

Hi there.

I am David Lang. It is great to be here – I am so happy to be here on such a great occasion. It is always great to be around when people receive money. When you get a chance to look at our two honorees I want you to look carefully at their faces – see how happy they are? Don't you all just want to see artists beaming like that, all the time? That's what people look like when they win something. When they get recognized for doing something well, when they think the world notices how much effort they have put into doing a good job. It's a beautiful thing.

I only now just today Craig Lucas, although I have been aware of his work for years. I have never seen a play of his but I have seen many of the films made from them; in particular, I loved his film *The Dying Gaul*, which I went to because Steve Reich told me that it had used his music well, and I was curious to see what he meant. And Steve was right. The music was used really well. On behalf of composers everywhere, thank you for that.

Eve Beglarian, however, is a different story. I have known Eve and have been listening to her excellent music for decades now. The music organization that I started in 1987 with two friends in New York, *Bang on a Can*, has a long history with her, having commissioned her and performed her music all around the world. She is a friend, and has even helped me out of numerous jams in the past. One of Eve's

specialties is working with machines, with computers and samplers and various cutting edge technologies. For years now whenever I have a project that uses any technology more sophisticated than a toaster, at some point in the process I call her up, begging pathetically for help. Thanks, Eve.

Both Craig and Eve are happy right now – they just won this great thing. When I was asked to speak to you tonight it was suggested that I talk about MY happy moment, about the thing that I won, the Pulitzer Prize. How the recognition changed my life forever. (Which is true, I might add.)

My first thought was that this would be a great opportunity to right the biggest wrong of the whole Pulitzer process, that, as a winner, you are never asked to give an acceptance speech. It is nothing like the Academy Awards. You never get the chance to stand up in front of an audience and thank all the people who helped you get where you have gotten. I thought this would be a great time to do that.

Well, imagine my surprise when, just two days ago, a new crop of Pulitzer winners got announced. They are all worthy, great, exalted, exciting creators, their lives are now all changed for good, as my life was, and they all now have the looks on their faces that Craig and Eve have right now – they are all basking in the glow of knowing that for this moment the world accepts them for themselves.

In particular, it was very moving to talk to Steve Reich after he received this year's prize. Steve never expected that such a thing would happen to him, and I could tell over the phone that he was really, really happy. I could hear in his voice that Steve now also has that look on his face, that glow. And, again, this is a beautiful, beautiful thing.

But where does that leave me? Two days ago I was this year's Pulitzer Prize winner. And now?

I remember all those years watching the Miss America Pageant. A new Miss America is crowned, the old Miss America walks over and gives the new Miss America her crown. And both of them are crying and crying. I didn't realize until this week that they are crying for very different reasons.

I am sure I will get over this. But, all things considered, I thought it just might be better to talk about something completely different.

So I would like to talk about politics. I don't know what anyone's political affiliations are here, I don't want to go off in any direction of advocacy – that is not really what I want to talk about. But I do want to talk about our recent election, and if you bear with me for a while I promise I will bring it around to art. Eventually.

I am something of a political junkie. I have always been interested in politics, in campaigning, in the inside horseracing and handicapping of electoral contests across the country. I have always been that way, but because of the historic nature of the last election I got in a little too deep for my own good. I moved from being a fanatic to being an addict. I would spend hours on the internet each day, checking websites of electoral districts in Iowa, scouring editorial pages of small town newspapers throughout the south, reading the minutes of party caucuses here in Florida and elsewhere. I was in way too deep. I got in so deep that, now that the election is long over, I still check those sites every day, just out of habit. I am going through withdrawal.

Right after the election was a very interesting moment, as editorial writers throughout the land tried to make sense of the incredible jolt of optimism we received with Obama's election. Everyone agreed that it was a great moment for our democracy, but I also remember many, many articles by people trying to predict just how great a president Obama would be. Would he be JFK? FDR? Lincoln? Does he have what it takes to be one of our greatest presidents?

I remember reading one article that just floored me – it said that there was really only one thing necessary to be a great president. It wasn't your education, your temperament, your experience. It wasn't your skills at compromise, or your rationality, your confidence or your leadership, your cool head or your big heart. This article said that the

most important thing you need to be a great president is to live in a time whose problems are so gigantic that only greatness can solve them. In other words, it isn't your ability to do great work that makes you great, but living in a time that requires great work to be done.

This is, of course, the situation the world is now in. The problems in the world are so enormous that small fixes won't work – the time calls for courage, for action. But this is also the situation we are in as artists. We are confronted now with huge problems in funding, in audience, in the apparent crumbling of the structures and apparatus of the institutions we have depended on for so long. Stocks are down, endowments are down. People are scared. In other words, the time is right for great work, both for our society and for our arts.

If only boldness, innovation, deep questioning of the status quo, and passionate, hard-working commitment to the future will get us where we need to go, who better to solve these problems than artists, who are bold, innovative, questioning, passionate and hard-working, every day of their lives? Who is better suited to changing the world than us?

One way to look at what is going on right now is that there is a great amount of fear in the world. People are not sure what businesses, or institutions, or ideas, will move into the future. What will last? No one knows, and everyone is nervous about it. It is possible then to think of every action you take as a kind of vote. When I write music

now I think of it as a vote for the kind of culture I want to make sure survives – that thought alone strengthens my own commitment to what I do.

Every work you make, every dollar you spend, every event you attend, is a vote for what you want to last. You vote with your money, with your attention, with your enthusiasm, with your love. This organization, and this prize that is being given tonight, is not just a wad of money being thrown around. It means something. It is a vote. That is what patronage is – a vote, based on the belief of the people who make it that this kind of art deserves to survive, and move into the future. For those of you in this audience who have voted for the survival of the arts, I salute you. The optimism of that way of thinking is also a beautiful thing.

I believe that making art is intrinsically a utopian act. It is fundamentally optimistic. It imagines that the world can be made a better place, if only it could hear this new piece of music or see this new play. For me, it is a logical extension to think that if my music could belong to a better world, there could be a utopian way to play it, a utopian audience, a utopian performer, a utopian venue. And those are the things I work for, and vote for.

OK, enough of my pontification. I think the time has come to listen to something. I was asked to provide some music for you to hear, that a string quartet could play, so I chose two things. One of them is really

serious, one of them is really silly. I think you will be able to tell the difference.

The first is a little piece called WED that I wrote for the Kronos Quartet – it was written in memory of a friend of mine, a conceptual artist named Kate Ericson. Kate worked collaboratively with her partner, Mel Ziegler, and when she was dying from brain cancer she and Mel got married, in her hospital bed. I tried to make a piece that would show both of the feelings this wedding brought out, the overall sadness of the situation with the remarkable kindness of the moment, and put them in equilibrium with each other.

And the other piece is just silly.

I have enjoyed being here very much. And I wish the Hermitage and all of us here today long and happy lives in the arts.

Thank you. And now let's listen to some music.