

**EPISODE #17 AR Reinkemeyer**  
Listening to Ladies  
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Interviewee: **AR Reinkemeyer (AR)**

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I'm Elisabeth Blair, and this is Listening to Ladies.

[excerpt of **Wrought Iron** plays]

**ECB:** This is an excerpt of a piece called Wrought Iron by composer Andrea Reinkemeyer.

[excerpt of **Wrought Iron** plays]

**AR:** A lot of my music explores nature. I've always been one of those people who love small details and looking at them. And I look at the world a lot of time through a camera, I'm not a great photographer, but I do enjoy taking photographs and I travel a lot, so I always like to find small details and I guess as a composer, I focus on those sorts of things in my music as well.

[excerpt of **Wrought Iron** plays]

**AR:** Now do you hear that I was looking at a little tiny leaf and watching how all the veins of the leaf branch out? Probably you would not necessarily do that, but for me it's a really important part of my process of thinking about music. What are these small details and what do they mean and how will they evolve over the course of a piece.

[excerpt of **Wrought Iron** plays]

**ECB:** When she was a kid, Andrea's family was a supportive one.

**AR:** They said what do you, try it all, see what the thing is that is really interesting to you. And the caveat was if I had lessons, I had to practice. So they never made me practice, they were never like, "Go practice the piano". It was, "Do you want me to cancel your lessons because you are not practicing this thing". So then it was really self directed.

**ECB:** She ended up focusing on piano and violin and she started composing after her very first piano lesson, the summer before second grade.

**AR:** We had been learning Mary had a little lamb, or something like that, and so I took the notes and I rearranged them and I made a little piece, so I've been composing from the beginning.

**ECB:** She studied under the Yamaha Method, which encourages composing.

**AR:** Everybody composed all the time. And so I actually think it's strange when I meet musicians who don't compose, because that from a very young age was the approach that I had, was like take these elements and make it your own. So it was really fascinating, because I never had those hang ups of like, other people composed, it was that we're all, even kids composed.

**ECB:** And as far as role models when she was a kid, she had a lot of them. Her piano teacher was a woman...

**AR:** And she was showing us how to improvise and how to do these things. So my very first exposure to that was a woman. There was a woman in my church growing up and she was always writing little tunes for the kids to sing. And then, you know, my music teacher in elementary school was a woman, and so my examples were always women making music.

**ECB:** Still, when she went to college, she did not follow a direct path to studying composition

**AR:** I went to the University of Oregon and I was going to be a biology major with a pre med in a music minor, and over the course of the year, I was like, I actually really love my music classes, that's where I should be. My mom encouraged me to finish out the first year, just to make sure that I did not want to be a biology major and yeah I pretty much decided that's the case. And so then once I was admitted into the music program, I kind of was all over the place. My transcript will say violin performance, piano performance, music education, I was kind of trying to figure out my direction and I just on a whim, joined the Gamelan Ensemble, which was primarily a composer's ensemble at the University of Oregon. And Robert Kyr, the head of the composition program down there, he took me aside one day and said, "Why aren't you a composition major?" and I've been on that path ever since. So yeah, that was really great to have that awakening at that point, because then I've never looked back.

**ECB:** She never questioned the validity of her chosen career path.

**AR:** I was never really in a place where that wasn't a possibility.

**ECB:** That being said, apart from Hildegard von Bingen and Clara Schumann, she didn't really get to know the words or the names of composers who were women until graduate school, and she did have to contend with some sexism when she was in college.

**AR:** My first composition teacher, he was a little more old school. It was a class of first year composition students, and there were only two women in the class and he made a few inappropriate jokes and things like that, but he couldn't see very well, which was one thing. And so I ended up cutting all my hair off and then the jokes stopped and the other woman dropped out and it was find after that, in quote right, "it's fine" after that.

**ECB:** But she says that other than that, her fellow students and other professors were nothing but supportive. And when she reached graduate school at the University of Michigan, there were many women, both on the composition faculty and within the student body.

[excerpt of **Wild Silk** plays]

**ECB:** You are listening to an excerpt of a piece called Wild Silk.

[excerpt of **Wild Silk** plays]

**ECB:** Andrea said that one of the things she likes about being a composer is the chance to explore things that terrify her through music.

**AR:** I've always had this dumb fear of moths and so I found this really beautiful moth.

**ECB:** That is the Luna Moth. In it's caterpillar stage, it grows so fast...

**AR:** ..that is breaks through its own skin five times.

[excerpt of **Wild Silk** plays]

**AR:** The adult moth actually has no mouth, so it's days are very numbered. It has to procreate before it dies.

[excerpt of **Wild Silk** plays]

**ECB:** The form of the piece reflects the life cycle of the moth. Be sure to check out the whole piece on our show notes page at [www.listeningtoladies.com](http://www.listeningtoladies.com)

Our conversation touched briefly on a little bit of composing Andrea's done for theater. She said it was a very different experience.

**AR:** Because you know, we always think of the composer as this solitary figure, right, the genius in their studio, right, away from the world in their, whatever, they are finally working something, this grandiose idea, right? But in the theater, it's not the same. In the theater, it's not about the composer and your job is to help tell somebody else's story. And you just have to kind of know that about half of your music is gonna be cut, they always ask for more music than they need. I mean, I remember when I was working on that piece, everyone was like, "Oh, I love this music, I'm so sorry we have to cut it". "I love this, it's really cool, bye bye." And it was fine because I knew that my role there was to support.

**ECB:** Hey Elisabeth here. I want to pause briefly to say thank you to all of my listeners, to everyone who has appreciated this podcast. All of you who have recommended it, who have left a review on iTunes, or sent me Tweets and Facebook messages and emails, thank you. Knowing I had your support and encouragement has helped me continue this podcast even while life was tugging at me from all different directions, as life generally does. You all are great, thank you. That's it, that's all I wanted to say. Back to the episode.

[excerpt of **The Thaw** plays]

**ECB:** You are listening to an excerpt of a piece called The Thaw.

[excerpt of **The Thaw** plays]

**AR:** The text was written by Artis Henderson, who is a writer, primarily a journalist, but she wrote a memoir about her husband's death in Afghanistan and it's a really powerful text. And I loved her writing so much, that when I was asked to write this piece, I asked if she could write a text for me.

[excerpt of **The Thaw** plays]

**ECB:** Again, that was a piece called The Thaw and coming right on it's heels, here is a piece called Things Heard Misunderstood, for solo alto saxophone. She wrote it when she was in Thailand.

[excerpt of **Things Heard Misunderstood** plays]

**AR:** As you may imagine, living in Thailand I was not fluent in the language, it's a very difficult tonal language.

[excerpt of **Things Heard Misunderstood** plays]

**AR:** So that's what that piece is kind of about those little misunderstandings.

[excerpt of **Things Heard Misunderstood** plays]

**ECB:** Naturally, I asked her for a few examples of these misunderstandings.

[excerpt of **Things Heard Misunderstood** plays]

**AR:** We lived kind of right in the heart of Bangkok, right off Sukhumvit Rd, which is one of the main roads through town. And this man would walk through our neighborhood and he would sing, sing at the top of his lungs so the whole neighborhood could hear, you know. And I thought I heard him say something along the lines of, "Hello", something about love and you know what have you.

[excerpt of **Things Heard Misunderstood** plays]

**AR:** And I just loved listening to this man and it was always unpredictable when he would come through. And I asked a Thai man that I knew, "What's he singing about?" and he had no idea what I was talking about at all. So one day he came through and I took this video and I played it for him and he started laughing so hard because it was, "Clean your drains, yes or no, clean your drains, yes or no".

[excerpt of **Things Heard Misunderstood** plays]

**AR:** The second movement is another kind of funny thing. We were going up to, I think it was Khao Yai, which just means big mountain and someone was trying to tell us, the person kept saying [makes kissing sound], you know kind of kissing sounds, and making biting motions at his arm and I thought he meant that there were going to be lots of mosquitoes. I was like, "Yeah we have Deet, this isn't a problem, we have things, we'll be covered, it's not problem".

[excerpt of **Things Heard Misunderstood** plays]

**AR:** Well it was actually leeches. Needless to say, I was covered in leeches, so that was another learning moment.

**ECB:** Andrea had some sage advice for those of you who are thinking about focusing on composition.

**AR:** Choose your mentors and your colleagues well. If you respect the person you will be working with and you like their music and they respect you, boy you can learn a lot.

[excerpt **Wrought Iron** plays]

**AR:** I think it's an exciting time to be a composer because we have so many options. You can be a minimalist composer one day and you can be a maximalist composer the next and it's fine, you can do it.

[excerpt **Wrought Iron** plays]

**ECB:** To find out more about Andrea or to listen to full streaming tracks of any of the excerpts in this episode, just go to [www.listeningtoladies.com](http://www.listeningtoladies.com)

[excerpt of **Wrought Iron** plays]

**ECB:** If you have extra resources that you would like to donate toward the production of this podcast, just go to our website and click on Help and you'll see a lot of options there for you to help, some of them involving money, some of them not.

[Wrought Iron clip plays]

**ECB:** That was another excerpt from Wrought Iron.

And as ever, thanks for listening.