

Story Angles for Deborah Henson-Conant and Invention & Alchemy

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Breaking Boundaries/Stereotypes/Categorization	2
Pretty Prejudice	2
The Harp as a Musical Disability	2
Making the Uncool Hip.....	2
A Life of Breaking Stereotypes	2
Music That Unites Instead of Separates	2
The Press’s Trouble with DHC.....	2
Limitation Leads to Freedom	2
Breaking All Kinds of Stereotypes At Once	2
Making “True-to-You” Art.....	3
Invention and Reinvention	3
Recreating Storytelling and Harp Playing	3
Deconstruct Your Life and Make Art Out of It	3
Creating “True-to-You” Art.....	3
Music That Reaches Out to Everyone.....	3
Breaking Boundaries of Creation Itself	3
Business and the Arts.....	3
Running a Business as a Composer/Performer	3
Being Given the Creative Opportunity of a Lifetime	4
Be Careful What You Ask For.....	4
Special Project Partnerships	4
Preparing for the Project of a Lifetime	4
What’s It Like to be Granted Your Dream?	4
Reigniting the Symphony Orchestra.....	4
New Face of the American Symphony Composer	4
Designing the Experience of the Symphony Audience	4
Inspiring New Generations of Symphony-Goers.....	4
Diverse Symphony Audience	4

Breaking Boundaries/Stereotypes/Categorization

Pretty Prejudice

Prejudice comes in many forms. Henson-Conant is no stranger to prejudice -- and it started inside HERSELF. "I had and still do struggle against prejudices about what I think I can do as a woman and as a person who plays this instrument. While it's frustrating to me that I encounter prejudice so often ("Oh, the harp! I love classical music!") the most debilitating prejudice for me has been my own. I first had to break through my own stereotypes before I can begin to break through other people's."

The Harp as a Musical Disability

It's a prosthesis, people are prejudiced against it. When you're physically disabled, that's all people see. "He's an amputee." He's not an amputee! She's not a harpist! It would be calling a man JUST a man when he's so many other things - a dad, a brother, a postal worker, songwriter, likes pickles, etc...

Making the Uncool Hip

Imagine you're a high school kid and you have zits and you need to figure out a way to make zits COOL and make everyone want to have zits. How do you do that? First, you have to forget that they're NOT cool.

A Life of Breaking Stereotypes

How breaking through one stereotype has led to a life of breaking stereotypes.

Music That Unites Instead of Separates

Music usually falls into a camp and an age range, but a few performers defy convention, defy age prejudice, gender stereotypes get right to the heart of the music—the IDEA—that people of all ages, classes, ethnicities, etc. can identify with.

The Press's Trouble with DHC

People who write about DHC are brave to do it. Because it's hard to do it. There's no one clear angle for a writer to take, because what she does is so big and so many different things. For example, we imagine it being somewhat easy to write about the popular new Hasidic Jew rapper Matisyahu, because even though his image and music goes "against the grain", in a few simple words, a writer can describe what he does. He is a rapper of a different flavor. DHC doesn't have a "new take" on classical harp music, or even on the harp. Her work is about using whatever the hell tools you have to tell the truth. It's like talking in a foreign language where you have to pull in all your resources to get across what you want to say.

Limitation Leads to Freedom

The limitations of the harp have made DHC be creative with the instrument and her performance in a multitude of ways.

Breaking All Kinds of Stereotypes At Once

A composer who is still alive whose works are being performed by symphonies? AND the composer is a woman? And she plays the harp...the ELECTRIC HARP? And sings and dances too?! She has long ribbons and braids in her hair and wears cowboy boots? And she is right there on stage as the symphony plays her music - right there with you, showing you the way in. SHOWING YOU THE WAY IN.

Making “True-to-You” Art

Invention and Reinvention

What “invention & reinvention” means and why it is so crucial to Deborah’s work.

Recreating Storytelling and Harp Playing

DHC doesn’t enjoy traditional storytelling and harp playing, yet she has created her own brand of those very things.

Deconstruct Your Life and Make Art Out of It

Take it apart, put it back together. We grow up with so many stereotypes of what we’re supposed to do, what we can and can’t do. Even the phrase sounds stereotyped. But what happens when you start deconstructing those stereotypes? What does that do to your mind and to your life?

Creating “True-to-You” Art

How do you create something that reflects who you are? Who you really are? What rules do you have to break? How do you -- we’re so immersed in the specialization for the arts -- but the point of any art is to provide a window to let others see what you see.

Music That Reaches Out to Everyone

Something that a whole bunch of different kinds of people could connect with. “I have never ever been stylish. On the one hand I always feel out of it - on the other hand nothing I’ve written has become dated.” There’s no “type” of audience she has. You don’t need to know anything to come to DHC’s show.

You don’t need to know anything about her instrument, anything about her style. You don’t really need to speak English. You only need to be there, to be able to feel and experience.

Breaking Boundaries of Creation Itself

Okay, so she plays the ELECTRIC HARP. So now she’s going to write the music for orchestra. Okay, but she’s also a comedian, so she’s going to mix that in. She sings. But she tells stories when she sings, so she makes sure that’s in the music and the performance. And the audience is essential to her performances, so she includes them. And she doesn’t want to perform IN FRONT of an orchestra, she wants to perform WITH them, so she writes for them as an whole orchestra and as individuals and as actors. She dances. She includes professional dancers in the show. She’s a cartoonist, so she makes a piece where the orchestra dresses up in lab coats and transforms into a ridiculous cartoon.

Business and the Arts

Running a Business as a Composer/Performer

It’s the same thing that Mozart had to do. I’m no Mozart, but even without his specific genius, I have to do the same things he had to do: write the music, rent the halls, get the musicians, deal with the business and the business behind the business.

Being Given the Creative Opportunity of a Lifetime

Be Careful What You Ask For

What happens when you get the opportunity and resources to make one of your wildest creative ideas come true?

Special Project Partnerships

Henson-Conant and her partner Jonathan Wyner went into this project TOGETHER and are a couple, creative partners and business partners in this project. The stress, the opportunity, the people, the experience has changed their relationship -- to themselves and to each other. It's made them stronger in many ways and been a serious stress in others.

Preparing for the Project of a Lifetime

Preparing for the DVD filming including writing the music, writing the orchestrations, testing the material musically and technically, working with coaches -- the development process included training their bodies, their minds, their skills -- and testing -- using themselves as both scientists and guinea pigs -- inviting audiences in to act as observers. Henson-Conant and Wyner tested the material with the use of "Maquettes". They made "scale models" of the performance, because when you only have 3 nights to nail it for the recording, you damn well better have practiced.

What's It Like to be Granted Your Dream?

A person is given the opportunity to create her dream project: given the \$ for it, given exactly the people she wants to work with, can be in charge of it from the very beginning to very end and put something out that is 100% reflective of how she sees the world...

Reigniting the Symphony Orchestra

New Face of the American Symphony Composer

A wild woman in braids, boots, and a miniskirt, singing, laughing, and telling stories! It's quite a different image than the dead old white guy you imagine.

Designing the Experience of the Symphony Audience

DHC wants to create an atmosphere in the orchestra hall where the entire audience feels comfortable and like they belong there, no matter who they are or where they came from. DHC often feels alienated in the audience (ask her more about this).

Inspiring New Generations of Symphony-Goers

As the major symphony audience literally dies off, DHC's orchestra performance get younger generations to like the symphony.

Diverse Symphony Audience

People of lower economic classes / education can afford to experience DHC's orchestral performance on this DVD. Because of that, they may feel like the symphony can be THEIR type of place, too - a community resource.