

Elliot Rubin

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Chris: How do you feel about being a gay composer?

Elliot: I have written pieces — it just so happens there are none on this program that deal directly with the issue of my being gay. And I certainly intend to in the future. In fact, on my Junior Recital I used a poem I found in *Christopher Street* that I thought was a very good poem. It's a hard situation because I feel like being open about it in this society is making a political statement, which is good. But, I'm also an artist, and I also have to always ask myself, "Is what I'm doing good art?" So, I always have to balance my political feelings with my artistic sense.

For example, a piece I had hoped to have done for this recital is dealing with pederasty. Well, it's really about a relationship with someone thirteen to seventeen. That is, someone not an adult, but not a child. I'm thinking not only of a sexual relationship, but a much larger relationship, like teacher to a student (like the Greek attitude), role model.

Chris: How are you going to handle it?

Elliot: Well, it interests me because it's controversial. I feel this is an important issue in the gay community, because it's similar to the discussions about transvestism or transsexualism. They're subjects that on the one hand do involve gays to some degree, if for no other reason than that they are always associated with gays in the minds of the public. And, if we deal with them, that means we have to think about them and we have to draw our own opinions about them.

Chris: Well, I haven't formed an opinion about pederasty — I haven't even thought about it much. It's a pertinent question.

Elliot: We still seem to want to keep people as children as long as possible, and not accept that many people mature faster. In many respects, they are mature beings at fourteen or fifteen years of age. Then, some people never mature, no matter how old they are, and yet are given adult responsibilities. Also, and this is something some people refuse to accept, very often these young people are the ones who initiate the relationship, whether it is sexual or emotional. They are the ones who start it, and they know what they want. I'm not talking about exploitive or abusive relationships — that's a totally different category. Look at how many women are abused by husbands no matter what age they are. That's exploitation — abuse at the hands of somebody else who takes power over another per-

son. Would anybody say that therefore there should be no heterosexual relationships?

Chris: Difficult question.

Elliot: It is. Unfortunately, it's made more difficult by social attitudes. There are a lot of people who claim to be liberal, who deep down feel that being gay is not quite as good as being straight — and a way to compensate for that is by overdoing something else that's respectable, whether it's voting Republican, or being very patriotic, or trying to look straight. It's all compensation, and I think that's very much the issue here when we talk about a relationship with a younger person. It's not accepted as legitimate in this society. I've talked to a number of gay men who expressed their disgust at the idea of a relation-

ship with a much younger man, and when you delve into their reasons behind that, it very often came out as a way of reacting against what had already been a struggle to win acceptance and respectability.

Chris: How are you going to get this across in your music.

Elliot: The idea I have for this piece is to have just one or two performers, maybe just a solo instrument and the concentration would be on the text — the dramatic activity of the one person with maybe the musical accompaniment of the other person, so that the attention really *can* focus on the actor.

Chris: Are you looking for an existing text, or will you write your own?

Elliot: Right now I'm thinking of using several different texts covering man-boy relationships in different periods of time and different societies. I've already done some research on this, and found some really marvelous examples — one from ancient China — a set of very nice love poems from the medieval Arab culture — and, of course, there are so many examples from Greek mythology and culture — I could do a hundred pieces with that alone! I want to show that it wasn't just in Greece — that it's a universal phenomenon. Then, to bring in the Western society and make it more contemporary, I'm using Batman and Robin, and concentrating on more literary or mythology — it doesn't matter whether it's myth or history so much really — it's to make a point.

Chris: So, you're not going to present different pros and cons about pederasty.

Elliot: Right. Mostly, I'll use the relationships themselves as examples of dialogues between the lovers for the most part. All of them will be different relationships. One of them

may be more sexual than another one — one may be more romantic or emotional than another one. Each of them is very unique in its own way.

Chris: It seems that the musicians — like actors — will now need to examine their own feelings and project some feelings visually into the performance, as well as maybe being expected to deliver lines.

Elliot: Yes. I read something that was dealing with that issue of personalities coming out in someone's music. And, of course, that's always been a big question. Very often, critics say, "well, if you can see that this person's dark side came out in the music and blah blah blah..." But then, can you really detect in Ravel's music *where* it reveals that he was gay? Or Saint Saens? Or Tchaikovsky's? That's absurd? And *yet* in a sense it may not be so strange, because in subtle ways your life experiences influence your music, and in turn, *you* influence everything else. Anyway, that argument just doesn't hold water. That's why I say that a good artist is primarily an artist — and then other things.

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