

## **Michael-Thomas Foumai**

### **1. Do you like writing for strings? What are the challenges? What do you enjoy?**

Yes! Since I'm a string player, the challenge is to get outside of the comfort zone of knowing how the instrument works. It's great fun to know all the tricks and what works great, but it can also be limiting when trying new and not so idiomatic things that could open up a whole new world of sounds. I enjoy writing for string instruments the most because they are capable of playing extremely fast, articulated, special effects and virtuosic acrobatics to deep, dark and gorgeous sustained lines. I can't find that expressive range and color on any other instruments.

### **2. If you had to write a piece for viola, which could be of any form or style, what would it be like? And why?**

If I had to write a viola piece, which I have...it would be tailored to the performer. Usually I have a great idea that probably won't work for the person who is going to perform it. If the person is great at playing virtuosic music that is incredibly visceral and dance-like, chances are the piece will be fast, energetic and bombastic.

### **3. What would you want us (instrumentalists) to do before we approach you for a commission? (e.g., play for you, send you a recording, listen to your works, etc.)**

Best thing is to get to know the composer, either in person or be familiar with the composer's works. If possible (even better yet), previous collaboration with the composer is a plus. This doesn't mean a commission need already have been made, but having performed in another work by the composer can be highly desirable so that both the performer and composer have some common ground and experience; Makes the collaboration to come more pleasant and fun. If you plan to approach a composer without previous experience together, recordings of your performance are a great help along with an introduction that you are seeking to explore a possible commission.

### **4. Under what circumstance and for what reason would you accept/reject a commission?**

I would almost always accept any commission. I would reject a commission for two reasons. 1.) The deadline interferes with other deadlines and I have absolutely no time. 2.) The commission is for an instrument/ensemble in which I have no interest to compose.

### **5. How clearly of an idea for the piece should we have before approaching you? (e.g., instrumentation, length, number of movements, etc.)**

The most important thing the performer can set is instrumentation and duration; it's a huge help to me. Other things, movements and all the other good stuff, having some idea is always better than nothing. It's good to come to the table with ideas, granted you keep

an open mind to changes. I appreciate ideas always, but will almost always change them.

#### **6. How and how much can we take part in the creation process?**

Depends on the composer. Personally, I like to complete the whole piece first then give into the performer and make revisions and changes from that point on. I have on occasion tried involving the performer in the actual composing part if I am not sure of a particular technique that can be executed.

#### **7. How far ahead of time should we ask?**

The more time the better, but always give a deadline. Generally deadlines should be made in consideration of how big or substantial the piece is going to be and the performance date. Personally, for a large chamber work, three to four months minimum is ok. For an orchestra piece, half a year at least. But always give a deadline, otherwise you may never get your piece. Schedule a deadline with enough room for a possible week to two week extension and enough time for the rehearsal; at least have the music a few weeks before the performance.

#### **8. What do you expect in return?**

Compensation should be clear from the start, be it food, money, nothing. If it is in the form of money, that is something to talk to your composer about. Usually the composer will have an expected fee (but sometimes not) that should be commensurate with the scope of the piece and deadline. If the fee is too much, I like to ask what the budget of the commissioner would be, and we can work from there.

#### **9. Any other things we should know or be aware of?**

I think that's it!