

Eve Beglarian: The Music is the journey

**By Paul Freeman
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Acclaimed composer Eve Beglarian has been described as an experimentalist, a post-minimalist and a multi-disciplinary performer. In delivering her compositions, she sings, talks, plays keyboards and explores electronics. For the listener, the result is stimulation of the imagination, an opportunity to share a wondrous journey.

Beglarian is based in New York City, though she has been away from home for nearly a year. For the past few months, she's been in residency at Montalvo Arts Center.

Tonight, Beglarian is to perform at Stanford. Many of the evening's selections will be drawn from her ongoing project, "A Book of Days." She plans to write 365 short, reflective pieces, one for each day of the year. Sixty are already completed.

"In a sense, it's like a journal, a record of my life and my life in relation to others," she told The Daily News.

One of this evening's "Book of Days" pieces will be the West Coast premiere of the soothing "Night Psalm."

"I wanted to make a piece for a friend of mine who suffers from insomnia, and he had just become a deacon. That combination led me to a psalm that talks about not being able to sleep."

A spiritual thread can be traced throughout her work. "It was always there, but maybe now I'm less shy about it. I'm at a different place in my life," Beglarian, 51, said. "I feel maybe I can be more articulate, musically.

"The process of working as an artist, over a span of years, often leads to the ability to simplify. When you're younger, from insecurity, confusion and trying to prove that you've got the skills, complexity seems like a desirable thing. As time goes on, I'm less and less interested in surface complexity. There's another kind of complexity that actually comes from simplicity ... or clarity."

The Stanford concert also offers Beglarian's "Really A Very Simple Person: Music From the River and Elsewhere." Inspiration came from her 4½-month excursion down the Mississippi River via kayak and bicycle.

Regarding the trip's impetus, she said, "Part of it was the economic meltdown. When the Great Depression happened, they sent out artists to document the country, with the W.P.A. and the C.C.C. Now we don't have government funding to do anything like that. But I wanted to see what was happening.

"The election of Obama made me feel like it was my country again, in some way that I hadn't felt in a long time. Part of it was also a sense that I needed to distance myself from my routine, my regular

life. So the idea of doing this thing that was quite foreign to me sounded good. It's been a wonderful experience. It's going to take years to sort through all the ideas that the journey has engendered."

Beglarian found the river fascinating. "On the surface, it's not glamorous. The hills of the Silicon Valley are glamorous. You walk out the door where I am in Saratoga and it's gorgeous. Much of the Mississippi River is not that way. It's scrubby and muddy. It doesn't have this immediate shock of, 'Oh, my God, nature!' Yet there's this ferocious, powerful nature going on that is mysterious and sort of scary. Yet if you're in it every day, you get intimate with its strangeness.

"I feel like I'm just getting started trying to embody the way the river affected me, making sense of it in musical terms."

There's no sense in trying to label Beglarian's music. Of the post-minimalist designation she said, "I get tongue-tied when people ask me what kind of music I write. What I hope I'm doing is responding to what each piece needs to be, rather than sitting in a particular stylistic window. But certainly minimalism had an impact on my music."

Growing up in a musical family, she was surrounded by 18th- and 19th-century classical music. At university, she was exposed to modernist composers, including Steve Reich, Terry Reilly and Philip Glass. She also soaked up pop music that employed sophisticated electronics.

"It wasn't until I left my family, when I was in college, that I began to compose seriously. I went to university to study neuroscience, but once I got there, I realized that music wouldn't just be in the air anymore, as it was at home. And I needed music centrally in my life.

"So I switched midstream and started studying music theory. I thought I'd be a conductor. I started writing music as a way of getting inside the process. And I totally fell in love with writing. That's what I've done ever since."

Often, the catalyst for a Beglarian composition is a text or a sound to which she responds.

"In a way, every piece I write is a collaboration with something that already exists. It's rare that I sit down and say, 'Muses, speak through me.' It's more like I find something out in the world that I fall in love with, want to engage with and make available to others."

The three-month residency at Montalvo (she plays a free concert there on March 26; see montalvoarts.org/events) provided Beglarian with creative freedom.

"The normal way a freelance composer lives is on commissions and grants. Grants are generally set up years in advance. To simply say, 'This is what I want to work on' and be able to do that is an incredible gift. It's liberating and sort of scary. I'm living on the edge," she said with a laugh.

Beglarian feels a responsibility to listeners. "I'm not doing this just to satisfy myself. I'm trying, as well as I can, to open myself to taking things in and then translating them for an audience, making them visceral.

"Not everybody kayaks down the Mississippi River. I think of my work in general as being a way of inviting people to have an experience that they might not be able to have on their own. The music can serve that function of taking you someplace, sonically, emotionally, spiritually."

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