

La Monte Young

Statement

Because of Jeremy's enthusiasm and his interest in our work, Marian and I gave him unprecedented access to our archives and made ourselves available for interviews and numerous phone queries when he was doing research for his doctoral thesis. As his thesis evolved into his book, we believed that it had the potential to be not only the first in depth treatment of our work and lives but also an accurate source for scholars on into the future. However, Jeremy's rush to publish it without taking the time to review it with us for accuracy has resulted in a make believe account riddled with errors and a misconstrued analysis of my major work, *The Well-Tuned Piano*, based on his own insular worldview. In his zeal to credit my Mormon background with an over-emphasized impact on my work, he has ignored the influence of my years of sophisticated, advanced education and my long immersion in world music and Eastern philosophy. But most importantly, Jeremy failed to understand the profound significance of Marian and I having become disciples of Pandit Pran Nath in early 1970 after bringing him to the U.S. and living with him much of the time for 26 years, studying the Kirana *gharana* (style) of Indian classical raga singing in the traditional *gurukul* method of serving the master night and day.

Being the idealist that I am, I had imagined a process whereby we would slowly work with Jeremy and carefully try to delineate the facts about my life and my work. Since the project began with much promise and mutual enthusiasm, I certainly never imagined that I would be writing this statement of disagreement with his book at this point in time.

From as early as 2003 we kept a running conversation with Jeremy over the telephone and gave him many corrections on his dissertation verbally and via email. But later, after 2009 when he began to edit his dissertation to become the book he contracted with Oxford University Press, I began to study the corrected texts that he sent back to me. I began to observe that Jeremy did not "report the news." Rather, it seemed that Jeremy was inventing an untrue mythological story about my life.

In our email to Jeremy of 3/10/2010, Marian and I stated:

1. First and foremost, you do not report the news. The book is riddled with errors that we must painstakingly correct because we are perfectionists and real scholars. You seem to be writing a novel with La Monte Young as the main character and the rest is an imaginary landscape, with occasional radio broadcasts of reality.
2. Second, you must learn to peer over the top of your Mormon-colored glasses. There is a world out there that is bigger than Mormonism, regardless of the fact that La Monte was born into this once radical and now highly conventionalized, extremely insular sect. The issue is that Mormonism is a Religion with a capital R. Music is a spiritual Path with a capital P.

In order to obtain a wider range of objective critique, I asked Jeremy for permission to send copies of his manuscript (DRAFT REVISION 01 14 APRIL 2009) to a few musicians who had worked most closely with me for the longest periods of time, especially:

Terry Riley, who has worked closely with me for 53 years (since 1958). We performed together including in my Theatre of Eternal Music Ensemble and studied and concertized together since 1970 as *guru bhai* (guru brother) disciples under Pandit Pran Nath;

Charles Curtis, who has worked with me for 27 years (since 1986), is director of my Theatre of Eternal Music String Ensemble and has performed concerts of my music around the world. *Just*

Charles & Cello in the Romantic Chord (2003) was composed specifically for Charles, who studied the performance technique for the work with me through oral transmission over many years;

Jung Hee Choi, our senior raga and visual arts disciple who has studied and worked with us for 14 years (since 1997), was a founding member of The Just Alap Raga Ensemble and is carrying forward the ancient tradition of the Kirana *gharana*.

All three of these colleagues concurred that the Mormonism element of the book was totally out of proportion and that Jeremy had portrayed me as a character that was practically unrecognizable to them.

In our email to Terry Riley of March 6, 2010, Marian and I wrote:

“Meanwhile, about Jeremy's book, don't give up. La Monte has finally finished reading it and has found that it is riddled with errors that we have to correct. In addition, we are very concerned that it is looking more like a Mormon missionary tract.”

I had originally recommended to Jeremy that Terry Riley was by far the most informed person to write an introduction to the book. Terry was sent a PDF of the Introduction and the five chapters we had at that time. In his email to me of March 10, 2010, Terry wrote:

“Of course, I did not read it all but I scanned through it and felt it was way overboard on the Mormon connection but I was not sure what you wanted. I was also surprised to see there was little mention of Guruji [Pandit Pran Nath] and even of me. I guess that has been part of my lack of motivation to jump in and write something. I was so inspired while listening to the WTP [*The Well-Tuned Piano*] that it was easy to write the notes back then but I have to say this has been much more difficult to get started and I think the reason is that the book itself doesn't thrill me.”

At our request, Charles Curtis read the entire book twice and carefully prepared notes and commentary for Jeremy. After they met in late March 2010, Charles reported to us that Jeremy had not been well prepared and could not definitively find some of the pages of the current version in his laptop. In his email of August 5, 2011, Charles wrote:

“...in my work with Jeremy, we only got through at most one third of the book, because we were working slowly and carefully, and he was having trouble finding the passages in question on his laptop... while he made some isolated efforts to resume our work, which was obviously (to both of us) incomplete, he never sent me any revisions, which I had requested, and his efforts to schedule more meetings did not seem very keen... I think overall, the refusal to send revisions and the latest versions to you, and in the context of my work with him, to me, is outrageous on Jeremy's part...”

Jung Hee Choi also read the book at our request. She sent Jeremy a detailed written critique, February 13, 2010, in which she delineated numerous fallacious assumptions that he had made. Jung Hee wrote:

“...however, I would like to call immediate attention to our need to reassess some of the important concepts in their [La Monte's and Marian's] work that might have been pushed too far [by you] and in so doing might have compromised the facts by their being either overstated or misstated.”

“...It appears that you [Jeremy] make the assumption throughout the book that La Monte made himself and claimed himself to be a prophet, while scholars, critics and musicologists are in constant doubt and disdain of this claim. Perhaps that even includes you. I believe the term

prophet has been used loosely here where it could be interchangeable with mystic, visionary, yogi or even creative thinker. Possibly we should consider whether the tone was set up for readers to think that La Monte is marching through the dismissive derision of this concept wearing the Emperor's Clothes. In addition, your use of the word prophet, strikes us with an excess of religious baggage that is highly reflective of power and politics."

Jung Hee specifically quotes 16 examples from Jeremy's writing, including:

"Having responded to what he considered his own divine mandate, and having founded what he considered a new but nonetheless ageless musical tradition, Young spoke in the words of both a shishya and a mystic." (209)

"when he says 'prophet' or 'heaven,' we don't get the impression that he's trying to make a point, we perceive that he's making an assertion." (218)

Jung Hee then states:

"The quotes above tend to proactively conclude that 'prophet' is La Monte's self-image rather than the status in music he achieved through his musical innovations.

After making several additional points, Jung Hee queries:

"Has La Monte claimed himself a prophet or invoked Messianic comparisons? This kind of comparison with a certain religious ideology would load on more unnecessary baggage and may negatively affect the understanding of La Monte's work."

Jung Hee pointed out another blatant example of Jeremy's insistence on attributing religious and specifically Mormon influences to our work, where it was in no way an accurate observation. Jeremy asserted in an early draft of his description of our Church Street *Dream House* Sound and Light Environment that:

"The whiteness of the interior, too, has certain religious overtones that may relate to a number of Young's formative Mormon practices and traditions."

Jung Hee wrote to Jeremy,

"The whiteness of the interior is a common characteristic of all art gallery spaces. More importantly, whiteness is absolutely necessary for the reflection of the color from the transmitted light from fixtures creating the environment. In presentation; there is no white wall in the *Dream House* since the space is filled with magenta light, just as there is no silence. You [Jeremy] experienced the white walls and the absence of sound only before the environment was turned on."

When we explained to Jeremy that his version of the book at that point was completely out of balance regarding the influence of Pandit Pran Nath versus Mormonism in my life and music, he said that he would try to include more about Pandit Pran Nath. However, after that point, he did not ever interview us about our 26 years with Pandit Pran Nath nor did he send us any of his expanded writing on Pandit Pran Nath. How then could it have been possible for him to have written about the most profound influence on my life and work, Pandit Pran Nath, without having interviewed me about it?

Jeremy distorts the truth. For example, in some of my writings I have quoted a famous Sufi story where the soul comes to earth for the purpose of studying music. Instead of acknowledging this parable as a Sufi story, Jeremy erroneously reports this information as: "He [Young] claims that 'God created the

body so that the soul could come to Earth to study music so that it could have a better understanding of universal structure. In short, Young sees himself as a divinely appointed, predestined restorer and refiner of ancient knowledge with special access to certain fundamental truths of existence, which he articulates through music.” [Chapter 5, P. 289]. This kind of manipulation of the facts runs rampant throughout the book and ranges from half-truths to outright exaggerations and misrepresentations of fact.

There was an extraordinary development in *The Well-Tuned Piano* after I began my studies with Pandit Pran Nath in 1970. However, Jeremy either could not understand or perhaps intentionally overlooked the fact that these changes came as a result of my work with Pandit Pran Nath and instead he attributed these developments to the influence of my background in Mormonism. Jeremy entitled Chapter 5: “Space Exploration, Part 2: Mormon Cosmology and *The Well-Tuned Piano*.” But if we can for a period of time stop reading Jeremy’s preaching of Mormon doctrine and instead listen to real musical examples of *The Well-Tuned Piano*, we can immediately discern the fallacy of his single-minded thinking. First, we should listen to the 1964 recordings of *The Well-Tuned Piano*, “4 VI 64 PM NYC” 4th day of the rose and “8 VI 64 AM NYC” day of gammadion. Originally distributed in a private, limited tape edition, these can sometimes be found on various bootleg editions and online bootlegs. Next we take note that I began to hear Pandit Pran Nath in 1967, brought him to the West in 1970 and became his disciple, studying with him until his death 26 years later in 1996. Then we listen to the 1981 version of *The Well-Tuned Piano* released on the Gramavision 5-CD set in 1987 and the 1987 version released on the Just Dreams DVD in 2000. What an enormous musical evolution has taken place on these later versions released on CD and DVD. The influence of my study with Pandit Pran Nath on the music in the versions of *The Well-Tuned Piano* recorded on the five-hour 5-CD set and the 6-hour 24-minute DVD would have been previously unimaginable. If it was Mormon cosmology that produced *The Well-Tuned Piano*, where was the Mormon influence in the 1964 versions? It is clear that all of the remarkable evolution of the work began to blossom after I studied with Pandit Pran Nath.

In the end, Jeremy was never capable of peering above his Mormon-colored glasses. Although some scientists begin with a theory that they wish to prove, another approach is to search without any preconceptions in order to retain the possibility of discovering something never before dreamed of. And as every student of spirituality is taught, you must go to the guru as an empty glass or as an empty bamboo tube, if one wants to be able to learn something. It appears that Jeremy began his journey with a very clear agenda about what he intended to set forth. It is Mormonism all the way down (as in ‘turtles all the way down’).

In 2009 I optimistically began entering all the corrections with track changes in the Introduction to the book and sent them to Jeremy. We satisfactorily concurred on all of the changes in the Introduction and then I began to work on Chapter 1. But by then another month had gone by. I had been unable to teach any of my private composition and raga students or meet any of my other professional obligations and financial responsibilities. Therefore, I had to leave the book and go back to earning a living through teaching and licensing concert performances of my work. I also had to begin rehearsals for my next concert series in November. Then I decided I had to read the entire book before making any more corrections in order to determine how many more errors I would find. Thus, I did not send any more corrections to Jeremy until I was able to get a sense of the scope of the entire project. In Chapter 1, I placed 66 Post-it flags of which 39 indicated factual errors and serious errors of omission; in Chapter 2, I placed 51 Post-it flags of which 40 indicated factual errors and serious errors of omission. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 each contain at least as many more flags, which means that the book contains over 200 factual errors and serious errors of omission. At this point I could see that it would not be possible to write up all of these corrections without a substantial independent grant to support me over the months that would be required.

It is the rush to publish the book in a hurry that is my greatest concern. Although Jeremy had been in touch with me about his proposed Ph.D. thesis in late 2000, the book has only been two years under contract with the publisher and many important books have taken decades to bring to completion. I can understand that Jeremy wants to publish the book as soon as possible in order that he can become famous, riding my name to fame. To me, it is a mistake to publish this book with all the errors that it contains. Some of the errors are so serious that they mistakenly attribute my own ideas to other people. For example, Jeremy attributes my creation and my definition of the “Young primes” to my student Catherine Christer Hennix, who enthusiastically entitled them but had nothing to do with creating or defining them. Jeremy also presents incorrect musical notation of some of my scores and misstates certain subtitles from *The Well-Tuned Piano*, even though they are clearly written in *The Well-Tuned Piano* booklet. He has also incorrectly reported significant dates of important events and misspelled proper names. I feel strongly that this book should not be published the way it is.

Even if there were time to correct them, these errors cannot be corrected by Jeremy because he obviously does not realize that they are errors. I do not want to become more famous and I certainly do not want to become more famous for the half-truths and errors about my life and work that make up the fantastical drama of much of this book.

In the early '80s at our Dia Art Foundation 6 Harrison Street 6-year *Dream House* project I had a motto posted for our staff: “I am not interested in finished work; I am only interested in perfect work.”

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