

Episode 01: Getting the Song Out with Leslie Uyeda - Transcript

Elizabeth McDonald:

Hello everyone and welcome to the GETTING THE SONG OUT podcast! We are WOMEN ON THE VERGE

I'm Elizabeth!

Emily Martin:

I'm Emily!

Kathryn Tremills:

I'm Kathryn!

During COVID-19 we realized that we needed to keep the art song world at the forefront of the conversation. We had been talking about this project for a long time and Quarantine was the perfect time to connect with new and old friends across the country - incredible Canadian female composers ...

Kathryn Tremills:

This week we are talking to Leslie Uyeda and we just heard a selection of her *White Cat Blues*, a cycle of three songs performed by soprano Robyn Driedger-Klassen and pianist Terence Dawson. Based in Vancouver, Leslie had a busy and full career as a vocal coach, repetiteur and opera conductor for many years before immersing herself fully in composition. I discovered her when a student of mine introduced me to Leslie's song cycle *into the shimmering*. An eerie, thought provoking, evocative and moving group of songs, Leslie replied to the singer's questions with such care and thought, I just had to explore her further and discovered a wealth of incredible vocal repertoire. This was the first time WOV met Leslie and here is our conversation with her!

It's so wonderful to have you here with us today Leslie.

Leslie Uyeda:

Thanks Kate, thanks. It's just as wonderful for me. I just would like to make that clear as the politicians say. Yes I'm very, very glad to meet you and to learn of what you're doing. And I think it's really neat that you're not all in Canada too. I think that's really great that one of our southerners is here.

Emily Martin:

Thank you, though. I would like to be Canadian right now, but other than that, thank you very much.

Elizabeth McDonald:

Uh, I think we're going to have to cut that comment.

Emily Martin:

No.

Leslie Uyeda:

I worked in Chautauqua with Marlena Mallis for summer as the head coach there. You know, music is the great welcomer, the great equalizer. And you know, when you're doing music, who gives a hell? But I played in her studio for about a year and a half and learned a ton about the voice and I heard such fantastic singers, and that was, you know, when you grow up in Montreal, you're just lucky. When I was growing up in Montreal, Toronto was really not where it is today. Obviously Toronto is a fantastic city. I love it, but it wasn't - we used to make fun of it and call it Toronto, the good, you know, that kind of stuff.

Elizabeth McDonald:

Well, and it's interesting because I still feel like there's a separation between the Toronto community and Montreal. That's sort of - that's maintained itself, you know?

Leslie Uyeda:

Yeah. That's kinda too bad. Eh?

Elizabeth McDonald:

I totally, I totally agree. And I have a colleague - or I have a friend who teaches at McGill who actually grew up in Calgary with my husband, so totally random. And it's been so wonderful for us to be connected and sort of share information because I never felt like I had that before. I feel like in the voice community now we're kind of, in some ways, passing students back and forth. There's a little bit more collaboration now between the Canadian opera company and the L'Atelier you know, they're sort of doing some exchange things. So hopefully we can bridge a little bit more. And I think that there's a bit of this in play too, with respect to us, not knowing you very well because you're in Vancouver, which even though Canada is small, I still feel like we're really pocketed, you know, we're so big geographically that's sometimes I'm sure you're like, yeah. But there's such a vibrant scene in Vancouver that a lot of times in Toronto, we're not sort of, I don't know. Maybe it's just us in academia and we're not aware. I don't know.

Leslie Uyeda:

No, no, no. I think that's right. Vancouver is really, really far from Toronto in every way, whereas Calgary is not, but once you get past the Rockies, it's sort of -

Elizabeth McDonald:

Depends on what passport you carry. I always joke about checking my liberal passport when I touch down in Calgary, when I go to my in-laws because sometimes it's really far apart.

Leslie Uyeda:

That's right. You should go via Edmonton then.

Elizabeth McDonald:

Yeah, no, totally

Leslie Uyeda:

One liberal there or something? Yeah it's far apart. But Montreal, when I was growing up, had fabulous opera singers, and I was lucky enough to be at McGill when I was really young. So to have that going on in my education, and then to meet people like Louis Quilico, Clarice Carson - it was just unbelievable. It blew my mind. And one time I remember I was not - well, I was probably 16 because it was my first year, and they said, okay, somebody at McGill who was older than me, a mature student, said, come to a concert that Clarice and Louis are doing. So I did, and, you know, go with the OSM - what could be better? So we went to the concert and I saw the rehearsal, and we all went out to lunch and Louis ate a chicken sandwich and got chicken caught in his throat. And he came back and he said to Clarice, "I can't sing." So, you know, the conductor, I actually forget who the conductor was - but anyway, the librarian from the orchestra came in and so, you know, it's backstage and the audience is out there and they're saying, "What are we going to do?" And she said, what do you have in your library? And I thought, that's what it means to be a professional singer. What do you have in your library? And she did. She went out and did the whole concert and it blew my mind. So, you know, that's Montreal - it has its own culture, but it's also - it was also more international than Toronto when I was a kid. And so I was extremely lucky.

Elizabeth McDonald:

Well and it's really interesting that you've jumped right into talking about your experiences with listening to singers, being around singers, and from that young age, because that actually leads me to one of the questions I wanted to ask you. Which I'm always fascinated by - with composers is like, well, how do you, now that you're, you're so established, what was your process in thinking about the voice, about writing the voice? What do you think about? And, and I need to just interject and fangirl for a moment because when I was listening to Solana's song, that just really blew me away. It's so beautifully written for the voice, and there was this one line - I mean, everybody has to go and listen to this, but there was one line that just like dropped me. And it was the line where they sing, "the frozen moon watched over me as my family unstrung me from their knot." And I just - the line was so lyrically written, but also had this disjunct-ness with it, and just the combination of that, just like, with like a sucker punch of, of emotion, like you just, you just got there, right there. And it was, Oh my gosh, it was amazing. So like, clearly your years of listening to voice has just seeped into you. And so what's your consciousness of the

voice? Or is it just organic now that it just happens? Was there a process in that, I guess is my question?

Leslie Uyeda:

I'd say, yes, it's organic by now Elizabeth, but I did write that part for Teiya. So one of my guiding principles, if you will, is to always write for somebody I know. It's more fun for one thing. It's way more fun, because you can pick up the phone and say, "can you do this vowel on this?" Or, you know, I don't need to do that very often because once I know somebody's voice, I really know it. But it was just fun to write that part for her. But now, yeah, I just know what voices can do actually. I've never seen Barbara Hannigan for example in life, but I watch, I watch a lot of her YouTubes and Mary Morrison is a close friend and has been for like decades now. So as soon as I knew her - started to get to know her, I learned about extended techniques and stuff like that. And so when you watch Barbara Hannigan, you think, well that's possible then! Although maybe nobody else on the planet could do it. I'm not sure.

Elizabeth McDonald:

Yeah, I think Barbara is a bit of an outlier in that way. Brilliant outlier. Oh my gosh. She can take her voice into so many different places, but you're right. It's a real lesson. Isn't it? About what's possible.

Leslie Uyeda:

Yeah, it is. I've learned the most about the voice, just being in opera because you get the whole gamut, the whole cast is there - men and women, and you're just, Oh, Oh, Oh, you get every kind of tenor role imaginable. And that's important because you know, a young composer could just write something for tenor and have no idea that there's a heroic tenor, that there's a comprimario and all that. And it's going to sound so different. For somebody to say I'm a soprano, it's such a huge catch-all.

Elizabeth McDonald:

So, so true. Emily and I are both Sopranos and yet we sing completely different repertoire.

Leslie Uyeda:

Yeah, exactly. So I think by now Elizabeth your question is actually quite hard for me to answer in terms of procedure in my head now. Just that I know voices, but when I say I know them, I can't say, you know, quite in the biblical sense, but I do, I do just love singers. They just love you. I love them. And I love pianists who loves singers because there is such a beast as a pianist who works with singers, who does not love singers, and those are wicked, wicked, wicked. They should not be anywhere near a singer, these are so destroying people. And I know some of them. No simpatico for what you are, what you do, where your voice comes from. Maybe the biggest guideline for me, Elizabeth, is that I always, or I never forget let's put it that way, that the voice is in the person's body.

Leslie Uyeda:

And you are asking a body to express itself, not just a voice that is not - we all know what a disembodied voice sounds like. And so she or he has to hide themselves to a voice teacher. But I'm asking the whole person to express what I write. And I think that's probably what I remember the most. And I knew Solana, you know, I knew Teiya would do it, but, she would do anything I could write for her probably. But I also knew who I wanted that character to be, you know. Does that answer some of it?

Elizabeth McDonald:

I think you've actually just given a full masterclass for young composers, because I was going to ask you about, "so what's your advice for young composers?" And I think you've just said it - it's that whole like listening and being present and it's that - I mean, you joked about not knowing them in the biblical sense, but it's pretty intimate that connection. It is so close and, you know, we've been so lucky to work with a couple of composers in commissioning. And one of them, Cecilia Livingston, when she was doing her doctorate, she sat in my studio and listened to my singers and we had conversations. And I just think there's such a beautiful connection or that can be had when we're able to have these conversations as - not just as a voice teacher, but also as a singer. And so your connection to Mary, who was my teacher in undergrad, and now my colleague, and Barbara was at U of T when I was there as an undergrad. So I remember watching it, like being part of that whole, like such enriched learning. But the embodiment of that, I mean, we all hope that we can, or we all aspire to be able to teach at that level and to teach students to do that.

Leslie Uyeda:

Yeah. I mean, a young composer and a young pianist has to be in the voice studio. You know, in a couple of weeks time, I have to give a zoom lecture on something or other - I don't know what I'm going to do yet - for the art song lab here to 10 young composers. And I'm just going to say the same things - if they want to write for the voice, and for the piano - because you can sure tell when a composer is not a pianist - Whoa! They have to be around singers and, and not just look up in a book what the range of such and such is and then write for it. You have to be around them and see how they produce sound, because what I learned from Marlina is somebody would make a sound and it was, it was good, but then she'd do something that would be like, and it would make all the difference in the world. Now we're talking about singers at a very advanced level at this point, but I learned then that a tiny change in a singer's production is a huge change for the audience and that you have to get your head around that. And when you know all precepts and you have them going on at the same time, then all of those things to remember are going off in my brain as I write it. In other words, it's deeper than just saying, you know, only write an 'ah' vowel on a high note or something like that. You have to know your basics, but you need to be around a great voice teacher, not a lousy one.

Kathryn Tremills:

Yes, you've said so many parts of the puzzle, the relationship between the composer and the singer and knowing who you're writing for and their voice and the pianist as well, and the relationship between the pianist and singer and the teacher - all of those parts, which leads us beautifully to poetry. Another part of that puzzle and you've chosen such incredible poetry in such a wide range of topics. We've heard some of your delightful chamber arrangements of Canadian folk songs, and we've spoken about your opera when the sun comes out, which Solena's Song is from, which, points to topics of social justice, and you also have your three volumes of Sex Lives of Vegetables, set to poetry of Lorna Crozier. We would love to hear how you come to choose your themes, your topics, your poetry. How do you decide? How do you choose?

Leslie Uyeda:

Oh, I'll tell you, there used to be a wonderful bookstore here in Vancouver, which went out of business when big boxes came in and was called Women in Print, and it was books by, for, and about women. It was a wonderful, wonderful store. I used to go there and the owner of that store became a friend of Kathleen's and mine, Louise Hager. And the poetry was on a certain shelf and I don't have great eyesight. So I went down on all fours to look at the bottom shelf. And it's a very, very funny story. I'm from the queer community, as you know, and so was Louise. And so I was crawling around looking at poetry and I pulled out this name, Lorna Crozier, and I read a couple of them and I thought, Hmm, I like that. I like that. And so Louise was shelving some books at that point. She was also on all fours, but just around the corner of that shelf. And I said, "Hey, Louise, Lorna Crozier, is she one of us?" And Louise said, "No, but she's still a very good poet."

They had a table and a chair for me and Louise used to bring over a pile of poetry like this for me. And I just sit there all day. And I did that many, many times, and I regret the loss of that bookstore to this day because looking online for poetry is like, you have to know the name ahead of time. I like books, as you can see from my -anyways. I found this book and I wrote it. I wrote a song. I wrote a choral piece for a summer singing actually first. And it was done at music in the morning, a series here that June Goldsmith started and Lorna came, she lives in Saanich just North of Victoria. She came to the concert, this is 2005. And I met her afterwards at the reception and we just went [snaps] friends.

I started exploring all of her poems and I've now written over 50 songs to her poetry, plus this dialogue, which she wrote for me specifically a couple of years ago in which we premiered last year, which I really like. It is the most exquisite extended poem you can imagine. So how do I choose? You asked me if I choose women writers. Yeah, that choice was made a very, very, very long time ago because I looked at the repertoire that I grew up with and with very few exceptions all the poetry was by men. I was like, you have enough, you know, male poets, but male poets don't need me. Right, you know? And I don't need them, frankly. I don't want their point of view anymore.

I don't think it's - it's of course not that I think they wrote shit. They didn't, it's nothing, this is nothing to do with quality. This is who I am when I'm alive at what time it is. And I just say, if not now when? Right. And that's the same. So that's just - I don't write songs to - I have written some by men because let's see, that's that song, 'And love says' that's by Hafiz but he sort of doesn't count as a male sort of, you know, he sold out of it. He can go into some other gender fluid category. I don't know. But in terms of poetry that says like that for me, I always look for women because I just have to express myself. It's, it's not a neutral issue for me. But it's not political, it's that I want - I mean, it could be, but it's not. I want - especially women singers, which is why I've written almost exclusively for women. I want us to have something that says something about us. And to me, the logical conclusion about that was to write a song about rape in the first woman. And you wouldn't believe some of the reactions I got to that - like three or four people were absolutely thrilled and it took after the premiere and, Lorna was with me and we held hands the whole time, like this for the performance at Heather Pawsey and Rena Sharon did the premiere and it was, it was just like, Whoa - it was an incredible, but after it was over, people in the audience turned around and looked at me as if I had three heads. Like what have you done? That's not what an art song is and stuff like that. And then I was in the washroom, at intermission, after my piece was done. And a voice teacher came up to me and she said, "well, that was interesting." I said, "well, thank you." She said, "Oh, I didn't mean it as a compliment." Yeah. So I said, "okay, but that's how I'm going to take it." And you know, I didn't care. But yeah.

Kathryn Tremills:

Well it makes people uncomfortable and that really makes people think right. And that's okay.

Leslie Uyeda:

It does. I mean, it's a brutal song. It is brutal. And I don't see anything un-brutal about being raped, you know? So people can rap about it. People can write poetry about it. You can have 10 Netflix movies about rape. It's all okay. But when you sing a serious song to a classical music audience, who's expecting, you know, Das Veilchen or something like that, you know, I sort of punctured their expectations, their world of art song, but I don't care.

Kathryn Tremills:

Yes. Well good. Good for you to puncture that, break down the walls and -

Leslie Uyeda:

Yeah. So I mean, that's what I mean, I write from a woman's point of view and you have to find a singer who's willing and able to do that kind of emotional outpouring. It's very hard for Heather to sing that song or for anybody because it's so close to women's experience, not necessarily their own, I hope - you know, the line between the artifice and speaking as a woman with that experience is not - it's thin, it's very thin. So it's a tough song to sing.

Emily Martin:

So this sort of leads me into a kind of an amazing question of your female experience, your experience as a female and composer, and then how, when you're doing these groundbreaking works, how does that experience help the next generation, right? We want the next generation to be these kinds of composers, the next generation of female composers. So can you speak a little bit about your experience as a female composer and how that might also work for the next generation?

Leslie Uyeda:

The first thing I'll say - as I, as I said, maybe in a different way, is that I want to write from a woman's point of view, that's the most important aspect of being a woman composer. I actually don't know enough songs by younger women composers to know if they're writing from a woman's point of view or not, but I don't think -

Emily Martin:

I don't know either, but I think this idea of freedom of seeing somebody do that will help.

Leslie Uyeda:

Yeah. Well, I hope so. As I said, it's not - being a female composer, I don't know what a loaded question that is. I mean, what a loaded answer. It has to be too, so multifaceted. I want to write songs that are compositionally technically good and speak to who I am. In other words, I have to take in everything that the men have written for the last 500 years or a thousand years, or, whatever in my instrumental music too, But I need to make the expression of the Western Canon, which has heretofore excluded women, mostly. I need to make that mine. And the only way I can do that is to be, is to embody myself, is to embody the texts I choose. So the poetry I choose is if it's written by a woman, then it's already me being able to write as a female composer. I don't have any gap to jump over because it's written by a guy. Lorna is straight, but she lets men have it, you know, and some of the best, some of the funniest moments in my personal life has been with my straight women, friends who take shots at their husbands and -

Elizabeth McDonald:

You're among friends in that regard...

Leslie Uyeda:

Yeah. Kathleen, and I just find it funnier than anything when straight women make fun, there's love in it, you know, but it's like - you have to live with them. We don't live with them. So we find it very funny, very, very funny. And then we meet the guys and we think, ummm, but anyways. I don't want to have to bridge that gap in most of my poetry. So I choose as a woman, I choose for women, I choose to express female being and that's why I - you know, I've been asked when I was doing, when the sun comes out, I was asked, what's it like to be a lesbian composer or something? I have no idea what that even means because it's just, I am, I just am. I was commissioned by the queer arts festival to write a piece. So I chose to write a story about love

between women, which seemed very obvious to me, but apparently, you know, groundbreaking and all that, but it was very obvious.

Elizabeth McDonald:

But I think that it's groundbreaking because we've grown up, well, you know, we've grown up with this stereotype or trope of a woman that always needs, you know, a man to save us. We've been talking about that as a trio about how we tell the stories that are relevant to us as women in this 21st century. You know, all three of us are mothers and we're wives and we're professionals, all of that. And so again, it's - I think I can speak for all of us and say, we totally understand that, because we're all looking to tell our story, whatever that is. And I think for so long we've been imposed stories that are about us, that as we always joke, it's like, how many more, 16 year old virgins do I need to sing about? Yeah. It's like, and then when you - no, I won't go there. So it's wonderful to have a breadth. I actually sent Solana's Song to one of my young singers. I was like, this is your fourth recital right here, go! And she was just so - and she's a little coloratura - and there was just this really excited dialogue about the song. And I'm like, yes, this is the conversations we should be having, instead of, do you really think that this is about sex? This song and the butterfly and the bee and the flower?

Leslie Uyeda:

No, that's right.

Elizabeth McDonald:

I'm so tired of that conversation.

Leslie Uyeda:

I know. I don't know how you stand teaching all that traditional repertoire all the time. You know, I mean, it's one of the reasons I had to stop coaching is that I could not do one more Mimi, one more Gilda. I just can't stand it.

Elizabeth McDonald:

That's so interesting.

Leslie Uyeda:

Nobody loves that music more than me, you know? I mean, I loved conducting it. It's just, it's orgasmic to stand up there as a woman and go roo roo and all this, but it's not by me. You know, it's not, it's not about me. It's about men's version of us and I'm sick of it. But even The Sex Lives of Vegetables are - I wrote them for soprano. Although a tenor has sung some of them, Jamie McLennan sang a book of them. And I saw that. I don't know. It was fine and everything, you know, but don't tell Jamie, but I just, I really appreciated it. I appreciated that he did it, but it turned out to be like cabaret songs, which is fine, but when women sings it, there's a different knowledge of sex and reproduction and things coming to life and things going wrong. And there's a sensibility that's brought to it, even though they're not about women, they're about

vegetables, but they were written by a woman who who's a great gardener and who lived with Patrick Lane, who was a master gardener and all of this stuff, but, you know, character fucking the earth. That's a - a woman would say that, not a man. I don't think a man would actually get off on saying that because he wouldn't want his, you-know-what to be related to a carrot. Whereas I think...Yeah

Elizabeth McDonald:

Especially if they're the carrots in my garden right now, they're pretty sad.

Leslie Uyeda:

Yeah. And you know, like Siebel in Faust, she goes, "Folie!"

Emily Martin:

So what we're talking about bridging. I can certainly hear that embodiment who you are in so many ways in your music. I was just blown away by your music, and I'm sorry I didn't know about you earlier, especially in my own career. So I'm so excited to explore some of your music just vocally for myself. And so, but then this bridging idea of being embodied as a woman and feeling like that's part of your music. So let's talk a little bit about your heritage. So on your website, you say I was trained in the Western music tradition, but much of my music is deeply rooted in my Japanese Canadian heritage. So then you go, you really expand your multicultural representation in all of the poetry you choose. I know we keep coming back to the poetry, but you, again, put that it's such a part of your music. So you have the Spanish, you know, the habanera year, the tango, the yam in *Sex Lives* in videos, I mean, vegetables.

Leslie Uyeda:

Yeah. That's a good one. I like, that's good.

Emily Martin:

Yeah, we'll do that next! You know, the *Haiku* and *Joy Kagawa* that you set and you mentioned Hafiz. So talk a little bit about, you know, you can relate so much to the woman part of it, but how all these cultures and why have you chosen all these cultures?

Leslie Uyeda:

Well in the *Sex Lives [of Vegetables]*, I'll just talk about that first, the Habanera and all of that for those - I mean don't you think that sweet potatoes and yams would dance to that?

Emily Martin:

Actually, I would hope so.

Leslie Uyeda:

Well, anyway. But here's another thing that I think young composers have to understand is about rhythm and a poet has to speak to you. First of all, there has to be some, and we all know poetry that has no rhythm. If I can't get in on the rhythm of a poem, that doesn't mean there's something wrong with the poem, it means it doesn't speak to me, but Lorna's and Joy's has so much rhythm in it that I relate to. So it just happened. The Habanera just came naturally. And I think that young composers have to read a lot, a lot, a lot of poetry, be around it, and they also have to study dance form, you know, like the reason Bach got to the point where he could write his big passions.

So when he was starting off his career, writing all his keyboard music, he was learning, he was teaching himself. I mean, this guy was largely self-taught right. And, Bach is my guy, by the way, so I am steeped in his music, his form, and his embodiment of the current dance forms of the day. He studied those dance forms and all of that's in my head. So if a poem comes off the page to me in a certain rhythm like that, then bum-bum-bum-bum - it just sorta comes along. I mean, it's bigger than Carmen in other words - I've had to play that aria far too many times for too many singers, but you know, it's just, it's just there. The Spanish, that was my first time writing, was just last December. And that was because it was a Lorca project. And, well, doesn't matter what it was - but I really enjoyed writing in Spanish. It's a fabulous language. What I want to do now is write in French, which I can speak. So I'd like to do that, to see if I can bridge the gap between Toronto and Montreal.

Emily Martin:

Do you think it's different to set a language you speak versus a language you don't speak?

Leslie Uyeda:

When I speak. I mean, I don't - I do speak French, but all of the other - yeah, I don't speak fluent German, but I certainly can speak, enough to get along. I know how the language works and I have an ear for it, same with Spanish and all of those things. So, no, I don't have to speak a language. I know Jesse Norman said, you shouldn't sing another language unless you speak it, but that's for you. That's not for me. But anyways, I'll write in whatever language I'm asked to write in to tell you the truth. That was a commission. So off I go. But I study, I really study. In my heritage that's happened in - I've written, you know, *Joy Kagawa* was for just piano and voice two or three cycles, but I've also written instrumental music. The most recent thing I did was a piece for the Vancouver Intercultural Orchestra, which was for a string quartet, erhu, shō, santur, and percussion. And I studied the erhu - I didn't take lessons, but I mean, study, get, get books, listen, listen, listen. The erhu and the show, which I didn't know how to write for before, and the santur - for three months before writing a note. But interestingly, what I wanted to, what I needed to do, even though the, the santur and the erhu, are not Japanese instruments and neither is the string quartet. I turned that, I said to Kathleen, I can't write this unless I have a story because just writing all those disparate instruments, that's not a natural combination. So I said, I have to write a story.

Leslie Uyeda:

So I started reading, I have lots of books of the early Japanese writers, like from the 10 and 11 hundreds, which is a big thrill to have some of those women, their works extend, right? So I started studying them and I have this story in my head about a real character who was Empress Jito, J-I-T-O, she was a real person and like a Renaissance woman. She reigned from six something to six something. And, it's all about her. It's all about her. So it's called the Emperor Jito dances. And you know, the Empress Jito never would have danced to a santur, but because she's dancing in my 21st century head, she is so.

Emily Martin:

I mean, I know you also said a piece with Taiko, but the singer plays the Taiko drum. Is that correct? Have you studied the Taiko drum?

Leslie Uyeda:

No, but that sound - the Japanese culture has been in my head since the year aught and my Japanese grandparents were a big part of my life. And my father was Japanese Canadian, my two aunts - but then they got kicked out of here because of the war. And that's how I got born in Montreal. So where the only person, the only person in Montreal who would give my father a job was a Jewish man, by the way. So that's, you know, this is, well, that was a sidebar. I don't know why I said that anyways. Probably because I just finished watching unorthodox...

Emily Martin:

But it's also part of your culture, right? I think even that is absolute. What makes you up as a composer?

Leslie Uyeda:

It absolutely does. I've been reading Elie Wiesel. Since I was 16. I don't know, it's just who I am, but the Japanese culture is very, very big in my expression. Yeah, In the *Sakura Songs*, obviously, because of what happened to my family it's important for me to keep them alive and bring them back to Vancouver in a way. It kinda felt like a full circle that I'd end up here, the place that rejected them. And they're very, very alive to me. And the pain that they went through and when you look around the world and all of the people who are being displaced moment by moment and who are suffering way more than my family did. That's how I can keep it alive. So if that's political, I guess, yeah it's a choice with my heritage. My heritage has some pain in it. Everybody does, but mine is just Japanese. So that's - that answer anything?

Emily Martin:

Yes, definitely. Thank you.

Elizabeth McDonald:

So I want to take this concept of rhythm and sort of change the rhythm of the conversation. And move into what we're calling a speed round, which we're doing to wrap up things. And you may have already answered the first one, but the idea is that I'll ask you all of these six questions and it's sort of like the first thing that comes to mind. So are you ready?

Leslie Uyeda:

Oh, you know what? I'm not good at this Elizabeth.

Emily Martin:

There's no prize.

Elizabeth McDonald:

You and Kate get along really well.

Leslie Uyeda:

I like to think - it drives Kathleen crazy, but I do.

Kathryn TRemills:

I like to think too.

Elizabeth McDonald:

Okay. Are you ready? First question. Favorite place in Canada? [pause] She isn't muted, ladies and gentlemen. She really is thinking.

Leslie Uyeda:

I don't have a favorite place. There are places I love.

Elizabeth McDonald:

Okay. Fair enough.

Leslie Uyeda:

Maybe Newfoundland.

Elizabeth McDonald:

Oh, with you on that one.

Leslie Uyeda:

Yeah. Newfoundland.

Elizabeth McDonald:

Alright Newfoundland. Most cherished music score?

Leslie Uyeda:

St. Matthew Passion.

Elizabeth McDonald:

Favourite Summer drink?

Leslie Uyeda:

White wine spritzer.

Elizabeth McDonald:

Okay excellent.

Leslie Uyeda:

I don't drink. I'm sorry, I don't drink.

Elizabeth McDonald;

Well it didn't have to be alcoholic. Someone said kombucha last time.

Leslie Uyeda:

Oh okay. Um, no I'll say it, white wine spritzer, what the hell.

Elizabeth McDonald:

There's no wrong answer Leslie.

Leslie Uyeda:

Okay. It makes me nervous.

Elizabeth McDonald:

That's so funny.. Morning, noon or night for composing?

Leslie Uyeda:

Morning.

Elizabeth McDonald:

Morning okay. I'm with you on that one. Musician you would like to be stranded on a desert island with?

Leslie Uyeda:

Murray Perahia.

Elizabeth McDonald:

And last question, so no stress after this. What professional singer would you like to write for?

Leslie Uyeda:

Sondra Radvanovsky.

Elizabeth McDonald:

Oh that's an unexpected but beautiful answer, awesome. Cool. One of the things we like to do is give our guest sort of last words, or last things, telling our listening audience where they can find you online social media how they can be in touch with you. So maybe you can tell us that.

Leslie Uyeda:

Well all my scores can be found through the Canadian music centre, and my website is www.leslieuyeda.com.

Kathryn Tremills:

Thanks for joining us for this interview with Leslie Uyeda. We are going to wrap up with an excerpt of "Solana's Song" for coloratura soprano, Teiya Kasahara with Rachel Kiyō Iwaasa at the piano, from her opera *When the Sun Comes Out*.

Elizabeth McDonald:

Thanks again for listening - we are excited to keep bringing you more badass Canadian composers' thoughts and music...

Kathryn Tremills:

Please go to our website for program notes, and links mentioned for this podcast.

Emily Martin:

This podcast was funded in part by a Digital Originals Micro Innovation Grant from the Canada Council for the Arts. Thanks to the amazing Sarah Forestieri for her management and editing skills!

