

Stephen Prutsman Interview 9/20/19

- **Robert Danziger** - Well, thank you for doing this. I sure appreciate it.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Oh, I'm--my pleasure. Looks very--really interesting what you're up to there.
- **Robert Danziger** - Well, it's--and you, too. I mean, I'm looking up range of things you're doing and classical and jazz and world music is sort of--and then the stuff you're doing with people on the autism spectrum and--
- **Stephen Prutsman** - --Oh, yeah--
- **Robert Danziger** - --All that--
- **Stephen Prutsman** - --Yeah, I--
- **Robert Danziger** - --Stuff is pretty great.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - It's all part of the big journey and I'm--I like it all. I really do. So--and you--tell me a little--you know, tell me what you're up to with your class. Jazz and the Brandenburg, right?
- **Robert Danziger** - Yes, that's right. The--I'm--several years ago, Cal State Monterey Bay gave me their first honorary doctorate in music. I'm not in the music world, , but I spent the last 35, 40 years rewriting the Brandenburg Concerto from a jazz/classical crossover point of view. I thought that it would be good for me to try to give something back to the community about what I know. And in the meantime, the Monterey Jazz Festival has employed me to do a lot of videos for different artists and--
- **Stephen Prutsman** - --Oh, sweet--
- **Robert Danziger** - --And that all fed into where we are today, you know?
- **Stephen Prutsman** - --Oh, that's wonderful.
- **Robert Danziger** - I was raised in L.A. I used to hang out at CalArts when it first opened and got deeply into their world music stuff.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - --Oh, that's great. Do you have a recording of your Brandenburg? Has it been performed?
- **Robert Danziger** - Yes, I do. It's--the Brandenburg 300 Project is the name of it.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - --Oh, fantastic--

- **Robert Danziger** - Yeah. I--you know, it's funny, you're the kind of person that I thought about when I was doing it.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Oh, great.
- **Robert Danziger** - Because I like to cross boundaries and--
- **Stephen Prutsman** - --Mm-hmm--
- **Robert Danziger** - --That came very naturally for me. So--and also, it's written for any two instruments playing in any octave. So, most of it is just two lines--two monophonic lines.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Wow.
- **Robert Danziger** - And some of it has three, but most of it's just two. And then, some of them I built back up with musician friends of mine and made full arrangements, but it all started by deciding to compose it so you could change octaves at will. And I thought about a great pianist such as yourself addressing it.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Wow. Super.
- **Robert Danziger** - Yeah. So--and you're in L.A.--born in L.A.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Oh, I grew up in Southern California. Yeah. I was born in Los Angeles, moved to a little town near the desert, and I went to--I bounced around a lot of different schools. So, went in my--you know, from 18 to 24 or so. UCLA was one of them.
- **Robert Danziger** - Well, how did you end up interested in so many different approaches to music and pursuing music?
- **Stephen Prutsman** - It started because my kind of introduction to the keyboard involved playing by ear -- and that at a very early age like, four or five, finding melodies and so on and I was encouraged. My father was an amateur singer and he loved the standards. So, he kind of imposed his will on me as a young kid, eight, nine, 10, 11, on up to--you know, to accompany him with the standards. And so, that's kind of--that was one way of getting into this world of basically what I call music of an oral tradition as opposed to a written tradition. And then, let's see, what else? A lot of it came through just necessity. I was 13 and broke. We were lower middle class and I discovered that by playing at a pizza parlor--in the old days, used to have ragtime piano and pizza, you know, pizza parlor. And get paid \$3.50 an hour, which was a hell of a lot better than the minimum wage at that time, which was \$2.70, I think, something like that.
- **Robert Danziger** - Right.

- **Stephen Prutsman** - And so, I did that on Thursday, Friday, Saturday nights. Didn't really like it so much because it's so noisy and I just play the same old rickety stuff all the time and was a young kid and I wanted to be out and about. But, then, that moved on to cocktail piano work?
- **Robert Danziger** - Mm-hmm.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - That's where this kind genre the money comes not through concerts so much, but through music accompanying others things, food, beverages, and so on.
- **Robert Danziger** - Mm-hmm.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - I did that for, God, until my 30s. I got a job in--working for a--one of those old fashion TV gospel shows, doing their music. And anyway. So, that's kind of where all that came from. And that just ran in parallel with piano lessons and all that that involves. Let me see. Then, later on, moving out to Baltimore for a while, going to school there. And those times, I still did kind of cocktail work.
- **Robert Danziger** - Mm-hmm.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - If I didn't have that, I would not have been able to go to school--I mean, it's just amazing.
- **Robert Danziger** - Mm-hmm.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - I tried for a long time to not do that and do kind of regular work in my 20s. And just realized, you know, working for minimum wage as a, you know, bellboy or--in a bookstore. What else did I do? Security guard.
- **Robert Danziger** - Wow.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Front desk clerk. All--you know, it's--it was such a great lesson because that's how the majority of the planet lives. I mean, in, you know, working 40 hours a week. And in a lot of places of the world, obviously, they--it's a lot more. But, I tell you, you know, from going from seven to four is one shift or from, you know, what else? Usually, nine hours because you get that one hour lunch break. You're beat, you know?
- **Robert Danziger** - Yeah.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - And you come back and you eat and you're beat. And then, how are you going to stay up and practice for four or five more hours? I couldn't do it. So, I just said I got to go back. And the reason I wanted to leave it because I was feeling that my connection to music was not sacred enough--I wanted it to be more pure rather than this job attitude. And also, people don't really listen to cocktail music. It's like wallpaper a lot of times.

- **Stephen Prutsman** - I realized if I could go back to that--so, that'd be, like, you know, Thursday, Friday, Saturday night, some time Sunday afternoon, and then I could pay all my bills easily. And all sorts of other things associated with music school. Then I started writing again. I hadn't done that for a number of years. Making a go of these classical competitions was kind of focal point. And if you really want to make a run for those, you know, like Tchaikovsky or Queen Elizabeth, you have to practice every waking hour that you're at the keyboard, it has to be devoted to those things. It's just there's no room to do any writing or something else. But, then, eventually, made connection through, you know, friends. Again, it's kind of necessity. Wanting, needing money. Finding a way to--that-- I started out doing takedowns for other people. Do you know what that is?
- **Robert Danziger** - --No.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - This is in the day before we had these fancy apps that could transcribe everything for you. But since I have absolute pitch. So, a lot--some really wonderful arrangers would utilize me to--if they want to do arrangement of, for example, some Mexican pop music, for example or, you know, folk music from Turkey, whatever. If they had it all transcribed for them, then they can do the arrangement.
- **Robert Danziger** - Mm-hmm.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - So, I'd sit down and listen to, you know, pop and then basically just transcribe everything. Every instrument that I'd hear with the pitch and time and then I can hand it to them and then they could make a sweet arrangement for concert music. Mostly for performance of western concert music.
- **Robert Danziger** - Mm-hmm.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - And there was one other kind of avenue that I felt really passionate about in my teens and early 20s and that was progressive rock.
- **Robert Danziger** - Mm-hmm.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - So, listening to a lot of the great bands of that era, the, you know, '70s. Yes, Genesis, Peter Gabriel, Emerson, Lake and Palmer, and, Gentle Giant. And King Crimson and all. King Crimson was just not quite my taste, but enormous, you know, respect, along with Gentle Giant with what those guys were able to accomplish.
- **Robert Danziger** - Mm-hmm.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - It was not just the love of the the atmosphere, the fantasy, the inventiveness, the intellect, the lyrics, the stage shows, all of the above. The total experience.
- **Robert Danziger** - --The Nice. You ever listen to the Nice?

- **Stephen Prutsman** - Oh, that was pre--yeah, pre-ELP. Yeah, I did a little bit. That was a kind of--before my time. Just like very early Yes. It's kind of that--a bridge from English tradition of that time of more straight ahead popular music of that time to progressive music. Eventually they began to be more adventurous with harmonic shifts and changes with the meter and all sorts of things.
- **Robert Danziger** - You ever hear of their version of the Brandenburg?
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Oh, The Nice?
- **Robert Danziger** - Yeah.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - No, I don't. I should check that out. I don't know it.
- **Robert Danziger** - Yeah. Yeah.
- **Robert Danziger** - --They combined it with Bob Dylan's Country Pie.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Oh, wow. Okay. I'll have to check that out. That sounds like fun.
- **Robert Danziger** - It's a great version, yeah.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Wow. Cool. They did so many innovative things. So, that was another angle that was really infectious to me.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Coming to the core of what is--what really drives our relationship with this thing. It's--and the love. And for me, it was--it had to do with fantasy. It had to do this in a world of my head and loving it and enjoying it so much and not being judged for how I appreciate this music. Whereas, with--which when you deal with a hard core European piano teacher--there's more of a clarity between right and wrong.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - --Judgment. So, you know?
- **Robert Danziger** - I do.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Okay. The takedown work led to getting an arrangement shot with Kronos Quartet, which led to a lot of those and--with other people. What else? Silent film. I--you know, I got a chance to write scores to silent films. It's kind of a new thing now with--as you know, those who are--the kind of--I should put it this genre of western art music being performed, the performances take on new twists and turns every 10 years or so. And again, because of necessity, because, my God, on a gorgeous Sunday afternoon, 2:00 here in San Francisco, how many people are going to want to do that and stare at four, you know, old white guys sitting in tuxes, sitting and playing a string quartet of Mozart? Although, I would. I'd love it, but it's just not so enticing to our young population that have other options. And so, western presenters are looking for ways to incorporate music of a written tradition with other avenues, visuals, and so on. So, this silent movie thing took off and I was happy to do that. But, that's kind of all of it in a

nutshell. I've always been interested. I have my favorite jazz artist, a favorite, you know, folks who work in world music. And along with, you know, western art music.

- **Robert Danziger** - Can you give me two or three of your most favorite jazz or world music?
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Oh. My God. Well, start with living. Chick Corea is a genius. I mean, my God, just lately, I'm going--I'm reviewing a lot of his electric fusion from the late '80s. And I'm listening to that stuff--like, this album, Eye of the Beholder, I just listened to it, you know, a few days ago. My God, it's so good. You know, it's just, like, wow. How did he come up with this? And I realize that it's--in a sense, it's really pure. A lot of jazz artists got to a point of, you know--well, I guess going back and forth where they wanted to, you know, plan things. Plan placement of pitch, which is basically what happens when--you know, which is music of a written tradition. They get really close to that. And with great--
- **Robert Danziger** - --Well, a lot of that is based on Scarlatti.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Of the Eye of the Beholder. Wow. You are a resource for information, Bob. I got to say it.
- **Robert Danziger** - --We talked to Corea about two or three weeks ago.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - You did? Oh, boy.
- **Robert Danziger** - Yeah. And we asked him about a lot of his stuff and he kept coming back to Scarlatti.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Yeah.
- **Robert Danziger** - And so, if you listen, you'll find a lot of Scarlatti lines in there.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Interesting. That is--that makes so much sense. Oh, my God, that's great.
- **Robert Danziger** - You know, because that way, you could--the showy thing, you know, crossing the hands, all that stuff. And--
- **Stephen Prutsman** - --Yeah.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - --Well, not just that, but it sounds so damn good.
- **Robert Danziger** - Oh, yeah. He's excellent.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Wow. Oh, that's amazing. Well, I'm really enthralled with him. Let me see. Of course, Tatum is just--Tatum is Tatum. It's--there's no--
- **Robert Danziger** - --Yeah--

- **Stephen Prutsman** - --Denying that. The--you know, listen to that--you know, Bill Evans' stuff is just not only so intriguing from a harmonic standpoint, but as a classical pianist you have to honor and appreciate and just, you know, kind of soak in his touch at the keyboard. How he would make such a gorgeous minor seven chord stretched out? I mean, that's--I'm almost belittling it by taking just a harmony that he does because it just--it's all part--his touch is intrinsically or inevitably, in a way, connected to his harmonic language. And that's obviously is great relationship with impressionistic composers.
- **Robert Danziger** - His rhythm is incredible.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Oh, that--
- **Robert Danziger** - --It's just astounding.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.
- **Robert Danziger** - --What about world music folks?
- **Stephen Prutsman** - World music. You have Angelique Kidjo. That's--she's fabulous. God, now, I'm going to--you know, run my--geez, I'd have to go out to my library to check it out.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - You know, a lot of the south and--you know, the guys from Brazil, the Tribalistas. Have you ever heard those guys? The--
- **Robert Danziger** - --No.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Tribalistas with--there's three people there that they got together. Arnaldo Antunes is the guy with the low--very low voice. He's amazing. And anyway, if you check out Tribalistas. They just made one album, I think. Three hot shots. Carlinhos Brown, Marisa Monte. They got together and they made this album that just is killer. It's so good. There's a--gosh, now, his name escapes. Of course, Jobim those cats, their songwriting ability is just off the hook. I'd really--I'd love to do some kind of program with Schuberts. Sorry?
- **Robert Danziger** - Sones de Mexico or Tiempo Libre, are you familiar with either one of those?
- **Stephen Prutsman** - I'm not sure who that is. I mean, that's a band or--Tiempo Libre--
- **Robert Danziger** - --Well, they're two different bands. Sones de Mexico--
- **Stephen Prutsman** - --Oh, these are Mexican bands?
- **Robert Danziger** - Yeah. This is a--well, they're actually based out of Chicago, but they do traditional Mexican music, folk music, and they also do a version of the Brandenburg.

- **Robert Danziger** - --Tiempo Libre is a Cuban band who do a bunch of stuff, including a version of the Brandenburg. In both cases, they did the third Brandenburg because it's written in 12/8. So, they could apply 6/8 type rhythms, which are the rhythms of Veracruz and Havana and places like that. And so, they applied those rhythms to the 3rd Brandenburg.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Oh, wow. I'd love to hear that. Wow.
- **Robert Danziger** - And they--and the process--I spoke to one of them the other day and the process they went through is very much the same as you. They--one of them transcribed by ear the third and then started applying the traditional instruments of the small villages and stuff and then took the rhythm. It does a hat dance type of foot tapping rhythm--
- **Stephen Prutsman** - --Oh, that's fun--
- **Robert Danziger** - -- the third movement of the third concerto based on the foot tapping.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Oh. Oh, man. Okay.
- **Robert Danziger** - It's--wow.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - That's in Tiempo Libre?
- **Robert Danziger** - That one's Sones de Mexico.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Sones, like S-o-n-e-s?
- **Robert Danziger** - Yes, that's right.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Oh, sounds of Mexico. Okay. Sones.
- **Robert Danziger** - Actually, in this case--Sones in this case refers to--it's a "Son", right? So, it's--as opposed to sounds, it refers to type of music.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Oh, okay. Cool. I'll check it out. Wow. There's another guy, if you like that tradition of Antonio Carlos Jobim and the songwriting of the '60s, Dori Caymmi. Do you know him?
- **Robert Danziger** - No.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - C-a-y-m-m-i. He lives in L.A. and he never really got a, you know, wide recognition as he should have. But, God, there's a Brazilian Serenata, an album that he did. And again, it's this-- part of me is also this fantasy world of concept albums, that was really intriguing for me as a young man.

- **Robert Danziger** - --What was the first time you encountered the Brandenburg Concerto? When was the first time you ran into that?
- **Stephen Prutsman** - You mean all six or, you know--or heard one?
- **Robert Danziger** - The first time--
- **Stephen Prutsman** - --Gee, I don't know, Bob. I don't know when I heard them. I got to know--I used to run a big festival in Cartagena, Colombia and we programmed all of them once in one setting. And during that time, I got to know better than I ever had.
- So, that I remember. That was maybe--God, a number of year ago. But, I--you know, I--I've been running across them all the time from either music festivals. Chamber music ensembles like to try to put those together, too. I mean, in larger groups. But, I have yet to actually encounter them kind of in--you know, being morphed into something different.
- **Robert Danziger** - --When--and have you--you played them with groups, haven't you?
- **Stephen Prutsman** - --Yeah, I played continuo. Not a whole lot. I've never, you know--and I'm not very good at continuo, I got to say. So, just because--and I--in all honesty, it's just because something that hasn't come along. And I mean, who knows? I might not be very good at it forever. But, I just haven't had a whole lot of experience doing that. But, I recall on the big G major Brandenburg playing continuo on that, had a ball with that. So, I think that was actually in Recife, Brazil. Yeah. And I think about that a lot of times, with the--which one has the super hard trumpet part? Is that five?
- **Robert Danziger** - Two.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Is that--
- **Robert Danziger** - --Two--
- **Stephen Prutsman** - --Two? Okay. Yeah.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - I just remember they did that and the poor trumpet player could not hack it.
- **Robert Danziger** - Yeah.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - So, it turned into a laugh fest, unfortunately.
- **Robert Danziger** - --That happens a lot, unfortunately. There are--a lot of lips have been ruined trying to play that tune.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - No doubt.

- **Robert Danziger** - You know, the--let me ask this one question and then I'd like to circle back to that because there is--I'd like to get your opinion on something. But, you know, that--the one that you're talking about, the second Brandenburg Concerto, is the first music on the golden record off of Voyager spacecraft that left the solar system that was back in the '70s.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Oh, wow.
- **Robert Danziger** - Yeah.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - They'll want to come visit us if they hear that.
- **Robert Danziger** - Yeah. Well, it's--I mean, it's a remarkable thing in the history of music. It's the only music to ever physically leave the solar system. And the first thing is Brandenburg Concerto, you know?
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Yeah, right on.
- **Robert Danziger** - The first movement of the second concerto. And I'm just curious if--and I used to work at Jet Propulsion Lab after I--when they--
- **Stephen Prutsman** - --Very cool.
- **Robert Danziger** - So, that's one of the--I mean, I was just a junior nothing at the time, but it really fascinated me, one of the things about that. And I asked about--I've asked Regina Carter, a few people, if you were in that position of selecting the music to--that's going to be found by some alien, you know, 100 million years from now--that represents earth, what music would you put on that record?
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Oh, wow. That's like a--that's almost like a desert island question,
- **Stephen Prutsman** - First thing, if there's no timeframe -- obviously I'd probably want to pack a lot into that disc. But, if there is no kind of limit to that, the first--it'd have to be B Minor Mass, man. That's--that would be the start. I mean, if you want to try to encompass a lot of what, you know, our planet has been through, that would be a biggie. You know, I would certainly want to take something of Tatum. I mean, just personal reasons. I would--something that jubilant and overpowering and it's fun and awareness and color--
- **Stephen Prutsman** - --And all that good stuff. That would have to be on there. Oh, geez. I'd have to think about this because there are two issues to consider. And you sort of have to take yourself out of the question, right?
- **Robert Danziger** - Mm-hmm.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - You have to say not my personal favorites, but what really represents this planet of 8 billion people. And so, I definitely stick with the Bach. I guess a lot of Bach because, and I don't want to get too touchy feely here, we are all deeply in

love with this music, but it's also beyond us in a certain sense. So, that it's the sense that it's the intimate, it's the really personal, it's the one on one. And at the same time, it's impersonal. It's beyond us all. It's so great, we can never understand it entirely. We can never grasp it entirely. So, that's probably the area. And, you know, from a personal standpoint, yes, I would want something by Revel.

- **Robert Danziger** - --Well, that's--that was a wonderful answer, by the way. I will now go and listen to all those things by this afternoon. You know, it's one of the great pleasures of doing this is you ask that question and Regina Carter mentioned, the Swan.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - --You know, there's a--I'll tell you real quick. If you ever--if you have a chance to check out--you already know this, but the movie adaption of the Kurt Vonnegut film (Slaughterhouse-Five) that the guy who's on this lonely planet with this--way off somewhere and all by himself with this really attractive young model and it's his fantasy, but the soundtrack is the theme of the brand--of the Goldberg variations. So, there is this sense of--with that theme of being in outer space just like the Voyager continuing without stopping forever and ever and ever, just like a beautiful light wave going on out. So, there is this attraction with the cosmos in Bach, definitely.
- **Robert Danziger** - Oh, that was--yeah. Well, you know who loves the Goldberg is Uri Caine.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - --Oh, no doubt. Yeah. He does some amazing stuff. My God.
- **Robert Danziger** - But, just as an aside, when I started getting into this about 10 years ago or more and some jazz journalists and others were listening to my stuff and they said--one said to the other, how many Taum's is it? And one of them says it's about--you know, it's about .9 and another guy says, oh, there's about 1.1. And I asked, "what were you talking about?" The journalists explained the standard they use for judging how fast something is is relative to Art Tatum.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - You need a frame of reference, boy.
- **Robert Danziger** - Yeah. And so--
- **Stephen Prutsman** - --I tell you.
- **Robert Danziger** - The frame of reference, which it leaves--and I just love that. It was sort of, like, oh, it's about a .6 Tatum, you know?
- **Stephen Prutsman** - There you go, .6 Tatum. There you go. It's like the speed of light, you know?
- **Robert Danziger** - It is.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - We can never achieve it, but we can--You know, try to get close.

- **Robert Danziger** - Slow it down when you get closer, you know? I love that, though. So, one--actually, two quick--two questions. One is--one of the questions I ask everybody in an interview is what lullabies your parents might've sung to you when you were a child.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Oh, wow. I can't think of any lullaby, but--and my mom was not a singer. So, I don't remember her singing at all. She was more of a--loved the classics. She loved Schumann's Kinderszenen. And so, sometimes she'd try to play that. She wasn't very good. She was a nurse. My dad, you know--it's really sappy stuff, but he would sing, like, If I Loved You from--is that from Camelot? I'm not sure. So, maybe it's--one of these old show tunes. There's an old standard called Red Sails in the Sunset and I think he loved that so much because his mother sang that to him. So, he--I could go on and on. I mean, I'll--as soon as we hang up, I'll think of a gazillion more, but those two come to mind. One of my favorites, I think, that came from him is--it's on an album of mine. I'll send it to you, but it's Irving Berlin's What'll I Do. It's very sad, but one of these bittersweet old tunes from the '20s.
- **Robert Danziger** - This is a--you've been wonderful. I really truly appreciate it.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Well, I appreciate it, too.
- **Robert Danziger** - So, when Bach wrote the Brandenburg Concerto, he did it through these really terrible times and then very uplifting times. His first wife had died and he met his second wife and the kids--you know, all this stuff that goes on. And one--
- **Stephen Prutsman** - --Yeah--
- **Robert Danziger** - --Of the things that happened was when his first wife was dying and he was on sort of a summer tour with his friends, they sent a letter saying, come back quickly, you know, your family's dying. And the proof of handlers stopped the letter because they didn't want to upset the prints or stop the music. So, by the time Bach got back after the summer vacation, his kids and--two of his kids and his wife were dead, along with his brother. So, you can just imagine how he felt. And then--
- **Stephen Prutsman** - --Yeah--
- **Robert Danziger** - --He gets this thing to--where this other principal, Margrave of Brandenburg, wanted him to sort of apply for the job over there. And you can imagine how he's feeling about authority at that point.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Mm-hmm.
- **Robert Danziger** - So, he writes the Brandenburg for 17 pieces. He writes it very hard, like that trumpet thing you were talking about.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Right.

- **Robert Danziger** - Very difficult. Several different ones that are so difficult to play. And the prince's band just wasn't that good. They--
- **Stephen Prutsman** - --Yeah.
- **Robert Danziger** - They didn't have enough players and they just weren't that much quality.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Yeah.
- **Robert Danziger** - And so, I can just imagine the Kapellmeister, you know, opening up this manuscript, looking at it and going, there's no way in the world we can play this thing. Rolled it back up, put it in a drawer where it wasn't discovered for another 100 years.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Uh-huh.
- **Robert Danziger** - It was never played--
- **Stephen Prutsman** - --Yeah--
- **Robert Danziger** - --During Bach's lifetime. And so, when I was putting together my version, when we got to particularly the third movement of the fourth concerto, which has it using the rhythms that are played today, it's got passages where it's nine notes a second for an extended period of time. And instead of asking my guys to try to play that exactly, I told them, I want you to play the highest, hardest, most difficult thing to play that you just have been kind of noodling with all these years, something that no one else in the world plays, and I'll write it down, and we'll use that as that really fast section. And both of them had played with Frank Zappa and they said, "that's what Zappa used to tell us."
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Is that right?
- **Robert Danziger** - Yeah. And I think that Bach, when it came to that section, he had these incredible musicians in his orchestra and they were not doing church music at the time. They--because the Calvinist church had banned instrumental music in this period when he was writing it. And I think he said, you know, fuck that guy, play the--I want these people to be humiliated when they open up this manuscript and know--
- **Stephen Prutsman** - --Yeah--
- **Robert Danziger** - --That they can't touch it.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Interesting. Wow.
- **Robert Danziger** - What do you think about that?

- Stephen Prutsman** - Oh, my goodness. I don't know where to begin. I think--I mean, I've always--I don't know what to think, to be brutally frank. I really don't. An old piano teacher told me once, he goes, we still constantly look for greatness, whether it's in performance, people recreating western art music or in composition or in performance of oral tradition. We look for greatness. But at the same time, in performance--and that's what you're talking about, in performance, the bar of mediocrity keeps rising. The bar of mediocrity keeps rising. And I'm sure--okay. You know, right now, you go to Julliard and you heard a gazillion pianists and violinists and they all sound fantastic. They all do. Or, Curtis or any of these places. I'm sure in those days when Bach--I mean, when he's writing weekly mass, you know, how did he do that? You know, write a 30 minute mass, one per week, right? For--and have his kids write all the parts and so on. And, you think about how much time do they actually have to prepare it? Do you know? I--I'm--you know, you know a lot more than I do about this. But, probably nowhere near the amount of rehearsal today. Was the bar of mediocrity quite low then? Absolutely. They didn't have the benefit all these hundreds of years of tradition of learning how to play. They didn't have the benefit of this insane competition that people have to work and practice, you know, six, seven hours a day. I don't think those guys actually conceived the idea that every day I'm going to practice.
- Stephen Prutsman** - They didn't have the benefit of all these great--and you just take violin. Schools of violin playing that have been honed in so that--to learn how to most efficaciously get accuracy and sound and so on. So, I got to--in my mind, I always think of these things when they were put together. Even, you know, Mozart concertos, when he'd write something for a party, you know, he'd get a little--you know, some money to say, write this for Saturday's party. And he'd do that, you know, and you'd find out how many--you know, what do we got? Oh, we just have two horn players and wind--and string. So, okay. So, it'll be a piano concerto for strings and two horns and put it together. They'd be reading it. You can only imagine how God awful it would sound then. So, you know, it's--when we think--we typically can--I believe, you cannot really compare today's level of performance of written down music--I mean, of concert music to what that must have sounded like way back when when they were reading it, for crying out loud. And they couldn't play it very well. The bar of mediocrity is quite low. And it was just a different kind of, if you will, soundscape. I hate to use that word. But, just a different kind of--right now, if a notable composer goes somewhere and--let's say John Adams, who's a composer I adore. Let's say he goes somewhere and he finds himself listening to some guys playing Shaker Loops or something. You know, one of these--one of his cool pieces and they suck, right?
- Robert Danziger** - Mm-hmm.
- Stephen Prutsman** - You can know right away because his frame of reference, his concept is hearing San Francisco Symphony play it, you know, stellar. You know, five recordings of that piece. I mean, my God. So--whereas with Bach, he was--you know, you can only imagine what his day must have looked like, right? With his--the writing assignments. I mean, it was crammed.

- **Robert Danziger** - During the Brandenburg period, he had no writing assignments. For over two years, the church didn't allow instrumental music. And so, during the period of time he wrote *The Well-Tempered Clavier* and the Brandenburg, he actually had no responsibilities. And so, the band--the orchestra and he had 17 of the best musicians in Europe because they couldn't get jobs in the churches anymore. So, he had the best orchestra he ever had in his life.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Yeah.
- **Robert Danziger** - And he had no religious responsibilities. And so, he wrote all this non-religious music during that period of time and they rehearsed every day, eight, 10, 12 hours a day.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Oh. They did. Okay. What years was this?
- **Robert Danziger** - That'd be--
- **Stephen Prutsman** - --Anyway, I don't want to bog down with--
- **Robert Danziger** - --No, it's okay.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - I got to ask you while I think of it, Bob. What is--what do you think is the best biography of Bach?
- **Robert Danziger** - Well, that's an interesting question because there's the orthodox, you know, sort of big guy who's this guy Chris Wolff, who I think sucks, personally. Christopher Wolff is the head of the Bach Institute and all that stuff. And his father was a Bach scholar and his grandfather. And he's--but, for example, when this--discussing the Brandenburg, he doesn't even mention that his wife and children died and that there was--so, he's one of those, you know, everything was done by number kind of guys.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Okay.
- **Robert Danziger** - The one that was recommended to me by Dave Gordon, you know, is the--who is the drama church at the Bach Festival is *True Life of J.S. Bach* by Klaus Eidam, E-i-d-a-m. And that's--and that one--much of it is a critique of other Bach scholars and he gets a little nasty here and there. I think that the best--it isn't a biography, but the best book on Bach, the one I always recommend, is *Evenings in the Palace of Reason* with--
- **Stephen Prutsman** - --Evening--
- **Robert Danziger** - Mm-hmm.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - I'm writing this down.

- **Robert Danziger** - By James Gaines, G-a-i-n-e-s. He--in his case, he's just looking--or he's building up to this meeting between Bach and Frederick the Great. It's just a two or three day thing. But, it--you know, he goes through all of these other things to get there. And I think that it presents the man and the music best of any of those, actually.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Awesome.
- **Robert Danziger** - I would read--I would actually start with *The True Life of J.S. Bach* by Eidam.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Yeah.
- **Robert Danziger** - And then, go to *Evenings in the Palace of Reason*.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Do both of those. Okay. Thanks a lot. I'm going to do that. I appreciate you because sometimes, you know, we get in these, you know--we hear one tidbit like, for example, when he was living with his, you know--I'm not sure which wife it was, but with 15 kids. And hearing that he was, you know, directing church music and teaching and trying to pull everything together. And then, I look at the amount of music that he has written. You know, a while ago, they came out with this great edition of all--you know, everything he ever wrote down in these very sweet and pretty hardbound editions, right? And it just--it goes from wall to wall. I mean, it's how is a man at his time--and also deal with all, as you were saying, the personal traumas of his children always dying, you know?
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Okay. Thank you, Bob. You have a great day. Thank you so much.
- **Robert Danziger** - You, too.
- **Stephen Prutsman** - Bye-bye.
- **Robert Danziger** - Thank you. Bye-bye.