

An Interview with Glen Hall

By Armen Svadjian

The Invisible Art

A.S. *What do you do in your music?*

G.H. Communicate.

A.S. *What do you communicate, and why is music the best medium?*

G.H. Being in action.

Music is an exploration in dimensions of time, space and motion. Music is a doorway we can walk through to explore other dimensions.

Sounds seem to move, from one to another over time. But this is an illusion. Notes don't 'move'; they happen and disappear, creating the perception of movement. So, music deals with creating the impression of motion in time—tempo, rhythms, overall structures such as sections of a piece, which are sometimes called 'movements'—and in space—different pitches and the registers in which they happen.

Music is invisible, right? It doesn't have any visual representation, any visible form. Of course, you can write music down, but that's not music. You can look at a CD, but that's not the experiencing of music.

Now, when I'm playing, I'm being myself: I'm 'being'. But I'm doing something. My being is in action. And that manifests itself through sound. Because it's invisible and it's intangible, in a sense, it's not some kind of a monument, something fixed and permanent. It's alive—when it's happening. There's no music unless it's actually taking place. It doesn't exist in some physical form someplace where you can dig it out. It only exists when it happens. And, to me, it's best when you the listener are there when it's happening, when you're experiencing musicians' beings in action through the sounds they're making.

Also, the kind of music I play demands that I be 'present' in the moment. I'm not thinking about getting a cab, or taking the garbage out, or something like that. The music does not allow its musicians to go on automatic pilot. We all have to be right there, with the music as it's happening . . . which, personally, is good for me. It's my version of meditation, a very active meditation. And also, this music requires me both to keep my focus on myself but also to abandon myself, to let go of my self so that I can hear what everyone else is doing. What I do only exists in relation to what the other musicians are playing. That requires, if I'm going to do it really well—at least in my estimation—a

certain selflessness. I'm not a selfless guy, but this music allows me to get closer to selflessness than I can get in most other circumstances. This music isn't about a single person's idea of it; it's collective and it requires its participants to become subsumed in and by the process of making it. So, for me, it's a good thing, a type of self-discipline or self-development.

Searching for Musicians and Myself

A.S. How do you find people to play with? What kind of screening process is involved?

G.H. There's no screening involved. I don't usually get too fussy about who I play with in terms of just getting together and playing. It's enjoyable just to play, and I like playing with all sorts of people, regardless of their approaches, their skill levels, etc. For instance, I recently sat in with an R and B group and had a wonderful time. I've performed and recorded with a power rock trio, The Cronics, and got to seriously rock out. Good times!

I play with noise musicians, electronic and computer musicians, Indian classical musicians. And in each situation I have to listen very closely to what they're doing, to what's going on, and to contribute to the overall sound in the best way I am able. My personal motto when playing is 'Serve the music.'

People invite me to guest with their groups. They want me to do my thing. But I want to serve their music so that it sounds as good as I can help it sound. Personally, I'm uncomfortable with being 'the star performer', not because I'm humble, but because I value the 'team spirit' aspect of making music more than the 'look-at-me', 'pay-attention-to-what-I'm-doing' approach. That has its place, too. But being connected with the 'group mind' is my main goal.

And playing with widely diverse types of musicians—not 'screening', as you put it—forces me listen to and serve their ways of making music. Although, there are times and circumstances—when I think the music has stalled, is not saying or doing what it could and the musicians have the capacity to respond quickly—that I feel I have to do the musical equivalent of kicking people's asses. "Come on! Say something! Don't just noodle. Get on with it, for Pete's sake!" And doing that definitely calls attention to what I'm doing. At some moments, I feel I have to instigate, to be the catalyst, by playing something that everyone can grab hold of and work with. Sometimes they do; sometimes they don't. Sometimes I'm left hanging in the breeze, sounding like a 'look-at-me', 'pay-attention-to-what-I'm-doing' fool. Oh, well, I tried.

On the other hand, when I put a group together or plan an event where I'm going to assemble a number of musicians, I think about it pretty much the way a chemist would. He's going to try to produce a particular product, a compound with specific characteristics. For me, what I'm looking for is the kind of musicians who are capable of reacting to others at a very high level of responsiveness. They will go where the flow is

going, but they are also capable of laying things down in a definite way so that we're not all standing around looking at our shoes, waiting for someone to come up with an idea. I look for people who can generate ideas; those are the people I love to play with, the ones that just bristle with ideas.

Fortunately, living in Toronto, I can work with quite a few musicians who do that. There are genuine iconoclasts here. Also, there are no 'schools' of playing creative music. If you go to New York or Chicago or Germany, there are the John Zorn 'school', the David S. Ware 'school', the Ken Vandermark or Peter Brotzman 'schools. They're not really schools. Rather, there are simply a number of musicians who have collected around these individuals' approaches; they play in similar vein.

Here, people play in their own damn vein. There is nobody that I know of that plays like (keyboardists) Ryan Driver or Andy Yue, or (lap steel guitarist) Myk Freedman, or bassist Jason Hammer, or sings like Christine Duncan, or who plays like drummer Jean Martin. I don't know of a saxophonist anywhere that plays like John Oswald. These guys, ladies, are their own people. And that's what I want. I don't want little soldiers lining up. I don't write symphonies so that a bunch of people can play Glen Hall's music. I want people that, when they play with me, play their own music, the music of their beings. And I'm right there with them, like their cheerleader.

Generous and Selfish

A.S. Is that how you see your role as a bandleader? As a cheerleader?

G.H. Absolutely.

Some reviewer once wrote that I'm a 'generous bandleader', that I give my musicians a lot of room to express themselves freely in the context of the music we're playing.

But I don't think of that approach as 'generous'. It's basic self-interest on my part. When musicians play in my groups, it's because I want to hear them play. As leader, I don't have to be the showpiece: that's the music. I just say what I have to say and let them do whatever they want, whatever they choose to manifest of themselves, and I never tell them no. Maybe that's part of the reason that I've had the good fortune to play with so many terrific musicians. I just ask them to please themselves within the contexts that I provide, because I want to hear them play. And I'm there to cheer them on. Is that generous or selfish?

Motives and Frustrations

A.S. Would you say then that self-satisfaction is one of the main motives for playing for you?

G.H. Well, it sure isn't for the money, the fame or accolades, because you don't get any, or not much, at any rate. This, mostly, is a way of finding new things by exploring what I

do and trying to knit them together, trying to find things I've never found before, or new ways of looking at things.

When that happens, I know what it's worth. What it's worth to other people is not my main concern. That it is worth something to them, beautiful! And I know for a certainty that it is valuable to others. But my primary motivation in music is not directed towards others. It is self-exploration and self-development, so that I can find my way. Communicating the results to others, however, happens because I play with groups of musicians in front of audiences who pick up on these kinds of inner experiences.

For me, music is a test, and I don't always pass. That tells me something; it gives me experiential feedback. Then I have to go back, do my homework, and study for the next test.

A.S. Does it bother you that there is not a wider audience for the music that you play? Is it frustrating sometimes?

G.H. Yes, it is frustrating. If I were to develop a cure for Multiple Sclerosis, people would beat a path to my door. If I were invent fuel-efficient car, people would be breaking their legs to get to know me, be my associates, use my invention and make me wealthy. But in our North American culture, very few opportunities exist for the cultural or social rewarding of those whose efforts are directed toward self-expression, its expansion and refinement. Most people don't want to hear someone express himself. Instead, they want to hear what they've heard before; they want their chosen, well-worn 'grooves'. They want their habits fed, like addicts.

They want to be entertained. And I don't really resent that. I like to be entertained, too. Folks want action-packed movies, light-hearted musicals, diverting situation comedies. Well and good.

Music as Food

But that's like living on a diet of potato chips. It's not nutritious. It'll keep you going for a while. But if we're going to grow as human beings we need to have proper nutrients, both in our diets, and in our intake of perceptions or impressions.

Our bodies require food. If we don't get food for, say, thirty days, we die. Our lungs, blood and physical brains require oxygen. If we don't get air for five minutes, we die. Our consciousness requires 'impressions', experiences. If we aren't able to receive impressions, we're already dead. Each one of these things is a kind of food. Impressions are a nutrient for our consciousness. Perceptual impressions are simply not recognized or understood as another sort of 'food'.

Our minds and beings grow in response to our perceptual 'diet', the kinds of music, art, literature, dance, philosophy, psychology and the like that we consume, that we expose ourselves to. And the music I try to be involved in is intended to be a type of 'food' ... one,

regrettably, people don't think of as being necessary. It doesn't mean that it isn't needed. It's just that, since people don't recognize this nutrient as being necessary, they aren't going to actively seek my music out, make me widely acclaimed and wildly wealthy, and put my picture on the cover of *People* magazine.

A.S. If that did happen, would you be suspicious? Would you think you're doing something wrong perhaps? Would you question yourself?

G.H. I would certainly question why people were interested in my music at that level, at the level of entertainment, since entertaining is not the primary goal in what I do. The people who do receive such public attention, in general, are, in my opinion, not doing work that is particularly 'nutritious,' although, hopefully, at least some of them are.

Robert DeNiro is a fine actor, but he does take roles that challenge neither him nor his audience. But he gets paid large sums of money to act. I don't get paid much to play my music. So I'm not motivated to do what I do differently or do something uncharacteristic because of a proffered reward. Were I to be offered a million dollars to play a concert, I don't think I likely go out and by a Spandex outfit, put feathers in a headband and glitter make-up on.

Presumably, I would be being asked to do what I do, so I'd probably just carry on in my usual way, because I'm not primarily concerned with entertaining people; I'm concerned with communicating 'invisible realities'. If people find what I do entertaining, that's just fine. I'm happy that people can enjoy things at a variety of levels. But if you give someone a watermelon and he only eats the rind and throws the rest away...well... Why not get to the meatier part? There's more to it.

Public attention is given to those who supply us with performances that are usually 'easy to digest' but which don't contain much psychoemotional or psychospiritual 'fibre'—material that's hard to digest, stuff that requires us to really think, to genuinely reassess our deeply held beliefs, to perceive reality in new ways. Again, it's our desire for our well-worn grooves, our habits of thought and feeling. Those rare individuals who provoke true changes in the social, artistic, psychological, or spiritual paradigms of their times are not readily acclaimed and rewarded. They are marginalized, because they are perceived as wantonly busting people's chops, as being troublemakers or just 'difficult.'

If my music were to be given the 'star treatment', I'd think either there must have been a major paradigm shift I wasn't aware of and people had begun to actively seek out the 'nutrients' I'm producing through music, or that I've unconsciously begun trying to entertain rather than explore.

Problems, Practice and Feeling in the Dark

A.S. What problems are you concerned with in your music?

G.H. Physical problems —I'm not terribly well coordinated. I have to overcome my natural clumsiness. I have to practice in a really concentrated way. One, just to do certain things that come much more easily to other musicians. Two, so that I can play in a relaxed way, because I tend to have a lot of tension and tension in my muscles translates into clunkier playing that I don't particularly like. Another problem is being able to hear accurately what other musicians are playing. I do that fairly well, but I would like to be able to do it better. Another issue is being able to play clearly enough so that other musicians can formulate a reaction that will somehow bond with what I'm doing. Sometimes I play pretty abstractly, and finding people who can hear that allows them to do what they do is not always easy. Fortunately, I've now got musicians around me in various groups who are able to react well to how I play. And since I do have these musicians to create with, I continue to work on how to make things more clear.

As far as playing is concerned, the main problem is just getting gigs.

A.S. How often are you playing out these days?

G.H. Generally, a couple times a month. I've been invited to a series in London, Ontario, where I'll be playing every Friday for a month with a different group of musicians. Plus I'm playing at the Guelph Jazz Festival with Powerbüch, which has recently released a CD. It's led by trumpeter Gordon Michael Allen. And I'm doing a CD release for my group, Trio Muo, as well as performing with a wonderfully eccentric assemblage of musicians called The Woodchoppers Association. Lee Ranaldo, William Hooker and I are having a recording released and we intend to play some concerts when it comes out. Also, I put on the annual 416 Toronto Creative Improvisers Festival, which allows me to showcase the talents of established and developing improvisers on the scene in Toronto and southern Ontario. I usually play with one of my groups during 416.

A.S. Is there much rehearsing that goes into your groups? Do your groups practise intensely?

G.H. EAR-CAM, my sound art group, never rehearses. We show up and play. Our music depends on intuition and listening, not going over things. My chamber group Sonora does rehearse from time to time. We just did a recording for which I wrote a series of directions that needed to be explained, discussed, played through and digested so that we would be familiar and more natural with the concepts.

With my free jazz group, Trio Muo, we practise quite often. That's because the music I've written for the group involves ideas that are not really part of the jazz vocabulary. Each of us has had to learn how to negotiate and interpret these compositions.

Most jazz musicians have a 'vocabulary' they can use, regardless of the circumstances, because the circumstances tend to be more or less the same concepts dressed up in different clothes. For instance, they know a pile of standard tunes; they know bebop tunes, the blues, those sorts of things. Chord changes come in repeating patterns. Since

there's not an infinite number of these patterns, once musicians can negotiate these changes and have transposed them through all the keys, they can, if they're good sight-readers, walk in and play a tune they've never played before and make it sound fine. Not necessarily brilliant or insightful or surprising, but decent.

The pieces I've written for Trio Muo are not those kinds of tunes. I'm doubtful that someone could come in, sight-read them and speak in their vocabulary in an articulate way. Not because they're hard, but because the tunes don't follow those standard patterns. There are no chord changes. The melodies don't follow traditional patterns. I didn't do this to be weird. That's just how they came out. The pieces have highly individuated characters. And when we started playing them, we found we couldn't rely on our shared vocabulary. Collectively, we had to invent anew dialect for ourselves. And that took months of work. It took us half a year before we could play these pieces competently, at least in our estimation. This was because the pieces were not, in any easily discernable way, part of that collective experience jazz musicians share. So we had to find our own way, feeling our way along in the dark.

A.S. Is a piece ever played the same way twice?

G.H. Not when I'm playing it. I'm not terribly good at repetition. Part of the reason I became an improviser was that I couldn't play things the same way twice. Some things, yes. Of course. And I'm not the kind of person who works out a solo. There are people who do that and can make the same solo sound fresh and new every time they play it. I not able to do that. Maybe it's a failing on my part. But if it's a failing, I've turned it to my advantage.

The Balancing Act

A.S. Are you trying to strike a balance between structure and improvisation?

G.H. I like improvisations to sound as if they're structured. They don't necessarily have to have a pre-existing structure. But when I play, I like there to be ideas that flower and fade, which produce a discernable shape or structure. The shapes are perceptible. There has been a change that has occurred. We've moved from this part to that part to the next part. This approach comes out of the way I think about improvising. I think of improvisation as instant composition: composing in real time. Melodies, rhythms, textures, structures, these all emerge from ideas generated during improvisation.

When Sonora played at a festival, the artistic director came to hear us. Afterwards, he asked us how long it took us to memorize our pieces. He was stunned to learn that every note was improvised. We had to explain that our approach was to find and build structures on the fly. Because we actively listen for musical events that lend themselves to various types of development, we can collectively make these structures while we've improvising.

A Doorway to Other Dimensions

A.S. The dimensions, the sizes, shapes and intensities of your music vary from ‘big’ to ‘small’, from very loud to very quiet, etc. Why is that?

GH. Musicians like to go for the ‘big effect’. Often, we blow our brains out, thinking that all this sound, all these pyrotechnics and histrionics will make a big impact on our listeners. But it’s been discovered in biology, in creatures from sea anemones to humans, that very tiny impacts can have significant effects. Even the most gentle, subtle stimuli can provoke profound reactions. In part, this is why my compositions vary from full-tilt, leave-no-stone-standing-upon-another-stone, take-no-prisoners blowouts to delicate, ethereal, minimalist pieces that can only make themselves felt if the listener makes a conscious effort to listen very closely. The range of impacts allows for a greater range of expressiveness and for an overall movement between intensities over the course of a CD, a concert or a set in a club. That spectrum of dynamics, densities, textures tempos and the like opens the way for greater freedom and wider opportunities to explore sound.

Being able to move freely across that spectrum—not being locked into one mode or approach to playing or composing—is something I’ve been focussed on for a long time. In the liner notes to my first album, *The Book of the Heart*, I wrote about being ‘master of the option’, being able to go back and forth, in and out of structure, harmony, time. That concept is still very much a part of my thinking about music. I have faith that listeners, if exposed to a range of weak to strong stimuli in music, can go through a doorway that connects them to other dimensions in their imaginations, their consciousness, their collective unconscious. My music, in that respect, is an equivalence, or at least an analogy, to that movement from one dimension into another.

Comparisons – True but Limiting

A.S. Why the comparisons to so many musicians...Mingus, Ornette Coleman, Frank Zappa, etc.?

G.H. Yes, I’ve been compared to Brian Eno to Wayne Shorter to Charles Ives. It goes on and on. I think that people hear in my music what they’re listening for. In that sense, my music is a mirror for what they want to hear. The fact that people have compared my music to Carla Bley’s or Ornette Coleman’s is, on one hand, flattering. On another level, Mingus and Zappa and Carla and Ornette were formative influences in me becoming myself, musically speaking.

I can think of a few tunes that I’ve written that, I would say, sound like Carla Bley or sound like Ornette Coleman. But that’s because I’m working with their vocabulary, although I’m telling my own story.

The number of times I’ve been compared to utterly different players, not in my compositions but in my playing, is, I find, astonishing. People hear Dexter Gordon, Sonny Rollins, John Coltrane, Archie Shepp, Roland Kirk, Wayne Shorter, Albert Ayler,

John Gilmore, Dewey Redman, Eric Dolphy, Stan Getz, Pharoah Sanders, Sam Rivers...an amazing array...again, the list goes on and on. All of those musicians I have listened to very deeply... with my whole heart, because they played with their whole hearts. So it's not surprising that at moments some of their fingerprints might be apparent in my playing. No one I've ever heard in 100% original. We all come from our 'parents', so to speak.

But I can't actually play like any of these people. I'm unable to play in any musician's style for more than a bar or two of music. As a consequence, if people hear those things in my playing, they're imposing something on my playing that I'm not actually able to put there. They can relate to what I do via those comparisons, but I'm pretty certain that the reality of what those musicians are doing is not the center of what I am doing.

A.S. Do you find the jazz tag limiting?

G.H. No, not particularly.

It's a cliché to say that one just plays 'music'. But, truthfully, I don't always play jazz. Certainly, in EAR-CAM, I'm not playing jazz. In Sonora, there are virtually no jazz elements.

So, am I a jazz musician? When I'm playing jazz, I am. When I'm not, then I'm something else.

Actually, I'm always the same person (laughs).

I have respect for people who can speak various languages. That's sort of what I'm doing. I'm doing what I do, but I'm translating my ideas, not into words, but into chamber music or sound art music or free jazz.

Cover Tunes

A.S. How about cover tunes? You've done all sorts of them. The Kinks, Stockhausen, Blind Willie Jefferson, Ornette Coleman. What's your approach? How do you pick them? What do you do with them?

G.H. I just pick them because they speak to me. They're what I want to hear. Each one is 'formative' in the sense that it contains a matrix that expresses something central to my musical personality. "You Really Got Me" is the quintessential rock tune: it's elemental. I've played a lot of rock and love it dearly. "Lonely Woman" speaks to anyone with ears to hear. When I play Carla Bley's "Ida Lupino", I can feel something so beautiful, so vulnerable, so human that I'm transported. I'm not sure I could write pieces like these, so I rely on those who can.

But I don't do covers that much anymore. In part, because of the demands of the musicians I play with. They want to play my music. And I'm thankful that they're adamant about that.

Recently, I played a jazz festival. The first set, we played my compositions. In the second set, we played some Monk, Carla Bley and Ornette Coleman. When we were finished, my drummer, Joe Sorbara, said, "That sounds old, man." God bless him. He pushes me forward. He says that we should take the next step. He insists that I don't need to play someone else's music.

Yet, I have to say, those 'old' tunes have many more miles left in them, as far as I'm concerned.

Extra-musical Inspirations

A.S. How about inspirations outside of music?

G.H. Painters. They have an influence on me, not so much from a conceptual standpoint, but from their artistic integrity.

The painters I admire went their own way. The fact that they have been vilified for what they were doing—no one's been that upset by what I do; no one has taken umbrage with my music, at least, not in print or to my face—and that they persisted with their vision warrants my respect. Their guts, their persistence, their courage, all these qualities are things I admire deeply. Their attitude is noble.

One of the musicians who plays in my group EAR-CAM, John Oswald, has gone his own way for as long as I've known him—nearly 25 years. I've never seen him cop out. I don't think he knows how. He seems to be incapable of doing anything other than he damn well feels like doing. To my mind, John is an artist in the genuine sense of the word. His example is 'true'. For example, EAR-CAM was recording. John didn't show up. He didn't feel right. O.K. That's attitude is so rare in an environment where everyone tries to make everyone else happy, just to "keep the show on the road", as it were. John doesn't give a shit about "the show". He only cares about the music and his ability to contribute to it. He's a gem.

A.S. It's in his DNA, in other words.

G.H. Yes. And I think that's brilliant.

So, when I look at a painting by Kandinsky or Rothko, I ask myself, "What possessed them to do that? To persist with that vision?" It's not just the artist's vision. It's his/her commitment to following through with the vision, in spite of the inertia that, de facto, opposes it. I marvel at that.

Another influence is literature, all sorts, from Thomas Mann, Cormac McCarthy, and Samuel Beckett to John LeCarre and Kinky Friedman . It doesn't have to be literature with a capital L. But I do like narrative. In my music, I think there is sometimes a narrative element. In Sonora and EAR-CAM, not really. Those groups are not specifically about narrative, although they both have moments of it. On the other hand, in Trio Muo, there are stories being told...but they can't be told in words. Sometimes deeply personal stories that I wouldn't want to put into words. My work teaching communications has made me hyper-aware of clarity, structure, pacing, tone, repetition, etc. I'm not 'airy-fairy' about getting ideas across in writing and I tend to adopt the same posture when playing, no matter how abstract, non-linear or cutting edge the context.

Also, I've been a long time student of the contemporary projection of Sufism, in particular, the writing and lectures of Idries Shah. His writing has given me ways of looking at myself and others that have been very useful in helping me to "deautomatize" my thinking.

Human beings have the marvelous ability to form habits. And some of these habits are very good, very helpful in day-to-day life. Being able to steer a bicycle, being able to handwrite. You hardly have to think about handwriting once you know how. Beautiful.

But habits can become restrictive. And Shah's writing has given me a perspective from which to observe my habits and habitual assumptions—social, emotional, psychological, musical—so that I can "deautomatize", make less habitual, make less automatic, my thoughts and actions. His stories, aphorisms, observations help me to be more a "master of the option", to have a choice of possibilities that otherwise I would overlook or undervalue.

That said, I'm hardly a model of Sufistic thinking. Please don't judge them by my example (laughs).

Changing Sounds

A.S. So this breaking of habits...is that why you use such different sounds when you play? Your sound changes radically, sometimes within a single piece, sometimes within a few seconds.

G.H. I change my tone a lot, particularly on the tenor saxophone. My sound goes from a breathy sub-tone to very hard metallic sounds to cat-like yowls and dog-like barks. And that changeability comes from watching actors.

There are some musicians, for instance, John Coltrane, who have a very consistent sound. That consistency reminds me of John Wayne. John Wayne in a movie is always John Wayne, regardless of the dramatic context. He's not necessarily the character. He bends the character into being John Wayne.

In contrast, I prefer to take the Lawrence Olivier approach. Whatever is being called for at a particular moment in a piece, that's what I'm going to try to do.

A.S. So you're like a method actor?

G.H. I don't know about that. But I watched Olivier in *Boys from Brazil* and he plays an Elie Weisel kind of old, Jewish Nazi hunter, and then in *Marathon Man* he plays Joseph Mengele. He's two utterly different people, called forth by context and character. If I didn't know it was the same guy, I would never think it was the same guy.

So, if I'm playing a ballad, I may choose to do that in a beautiful, lyrical way, and I'll use a tone that captures the context and character of the tune. Whereas, if I'm playing an abstract piece, I may use a sound that literally doesn't sound human. And that comes from my experiences dealing with animals and insects. I'm interested in non-human forms of expression, too.

Non-human Elements in Music

I have two tarantulas, and I don't relate to them on a 'human' level. They don't express themselves in human ways, as we like to think dogs do, for instance. I can't anthropomorphize them. They don't 'smile' and ask to go for a walk. They don't ask to have their bellies rubbed. But one can communicate with them in other ways.

Sonora just finished recording a series of pieces based on radioactive elements. My instructions were that our rhythms were not to be human. Nothing you can shake your booty to. Think of patterns being emitted by elements, stones, particles. These things are not remotely human. Try to merge yourself with something not human and see what you can come up with. These things are part of our world. Why restrict our intuition and creative impulse only to that narrow bandwidth 'humanity'?

Using these kinds of things as inspirations helps take us out of our habits. You can't play Berg's *Lyric Suite* licks when the subject matter is selenium.

A.S. That sounds like an out-of-body experience.

G.H. When it's working right, it is. The music takes me out of myself.

There are times when I feel like I'm locked up in my body. Now, I'm in no rush to die, but once in a while I'd like to go on vacation from 'the meat suit'. Music is a way of transcending the body. And I can tell when the music's going really well when I'm not there anymore. Something else is happening.

Your Horns

A.S. You're a multi-instrumentalist: saxophones, bass clarinet, the family of flutes, percussion, even guitar, your original instrument. Is there one you feel closest to?

G.H. The tenor saxophone is the one I feel I have the greatest range of expressiveness on. Gil Evans told me that my instrument was really the soprano saxophone. But I don't feel as comfortable playing that instrument as he maybe thought I was (laughs).

I would like to play flute better than I do. That's because I can hear things on the flute that I simply can't get on any of the other instruments.

On bass clarinet, I'm basically an intuitive player. I don't play it from a repertoire of automatized licks or patterns. I just melt into the instrument. I don't try to make things happen, but rather just let them happen through the instrument.

A.S. You're the conduit for the music coming from the instrument.

G.H. Yes. I don't try to force it to do things as I do on other horns. So I don't play it remotely like I play the saxophone or the flute, which is good, because, that way, I can go somewhere else.

Emotions and Expression

A.S. Is there some aspect of music we haven't touched on that you'd like to talk about?

G.H. Some music is deeply emotional. Well and good. But I've made a decades-long study of psychology, and one of the things I've learned is that emotions are not inherently human; they're pre-human. Mammals display emotions...fear, affection, etc. So to be restricted to playing emotional music is unnecessary. It limits the possibilities of creativity.

So, when I mentioned the series of pieces Sonora played, *Irradiations*, part of the point of those pieces was to not play emotional music. Not unemotional or monotonous or dull. I mean that emotions don't have anything to do with the organizing concepts of the pieces.

A lot of Bach's music has no emotion to it. You can play his music emotionally. But it is the isomorphism of patterns, the evolution of a pattern from its 'seed' that is the heart of his music. It's the creative exploration of patterns, shapes, densities, relationships, lines, harmonies, textures, space and time.

A.S. But his music sounds mechanical because of that.

G.H. To me, it sounds like the unfolding of patterns in space and time, not inherently mechanical. More architectural.

A.S. It's cerebral music rather than emotional.

G.H. I don't like to put the emphasis on the intellect too much in music. Certainly, Bach's intellect is staggering, but its manifestation is beauty. The working out of these

patterns is beauty unfolding in time. And I'd like to find other things that unfold that way. I'd like to find out what other things can unfold like that besides emotions.

I can play emotionally when it's called for by the music. But when it isn't, I want to be capable of going wherever the music is going. And I don't always know where the music can go, some I'm discovering stuff.

Music whose purpose is to crank up your emotions can be and often is manipulative. It's a form of psychological conditioning. When I mentioned 'deautomatization', what that is is 'deconditioning', making people more free of their conditioning, their habits of thought and feeling. At least, that's what I hope these non-emotion-based musics are doing to some extent. And that's one of those nutrients I spoke of earlier that I hope people can take in and digest.

Music doesn't have to be all joy or tears, happy and sad. It can express cosmic things. It can express microcosmic things. It can express non-human things. It can express spiritual things. Why not?

Levels of Music

A.S. So you're saying that music that intends to elicit these emotional, conditioned responses is on a lower level?

G.H. I don't think it's lower. It's just one level, a perfectly legitimate type of expression. Unless the music is intended to elicit these emotional responses for some purpose other than what the song is about.

You go to a rock concert. The band plays their 'anthem' and the audience responds by flicking their Bics, doing 'the wave', singing along...and the crowd becomes ONE.

No they don't. They're conditioned. They know what's expected, so they do it. It's social conditioning, not self-transcendence and the unification of I and Thou.

Fine. But I'd rather go a different direction.

A.S. Are you consciously working against that, trying to get your music as far away from that as possible?

G.H. No. I'm not terribly nostalgic, but I do bring much of my past with me. And music that elicits emotions has been a part of my evolution. But it's not where I stop. It's not all that I do.

I just don't think it's the 'highest' form of expression. It's one of many available forms, some of which perhaps haven't been discovered or created yet. Or at least, not by me.

A.S. So there's no particular emotional response you're looking to get from your audience?

G.H. It depends what I'm playing. If I'm playing Billy Strayhorn's Blood Count, well, there's an inherent emotion in the tune itself and I'm just trying to manifest it my own way. So, yes, I do hope for an emotional response.

But the response isn't what I'm really after. I'm just trying to play the best version of that song that I can in my own way. And to do that, I bring all kinds of elements from the past to bear on that. All the listening I did to Paul Gonsalves and Johnny Hodges comes with me when I'm playing that tune.

And I can see how someone, listening to that, might have their heart in their mouth, because I believe so deeply in the beauty of that piece, that the force or the energy of the beauty itself is communicated and has an effect, not just on the listeners emotions, but on the listener's entire being.

When I'm playing one of the geometric pieces with Trio Muo, there's sometimes beauty in that, but it's not the same one, and it won't have the same effect. It's not the beauty Billy Strayhorn was after, because at that moment that's not what I'm after.

Reality is an Illusion

A.S. Your pieces *Alamout* and *The Book of the Dead on Hallucinations: Music and Words for William S. Burroughs* talk about illusions of time and space. Is this a recurring theme in your music and your thinking in general?

G.H. Yes. It is my understanding that our perceptions of time and space make them seem absolute. But this appearance is the result of our physiology. Our eyes see less than a fraction of one percent of the electromagnetic waves we call light. In addition, physicists explain that matter consists mostly of space and is not solid. We can't see this; we can't experience it directly through our senses. Consequently, for us reality is actually a fiction, an illusion, and vice versa.

In those two pieces, I convolve concepts drawn from Burroughs, the Sufi poet Rumi, the Tibetan Book of the Dead and contemporary physics and the psychology of consciousness. I use language to allude to or to outright state this concept of non-absolute time and space.

In my compositions, I like to deal with the same concept, only using tempo, meter, pitch, rhythm, tonal centers, themes, motifs, and various sorts of patterns. In my music, tonality is malleable, not fixed, not 'absolute'. Time speeds up, slows down; it 'bends' or stops. Ideas are stated and invert back upon themselves. My music reflects my understanding of the non-absolute nature of what we take to be reality.

Travels in Sound

A.S. Why do you do this (music)?

G.H. Perhaps one day, I'll have learned how to experience the reality of these concepts for myself. Maybe I'll experience their truth directly. In the meantime, I'll continue to make 'invisible art' and to explore the freedom music permits me to experience. Music allows me to walk through a doorway into other dimensions, to remain in my body and consciousness while being able 'to fly.'

One thing I'm certain of is that, if I am ever able to experience these things directly myself, I won't be able to tell anyone about such experiences or explain them in words. But maybe, somehow, I'll make music that can embody or indicate the possibility of the liberation of perception. The transcending of time, space, body and self. Meanwhile, I travel...travel in dimensions of sound.