

Virtual Town Hall

October 21, 2025

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00:00:00.000 --> 00:00:01.690

Alan Valentine: First of all, welcome.

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00:00:02.190 --> 00:00:18.419

Alan Valentine: Oh, sorry, there was a, okay, message about the recording. I first of all, I want to welcome all of you to this donor town hall, today. As Erica said, I'm on the League Board, I'm also on the development committee.

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00:00:18.460 --> 00:00:22.349

Alan Valentine: And, involved in, our campaign.

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00:00:22.440 --> 00:00:31.430

Alan Valentine: But I wanted to begin by thanking all of you for your generous support. It really means so much to all of us at the League.

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00:00:31.530 --> 00:00:40.969

Alan Valentine: and to the field, especially. And so, thank you for your support, and we're thrilled you're here, and hope you enjoy this.

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00:00:41.040 --> 00:01:00.469

Alan Valentine: One quick housekeeping thing I might mention is if we can ask everybody to mute their, Zoom, their microphones, that would be great, because sometimes we inadvertently find ourselves doing other things in these calls, and it would... that would help. So, little bit of housekeeping there.

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00:01:00.700 --> 00:01:02.130

Alan Valentine: So,

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00:01:02.710 --> 00:01:14.600

Alan Valentine: I guess we'll just jump right in here. So, Ben Folds probably needs no introduction to many of you, but,

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00:01:14.600 --> 00:01:28.240

Alan Valentine: Ben, before we get started, I know you were born in North Carolina, Winston-Salem, I think, and I think probably started playing music when you were quite young, maybe 9 or 10 years old or something.

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00:01:28.770 --> 00:01:41.220

Alan Valentine: And, and you've built a really remarkable career. And, I think it would be interesting to start with, just to have you tell us a little bit about your journey, you know, kind of how you got your start.

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00:01:41.860 --> 00:01:51.399

Alan Valentine: And, where that went in terms of, you know, your formal education and your career. So, why don't we do that first?

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00:01:51.820 --> 00:01:52.699

Benjamin Folds: Well,

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00:01:52.930 --> 00:02:01.719

Benjamin Folds: I'm a proud product of the Forsyth County Public School Systems in North Carolina, and we had,

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00:02:01.910 --> 00:02:04.150

Benjamin Folds: We had, you know, a little orchestra.

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00:02:04.730 --> 00:02:13.120

Benjamin Folds: at every school I went to, and good... good, interested... Music teachers that

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00:02:13.340 --> 00:02:19.490

Benjamin Folds: We're not one-size-fits-all, sort of, thinkers and, and,

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00:02:20.360 --> 00:02:23.060

Benjamin Folds: And I also... I lived near the,

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00:02:23.420 --> 00:02:30.510

Benjamin Folds: the North Carolina School of the Arts, and they had a youth orchestra, so I was playing in a youth orchestra.

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00:02:31.310 --> 00:02:37.620

Benjamin Folds: probably 10 or 11 years old, I so... Over-the-top, obsessed with,

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00:02:37.730 --> 00:02:50.979

Benjamin Folds: with percussion and playing in orchestra. Specifically, I didn't love band, and I didn't do that marching band stuff, except for when I had to, but I really loved orchestra.

21

00:02:50.980 --> 00:02:58.990

Benjamin Folds: So, we had access to that. And then, because I was over at the School of the Arts, I ended up with private lessons with a pretty notorious

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00:02:59.000 --> 00:03:02.750

Benjamin Folds: percussionist, percussion teacher.

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00:03:02.850 --> 00:03:19.310

Benjamin Folds: who, I didn't realize he was so kind of famous until I was playing with, Boston, and Keith Lockhart, said that he heard I studied with Massey Johnson, and I felt fancy. So I had a lot of... I had a lot of, you know, I had a lot of access. And, and I also...

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00:03:19.660 --> 00:03:28.540

Benjamin Folds: You know, although I'm a rock musician, but my... really, my first entry point into music and playing with other people was

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00:03:28.670 --> 00:03:46.300

Benjamin Folds: you know, was the orchestra, so that always meant a whole lot to me, yeah. And then I, you know, went on... I studied percussion, you know, off at university. I didn't finish, but that's what I wanted to do. I wanted to play for Cleveland. Is Cleveland here?

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00:03:46.910 --> 00:04:00.330

Benjamin Folds: I wanted to play... I wanted to play timpani for Cleveland, because I had all these Cleveland Symphony, or Cleveland Orchestra, records when I was a kid, and I just thought that that seemed like the one to play with. I think it's one of the two that I haven't played with.

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00:04:01.010 --> 00:04:20.329

Benjamin Folds: Yeah, but yeah, so, you know, piano, drums, I mean, I play... I was as interested in formal music as I was interested in being in a garage band, and I never viewed them as being very different, and as I've been more of a, you know.

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00:04:20.550 --> 00:04:26.400

Benjamin Folds: professional musician, I've tried to bring together, you know, the virtues of both, because

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00:04:26.400 --> 00:04:41.040

Benjamin Folds: there's a... there's a way of communication in a garage band, which sometimes, because of the numbers and the necessary for formality, that we forget when we're playing an orchestra, and I... I like to remember to bring that to that, because then it's just... just 70 people

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00:04:41.040 --> 00:04:47.000

Benjamin Folds: Some of them you know, you know, like, and playing together is, you know, it's important.

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00:04:48.610 --> 00:04:51.910

Alan Valentine: Well, thanks. I know there's a lot in between

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00:04:52.170 --> 00:04:54.450

Alan Valentine: You know, your start there, and...

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00:04:54.540 --> 00:05:13.370

Alan Valentine: when we first encountered each other, and we first met, and... but in 2010, Nashville experienced a thousand-year flood, they say, and it was a catastrophe that did \$40 million worth of damage to our wonderful concert hall, and only the fifth year we were open.

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00:05:13.410 --> 00:05:18.009

Benjamin Folds: And, and I have to give a shout-out here to the league, because.

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00:05:18.190 --> 00:05:23.640

Alan Valentine: You know, if anybody ever questions the value of the league to our field.

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00:05:23.780 --> 00:05:33.379

Alan Valentine: Just send them to me, because I can tell you in no uncertain terms that if it were not for the league, this orchestra might not still be here.

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00:05:33.490 --> 00:05:44.380

Alan Valentine: Because that... that \$40 million problem we had was largely solved by the great work of the league, and Heather in particular. I know you're on the call, Heather.

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00:05:44.380 --> 00:05:55.939

Alan Valentine: who, really, working with colleagues from other disciplines, the libraries, the, zoos and museums and so on.

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00:05:55.940 --> 00:06:10.730

Alan Valentine: got their FEMA regs changed so that orchestras and other nonprofit arts organizations could actually access FEMA for buildings that were not owned by city governments, and so we were one of the early

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00:06:10.790 --> 00:06:14.740

Alan Valentine: orchestras to benefit from that. I think the other being maybe Cedar Rapids.

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00:06:15.080 --> 00:06:23.970

Alan Valentine: But, we, we got a lot of help from that. But, you know, it was a very dark time for us, and I got this phone call

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00:06:24.100 --> 00:06:27.449

Alan Valentine: Just literally, like, a week or two after the flood.

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00:06:27.750 --> 00:06:42.529

Alan Valentine: from Ben, and so, you know, hope arrived in another form, which was Ben calling and saying, hey, man, I'm Ben Folds, you know, a rock musician, and of course, I knew who you were, but he said, you know, man, I want to help. I think this is... our town needs this, and...

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00:06:42.600 --> 00:06:48.429

Alan Valentine: And so, you know, between the benefit concert and the Piano Keys project.

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00:06:48.550 --> 00:06:59.609

Alan Valentine: You know, just talk about, for a moment, if you don't mind, Ben, kind of what your thought process was, your motivation for reaching out like that, and that began a wonderful relationship we've had for.

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00:06:59.610 --> 00:07:00.080

Benjamin Folds: Yeah.

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00:07:00.080 --> 00:07:01.799

Alan Valentine: Many years now, and .

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00:07:01.800 --> 00:07:02.610

Benjamin Folds: Man.

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00:07:02.740 --> 00:07:07.190

Benjamin Folds: Well, you know, I was beginning to play...

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00:07:07.280 --> 00:07:23.710

Benjamin Folds: in my, you know, songwriting pop career, with orchestras, which was its own sort of... I was kind of hesitant about that, because as, you know, growing up playing, in orchestras,

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00:07:24.090 --> 00:07:33.690

Benjamin Folds: I just... I didn't love what I saw when I saw rock bands play with orchestras, you know, so I didn't really want to kind of join that unless I knew...

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00:07:33.960 --> 00:07:53.289

Benjamin Folds: how it's gonna do it, and how to orchestrate so that the orchestra is the band. You know, like, is the motor, and is not, you know, like, and strings to make the rock band look fancy. We've talked about that a lot, and why I don't think that works.

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00:07:53.300 --> 00:08:03.920

Benjamin Folds: But... so I was, I was kind of going down that path, and I started to really feel like the symphony orchestra was becoming maybe the shovel I would pick up

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00:08:03.970 --> 00:08:19.469

Benjamin Folds: to chip back in, you know? Like, I'd had a few years of success at what I did, and I always figured that I would, at some point, start to contribute. You know, you look around, like, like, maybe it's, you know, with...

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00:08:19.470 --> 00:08:35.069

Benjamin Folds: music education, which has been some, or music therapy, which it has been some, or something political, but that was something I thought I could really sink my teeth into, because, because the orchestra, every generation has to figure out a new way to survive.

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00:08:35.190 --> 00:08:36.710

Benjamin Folds: And,

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00:08:37.280 --> 00:08:57.049

Benjamin Folds: I knew that. And so, when this happened, it just seemed like a natural... when the flood happened, it seemed like a natural extension of this sort of new, new ambition I had to advocate for and to help orchestras out. So, to me, to take my, you know.

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00:08:57.170 --> 00:09:01.289

Benjamin Folds: repertoire that thus far. We've got so much more now, but at the time.

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00:09:01.850 --> 00:09:14.859

Benjamin Folds: Hopefully bring it in and do a set, and all that money that gets made that normally goes to everyone from me to conductors to everyone, anyone that could waive that, so we got a conductor to waive

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00:09:14.880 --> 00:09:22.039

Benjamin Folds: his fee, and he was awesome. And, you know, tried to raise a little bit of money, but it really came from me

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00:09:22.140 --> 00:09:26.409

Benjamin Folds: Taking, kind of, going a little bit down the journey of, of...

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00:09:26.650 --> 00:09:35.920

Benjamin Folds: okay, well, my cause is the orchestra. You know, that seems to be a good cause to me. You know, it's... if the orchestra goes away, then what?

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00:09:36.590 --> 00:09:40.089

Benjamin Folds: I mean, like, if the orchestra goes away, that, to me, seems like...

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00:09:40.510 --> 00:09:54.469

Benjamin Folds: the biggest symbol of people working together for something bigger, civilization, has... that symbol is gone. And if that's gone, then what about the actual civilization part? It just seems...

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00:09:55.120 --> 00:10:08.500

Benjamin Folds: Like, you have to have an art form that requires that many excellent artists to bring one thing together. That has to be one gear that you have. It's A gear, it's not the only one. Anyway, that's what my thought process was.

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00:10:08.960 --> 00:10:16.050

Alan Valentine: Well, and you know, in addition to the benefit concert, you also... Ben took the keys from his flood-damaged piano.

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00:10:16.360 --> 00:10:23.950

Alan Valentine: And autographed them, and sold them on the internet, and raised a whole lot of money. And when those keys ran out, he got more keys.

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00:10:23.950 --> 00:10:26.950

Benjamin Folds: Yeah, we just start again, Keith. Start again, Keith. Not my key!

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00:10:26.950 --> 00:10:27.580

Alan Valentine: Smaller we can.

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00:10:28.980 --> 00:10:29.810

Alan Valentine: Yeah, we got more...

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00:10:29.810 --> 00:10:43.680

Benjamin Folds: other, other, other, pianists coming through? You know, you found people, we found people to, to, to sign keys, called it Keys from, Keys to Music City, I think was the... Yeah. Oh, I've got one! Look at this!

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00:10:43.900 --> 00:10:51.380

Benjamin Folds: It's something I'm proud of enough to where it's on... it's on my wall, I forgot about that. That's... that's one of them right there.

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00:10:51.380 --> 00:10:53.889

Alan Valentine: I think there's one right here, too, on my desk.

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00:10:53.890 --> 00:10:56.729

Benjamin Folds: How about that? Yeah, it's... I mean, you know.

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00:10:57.700 --> 00:11:13.870

Benjamin Folds: That piano had turned upside down in flood water, like yours probably had, you know, it was floating in a rehearsal space somewhere in downtown Nashville. And we thought, yeah, we'd like to just take the keys off of it and sell it.

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00:11:13.980 --> 00:11:20.999

Benjamin Folds: I think Mike had to wrestle with the insurance company over that forever, like, I was like, no, no, we want... we want them. For what?

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00:11:21.000 --> 00:11:21.920

Alan Valentine: Yeah, exactly.

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00:11:21.920 --> 00:11:32.180

Benjamin Folds: But yeah, but this is what... another great thing about the orchestra, I mean, I'm preaching to the obvious choir here, I'm preaching to the league. But, you know, like, one thing that I always try to tell people who are

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00:11:32.180 --> 00:11:48.029

Benjamin Folds: you know, punters who don't know much about the symphony orchestra, because I think they feel like the symphony orchestra is maybe something that needs our help. I'm like, look, the symphony orchestra does a lot of... a lot of outreach. I mean, all orchestras do a lot of outreach and help, and and that was one of those cases, because

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00:11:48.030 --> 00:12:05.820

Benjamin Folds: We took that money then, and people that worked in the orchestra were... were fixing instruments and riding them around to public schools and places that needed kids that needed instruments. So, you know, musicians who weren't working for that time, who were good... good at fixing instruments, were... that's your outreach. It's...

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00:12:06.190 --> 00:12:09.849

Benjamin Folds: It's... it's just a great... it's a, you know, yeah.

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00:12:10.100 --> 00:12:10.540

Alan Valentine: Yeah.

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00:12:10.540 --> 00:12:11.619

Benjamin Folds: pictures, yeah.

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00:12:11.620 --> 00:12:23.620

Alan Valentine: Yeah, you reminded me of so many good things, but I don't want to get off track here. So, there were a lot of... it's amazing how so many good things can come out of a tragedy or a catastrophe like that.

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00:12:23.620 --> 00:12:24.360

Benjamin Folds: You try, yeah.

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00:12:24.360 --> 00:12:33.289

Alan Valentine: And there really were a lot, including a complete revamping of how the schools approach instrument repair, but that's another story for another day.

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00:12:33.690 --> 00:12:53.259

Alan Valentine: So, you know, not long after all of that, of course, we began a different kind of conversation. You and Paul Vasterling and Giancarlo and I all got into a conversation about... by the way, Giancarlo, I'm referring to our former music director, Giancarlo Guerrero.

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00:12:53.320 --> 00:13:01.660

Alan Valentine: And Paul Vasterling was the artistic director of the ballet here in Nashville. But we got into a conversation about a piano concerto.

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00:13:02.050 --> 00:13:11.189

Alan Valentine: And, we made that happen. We ended up giving the premiere of that concerto and, recorded that with you, and,

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00:13:11.330 --> 00:13:15.729

Alan Valentine: One of the moments I'll never forget is the encores that you chose.

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00:13:15.930 --> 00:13:23.869

Alan Valentine: For the performances, which were just out of this world. He had the whole audience, if you can imagine this, in a classical concert.

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00:13:24.080 --> 00:13:34.399

Alan Valentine: We had done Bartok's Miraculous Mandarin right before the concerto, and we had all of these... the hall was packed with, you know, a much younger audience than usual.

93

00:13:34.400 --> 00:13:46.919

Alan Valentine: And they were all on their feet, screaming and yelling for Bartok like they were at a rock concert. And then after the concerto, Ben had the whole audience the first night singing along to Purple Haze by Jimi Hendrix

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00:13:46.920 --> 00:13:47.590

Benjamin Folds: That's right, yeah.

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00:13:47.590 --> 00:13:55.430

Alan Valentine: Yeah, and it was quite something. It was really spectacular. But, but, talk about the, the experience of,

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00:13:55.540 --> 00:14:10.789

Alan Valentine: you know, writing the concerto, and premiering the concerto, and kind of that process for you, and how that sort of influenced everything that kind of came after that in your career, because I think it did have a pretty profound impact.

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00:14:11.450 --> 00:14:17.190

Benjamin Folds: Yeah, it did. I mean, I went back to school, essentially, you know?

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00:14:17.360 --> 00:14:24.840

Benjamin Folds: To... to do that, you have to ask yourself, someone like me who's, like, used to really, like, you know, lyrics are a big...

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00:14:25.010 --> 00:14:25.899

Benjamin Folds: part of

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00:14:26.320 --> 00:14:40.719

Benjamin Folds: what I write. And so, take that away, but then add this palette of the symphony orchestra. Yeah, it was really... it was... it was quite a head trip for me. I like to write... I think of...

101

00:14:40.830 --> 00:14:43.690

Benjamin Folds: Songs and compositions as...

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00:14:43.910 --> 00:14:54.550

Benjamin Folds: being story-based. I know everyone doesn't think that way, but that's sort of my framework, you know? It doesn't have to be once upon a time as a story, but there is... there is something of a story involved.

103

00:14:54.670 --> 00:15:01.309

Benjamin Folds: And so I had to ask myself what this story was. Of course, Paul was working

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00:15:01.520 --> 00:15:17.050

Benjamin Folds: on another level with the Nashville Ballet and creating a ballet to it, so it was sort of a ballet, as well as a concerto. But I actually just decided it was a piece about a rock musician who has to write

105

00:15:17.550 --> 00:15:30.830

Benjamin Folds: A piano concerto. Like, that was the most realistic and honest I could get, and so I just thought, what am I excited about when it comes to the piano and the orchestra? And sometimes that's...

106

00:15:31.190 --> 00:15:37.570

Benjamin Folds: Sometimes that's 5 seconds of Rachmaninoff or Prokofiev, or sometimes it's... It's...

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00:15:38.480 --> 00:15:43.619

Benjamin Folds: even, even movies. I mean, I'm not a huge fan of cinema.

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00:15:44.800 --> 00:16:04.650

Benjamin Folds: concerts, but it's undeniable that there's really great music, you know, for the cinema, written for the orchestra, and the orchestra works so hard, in those. Yeah, so I... that's just what it became, and then we premiered it over there, and I mean, I don't know, you know, I'm really proud of what we did, because...

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00:16:04.710 --> 00:16:08.380

Benjamin Folds: We had really, really good, curious attendance.

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00:16:08.550 --> 00:16:26.390

Benjamin Folds: For this, you know, 3 nights, and then 3 nights over at TPAC with the, with the, again, with the ballet. And I had to ask myself, when might have been the last time that that many people, that many thousands, showed up for a piano concerto premiere?

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00:16:26.650 --> 00:16:32.469

Benjamin Folds: I mean, I don't know. I mean, it doesn't happen that often, so... It made me think, like.

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00:16:33.020 --> 00:16:36.000

Benjamin Folds: You know, it's not because it was the best composition.

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00:16:36.400 --> 00:16:43.739

Benjamin Folds: Some of it's because there's context in the story. I wasn't just gonna go down there and do my songs.

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00:16:44.100 --> 00:16:46.820

Benjamin Folds: That would have explained the number of people that showed up.

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00:16:47.200 --> 00:16:54.830

Benjamin Folds: they knew I was playing a piano concerto, and there would be bar talk, and I think there might have been Rosini or something on there, too. They knew there was gonna be

116

00:16:55.500 --> 00:17:01.620

Benjamin Folds: Not... not that. And they came anyway. And it just made me think about the possibilities out there of...

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00:17:02.490 --> 00:17:08.499

Benjamin Folds: artist who... have something... To say that they can say it in that framework.

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00:17:08.849 --> 00:17:12.159

Benjamin Folds: Saying it with the symphony orchestra on their turf.

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00:17:12.359 --> 00:17:14.279

Benjamin Folds: Not with a rock band, and...

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00:17:15.180 --> 00:17:28.819

Benjamin Folds: amplifiers and stuff, but, like, actually going out and doing what the orchestra is, you know, the excellence that has been honed after, you know, at least 250 years of really working that, you know? It's like...

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00:17:28.970 --> 00:17:46.980

Benjamin Folds: I don't know, that's where my head went about it, was... it's difficult to do, and it can't be novel, you know, it can't be like, this is a novelty, this is... it's like, I was so serious about it, and I put it on my album and everything, that I think my fan base understood that it was my new thing, you know? Like, it wasn't like...

122

00:17:47.110 --> 00:17:56.840

Benjamin Folds: a one-off. I then turned around, I think we played at least part one or two movements a night on tour. I played it with 100 orchestras.

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00:17:57.300 --> 00:18:03.890

Benjamin Folds: So, over the course of a couple years, I played a piano concerto at, like, 100 performances.

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00:18:04.050 --> 00:18:10.940

Benjamin Folds: I mean... That's... that's great. I'm not gonna speak to the quality of it. I really...

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00:18:11.030 --> 00:18:19.119

Benjamin Folds: Honestly, and I don't want... I don't want to know. I just... I meant it, but it's like, you know, if I wrote, like, 8,

126

00:18:19.160 --> 00:18:34.110

Benjamin Folds: you know, then I'd start listening to maybe opinions about it. But I got through, you know, I was like, because just even the orchestration of it, but it also made me revisit my, quote, pops arrangements.

127

00:18:34.350 --> 00:18:36.999

Benjamin Folds: Because so many of the powerful moments

128

00:18:37.750 --> 00:18:42.609

Benjamin Folds: We don't think about that. We send pop acts out to do things, and they don't ever stop.

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00:18:42.850 --> 00:18:48.350

Benjamin Folds: Like, they just go chomp, chomp, chomp, chomp, chomp. But if you listen to a great piano concerto.

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00:18:48.480 --> 00:18:52.010

Benjamin Folds: You know? The piano player shuts up sometimes.

131

00:18:53.310 --> 00:19:09.139

Benjamin Folds: It's not... it's not... it's not all 2D, either, like, the... it's just... it's just well-orchestrated stuff, and... and, you know, what I was doing at the Kennedy Center, I don't want to jump forward too much, but was 8 years of working with as many orchestrators as I could with, like.

132

00:19:10.820 --> 00:19:14.399

Benjamin Folds: Look, this has to sit next to Shostakovich tomorrow night.

133

00:19:15.000 --> 00:19:17.520

Benjamin Folds: Guys, like, it has to sound...

134

00:19:17.750 --> 00:19:28.440

Benjamin Folds: Let's... let's get good at this. I mean, they were only people, like, why do we have to write garbage for the... for, for pop artists as a one-size

135

00:19:28.820 --> 00:19:32.039

Benjamin Folds: Fits-all thing where everyone's the hairpins and the...

136

00:19:32.590 --> 00:19:41.880

Benjamin Folds: And the footballs and all. I mean, I understand that, because it's... you're trying to save time and money, and it must work. And the orchestrator's probably not there.

137

00:19:41.880 --> 00:19:58.649

Benjamin Folds: But there is a way to do it. So that was another... but my whole time with the symphony orchestra has been a kind of a full-time... it's not a tangent. It's not part-time for me. I take it seriously, and I didn't want to jump in at the first, when I did it for the first time.

138

00:19:58.660 --> 00:20:17.459

Benjamin Folds: like in 2003 in Australia, I committed to myself that this is what I... I'm doing this, and I'm gonna go through all the seasons, and I could talk your ear off about it, but I think if I have one contribution, if it can happen, that a successful contribution would be.

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00:20:17.670 --> 00:20:22.299

Benjamin Folds: To bring artists with something to say. Pop artist?

140

00:20:22.850 --> 00:20:25.490

Benjamin Folds: Whatever category you want to call them.

141

00:20:26.100 --> 00:20:27.380

Benjamin Folds: popular.

142

00:20:27.810 --> 00:20:39.259

Benjamin Folds: Into the orchestra, not with the orchestra behind them, And not orchestrated around it but one... Using the orchestra.

143

00:20:39.810 --> 00:20:42.840

Benjamin Folds: Utilizing, challenging the orchestra, and

144

00:20:42.890 --> 00:21:00.309

Benjamin Folds: almost... almost a new genre. I mean, classical music has always eaten folk music, you know, Chopin, Bartok, I mean, it's always incorporated. This is a way to do that, and to flex a little star power to bring people into the seats.

145

00:21:00.310 --> 00:21:19.040

Benjamin Folds: But bring them back because they loved the orchestra, not because they put up with the orchestra, or they felt fancy, or they didn't know what they were supposed to wear, or not to clap between movements. Dispense with all that, and get people in their hearts, ears, you know, listening to the symphony orchestra in that way. That's not what you asked me, but I just gave you the...

146

00:21:19.040 --> 00:21:36.149

Alan Valentine: Yeah, but, well, no, it's a perfect segue into kind of what I had afterward, and you answered part of it, but, you know, we've known each other now, of course, a long time, and, you know, I know how you feel about this sort of artificial labels that we try to put on things, and

147

00:21:36.200 --> 00:21:43.910

Alan Valentine: And how that kind of, in some senses, stifles creativity, because we all think everything has to fit neatly into some box.

148

00:21:43.980 --> 00:22:03.489

Alan Valentine: And what I'm going to say that you, you know, wouldn't say about yourself, you referenced it kind of a minute ago, is that the concerto is a really fine concerto, and there's a great recording of it with the Nashville Symphony on New West Records, and you can download that recording and listen to it, and I would encourage everybody on this call to listen to it.

149

00:22:03.540 --> 00:22:08.819

Alan Valentine: It... it... in my view, you know, you had a lot to say there, and...

150

00:22:08.930 --> 00:22:17.130

Alan Valentine: And so, thinking about this question of labels and creativity and imagination, you know, what would you say about...

151

00:22:17.130 --> 00:22:31.639

Alan Valentine: the work that orchestras are doing and need to do to really, you know, boldly break through those shackles and unleash the creativity that really ought to exist within our institutions. You know, we have so many

152

00:22:31.760 --> 00:22:42.759

Alan Valentine: Constraints around what we do, the structure of an orchestra, the fact that it's unionized, the fact that we have high fixed costs, all of those things that we talk about.

153

00:22:43.040 --> 00:22:55.120

Alan Valentine: But there are hindrances in some ways to creativity, and I'd love to just hear your thoughts around that, because I know with the Declassified series, you did a lot of that sort of shackle breaking, and so... Yeah.

154

00:22:55.390 --> 00:22:58.310

Benjamin Folds: Well, and it was expensive. I mean, that's why...

155

00:22:58.800 --> 00:23:03.340

Benjamin Folds: That's why the Kennedy Center and the NSO, the other net, so...

156

00:23:04.070 --> 00:23:09.169

Benjamin Folds: Was, was the place to do that, because they can get

157

00:23:09.860 --> 00:23:17.130

Benjamin Folds: donors, and they have a mission there. They're not... I mean, we've sold everything out. I don't know of any shows that...

158

00:23:17.230 --> 00:23:31.290

Benjamin Folds: that we did that didn't sell out. Maybe there was one, and this just goes one ticket or something, but we did really well. And it was actually selling, by the way. After the first couple, they were selling

159

00:23:31.430 --> 00:23:35.329

Benjamin Folds: Pretty... pretty strong before we would announce

160

00:23:35.520 --> 00:23:47.799

Benjamin Folds: the artists, so we knew that people were interested in seeing the orchestra.

161

00:23:48.120 --> 00:23:58.520

Benjamin Folds: But the point of that is that that's... it's true, it's actually something to do That is...

162

00:23:58.690 --> 00:24:06.840

Benjamin Folds: should be considered as a thing for any... anybody. Like, it should... and it's not. You know, some of it is...

163

00:24:07.340 --> 00:24:26.460

Benjamin Folds: you know, there's a level of formality. Another thing is, like, all these great works of art that have survived over the years with the orchestra, classical compositions, they all... they didn't come out of a vacuum. You know, there's stories and, and,

164

00:24:26.720 --> 00:24:36.649

Benjamin Folds: context around them all. And it's difficult to spoon-feed that context to a younger audience. They feel they're being, you know.

165

00:24:36.810 --> 00:24:41.010

Benjamin Folds: Made to eat their spinach, or they're having to listen to a history lesson or something.

166

00:24:41.230 --> 00:24:44.280

Benjamin Folds: But when we're kind of pushing...

167

00:24:44.480 --> 00:24:46.699

Benjamin Folds: Forward and trying to innovate into the future.

168

00:24:47.370 --> 00:24:54.890

Benjamin Folds: I think saying this, saying, the symphony orchestra is an incredibly powerful way to tell a story.

169

00:24:55.200 --> 00:24:56.510

Benjamin Folds: Got a story?

170

00:24:59.130 --> 00:25:00.139

Benjamin Folds: There you go.

171

00:25:00.250 --> 00:25:13.350

Benjamin Folds: That's not, can we sound impressive, or can it... like, there are many... we don't listen to music... we listen to music because it communicates. So, even though...

172

00:25:13.560 --> 00:25:21.180

Benjamin Folds: you know... Beethoven, Mahler, even though that stuff communicates, We're still removed.

173

00:25:21.710 --> 00:25:28.819

Benjamin Folds: by history a long way. So, it's like, there needs to be an art to

174

00:25:29.140 --> 00:25:32.760

Benjamin Folds: Telling a story with someone who is a master

175

00:25:33.020 --> 00:25:38.559

Benjamin Folds: And there are people out there like that. Oh, some of the stuff that I would have at the Kennedy Center would be, like.

176

00:25:39.240 --> 00:25:55.880

Benjamin Folds: Sarah Silverman. That was one of my favorite ones. You know, Sarah was able to, essentially, we, we, we got a Joan Tower piece, an Uncommon Woman, and we, and we, and then we, we took the beginning of, Lincoln Portrait.

177

00:25:56.450 --> 00:26:16.420

Benjamin Folds: Sarah Silverman begins to perform Lincoln Portrait with the NSO, and then she's like, wait, this is a sausage fest. What is this? You know, and with all respect to the piece, she's able to show how there have been no women involved in the orchestra up until, like...

178

00:26:16.430 --> 00:26:25.440

Benjamin Folds: Too recently, right? So that's a great story. People didn't know that. And the French Hornist in the NSO was the first female blind

179

00:26:25.550 --> 00:26:35.900

Benjamin Folds: audition, a first chair French hornist. She's sitting there, so we get to tell that story. Then she's... then we, you know, we pivot to Joan Towers.

180

00:26:36.150 --> 00:26:43.100

Benjamin Folds: You know, one of the great modern female composers, And she speaks a piece.

181

00:26:43.240 --> 00:26:54.800

Benjamin Folds: That she wrote, over... over that. And, I don't know, that's a story. William Shatner got sent up into the corner of space in a... in that...

182

00:26:56.010 --> 00:27:12.680

Benjamin Folds: you know, that Amazon beer can that they shoot up there. And he went to, like, the edge of space, and came back down, and he was saying crazy stuff about it. So, I know him, so I called him and said, you have to say what you said when you got out of the spaceship.

183

00:27:12.910 --> 00:27:28.709

Benjamin Folds: about life, and about how black it is up there, and how about there's... how... how amazing the Earth is, and how everything looks like death. He had all these things he thought about. I was like, and we'll pair you with some, some composers. I know people do these things, but it... it's... it's so,

184

00:27:29.560 --> 00:27:37.339

Benjamin Folds: It's so important to really, really be artistic and careful about what you're saying, and then if you put that next to...

185

00:27:37.700 --> 00:27:40.890

Benjamin Folds: Well, I think I mentioned before, Shostakovich.

186

00:27:41.120 --> 00:27:57.610

Benjamin Folds: you know, you might be able to then tell a story about, autocracy. You might be able to tell a story about freedom of expression, and how he was worried that his friends and neighbors and family members would be jailed for things that he wrote.

187

00:27:57.830 --> 00:28:04.760

Benjamin Folds: It's different than making it a professorial thing, where you're just...

188

00:28:05.140 --> 00:28:20.509

Benjamin Folds: going off like I am, and showing people. You know, so that's what I want... I'd like to... I think a category, for instance, in the Grammys, that doesn't exist would be nice as an incentive for people to fill that space.

189

00:28:20.630 --> 00:28:25.060

Benjamin Folds: Composers and rock musicians and popular musicians.

190

00:28:25.220 --> 00:28:36.300

Benjamin Folds: might be motivated because they could get a Grammy by pushing through the pain barrier to tell stories to audiences, not just

191

00:28:36.300 --> 00:28:46.869

Benjamin Folds: feel good with the orchestra, make it feel fancy, make it feel tall, look, we're important, we're playing with the symphony orchestra. But actually use the palette and the power of the symphony orchestra. And...

192

00:28:47.170 --> 00:28:48.220

Benjamin Folds: Challenge them.

193

00:28:48.520 --> 00:28:52.029

Benjamin Folds: If... if that was a category,

194

00:28:52.480 --> 00:29:02.729

Benjamin Folds: I think that would be really, really helpful, you know? Like, like categories for good, rather than lame... lame categories to box stuff in.

195

00:29:02.730 --> 00:29:17.650

Benjamin Folds: open... open up another box that people aren't thinking about. And you guys were doing some of that before, I mean, it's like, there are orchestras doing that. It's not like I was the only guy who ever thought of this. You know, you guys did, you know, right before me, you'd done a banjo concerto with,

196

00:29:17.950 --> 00:29:18.510

Alan Valentine: like.

197

00:29:18.510 --> 00:29:20.610

Benjamin Folds: With Bela, yeah. And.

198

00:29:20.610 --> 00:29:21.470

Alan Valentine: Exactly.

199

00:29:22.680 --> 00:29:26.360

Benjamin Folds: I mean, that was a pretty intense piece.

200

00:29:26.460 --> 00:29:45.529

Benjamin Folds: I don't know what story that told, but... but it was... it was definitely a, it wasn't lightweight. Like, he came out swinging, like, that... that was nearly, you know, like, there's a 12-tone movement in it and stuff. Anyway, that's... that's my... that's what I'm passionate about, is, like.

201

00:29:45.690 --> 00:29:52.560

Benjamin Folds: If the orchestra's gonna survive, it's not always gonna be... it will survive, but it won't always be...

202

00:29:52.850 --> 00:30:10.100

Benjamin Folds: taking movie music and playing it with the movie in the background, or... or doing theme and variations on Pokemon. I mean, all that stuff is fun, and bringing the OJs in to play your favorite beach music. I mean, all that is fun and everything, I don't think that's evil. But it's...

203

00:30:10.100 --> 00:30:17.880

Benjamin Folds: night, or ladies' night, or open mic, or something. It's a way to get people and butts into seats, but it doesn't have any plan

204

00:30:17.880 --> 00:30:23.720

Benjamin Folds: as to how to inspire. And also, you know, we know musicians, and musicians want to...

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00:30:23.750 --> 00:30:34.630

Benjamin Folds: Want to be pushed and want to be inspired, and the reason they get so grumpy is because they're having to sit there and play crap, you know, that they didn't sign up to do, and they're on the team, they want people in the audience.

206

00:30:35.200 --> 00:30:43.489

Benjamin Folds: But they also have to sit down and play something utterly predictable and not particularly well scored. I hear a lot of that, and I think if...

207

00:30:44.170 --> 00:31:05.979

Benjamin Folds: a program, yeah, anyway. I could really go on more than the time allows on it, but I think there's a way to do it, and it's so detail-oriented. Anyone wants to know what we did for 8 years there, so much of it had to do with how to deal with the evils of sound reinforcement, how to get monitors completely off the stage.

208

00:31:05.980 --> 00:31:08.730

Benjamin Folds: How to get your, your, your,

209

00:31:08.730 --> 00:31:12.429

Benjamin Folds: Scores, you know, kind of tweaked and done

210

00:31:12.610 --> 00:31:30.220

Benjamin Folds: properly, so that it actually gets on stage and wrap it up with a bow and move it somewhere else. I'm... Mike can give you my number. I mean, I'm happy to talk to any orchestra about how we did that, because it's expensive learning, and it's not something that I could have done somewhere else, and

211

00:31:30.220 --> 00:31:34.489

Benjamin Folds: And we learned a couple things, since I'd be happy to help.

212

00:31:35.150 --> 00:31:50.920

Alan Valentine: Yeah, I'm just... I don't know about the rest of you, but I love hearing, you know, his philosophy around, you know, the value of music, because I think too often in this field, we let other people tell us what's valid and what's not valid.

213

00:31:51.180 --> 00:32:02.980

Alan Valentine: You know, like musicologists, or, you know, and I think music's music's music, right? And Duke Ellington was right, right? There's only two kinds. Good music and the other kind.

214

00:32:04.110 --> 00:32:13.539

Alan Valentine: And, you know, so... and that's different for everybody, right? It's different for every single person, you know, with an earshot of whatever it is.

215

00:32:13.760 --> 00:32:15.660

Alan Valentine: So... so the...

216

00:32:15.750 --> 00:32:29.709

Alan Valentine: Folks on the call today are generous supporters of orchestras across the country, and of course, are supporting the league as well, so they care deeply about orchestras, and

217

00:32:29.790 --> 00:32:38.940

Alan Valentine: You know, they generously support the work of the league, but talk for a moment about why you believe it is important to continue to support orchestras.

218

00:32:39.130 --> 00:32:43.619

Alan Valentine: And ensure that our field not only survives, but thrives into the future.

219

00:32:44.710 --> 00:33:02.049

Benjamin Folds: Yeah, I mean, kind of like I touched on before, I do think that the orchestra, and what I learned at playing in orchestras from the time I was little, you know, mostly was music, but then there was that civilization thing, that sort of concept that is...

220

00:33:02.050 --> 00:33:10.470

Benjamin Folds: instilled in you when you see people working together for something bigger. And all the rhetoric that is political rhetoric that, you know, I don't...

221

00:33:10.870 --> 00:33:18.060

Benjamin Folds: I think it's great that it's used, it needs to be used, you know, but it's just... it's not... it's usually disingenuous, but, you know.

222

00:33:18.240 --> 00:33:40.409

Benjamin Folds: we're working in concert with the other, you know, across the aisle, or in harmony, or we're working to resolve our dissonance, you know, stuff like that. That actually only happens, you know, on stage, in any kind of order in civilization. So, my feeling has always been that if you see the symphony orchestra waning.

223

00:33:40.410 --> 00:33:46.320

Benjamin Folds: That shows little interest, then, in people, you know.

224

00:33:46.440 --> 00:34:00.890

Benjamin Folds: that shows a little interest in seeing people work together for something that's greater. That means that the diva has now become so important, and the cult of personality, and me, me, me is the only thing, and the orchestra is the opposite of that.

225

00:34:00.890 --> 00:34:08.289

Benjamin Folds: It's a whole stage full of the most talented, you know, accomplished people that you know, and none of them even have a name tag on.

226

00:34:08.290 --> 00:34:15.240

Benjamin Folds: You know, so that's... to me, what's important is that it survives, because

227

00:34:15.980 --> 00:34:20.349

Benjamin Folds: Because of that reason, but it... It also doesn't mean

228

00:34:21.510 --> 00:34:33.430

Benjamin Folds: There is a way to be able to look back and forward at the same time, and to preserve and even rethink the masterpieces that have been made for the orchestra.

229

00:34:33.880 --> 00:34:36.540

Benjamin Folds: There's a way to do that for audiences.

230

00:34:37.239 --> 00:34:40.209

Benjamin Folds: And, and, and lend it context.

231

00:34:40.570 --> 00:34:50.380

Benjamin Folds: but also not freak people out that there's, like, no... I mean, I remember, like, an adult told me this when I was a kid, and writing music, it was like, all the good music's already been written, you know, like...

232

00:34:50.380 --> 00:35:09.929

Benjamin Folds: You know, after the 19th century, like, you know, you can do it, but there's no chance, there's not... that's crazy. Like, we ought to be pushing the orchestra forward, but, you know, it can't be, like, kind of faculty rock or faculty composition that's getting us there. It has to be not in theory, not like the next...

233

00:35:10.140 --> 00:35:26.289

Benjamin Folds: you know, one more minimalist piece, or some kind of... now it's funky time minimalist piece that grew to, like, you know, 70 of the whitest people you've ever heard. It doesn't have to be all that. It can be joyous.

234

00:35:26.290 --> 00:35:33.329

Benjamin Folds: You know, I mean, I remember seeing Leonard Bernstein kind of alluding to that, and it was cracking me up.

235

00:35:33.330 --> 00:35:45.390

Benjamin Folds: Like, he was like, it's joy and melody, like, what are these people doing? I'm not saying you can't innovate in all different kinds of ways, like, great, like, I like experimenting and everything, but I think we lose track

236

00:35:45.420 --> 00:35:56.719

Benjamin Folds: Of the joy of the orchestra, that a couple can go out at 30 years old on their first date, that it can be part of life, and that a story might go into the heart

237

00:35:57.330 --> 00:36:13.240

Benjamin Folds: unbeknownst to the mind, through the years, and you just get something gorgeous, and it's hard to get people there. You know, hard to get people in the seats, hard to keep them from feeling formal or out-elite, elitists, you know, those things. Those are our challenges.

238

00:36:13.240 --> 00:36:21.300

Benjamin Folds: You know, the very things that are the strength of the orchestra are also, you know, like you say, the hamstring, you know, the unions. I love unions.

239

00:36:21.300 --> 00:36:29.589

Benjamin Folds: I thank God for unions, but then sometimes they start thinking like unions, just like musicians. I love musicians, and we start thinking like musicians. It's like.

240

00:36:30.020 --> 00:36:33.710

Benjamin Folds: Sometimes there's a creative thing to be done here, and...

241

00:36:34.310 --> 00:36:45.239

Benjamin Folds: Maybe loosen up just a little bit. Just a little bit, you know, like... but everyone has to have respect for the unions. I've played some non-union gigs, and it's just the worst.

242

00:36:45.420 --> 00:36:50.119

Benjamin Folds: It's the worst. I'm a big union fan, but you know?

243

00:36:50.540 --> 00:36:57.120

Benjamin Folds: So many details. When you've got that many people on stage, that's... look at how many people are in here just trying to make this... this work. It's...

244

00:36:57.870 --> 00:37:12.169

Benjamin Folds: It's a lot, and I respect anyone that's here means, like, you full-time this stuff, and... and you love the same thing as I do, and you're making it possible, so I'm... I'm just happy you'll listen to my little ideas, and I'm gonna shut off.

245

00:37:13.630 --> 00:37:31.690

Alan Valentine: Well, so you, you also, Ben, served as a, an active participant on our board of directors, and you were involved in the Education Committee, and by the way, everybody, he came to the meetings and contributed to the meetings, and was really a very active board member, and...

246

00:37:32.030 --> 00:37:45.519

Alan Valentine: Talk a little bit about your view about the future of music and music education and how critical that is. It's a... no secret, it's a critical part of all of our missions, but talk about your views about music education.

247

00:37:45.760 --> 00:37:57.170

Benjamin Folds: Well, music education... I mean, first of all, people are, you know, humans are successful Race, because...

248

00:37:57.790 --> 00:38:09.320

Benjamin Folds: we don't get eaten anymore by other animals, and the reason that is, is because we have ideas. We had ideas to... we were physically not very impressive. I mean.

249

00:38:10.010 --> 00:38:13.030

Benjamin Folds: Definitely no one in an orchestrate this.

250

00:38:13.040 --> 00:38:32.529

Benjamin Folds: But, yeah, I mean, it's like we're ideas animals, and that has to be exercised when you're young, and the way to, the way to exercise that and fuel that to have healthy people is to have a dose of arts education. Music.

251

00:38:32.570 --> 00:38:39.750

Benjamin Folds: visual art, dance, all those things. That's how... that is the literal playing field for

252

00:38:39.970 --> 00:38:53.170

Benjamin Folds: creativity. Without creativity, we're back to the middle of the food chain, just eating each other. Like, like, it's so important, not just to... for the economy, and for... keep people from being crazy, and...

253

00:38:53.310 --> 00:38:59.919

Benjamin Folds: live a fuller life, all those things that we all know exist. But to leave any,

254

00:39:00.030 --> 00:39:02.630

Benjamin Folds: To leave arts out of,

255

00:39:02.800 --> 00:39:12.810

Benjamin Folds: Out of even early education is, is cutting off An entire lobe of... children's brains.

256

00:39:13.600 --> 00:39:15.120

Benjamin Folds: And, of course.

257

00:39:15.500 --> 00:39:32.629

Benjamin Folds: most people aren't going to have a career in the arts, that's not what they want to do, and I'm quite happy to hear people say, I took piano lessons, I didn't really like it. I'm like, great, I don't care, because it went in. You know, I didn't like trigonometry either, but it went in, and it's part of what you need to...

258

00:39:32.740 --> 00:39:35.400

Benjamin Folds: to do. So I, I think the, you know, the...

259

00:39:35.930 --> 00:39:45.860

Benjamin Folds: Ultimately, the only way, in my opinion, to get, civilization, at least in this country, back on track is,

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00:39:46.360 --> 00:39:51.770

Benjamin Folds: is arts and education. It's... because... because it's communication.

261

00:39:51.770 --> 00:40:10.020

Benjamin Folds: art is, at its very best, is the kind of communication that you can. Dude, the reason I write songs is because I'm so long-winded. I can get a song written in three... I can have a three and a half minute song that goes in on so many different levels, opens up their experience and mine, which might be completely different.

262

00:40:10.030 --> 00:40:14.259

Benjamin Folds: You know, just even the syntax of a melody that is...

263

00:40:14.260 --> 00:40:32.419

Benjamin Folds: that you... when you... all the chords that are moving below are, like, at the same time, or all these little, you know, qualifiers of actions and adverbs, and all this stuff is happening at once, and you're unzipping an amazing amount of information in three and a half minutes. I just went on about that for probably two minutes.

264

00:40:32.420 --> 00:40:37.790

Benjamin Folds: It's like, you just can't get it done with, with, with oration. You, you, you...

265

00:40:37.950 --> 00:40:43.620

Benjamin Folds: Having that ability, is, it makes a successful person

266

00:40:43.790 --> 00:40:58.350

Benjamin Folds: Which makes it a successful society, so I... I feel like if you had to go in with one... like, had just had one wish for the future, it would be that right now, every kid in the country had a healthy dose of

267

00:40:58.420 --> 00:41:04.450

Benjamin Folds: Of arts education, healthy, not too much, dose of arts education.

268

00:41:04.880 --> 00:41:15.050

Benjamin Folds: all through school, I'm positive that would turn things around, because you're only as good as the decisions you're making if you're making good decisions.

269

00:41:15.170 --> 00:41:22.800

Benjamin Folds: And that... Having some abstract Reasoning to go with your critical thinking, which is also missing, is...

270

00:41:23.170 --> 00:41:29.780

Benjamin Folds: is wonderful. So, I mean, I think putting everything in arts education, means a lot.

271

00:41:30.770 --> 00:41:45.319

Alan Valentine: Well, I had one more question, but I think we've really just about covered it, and it's really about how, in our complex world today, in our polarized world, music can be a force that helps us celebrate our own humanity.

272

00:41:45.320 --> 00:41:56.049

Alan Valentine: And all of those things, and brings us together, unites people, you know, and makes us realize that we're not really so different from each other, even if we have different views about things.

273

00:41:56.320 --> 00:42:01.030

Alan Valentine: But we've kind of covered all that. I mean, you did a really good job of talking about

274

00:42:01.350 --> 00:42:02.790

Alan Valentine: station, and...

275

00:42:03.590 --> 00:42:09.620

Benjamin Folds: It is communication, though, and it's like, it can bring people together, but it can also communicate opposites.

276

00:42:09.690 --> 00:42:25.419

Benjamin Folds: You know, I can hear a couple bars of, like, some stupid auto-tuned twang country, and in 2 seconds, I'm ready to fight. It's like, it's not all forced for good, you know, it's like... but what's important is that it's understood that it's really powerful,

277

00:42:25.460 --> 00:42:34.640

Benjamin Folds: I mean, look what happened to Wagner's music for a while. It's like, it's... but it's really... it's really powerful communication, and that's the most important thing. I... you know...

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00:42:34.910 --> 00:42:35.730

Alan Valentine: Yeah.

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00:42:36.550 --> 00:42:45.750

Alan Valentine: Well, I know there was a plan here to have a little Q&A, so I don't know, Erica, do you want to... is there a way to facilitate that?

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00:42:46.470 --> 00:42:47.580

Alan Valentine: Do you want to...

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00:42:47.580 --> 00:42:49.630

Benjamin Folds: Good to two sentences. Thanks, Don.

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00:42:50.230 --> 00:42:55.839

Erica Green, League: Sure, if anyone has any questions, please put them in the chat. I can read them.

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00:42:56.780 --> 00:43:04.300

Alan Valentine: Okay. Well, this is really, fun. We could go on forever talking about this stuff.

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00:43:04.300 --> 00:43:05.000

Benjamin Folds: Damn.

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00:43:05.000 --> 00:43:14.310

Alan Valentine: But, but I, I, for one, want to say, while people are thinking about what kind of questions they might want to ask.

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00:43:14.380 --> 00:43:26.880

Alan Valentine: that I am deeply grateful to you, Ben, for all the ways in which you've been engaged with orchestras, and in particular with the Nashville Symphony. It really, you've,

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00:43:26.970 --> 00:43:32.090

Alan Valentine: Impacted us in ways that you can't even imagine.

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00:43:32.240 --> 00:43:51.850

Alan Valentine: And it's not just about raising money to fix a building, or to get through a difficult time. It's really much more than that. And, you know, a lot of the way we think about creativity here at the Nashville Symphony, and we tend to ignore, you know, the sort of, you know, outside influences of, you know.

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00:43:51.880 --> 00:44:00.350

Alan Valentine: Gee, you're doing something that's, you know, off the beaten path, and our is, hallelujah, we're doing something off the beaten path.

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00:44:00.350 --> 00:44:02.240

Benjamin Folds: Yeah, absolutely.

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00:44:02.390 --> 00:44:04.440

Benjamin Folds: Well, I mean, I... I should...

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00:44:05.070 --> 00:44:14.350

Benjamin Folds: thank Nashville Symphony Orchestra, too, for trusting me, and a lot of, you know, a lot of the orchestras, I mean, orchestras give me...

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00:44:14.560 --> 00:44:34.040

Benjamin Folds: a platform as well, and give me an experience that I pinch myself every time I come off of a good orchestra gig, because it seems so unlikely to get that number of talented people together, and have all the organization, and get to hear that many amazing players play at the same time when it's successful.

294

00:44:34.090 --> 00:44:50.459

Benjamin Folds: When it even was not successful, it's like, you know, still fun. But when it's beautiful and it's working together, everything's firing together, how lucky am I? Like, so, I mean, any orchestra that's represented here in any way that's had me, I'm... I'm really grateful.

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00:44:52.740 --> 00:44:58.569

Alan Valentine: Yeah, so there's a question or two that have come up. Erica, I don't know if you want to...

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00:44:59.290 --> 00:44:59.640

Erica Green, League: door.

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00:44:59.640 --> 00:45:00.450

Alan Valentine: Read those.

298

00:45:00.450 --> 00:45:12.900

Erica Green, League: Before, I got one sent directly to me that says, as you engage with students, what do you... what do you hear them say that's exciting for them about the future of orchestral music?

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00:45:14.960 --> 00:45:23.440

Benjamin Folds: Well, I mean, I just don't... I don't teach. You know, I talk to fans, I do do an occasional masterclass.

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00:45:26.340 --> 00:45:43.860

Benjamin Folds: I'm not sure I really get... because I think that the kids that are going into the orchestra, that's one mindset where they're trying to kind of understand that they're going to be sort of, you know, in the chorus line. Like, they're going through a psychological thing where it's like.

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00:45:44.140 --> 00:45:56.289

Benjamin Folds: that would be great, but I want to do other things. So I don't know. I mean, I'm not sure I hear a lot of vision from kids, about the orchestra and what it can do. It's an intimidating...

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00:45:56.420 --> 00:46:05.690

Benjamin Folds: institution, so I... yeah, I wish I had. I wish I had some... had... I'll keep my ears open, I just haven't... haven't heard students

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00:46:05.740 --> 00:46:19.499

Benjamin Folds: talk about much more than they're... they're concerned with what are they gonna do with their life, and how they're gonna get a gig with an orchestra, and if they do, maybe they should do it another way. Is that the best way to do it? And, you know, like, just life stuff, you know?

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00:46:22.890 --> 00:46:30.499

Erica Green, League: Thank you, Ben. Another one we have is, what new projects are on the horizon for you right now, both orchestra and non-orchestra related?

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00:46:31.210 --> 00:46:38.399

Benjamin Folds: I'm probably gonna, immerse myself in a couple of musical theater...

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00:46:38.450 --> 00:46:56.770

Benjamin Folds: pieces to compose songs and music for. And, you know, one of them is very centered around classical music, actually, or it's really... it's centered around, the music of Rachmaninoff, actually. So, it's gonna be a real,

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00:46:57.410 --> 00:47:01.789

Benjamin Folds: That's gonna be a real challenge, writing songs in and out of...

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00:47:02.070 --> 00:47:09.200

Benjamin Folds: Yeah, so those kind of come together. And then, I'm always making sure that things that I've

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00:47:09.200 --> 00:47:26.679

Benjamin Folds: written before, don't have kind of a cool home, in an orchestration, thinking about what existing that I can kind of orchestrate. But, we've kind of, you know, we had the National Symphony Orchestra album out this year, and I did a lot of touring on that, and so I think orchestra is...

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00:47:26.680 --> 00:47:30.170

Benjamin Folds: Touring with orchestra's probably to the back burner for 2026.

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00:47:33.100 --> 00:47:34.260

Alan Valentine: And.

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00:47:35.210 --> 00:47:39.779

Erica Green, League: I think I can ask a few more. So...

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00:47:40.570 --> 00:47:48.890

Erica Green, League: One of our donors said, are there other artists in the popular music vein that you think would be good collaborate... collaborators with orchestras?

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00:47:50.140 --> 00:47:53.479

Benjamin Folds: Yeah, I mean, I'd like to see some poets.

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00:47:53.670 --> 00:48:13.050

Benjamin Folds: Because, you know, spoken word's tricky, can just be too collisionist, but I think if, if, if done right, can be really, can be really cool. I mean, so, so yeah, poets, I mean, I think during Biden's,

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00:48:13.090 --> 00:48:24.979

Benjamin Folds: inauguration. It was, Amanda Gorman, I think was her name? I mean, that was so inspiring. How many kids are there out there doing stuff like that? That could be really, really cool.

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00:48:25.260 --> 00:48:27.909

Benjamin Folds: I have a whole roster of people that I...

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00:48:28.670 --> 00:48:45.020

Benjamin Folds: brought to the orchestra kind of for the first time, and they haven't done it a whole lot since. Some. John Batiste, I brought to the National Symphony Orchestra, that was his first performance of the Symphony Orchestra. Sarah Bareilles, we brought,

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00:48:47.440 --> 00:48:50.089

Benjamin Folds: Kendrick Lamar,

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00:48:50.880 --> 00:49:01.069

Benjamin Folds: who else? You know, an artist that took off, like, the day that it's, like, kind of same time that we booked her was, Live A.

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00:49:01.540 --> 00:49:12.849

Benjamin Folds: Jacob Collier. I mean, you know, Chris Dealey I never had, I wanted to, I was kind of saving that. Haley Williams, I wanted to, but I had to resign, because...

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00:49:13.600 --> 00:49:17.450

Benjamin Folds: to know what happened. And, who else?

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00:49:17.660 --> 00:49:20.170

Benjamin Folds: I mean, there's so many, there's so many great musicians.

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00:49:20.310 --> 00:49:26.379

Benjamin Folds: You know, really, the thing to remember is, if you're thinking about booking them, is, like.

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00:49:27.010 --> 00:49:34.229

Benjamin Folds: Do they really have something to say? If they've got something to say, then the orchestrator's job is to pretend that they're

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00:49:34.610 --> 00:49:40.760

Benjamin Folds: just naked with no music on stage, and they're doing their piece. Why do we need the orchestra?

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00:49:40.940 --> 00:49:45.009

Benjamin Folds: Oh, we could... we could help tell that story with that.

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00:49:45.010 --> 00:50:02.270

Benjamin Folds: we could do the... and then pretty soon, it's using it for the right reason. It's not just going, let's cover this, and let the winds do their thing, and then they shut up, and the brass, okay, on the spring. You know, like, really, really, like, take it out completely. The other thing is tell your orchestrators, do something here that's gonna get you fired off of anything else.

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00:50:02.580 --> 00:50:05.590

Benjamin Folds: Well, what can you do that would get you fired? Please do that.

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00:50:07.290 --> 00:50:21.309

Alan Valentine: Yeah, so now, Ben, I know what our next thing needs to be. We did a concert last week with Jacob Collier and Chris Theely on the same bill together with the orchestra. We need to put you together with Chris. That's what we need to do.

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00:50:21.310 --> 00:50:28.179

Benjamin Folds: Yeah, and I've worked with him a little bit. Yeah, he's a... he's a fantastic musician. He's great, yeah.

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00:50:28.560 --> 00:50:29.780

Alan Valentine: It really is.

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00:50:31.100 --> 00:50:36.600

Alan Valentine: Great. Anything else, there's,

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00:50:37.500 --> 00:50:43.889

Alan Valentine: There's one question I saw about... It was about...

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00:50:44.290 --> 00:50:51.920

Alan Valentine: you know, you're known for blending humor, honesty, and storytelling in your songs. What usually comes first for you, the lyric, the melody, or the story?

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00:50:53.990 --> 00:51:10.959

Benjamin Folds: Yeah, it depends. I mean, I think I'm normally kind of a music-first kind of person, because, I think that's sort of my, you know, my play therapy. You know, like, you try to... try... try to coax the truth out of a... out of a kid, you know, by...

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00:51:12.140 --> 00:51:23.640

Benjamin Folds: by playing with different toys and stuff, rather than just asking a direct question, and I think I'm evasive enough that somehow, when I'm composing music, it's...

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00:51:23.690 --> 00:51:35.199

Benjamin Folds: more... it leads me down an honest path, and then I'm like, wow, I have to meet that now, what does it mean? But it could come in any form, and as far as humor, humor's definitely part of,

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00:51:35.630 --> 00:51:40.689

Benjamin Folds: It's part of life, and, it's, it's, you know, we're, we're laughing, because

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00:51:41.130 --> 00:51:49.789

Benjamin Folds: because things are absurd. The absurdity is often painful, and then you laugh at it. So, I'm not sure why...

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00:51:50.180 --> 00:52:05.250

Benjamin Folds: why musicians, and especially pop songwriters, are so scared of humor. I think it'll give them a novelty hit, and they'll be like Ray Stevens or something. I don't know. But life without humor is like...

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00:52:07.190 --> 00:52:15.080

Benjamin Folds: it just means you're not paying attention or something, you know? So, so yeah, all that together, it's a pain in the ass. Writing is a pain.

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00:52:15.320 --> 00:52:15.860

Alan Valentine: Dude.

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00:52:16.660 --> 00:52:20.110

Alan Valentine: Well, anything else? Anybody?

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00:52:20.550 --> 00:52:24.539

Alan Valentine: Not... I think we're getting close to the time here, so...

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00:52:24.720 --> 00:52:26.250

Benjamin Folds: Everyone wants to go live, no.

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00:52:27.600 --> 00:52:42.350

Alan Valentine: So, I just want to, again, reiterate, on behalf of everybody at the League, the League's gratitude for all of your support, means a great deal. These are challenging times. There's a lot of competing demands on donors.

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00:52:42.480 --> 00:52:45.039

Alan Valentine: Resources, and

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00:52:45.170 --> 00:52:57.729

Alan Valentine: And so, I just really, you know, want to be sure that you all know how valuable your support of the league is, and your presence here today, which also speaks volumes about how much you care.

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00:52:57.920 --> 00:52:59.410

Benjamin Folds: Yeah, so thank you.

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00:52:59.610 --> 00:53:01.210

Benjamin Folds: Yeah, definitely, thank you.

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00:53:03.000 --> 00:53:07.030

Alan Valentine: Okay, well, Erica, anything else you want to add?

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00:53:07.410 --> 00:53:13.669

Alan Valentine: No, that's it. Thank you so much, Ben. Thank you, Alan, for doing this. We so love this conversation.

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00:53:13.680 --> 00:53:25.249

Erica Green, League: We appreciate having you here. And thank you again to all of you for supporting the League and for being here today. It was great to see all of you, and we look forward to talking to you soon. Thank you, and have a great.

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00:53:25.250 --> 00:53:25.900

Alan Valentine: Right?

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00:53:27.100 --> 00:53:29.609

Alan Valentine: Okay, thanks. Great to see you, Ben.

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00:53:29.610 --> 00:53:30.650

Benjamin Folds: See ya, Alan, Sierra.

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00:53:30.650 --> 00:53:31.120

Alan Valentine: Okay.

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00:53:31.120 --> 00:53:33.220

Benjamin Folds: Thanks, everyone. Take care.

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00:53:33.440 --> 00:53:34.310

Alan Valentine: Take care.