik is a wonderful soprano and she teaches at New England Conservatory, and she agreed to come with me, and we really workshoped the piece and worked with Mark Oswald, who was the mentor vocalist at the time.

Emily Martin:

He's a great guy, isn't he?

Vivan Fung:

Oh yeah. He's really wonderful. Really got to know, not only about writing for voice, but also writing for a specific voice types and also for my singer, and you know, just really nuts and bolts of how to write for voice. And so that was really great to be able to do that. And then the second experience was, I was lucky enough to get a spot in Composers and the Voice, which is run by American Opera Projects and you work and they run, I think, what's it six months, or I think it was around six months that you write for each voice type, every month.

And you also find out about repertoire, you get a workshop with that particular voice type, you know, a singer comes and shows you, we know what works for his voice and the repertoire associated with it, and all the different things that you need to know. And that helped me a lot. So those two things, I think really set it up for me as far as how to, how to write for voice. And then I think a third event, I think you're alluding to is my travels to Southwest China.

So I've been interested in minority groups, in Asia for a bit, for quite a while. And I decided one day to really explore some of the minority groups. And I noticed that Yunnan province, which is located in Southwest China, kind of borders Tibet Nepal and that region has the largest density of minority groups. I think over 26 official minority groups, there are more, but they're officially recognized. So I contacted an ethnomusicologist there who has been working with minority groups. He taught at the union arts university for a long time. And so I went to work with him. So for the first couple of weeks that I was there, I just worked with him as far as recognizing the different types of minority music. And then after a while we got a car and a driver and we basically did the bar talk thing. We went to different villages, that the ethnomusicologist, his

name is Zhang Xingrong - he took me to a lot of the villages that he personally, a lot of the farmers and villagers, he was personally acquainted with and knew. And so we did homestays and I started recording their music and their dances.

And I had known about this kind of music before, because I was listening to his recordings of, of the minority groups, and some of that music found its way actually, before I went to the trip, I composed a song cycle called Yunnan Folk Songs, and that's based on some of the music of the minority groups. So the Yunnan folk songs sort of highlight, different minority groups. I think there are seven or eight songs in there and it kind of highlights different minority groups and it's my own contemporary resetting of it. So yeah.

Elizabeth McDonald:

Sorry, I'm curious about the idea that you said, because I have a quote and you just quoted yourself, creating your own contemporary reaction to the source materials with these folks songs. And as a teacher, as a voice teacher at a university, you know, you're always looking for repertoire for singers and then not having a very diverse studio with respect to cultures. I'm wondering, is it acceptable for non-Chinese singers to sing these songs? Like do they study them in depth with the Chinese teacher for technique and style? I'm wondering if you can sort of speak to that aspect of cultural appropriation versus appreciation within the context of that?

Vivan Fung:

You know, there was a recent article that actually someone just friended me, his last name is Tan. He talks about appropriation versus appreciation. I think I was talking to ethnomusicologist about it. And first of all, I think it's important to recognize he was quite quite adamant in letting me be aware of the differences in the minority groups, you know, inflections and everything, but also that you're acknowledging that this is the source that it's coming from. So you're not just taking it and you know, just claiming it as your own. I think that that is a very important distinction. So I am honoring the fact that this is coming from this minority group and then I'm taking it as a contemporary reaction to it. And it's true though. I mean, as far as the premiere of that piece, I had everybody listened to the source recordings so that they could get the inflections.

And I don't know about instruction about that. Unfortunately, you know, I don't know if there is any sort of instruction, but at least they were listening to the recordings. And so the way the text works actually, is that a lot of the minority groups or some of the minority groups, their languages are actually becoming extinct because the languages themselves are entirely oral, there's no written language. And it's, so it's passed down orally from generation to generation and as a result of modernization and children kind of being best off to boarding schools or to work in the cities, the language is being lost. And so actually, you know, it's also a means of preservation that you know, the people that are trying to preserve the language through oral oral histories or some sort of way to write it down phonetically. So this is what I did with the song

cycle is that I try to as accurately as possible to put it down in phonetics. And that's the way that the singers were able to understand a little bit more.

Emily Martin:

So when you had the original premiere, you had them listened to those recordings, are those recordings part of, if somebody else wants to perform them, do you offer those recordings?

Vivan Fung:

Yeah, there hasn't been actually, but yeah, I mean, these are recordings that I worked with as a musicologist, so that I can get them and they've been released. I think, you know, there was one other example of, I wrote a clarinet quintet, after I came back from Yunnan and I, at the end of that quintet, I quote, I have a recording playing of a singer from Yunnan, the source recording at the end, as the inspiration behind the piece. And the musicologists contacted me and said, this is not right. You have to acknowledge that person. And so whenever possible, I try to make sure that both the recording is from him - *Zhang Xingrong* - And also the fact that she is the name, and which minority groups she's belonging to. I think that's important. And I think that that's very important as far as appropriation, too, as far as acknowledging the fact that this is the source of material and that you're not just, you're not just using it, or just trying to, you know, claim it as your own.

Emily Martin:

So with that being said, and I know COVID right now as an issue, have you thought about, have you brought these songs back to that province? And sort of seen what that reaction is with some of these people who helped you create them?

Vivan Fung:

Well, I've showed it to the musicologist and he thinks it's kind of weird [laughs]. But he appreciates it because it's you know, it's a different layer, and I think, you know, you have to take it into perspective because a lot of the singers, the folk musicians, perhaps has not even - well maybe it's different now because it's been a while since I've been traveling and doing that, but the fact that they haven't even been on a plane before and have had no sort of knowledge of what's happening other than what they see on TV. So I think, you know, with that understanding, I think a lot of things are weird.

Emily Martin:

Very interesting.

Kathryn Tremills:

You have an article where you talk about embracing your banana-ness. We were wondering if you would like to talk about that and what that is, what that means, and how that has influenced your writing of the folk songs of some of your -

Vivan Fung:

Yeah, as you know, reflecting on things and also, you know, it's also apropos of the times, I'm thinking about potential opera material as well. You know, I consider myself sort of like a hybrid, but you know, so to speak in the sense that, I was born in Canada to Chinese parents, and grew up with a largely Western upbringing. Although, you know, there are pockets of times where I really got a sense of my cultural heritage, when I was growing up, I grew up in Edmonton, and there was not really a bonafide Chinatown, you know, and, and it was very hard to get even a Chinese meal out. And, and my parents felt quite isolated and so it was one of these things where, you know, the cultural bits that I did get were, were very much nostalgic and of another time, and so I got it in bits and pieces, so I don't really identify myself from mainland Chinese.

And so, you know, it's sort of like the claims of my Asian has come from traveling and, you know, and my interest in other, you know, non Western music and for awhile, I was really obsessed about gamelan music. And that was my connection to the Asian-ness, you know, that everybody speaks of, and also, you know, with traveling, it really opens my eyes of what is possible and the nuances of Asia and of different cultures. So just because you have a certain cultural face or you're named as such, it doesn't necessarily mean that you identify as such.

Sometimes I get grouped with other composers from China, and I don't identify with them at all because of the fact that, you know, I come from a very different background and you can't expect me to understand, that sort of upbringing, because I didn't. It's not to say that to dumb it down or whatever, but I didn't come from that. And so it's something that I've been ridiculed with because, Oh, how come on you're not Chinese enough? You know, or, and so this is where the banana-ness comes in, you're yellow, on the outside, but white on the inside, and so, you know, it was a journey for me to accept that, and to come to terms with that, that you are who you are. And it is not that, you know, you're less than because you have a perceived face, and you have a different sort of upbringing, and so I think, try to embrace that, but also trying to learn from experiences. I think for me, traveling is very important, and trying also to find commonality between cultures is quite important. And I think that's where music is something that can heal.

Kathryn Tremills:

It's something I - it would be hard for me to imagine what that experience has been for you, but what richness going through the process of sorting and identifying yourself what richness that creates. It's really, a word I put down and often, your rich background and, and how much richness there is in your, in your music.

Emily Martin:

Speaking a little bit more about the gamelan. So I have a good colleague who's our Gamelan expert at the university I teach at. So it looks, you actually wrote recently-ish for the gamelan, right? I believe it was in 2012 that year. So are you still writing for the gamelan, and I actually have a question about the shadow puppets that you wrote for as well, and then if you've written for voice and gamelan.

Vivan Fung:

So for a long time, I was playing actually with the gamelan, that was associated with the New York consulate. And they're no longer there, but so I went to Bali three times and the last time that I went, it was with this gamelan and we were invited to be the first mixed ensemble, mixed meaning both male and female, which is unheard of, I don't know if that's changed at all in Bali or not, but traditionally -

Emily Martin:

I don't believe it has, my colleague is a female. And she's spoken about that quite often.

Vivan Fung:

Yeah. So it's the first sort of mixed ensemble being invited from the United States. So we were invited to participate in the Bali arts festival and as part, and it was an invitation not just to perform, but to come. I don't know the technical name that they used, but it was basically a battle of the gamelans. So we were -So was it outdoor...

Emily Martin:

That's just loud. That's all I'm gonna say out loud.

Vivan Fung:

Exactly. So we were on one side of the - it was an outdoor atrium, thousands of people, and we were on one side with all these banisters. And so I was one of the bass sort of gamelan on instruments, Bethany and I was at the top and you could, you know, it was like a good 20 foot drop, you know? And so they were on the other side, one of the local Balinese groups. And so it was like, you know, we played a piece, they played a piece, we played a piece, they a piece. And it was, I mean, it was like, you know, one of the experiences that you would never forget. And so as part of this, we had to compose a piece. And so there were, I think, five or six composers in the group. And so we collectively, we each had sort of a scene, and we collectively came up with a composition. So that was my exposure to that. And then I think I composed another piece because one of the members of the group also had a Gamelan at Queens college in New York. And so -

Emily Martin:

Do you know - my colleague is Bethany Collier. I'm not sure -

Vivan Fung:

Yeah. Oh my gosh, yes of course!

Emily Martin:

Well, she's huge in the Gamelan world. And so I was like, you might know each other because.

Vivan Fung:

- She came with us!

Emily Martin:

I was wondering, because I was like, I think she's done this before. So yeah, she's actually a really good friend. She just had a baby a week ago.

Vivan Fung:

Oh yeah.

Emily Martin:

And so the reason the shadow puppets came up is we have had multiple conversations about doing an opera with the shadow puppets, with the gamelan. And so that's why I asked you if you had ever written for voice and Gamelan, because there's not a lot out there and we've talked about it, but I was just curious.

Vivan Fung:

No, I mean, I know Evan Ziporyn has written a shadow play. I don't - forget the name of it, but yeah...

Emily Martin:

Because they did Magic flute, I believe at Yale or somewhere recently with the gamelan and singers, but I'm just curious about some original compositions, right, because I know balinese singing is very different than Western -

Vivan Fung:

Oh very, very, very different.

Emily Martin:

You know, she tells me quite often that there's like blood coming out of your mouth. It's so screamy. And so, but we've talked a lot about collaborating, so I was just...

Vivan Fung:

Oh, okay.

Emily Martin:

- Big deal in your composition.

Vivan Fung:

Well I haven't really been a part of a gamelan for quite a while. Since I moved from New York, it was in 2013. So it's been quite a long, long time. And, and since then I kind of have morphed literally with different things, different projects. But back in the - yeah was on the tour, she was one of the essential people.

Emily Martin:

Wonderful. And she's really good at it. She's just, yeah. It's amazing what she does. I teach at a private liberal arts school, right? So we don't have people who are coming there for gamelan and she's grown this ensemble that she has. So it's just people from all over the campus, a part of it. And I actually took it first semester because I had no idea what it was like. And it was the hardest thing I've ever done. I have to be, it's hard when you are a Western musician and then to learn by rote. It's very, very, very different and very difficult.

Vivan Fung:

Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. I think that was part of the appeal for me. You know, gamelan is such a different way of thinking. We have learned a way of making music and it was very appealing to me after having such a very rigorous methodical Western sort of training. It was a great way for me to step outside of that. And it was the music where I started healing, I think, as far as coming to terms with myself and sort of reclaiming some of the things that I had lost because of a lot of things that, you know, I talk about the experiences that I had when I was young and also just the idea of who you are, your identity and who, who you associate with. And so that was very healing for me to be able to do that and not to say that I identify as strictly a gamelan person, but through that process I think I really accepted the fact of who I am, you know?

Elizabeth McDonald:

So you've said that you've when you left New York, you are not playing with the gamelan anymore and you said you've morphed and I'm sort of curious about what that means.

Vivan Fung:

So in the last couple of compositions, I actually call it morphing. I was just speaking to another writer who's been, I kind of expressed it to her in a way. And she kind of put it together to me that I thought was really making a lot of sense. So I wrote a couple of pieces now that sort of have this sort of idea in which, and that first came directly after I came back from Cambodia. So I have family, extended family that went through the escape, the Cambodian genocide, and it was the year also that I was born. So I feel like I have to go back and understand a little bit about that context, and that's where my interest in potential opera lies, not in the sort of, maybe not directly about the Cambodian genocide, but the idea of, I don't know, of genocide and the effects of people.

So we took a trip to Cambodia this past, no a year ago, a year ago now, for me to try to understand. And there was just something about walking through the jungle and the forest of the

cicadas and all the insects that kind of reverberated with me as I was trying to understand what was happening. It was, you know, that whole trip was so eye opening and emotional. And then I came back with that, and I composed my String quartet, in a matter of three weeks. And with that in mind, it wasn't, I don't have any overt, Asian sort of influence in it, but the way I describe it, it's subtitled, insects and machines, and it's sort of like, your life, the way you live your life in sense that it is, it's a 12 minute piece and it's constantly going, but it's as if you're kind of walking and the scenery is constantly changing.

So it's constantly morphing from one idea to another. So I'd call it morphing now because you know, it starts off with these sort of chromatic insects, insects sort of sounds, and then it kind of morphs into something else and then it morphs into something else. So this is a constant sort of, it's not minimal, but it's sort of, I don't know how to describe it, but morphing, it's like a morphing of material, a morphing of sound, and then things come in and then they gradually fade out, and I was speaking to this writer who's been sort of trying to get me to say a few things, and she was saying that perhaps that's also as a result of your coming to terms with your Asian identity, that you're traveling that, you know, you can sort of take from things, disparate elements and kind of assemble them into a whole, that sort of like, and it'll make sense. So, maybe that's my way of coming to terms with that too. I don't know if that makes any sense at all, but -

Kathryn Tremills:

It makes a lot of sense. Yeah. It's beautiful.

Elizabeth McDonald:

Actually, what I was going to say, is it's so timely as we are finally talking about breaking free of this European Western classical white sound, and that your sort of inhabiting, yourself in your music, if that makes any sense, it sounds like your journey as a person is really making your music really personal. And there will be so many people that will relate to that, be attracted to that, be able to find themselves through your music, which I think is a really powerful, a really powerful statement. So thank you for that. I mean, you're bringing something to the world that not everybody can, and that's pretty amazing.

Vivan Fung:

Thank you for that affirmation. Um, well, I mean, it's sort of weird because, you know, I have in the quartet, I have like little hip hop references, and then I have this little diddly sort of Asian-esque tune in there. And it's like really wild, like the desperate elements. But somehow for me, it works because that's -

Elizabeth McDonald:

But that's exactly it, it makes sense, right? When it makes sense to you, when we have an idea that makes sense to you, then we're able to better articulate it to the world. So that's really amazing. I would love to wrap up the way we've been wrapping up all of our podcasts, which is called a speed round. And most composers that we've been interviewing freak out immediately because I've got six questions. And the idea is to answer them with the first thing that comes to

mind and you haven't freaked out yet. Excellent. Our listeners can't see your face. You're like, okay. Yeah, bring it. You're good.

Vivan Fung:

Nothing phases me anymore. You know?

Elizabeth McDonald:

Because you have a five-year-old.

Vivan Fung:

Exactly, and I'm slowly going crazy.

Elizabeth McDonald:

Well, if it's any consolation just before we got on with you, our new puppy that my husband decided was a great idea, was like eating my skirt and chewing on my ankle and I was going to lose my mind. So yeah. I'm with you on the five-year-old anyway, we'll launch into this, my first question. I know you live in the US but what is your favorite place in Canada?

Vivan Fung:

Oh, well has to be my home in Edmonton, my second - Okay, can I mention a second favorite place? Is the Canadian Rockies.

Elizabeth McDonald:

Yes. I wondered actually, because you're from Edmonton. If you were going to say that. Yeah. Most cherished music score?

Vivan Fung:

Most cherished music score. The thing that comes to mind is the thing that really made me become a composer and that Stravinsky's Rite of spring.

Elizabeth McDonald:

Ah, amazing. Favorite summer drink?

Vivan Fung:

It's always coffee. What can I say?

Elizabeth McDonald:

Hence again, we go back to the five-year-olds.

Emily Martin:

I was just going to say even more now than ever before.

Vivan Fung:

Exactly. Especially this summer.

Elizabeth McDonald:

Yeah, no kidding. Morning, noon or night for composing?

Vivan Fung:

Night lately.

Elizabeth McDonald:

When your kid's asleep.

Emily Martin:

We read that in the article, but that's that's about it.

Elizabeth McDonald:

Musician, you would like to be stranded on a desert Island with? Oh, her face is priceless for our listeners.

Vivan Fung:

Wow.

Emily Martin:

This is not meant to get you in trouble.

Vivan Fung:

How about Hildegard Von Bingen?

Elizabeth McDonald:

Oooo.

Vivan Fung:

I recently wrote Prayer and she is inspiration behind that.

Elizabeth McDonald:

Great answer. Very cool. Very cool. And our last question, is there, what professional singer would you like to write for?

Vivan Fung:

Okay. Oh my goodness.

Emily Martin:

You don't get in trouble for this either.

Vivan Fung:

Well I - it's just this, this is, this is so hard because I grew up with Don Upshaw. Knoxville's you know?

Elizabeth McDonald:

Yes. That recording was like -

Vivan Fung:

I love that recording.

Emily Martin:

The whole album.

Elizabeth McDonald:

Yeah. Anne Truelove's Aria? Harbison? The Mirabai songs?

Vivan Fung:

Oh, John Harbison, the Mirabai Songs, that album was like gold for me. I love that voice. I know that since she has had a child and I think her, her voice has changed right? Or something like that.

Emily Martin:

I think so. I don't think she's singing quite as much. And she is also at Bard. So she's teaching a lot.

Vivan Fung:

Yeah, but there was, there is a voice that I've been really, was like, she also sang Knoxville and I've heard it live with the St. Paul chamber orchestra. Julia Bullock she's -

Elizabeth McDonald:

Isn't that a gorgeous instrument.

Vivan Fung:

She was really incredible with that.

Elizabeth McDonald:

Oh, I'm so excited that you said Julia Bullock. That's awesome. That's amazing. So just to wrap it up, do you want to tell our listening audience where they can find you where they can find your music, where they can find you, can they follow you on socials?

Vivan Fung:

Yeah. You can find me Vivianfung.ca that's my website. And that has most of my up to date things. When I do social media, I do Facebook the most. And I also do Twitter. I do have an Instagram thing, but I don't use it very often.

Elizabeth McDonald:

Awesome. Awesome. That's great. Well, thank you so much. It's been such a pleasure to interview you and we are so looking forward to delving farther into your music and hopefully our listeners will as well.

Vivian Fung:

Oh, thank you so much for inviting me. Thanks. Really, really fun. Yeah. Thank you so much.

Music: "Is the Moon Tired"

Kathryn Tremills:

Thanks for joining us for our interview with Vivian Fung. We are going to wrap up with "Lullaby I" from her cycle *Songs of Childhood*, recorded online by Emily Martin and me.

Elizabeth McDonald:

Thanks again for listening - we are excited to keep bringing you more badass Canadian composers' thoughts and music...

Kathryn Tremills:

Please go to our website for program notes, and links mentioned for this podcast.

Emily Martin:

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