

Interview With Peter Lucia

The following interview was conducted by Sir Remington Sheets (late of the Royal Hereford Fusiliers) in the library of his American estate, somewhere in the northeastern U.S, on a breezy autumn afternoon in the year 2008.

R.S.: "Peter Lucia, I want to thank you for coming here today."

P.L.: "My pleasure. Thanks for inviting me. You know, you remind of me C. Aubrey Smith."

R.S.: "Well, thank you, I've heard that before."

P.L.: "I'm glad you have. It's heartening that people remember him."

R.S.: "Yes, I agree. So, let's begin... I want to ask... What can you tell us about the origins of Nowever Then -- I mean specifically the expression or title Nowever Then?"

P.L.: Well... I was riding my bike one summer day, as I often ride, pursuing one of several routes from Interlaken to the little Allenhurst boardwalk (I stop there to take a few recreational breaths and stand 'fixed in ocean reverie', to quote Melville). I was actually riding west on Elberon Avenue back toward Ocean Avenue, before turning back east, when, relaxed by the quadrangles of shade on the street, cast by the houses -- you know I've always liked being in shadow if some brighter area is visible nearby -- it's a pattern that excites me -- when, as I was saying, I began to wonder what would be the best and shortest way of expressing verbally that which, to me, is the summit of my inner experience.

R.S.: Ah.

P.L.: No, wait... That's not exactly correct, is it? Here's a better setup... All right... Take my peak experience (which I haven't even described yet); then imagine that this experience were *constant* -- that it were there all the time (which is impossible, since it only comes in tantalizing flashes). Then ask how you would express that in a slogan. That's it!

R.S.: Bravo.

P.L.: In other words, what would the most wonderful way of being -- or feeling alive -- in time and space and the briefest way to express it?

R.S.: Won't you tell us?

P.L.: Let's don't be sardonic now. Anyway... You may have heard me say on a number of occasions that in the range of all experiences there is simply no substitute for recollection -- I speak specifically of what I call 'charged remembrance', or what Proust calls 'la mémoire involontaire.' You see, such memory brings the full emotional tone or identity of a time or a time and a place; it's an understanding which you didn't exactly grasp in the original experience -- plus there's that sense of having overcome time in some miniature way (but I'll say more about that later). The irony, I believe, is that the *real sense of life* -- of True Life and Time -- becomes present only in what is no longer present. Why this is a tremendous fascination -- and why it is important -- I may speak of later on, but it's clear that this experience accounts for the "Then" part of "Nowever Then."

R.S.: "And the Nowever part?"

P.L.: "The perfect question at the perfect moment."

R.S.: "Actually, I wanted to break the paragraph, to make some visual space when I type this out."

P.L.: "You're a gentleman with foresight. Well, "Nowever" is really two words put together. Let's take "Now" first. Okay... Imagine if the "True Life" feeling that I just spoke of -- the "Then" feeling -- imagine if it did not just come in marvelous flashes, as it usually does, but if "Then" were "Now" -- all the time. Imagine, that is, if the feeling of "Now" had all the qualities of the feeling of "Then." I don't necessarily mean that it is an actual recollection of any past time, but that the present itself would have the power of charged remembrance while not actually being a recollection. If such were the case, we would have an unparalleled appreciation of existence, of our place in it right now. We would know what living felt like while living it. This would, of course, be a super-present. "

R.S.: "Ah."

P.L.: "I'll get my tongue-depressor. Now imagine if not only the broad present (and hence all of life) had the essential quality -- the defining tone and taste -- typical of the 'past recaptured', but that -- at the same time -- this sensation of being would last forever -- I mean, that you *knew* you would live forever -- deathless -- with this sense of life."

R.S.: "My good man, you speak of Heaven!"

P.L.: "Right you are, Sir Remy, and that is the 'Ever' part. Life, you see, would be a never-ending 'everness' of 'thenness' *now* -- the 'Now' would have the continual power of Then but would always be Now. But I must absolutely stress that the 'Ever' part would be an equal power. The sense of

'Ever' is just as important as the 'Then' feeling, even though the words *Nowever Then* seem to stress "Then" a little, I admit. Ultimately I'm talking about a 'Forever-and-Ever' feeling -- timelessness -- that has forever the authentic power of 'Then' found when 'Then' is recaptured in its own timelessly charged way."

R.S.: "We'd be walking on air!"

P.L.: "Yes, well, we all know similar feelings, but usually in flashes, though some of us tend to be more receptive and dwell on it. Every day -- forever -- would be your wedding day, your graduation day, your days of first love, your first day of life, the birth of your first child... These are temporary and speck-like examples that hint at the idea. There's a big, wide wholeness to existence, with endless extension and possibilities."

R.S.: "So the past present and future are all present in the title *Nowever Then*."

P.L.: "Yes, it's a kind of Eternity -- a feeling of Eternity, of timelessness. Of course, you know, with any serious individual, I think, it's never enough to simply rely on feeling. You can't stop there. You must derive something meaningful from it."

R.S.: "You mean in art, for example?"

P.L.: "Well, yes -- though art can fall into the same trap, get stuck at square one. The active mind naturally or eventually looks for something beyond."

R.S.: "Do you mean not only just the expression of a feeling -- as in pure music -- but the addition of a story or plot, an extra meaning? I mean, a story or plot which..."

P.L.: "A story or plot which points to a meaning beyond itself."

R.S.: "Yes."

P.L.: "Well, let's take music, for example. Some people know that I can produce in myself a fleeting or maybe 'wafting' sense of *Nowever Then* -- or something like that -- by way of a small class of musical harmonies. Everybody who knows me has heard me speak of this. As engrossing as such harmonies are in themselves, they long to utter something. They ache to speak, I ache to decode; and what little bit I can decode I then ache to communicate. Now I could write a piece of music using these harmonies, but that would put me almost in the same place, wouldn't it? -- the same place I was in when I was just playing and studying them (except, of course, that I would have a 'showcase' for them -- a work that others might

listen to). Still, as much as the harmonies point to something beyond themselves -- a fine thing in itself -- there's the added desire to *say* what they point to, to figure it out. What is the 'unconsummated symbol,' which Susanne Langer says music, in general, is? Why don't you make another paragraph here?"

R.S.: "Alright."

P.L.: "Thank you. Now one could take Nietzsche's Dionysian-Apollonian advice and add 'reasoning' words to the 'unreasoning' music, like a chorus, or write an operetta of some kind, using in words the 'message' of the music. By *message*, I mean, at this point, talk of timelessness and all that, as I've already talked about here; but while that would add some welcome extra feeling to what I've already stated; it would not *explicate*. Now -- to switch to pure writing for a moment -- one could write a story that contained this feeling as general atmosphere, but it would be closer to my intent to write a story *about* this feeling, one which still delivered it as atmosphere or even as overall sentiment. Always, the question for both the symphony-chorus and the novel would be: What's it about? What can you possibly say or write, beyond that of my own more or less 'technical' descriptions, which I've already tossed about in your excellent interview?"

R.S.: "In short, what, beyond feeling, do the harmonies speak of, you're asking? Do they say anything about humanity, about the universe?"

P.L.: "Exactly -- beyond using just a description of the feelings. I mean talking about "timelessness" and all that. Well, you would have to look to something 'beyond.' Here's where you start waxing poetic. You start using expressions like 'wholly other' -- but when I say that, my mind instantly recoils and says, 'Well, it's not wholly other, it's also familiar -- it's near and far at the same time.' That's why I, for one, often use opposites together in my poetry and wherever -- near and far, unhappy joyousness... The sadness, of course, comes from the yearning (though there's something more in this that I'm getting to). But it's still not enough to say this, unless you did a whole discourse of some kind about opposites uniting. That would be interesting, and you would have some kind of work, but you'd be only a tad above the original musical statement and you'd ask, 'So what about the union of opposites? Oh, really? That's fine. That's moving. I like it.' No, you see, you can accompany the harmonies with all kinds of 'action', but there's really *only a couple scenarios* that fit it like a glove -- and that has to do with another world or a new world of some kind. It's a place whose sense of life *is* this feeling, in your living there, as you live in it, always."

R.S.: "So I was right. This must be heaven. And the harmonies speak of it."

P.L.: "Well, you can't apply the harmonies to any other thing or situation without that particular sense of beyond or absolute newness, and the sense of beyond is *both the feeling and the meaning* of what they point to -- the life and the fact of life they point to. And it's not just any 'beyond' -- it cannot mean Jupiter or some distant galaxy or even 'the wonder of the universe' as a material thing -- it's too much even for that... No, it's a pure sense of life, a special sense, hyper-life, supra-life, if you will."

R.S.: "What you speak of is certainly found in religious writers like C.S. Lewis and others. 'The Undiscovered Country,' I believe Lewis calls it."

P.L.: "I think everything that haunts us thrillingly eventually leads to it. But let me digress for a moment before returning to this. I mentioned already that there's a bit of an ache involved and that this ache is the yearning for something that we feel but cannot have. Now the following is very important... While I said a moment ago that you can't apply the harmonies to any other thing but 'another world of some kind', there is, I must admit, *one other thing* besides that sense of 'super-life' that it can properly go with."

R.S.: "Pray, continue."

P.L.: "The deathbed."

R.S.: "My dear Lucia!"

P.L.: "I know, I know... Well, the deathbed and perhaps it's presumed opposite -- being born. But it's so logical! I mean, it's like that -- not logical like something I had to deduce. It's simply like that when you drill into it, so to speak. It works by itself. My goodness, it's the kind of thing that brings tears to your eyes when you hear such a chord in... in a musical score, say, in a movie, wherein someone wonderful passes away after a beautiful life. Anything like that. It's huge and overarching; it's beyond life somehow, even if one describes being born into the present life (insofar as that implies something wonderfully -- I don't know -- celestial and bigger than everyone). And it's also, yes, it's also somehow -- somehow -- related to why we at times get tears in our eyes when we see something beautiful, a sunset for example. What are those tears telling us? Why cry? What are we sad about? What are we yearning for! We know it's there! We know it's out there!"

R.S.: "Please calm yourself, my good man. Shall I get you a powder?"

P.L.: "Of course, you can't really capture it. You can't really possess your love. Aside from our meager artistic attempts, it's an 'insulated ecstasy', to quote Aldous Huxley -- who, by the way, was talking about coitus when he

said that. However, the analogy is thought-provoking, because in the case of Huxley's reference, the desire of possession 'leads you on' -- leads you to offspring, what nature intended (that is to say you got what you wanted -- a kind of immortality -- but by way of a third party -- quite a trick indeed!). Well, I give away my ultimate meaning a little bit. Anyway, what does an attempt to study the near-and-far harmonies produce? Well, it must *lead* somewhere... To art maybe? But that's not always as automatic as biological conception. So maybe we ourselves unite with it when we die, conception's opposite, which might be a spiritual equivalent of some kind, or maybe of being born. Here we go with the opposites again."

R.S.: "God, Eternity... As an old man, I'm encouraged."

P.L.: But it's also the joy of living... of living *within* all this, of finding yourself here -- in the wondrous newness of it. "The supreme adventure is being born," to quote Chesterton. It's the wonder of being alive that we may remember from childhood when perhaps we were convinced that life would go on forever. And, I repeat, it's the opposite too: the passing away, which -- who knows? -- may be new life after all. Or perhaps the passing reminds us of being alive, of being born. They tend to work back and forth. "To quote Boethius: 'Interminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta possessio.' It simply always goes to some feeling of Eternity. But certain people, Freud, for example, would think that it's the 'oceanic' vestiges of the child-mother connection and with the perennial sex drive (see 'Civilization and Its Discontents', near the beginning); Nietzsche thought the greatest urge was for power. Actually, I think they are both right but in the wrong way, or right in a small way. I repeat: *It's Immortality!* Immortality is the combination. This, I believe, is behind so much of what the human race engages in. It is really the primal urge behind everything. Sex gives you quote-unquote 'immortality' or 'eternity' through offspring and is the deeply-rooted and deeply-craved power of *genetically* 'living forever.' But this is immortality with a small "i." The question is: Are we made for another world? "

R.S.: "You tell *me*."

P.L.: "I should tell *you!*"

R.S.: (chuckles) "You are a card."

P.L.: "My grandmother used to say that. Thank you. Very quaint expression. Now the only fully competing theory, materialist idea, I mention in fairness, is that science will one day be able to resurrect the dead and all of history and that we will live on and on, say, in absolutely realistic emulation software or something; that somehow we know this to be our destiny -- destiny, a thrilling word -- and that this embedded

glimmer of knowledge -- along with our capacity for reproduction and creation -- is what moves us so powerfully and inexplicably. Who knows, maybe we're software already."

R.S.: "The beta version, as they say."

P.L.: "Yes, with a number of stubborn bugs."

R.S.: "But isn't this subjective on your part? That is to say, one person hearing the harmonies might think of something different."

R.S.: You must live with them, the harmonies, that is. Even over many years, until you can chip out the words or the words come to you. But, listen, listen closely, listen... quite often, when you see a film or something musical where transcendence or 'passing over' into another world -- spiritual world -- is involved, I've noticed, as I've already suggested, that some composers will choose from these harmonies to express that kind of notion. It tugs at the heart in a certain way. It's a bit like a secret life, if you read between the lines, the secret life of music, though I can't say how philosophically involved individual composers are in it. I just can't say. But *there's something there*, if you know what to look for and are sensitive to it. It's more than coincidence and it does seem to diverge from the subjective. Very haunting at times. Even some sweet, popular 'love music' adopts it on occasion -- not often the grand harmonies but less developed 'earlier' manifestations of it; but we know where love leads, right? Immortality (the 'baby kind' of immortality -- the pun is intended). Of course, feelings are not a good method of knowing anything other than how you feel -- and I'm not saying that this has anything to do with knowledge; but, as I said, there is some haunting 'hidden' consensus. Of course, what we want or like should have nothing to do with our opinions in our search for what is true. But this is not *about* something in the way opinion is about something. Well, well... I could go on about the several categories, shadings, of harmonies within these harmonies, which includes those few -- how did I ever skip this? -- those few that make me feel I'm on the brink of some grand cosmic truth or understanding... Damn, there's too much!

R.S.: Perhaps we'll save this for another interview.

P.L.: At any rate, you should see my perfunctory account of Saudade and Sehnsucht. You'll find it at "<http://www.noweverthen.com/many/many.html>"

R.S. Goodness, you've quite a memory.

P.L. Not really. But at the moment I'm out of breath. I need a cigarette or something. Brandy and soda... Potato chip..."

R.S.: "Potato chip! Peter Lucia, thank you very much."

P.L.: "My pleasure... You know, I think I saw a photo of you playing cricket."

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