



# Peter Wiegold

## Composer Questions

### 1 Where do your ideas come from? And, are there particular sources that reoccur?

My ideas equally come from sound and poetic starting points. Also from commissions! Ideas that others provide can open new doors. There are themes I seem to keep returning to - to do with real and other. Brief glimpses - farewells (death) - the intangible - melting clocks - nonsense, the surreal - impermanence - joy and spiritual ecstasy - spiritual devotion - the south (Spain, Middle East.....)

### 3 What form do your musical ideas take?

A quality of sound, a kind of resonance, a kind of movement (vibration).

### 4 What form do your extra-musical ideas take? And, why were you attracted to them?

More poetic and spiritual ideas than more objective or structural or sculptural ideas.

### 5 How do the extra-musical become musical ideas?

Melting clocks is obvious - intangibility through unresolved harmonies (they feel both here and elsewhere) ambivalence through symmetric scales. eg whole tone or octatonic (tone-semitone-tone semitone etc.), joy through lifted, heightened rhythms.

### 6 Do your extra-musical ideas determine/generate structure? How do they do this?

I am a great believer in the idea that the large mirrors the small. They grow from the same DNA. So the whole structure might be an expanded mirror/reflection of a short moment. I also believe, keep thinking the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

### 7 Do you compose at the piano or not? Why do you work this way?

Yes. I can feel the material. If I compose only in my head, it can easily be more contrived, less natural.

### 8 What techniques do you use to develop musical ideas/material?

My favourite metaphor at the moment is re-potting! All material results from an original plant but it is continually re-grown in other environments, transplanted, discovers new branches, new shapes, new sizes, new environments. In other words all material is developed organically. I look for patterns/features/ characteristics - say two significant intervals, or a rhythmic gesture - and then spin these out in all sorts of other ways. I invent systems out of actual discovered, felt material rather than in any more objective way.

### 9 How do you make decisions about which ideas to keep and which to discard?

I try to listen and distance myself. I listen through first thing in the morning, as if it's somebody else's music. Look for simplicity and organic unity - sadly many good ideas have to go just because they get in the way of others, are overbearing or dominate too much and create confusion. Keep it simple. Less is more.

### 10 Many composers talk about setting themselves challenges which they work through in a piece. Do you identify with this?

Once I have started gathering material I look out for things that stand out as key ideas, I try to look for organic processes, then be rigorous about following through every possible implication of an idea. For example, if I particularly feel the interval of a 5th and a semitone together are significant in the unfolding music then I plot lots more of them.



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### 11 Is there a set way you approach the process of composing?

Often by improvising, recording this then listening carefully for things that seem to carry the essence of the feeling I want. Then carefully extracting this and working the same material over again.

### 12 What is your working practice?

Usually mornings. I always stop for 'The World at One' on Radio 4. The only set point in my day.

### 13 What do you do when you are stuck?

Know that somehow I have to let go. Try and rediscover that things look different from a distance. The most valuable thing I ever learnt, and it took a long time, was the ability to say no to material and let it go.

### 14 What is the best piece of advice a composition teacher has ever given you?

Start each day as if you've never composed before.

## Composer Biography

I did not take up formal music lessons until the upper 6th. Before that, I only had piano lessons so was largely self-taught, and played as much in rock bands and jazz bands as classical ensembles. I went to University and got a B.Mus., M.Mus. and Ph.D. so studied classical music thoroughly, and then went on to begin a career as composer and conductor. My early 'band' influences were always there and after a while I began to be interested in seeing how other kinds of music worked. I studied Indian music (playing with Ravi Shankar's chief pupil), Javanese Gamelan music (in Java) and also worked with Greek and African musicians. I've worked in theatre, cabaret, and also much in education, introducing children and students to practical and creative music-making, including a lot of improvisation, and crossing many styles. Now I work again as a 'classical' conductor and composer but am able to bring these other influences, and my ability to work with improvisation, into my work. I've worked with BCMG in several ways, but especially introducing the players to improvisation and being part of a 'creative ensemble' which culminated in our 'Invisible Cities' concert, September 2004. My inspirations are wide - but they are usually 'poetic', from poetry or from nature, rather than abstract. I've always been religiously influenced and recently have been influenced by Sufi and Buddhist texts.