

# Contemporary Players Artist Chats

## 2020-21

This is Artist Chats brought to you by San Francisco Contemporary Music Players. You'll hear contemporary music's most inspired personalities share insight into their art, their life, and their upcoming performance with the Contemporary Music Players.

### Season 1 Episode 2

*Onward: the Performer's Perspective*

Artistic Director Eric Dudley speaks with guitarist David Tanenbaum about the workshopping and the creation of Garret Lucero's new piece.

**Eric Dudley:** David Tanenbaum, you have been with us, as guitarist for San Francisco Contemporary Music Players since around 2008, is that correct?

**David Tanenbaum:** That is correct, although I did a number of projects not as a member of the group before that.

**Eric:** Right, yeah so you've known these musicians for a while and interactive quite a lot. What is it to you that is so special about performing with this particular group?

**David:** Well, I mean, the group is a labor of love for sure. It is, it is highly skilled musicians getting together a few times a year and exploring the music of our time and of the 20th century as well. And you know, it's just a fantastic experience, it has formed great memories. And I love the music I discovered in this group.

**Eric:** In the course of on working on this piece with Garrett, which you've been doing since the fall of the previous year, right, of 2020 (**David:** Yes.) did you find yourself making some specific suggestions about in a writing for the guitar as an instrument in particular, and also did you find maybe that you are learning something as well about you know, interacting with the young composer was trying to write for guitar plus electronics?

**David:** Yes, I would say. Just to describe the process a little bit - we met for a session on writing for guitar and I just described what the idiosyncrasies are in this instrument. You know it's the most popular instrument of the world - when it's not tuned in the way of string instruments that they're used- to it's outside the normal canon and so for a lot of them and for Garrett it was the first time writing for guitar. So I explained some of the sounds that were available, some of the things that were difficult on the guitar, I showed them examples of really fine writing, and unsuccessful writing for the guitar. And then the second time we met, it was after they had each delivered samples of their work, so they had gotten going and we met and I

went through each of the pieces in front of all the composers who were part of it and guided the pieces and said; *you don't hear possibly to adjust here* and this and that. So I had some time with the pieces before that session and as I was able to give them suggestions. One of the things about Garrett's piece is that I felt the balance between electronics and the guitar was very good. (**Eric:** Mhm) It didn't feel like one dominated the other, they both had a good voice and it felt like an interesting combination- you know, we live in such a technological world and the guitar is such a personal instrument- it is challenging to play with electronics, each piece has its own different challenge, you know, if it's interactive it's one thing because the electronics are in most cases responding to what I'm doing. But if it's pre-recorded there are issues of synchronicity. So, it was fun, I enjoyed that a lot.

**Eric:** Music like this can really stretch us, right ? It's interesting because when I think when a lot of people think about guitar, we think about it in other contexts- as being a fully electronic instrument, right? It's like, the electric guitar is the sound of rock music and so much other stuff that we would hear. But for the longest time classical guitar has been this quintessential acoustic animal right? It's like this wonderful intimate sound. So the combination of that, you know, those kinds of associations and then with the realm of electronics is always going to kind of challenge our ears a little bit, right?

**David:** Definitely, I made three different kinds of guitars available to these student composers; I said I would play- electric guitar, steel string guitar, or classic. And several times I asked Garrett, are you sure you want classical and he was very firm and sure of himself that he wanted to pit the classical guitar against the electronics. He wanted the personal and the technological. (**Eric:** That's a nice concept) And in the development of the piece, particularly the ending kind of just ended together and I advocated for a cadenza where the personal had the final say.

**Eric:** That's really nice and that, that gives us a nice kind of bit of something to latch onto and listen for in the actual performance.

**David:** And that will be improvised with some guidelines, but yeah-

**Eric:** Well David, thank you so much. It is great to hear from you directly about the experience of helping Garrett work on this piece and you know, both of you bringing it to life for this performance and we're looking forward to hearing it.

**David:** Thank you.