

Charles Morrow

Fantastic wine !

It's from Portugal. It's called Dao. I've never had it before, and it's very cheap, (laughing) Yeah, a dollar forty a bottle. A friend of mine bought a case. It was marvelous. After a day like today the thought of sitting down there with a nice glass of wine like this.....

Ya. Was it a hard day today?

It was incredibly hard day, yes.....yes.

What were you doing?

Well..... I ah..... the reasons for today being a hard day is what I do for a living.....So I had some problems. I had some problems in business.

You have such huge loudspeakers. I have never seen such huge loudspeakers in my life.

My friend Jack built them some time ago. In the sixties I was very interested in vibrations..... So I had these loudspeakers built so that I could resonate the room. It's interesting, you were playing Charlemagne's recordings in which he speaks about the sensuous in music. I was interested in the sensuous properties of music then, too..... I still am. I was approaching it at that point with bass vibrations. These bass speakers are HUGE. I spent a thousand dollars on bass speakers.

So you then had the idea of using your voice in the sixties too?

I was using my voice..... Ah, at first I was all caught up. I was trying everything, electronic things as well as instruments. EVERYTHING was used. Gradually..... toward the end of the sixties, I became very interested in just chanting the voice. And gradually I moved out of the technological era. While I find it nice to make recordings of the voice, I think of the studio as tools to document my ideas rather than as an instrument.

Most of the recent work is geared towards rituals that involve other people. Although I do perform still and will occasionally write a piece for someone to perform using notation, more time has been devoted to understanding how relationships get on in music. So I've been concerned with relationships, and chanting is part of that. Ah, at first chanting was a way of exploring myself, be it through meditation or through the sense of travel. Singing is traveling for me..... And ah then, I became interested in it cross-culturally, with many different groups of people, particularly American Indians.

Oh ya. did you study actually the styles of some Indian tribes like the Hopis?

Sure. I worked more with the SENECA, eastern Indians, because they were here. I studied by learning. I studied by ear. Now this was a whole new thing for me. I had studied in academic situations..... (a telephone call. There are many, many more coming, so I won't mention them any more.)

So you studied with.....

I spent some time working with the Seneca Indians. Seneca are members of the Iraqis nation. It's a northeastern tribe. The singer I

worked with was an old man, and we had the same problems of any generation difference. Everyone out there listened to American country music. And the Indians only did their own music for themselves. They weren't interested at all in what an artist might be doing, you know? One of the things that happened was that I began to feel less like an artist and more like an explorer in singing. My whole self-concept began to change.

Recently I met some Indians I grooved with in New York City and I began to work with them. And I discovered that amongst these Indians there's not a tribal concept of the music. Certainly the music started with certain styles associated with each tribe, but most young Indians who are good singers now learned the music of each others' tribes. There are increasing connections between various tribes. For example the Seneca fellow that I worked with was a song maker. And there's no difference between singer and song maker. To be a good singer you had to be a song maker. He was trying some things. He had gotten a western drum and brought it East. All his life he had sung with the accompaniment of a little water drum, the traditional Iraqis instrument. But now he was performing with the big drum.

As I spent more time with the Indian people I realized too that their whole purpose in singing was completely different from what I had imagined. There was an energy and intensity, and there was openness. Some of the nicest people that I've ever met, people whom I've enjoyed making music with, people with whom I've felt the most immediate connection with were the American Indians.

There's an attitude in American Indian culture that making mistakes is possible. They have the concept of a vision. What is it when you talk about a vision? I always worked with the concept of visions in my music. I dreamed my pieces. I'm concerned with a sense of vision.....And in most Indian cultures vision is misseeing, mishearing, mistaking, the sense of not-getting-it-right as a source of information. So one of the things that happened while working with the Indians was this gradual shift of beginning to enjoy making certain kinds of mistakes.

I mean one typical thing that JERRY ROTHENBERG wrote and he recites in one of his poems, he says, "I looked, and I saw three buffalo. I looked again, and it was three crows." And it's a sort of thing, I mean, that visions are very tricky and most commonplace. So therefore, since life is filled with perceptions of common things, that's where you get things right or wrong in the commonplace that you can talk about your whole awareness of the world. That's one area where I became deeply interested in what it was that the Indians were talking about. Because they would be willing to say that mistakes could be a source of information too.

And I've been raised in a situation where everything's very perfect, you know, very European. It was like everything had to be absolutely right. And being right was suddenly so ingrained in me that gradually this position was being eroded through connection with the Indians until I had a completely different attitude.

So what happened then was I began to realize what the singing was about. I said you've got to start first with self-exploration, to then singing with other cultures. And the next stage

was to realize what they were singing was. Then animal language. I got involved with animal language, fish language, imitation. This was actually in many ways beginning to appear like more of a dialogue. It wasn't just making animal sounds. It was getting into the animal world.

Ya. The Indians use it very practically just trying to imitate animals to hunt them.

And more than that. There's a sense of play, you know, just messing around. And so the whole sense of extending yourself via animal language became important. I realized that a lot of the fooling around that I had done as a child was very important.

So, first I worked with animal sounds essentially, and I continued to work with Indians as I still do. And then began to get more into fish language and farm animals, just to see the whole sense of what my relationship to animals was. All through this I wasn't looking so much to learn to be in another culture. I always believed that if you speak of another culture, it's just like speaking another language. You always do it with an accent. So I wanted to approach basic music and basic language without an accent, just to find a place for myself.

I went beyond the animals. And I realized that with all of this in a way we return to a kind of childhood position. For the last year I've been working with the language and music of children, particularly in a day care center with four year olds, five, six, seven, eight, nine to see what happens between four, five, six, seven, eight, nine. And performing with the children and getting close to them. And seeing what it is that's going on.

I hope soon to travel to Australia to study some of the children there. A man named WATERMAN, an ethnomusicologist studied aboriginal children and discovered that this particular group of children were regarded as a source of important songs. The infant then is coming into the world, and he enters the world with a song. You know?

Yes, you can find new universal expressions through that. So how are you doing that here in New York?

Well what I've been doing is singing and playing with children in an informal way, because I've discovered that children can get into anything. I feel like many different approaches are valid in terms of getting children into music. Some people use music that teaches children discipline. Others use the music to teach them counterpoint. I was interested in seeing what children would do ah with improvisation of animals, which is how they would play with nonhuman sounds and how they would play with words. So I said I'd get their reaction situations. Particularly I was interested in what would happen if one child would become the leader and everyone else would have to follow.

Because I've discovered that there are a number of fundamental processes that are at the root of all language....whether it's a musical or spoken language.... BEFORE there are words. One of these things is that there's an absolute ability. Ah, if you take the word tracking from radio for instance, there's an ability. If you concentrate, you can make sounds with each other. So there's an ability to be in unison with each other, even if there's an

improvisation going on. It depends on how much the leader wants to try to fool you or keep you with him, and how much the follower wants to stay or how much the follower doesn't concentrate. So there's a lot of human dynamics in the situation of improvising and being in unison, particularly if a large group of people follow the leader.

So I've developed some children's games in which each child would have turns at the leader.... He would make animal sounds, and the group would follow in unison. And I studied what would happen. Children have a spontaneous reflex. So when a child hears a sound, he imitates it. He immediately does it, like a kind of quick spontaneous biological response, almost like, almost like.... falling down and holding out your hands.

This spontaneous response to sound and the ability to make unisons are very, very important. And then within that I've begun to study the nature of intonation. One sort of intonation was dialogue where one would make a sound and the other would answer. I discovered by working with the LAVENDER FROGS that this was a very, very simple binary language in which the frogs would have dialogue with each other. And one frog would lead, and the other would follow.

So, for example you could have two frogs. (Snapping the fingers of his left and right hands, the left hand being dominant.) And this frog here wanted to take over.

(The right hand pauses one beat to take over the dominant role.) click click click click He waits for a pause.

Then he gets the first click!

Now this is one very basic human dialogue, and this occurs with the children as well.

The other one is where the children are making sound at the same time. Because while things are going on at the same time, the degree of relatedness is determined by both individuals. Recently psychologists have been studying this kind of thing, because these things are the two kinds of things that are going on between infants and mothers. You know, the mother makes a sound. The infant answers. The infant makes a sound, and the mother answers. Or they're both going "Go go go go" or something together.

And somehow these are two very very important forms of dialogue, the simultaneity, where there's an important kind of interaction, and the dialogue response. So I've been studying these as kind of primordial musical hours. I discovered that they have kind of a basis to actualize before there's ever a sound uttered, which is very interesting. . It's a cultural breath. Since breath is the universal carrier of information.... ah, if you listen carefully, you will hear my breath and know it's steady. And upon observing you, I'll know whether you're relaxed, whether you're tense. If you're a father, you'll know if your child is sleeping. If you have a dog, you'll know if your dog is well. The dog knows if you're well, mainly through breath information.

And GROTOWSKI has talked about the breath as very important in this way too. So it's interesting to study farm animals. And I went to see how the farm animals and the farmers were getting along. I discovered it wasn't the sound

making, but the silence, that conveyed the most information. Most of the time they were just sort of interacting on the level of like breathing, you know?

So you went out to the farm to take a look at that?

Yeah, to see the farmers and cows, you know. And it was part of trying to understand what was going on.

And what did you find out?

Well, I found out that the breath was the main source of information between the farmers and the animals. And I can't be sure between the animals themselves. But you know, I thought for a while that I was gonna go to the farm, and I was gonna hear them make animal sounds. And they do, but only occasionally. Most of the time it's just kind of a situation where breath information is very critical.

And then for years I was doing a piece called BREATH CHANT, in which I worked with the style of Navaho Indians with just the breath. The Navaho style means the leader makes a song and everybody follows as best they can. Some people know it well. Some people don't. Some are sort of half faking, and so on. So it's really an okay situation, to not know it all. I was doing that kind of situation where this audience has to breathe with me. So I figured the breath sensor was going to convey the state I was in. They could breathe with me. And I could do very dramatical and very meditative things, different things that would enter my space so to speak. I had a kind of sensuous sense of being inside of me, and I'd be inside of them.

I found that people can breath together in unison easier than they can make sounds in unison, because the breath isn't as loud as the voice. So it doesn't get in the way of your reception. If people are making the same breath sounds, then they can be in absolute unison with each other for long periods of time. Then I noticed that breath is a basis for physical E.S.P. Physically you'd become linked with another person through the breath whistling and imitation.

It's E.S.P. somehow only in that the most people are not aware on conscious about that.

Right. It was E.S.P. only because it seemed magical, but it was truly physiological because it could be explained. I'm very pragmatic when I deal in matters with a certain mystical component to it. It doesn't lie on the level of explaining things as magic, but rather as explaining things as being repeatable.

As being hidden like behind the daily communication forms.

Exactly. So that my work has been concerned then with the breath. Actually then it became much easier. Then I realized that on the breath there was the voice. The musician of the voice in each breath was an emotional factor. The voice became important. And so it began to stay at the level of the voice, and the concept that the body was available. I knew this from many systems of chanting that were more Oriental. You know, about resonating areas of the body through different kinds of repetitive vowels, and mastering overtones. But that was a relatively simple thing, because that's been around for

thousands of years.

But it's very rarely repeated by western singers, in so far that they are even able to influence parts of the body and relax certain tensions through this kind of music.

Right. Well I should have pointed out in the first place that I'm not a composer of anything except sacred music. What I do in situations is to follow the ritual of people and consider it all a kind of sacred music. For that reason I consider always the ritual or the context of the music, not just the sound itself. I'm a nonabstract artist, totally nonabstract. I don't believe in abstraction.. But I'll have to deal with that a little bit later.

The chanting music for me has opened up what I feel to be the pragmatic basis of music making. Using music is a kind of a way of connecting with people. And It's a kind of a way of vibrating my own body. That's a very, very important basis. Beyond that sound making is location. When I vibrate off the walls of this room, I have a sense of the size of the room. You know, if I was a deaf person, I could tell what the size of this room would be, if it was a conference or social room. So that sound making, the sense of voice, is a kind of a personal radar to measure one's environment. And just simply breathing in space gives you this particular sense.

Another part of it is that voice is characteristic of different stages of your life. There's a voice of a child, a voice growing up, and a voice as you're getting older. And there's also a voice as you take on the voice of animals, as you take on the voice of regional dialects, as you're taking on the language aspect. But voice becomes very important, because it is a way of being more specific in breath about what it is that's going on. It also defines your regional location. You know, where a person appears through their voice, and you know about them. You know their gender. You know about their stage of life. You know a great deal from the voice that the breath didn't tell you.

After that, then comes words. And then comes music, then location that is very regional. The voice by itself is very interesting, the voice without words. If you consider the voice, you know in this personal sense how to locate yourself and understand others. And also in terms of your real relationship to the environment. Because I truly believe in a communication between all levels of matter, living and nonliving to the extent that my communication with these walls is the way my voice and energies bounce off of them. And their character is revealed by the way their energies and mine interact in that particular sense.

I believe that there's always a ritual going on in sound making..... Let's say if you examine western music making, which I feel is very interesting because it's like a seance. Usually you have a musician in a special place playing music of a dead person. And so the voice of the dead person is represented in the personage of the living musician. The living musician is listened to by people who accept him because he's supposed to be great. Part of that is that the musician has to have a terrific energy and a terrific control over a musical instrument. Part of that is the musician has to have mastered memory and memorized music. Part of that is they have to have a good sense of style, and they

have given something to music.

I discovered for example in breathing with people that everybody has the same incredible possibilities as musicians. And having been through the great elaborate process of mastering an instrument and becoming the one person in a billion to be called a super-genius, you know? But everybody has this particular sense of music. And I think that's why we identify with the great artist, because we all have that greatness in us, and that's what's touched. And our own greatness is touched.

One definition of genius is a very easy one. A genius is just a person who puts all his energies to life.

Right. I try to get for example with the breathing, when a person knows that a whole group is breathing, no matter who the person is, they find themselves in the same position as the composer in making this kind of body music. And in that situation there's a sense of the tremendous feeling that normally you get only with a great performer. I mean try to feel, try to give the power back to the observer rather than leave it only in their master musician. Because unfortunately this mass music thing given in an aggressive and capitalistic economy means that there are fewer jobs for musicians than ever before.....

The whole world kind of revolves around a few great ones. | And that's bullshit. Because you'd think that in such a huge population that every town would have a great one.

And so I'm trying to start a kind of a counter-philosophy that says in effect that what you could refer to the error of sexism, abstracting the attractive qualities of a woman and converting her into a sex object, so that she's no longer a human being. It's the same thing that happens in "artism". That in art, when creating an aesthetic object you deprive it of its creator in life in the ritual sense, in the ritual context and you make it into a kind of a closed system.

Not that it isn't wonderful in that way, and not that one still doesn't want to make love to a woman and feel a woman is attractive. But if you just think of that woman as a sex object and not as a full human being, you've really missed the full richness of life. If you think of art as only possible in this kind of vacuum where everyone sits quietly and looks, instead of a full range of things everything from a football game to a harvest ritual amongst the Indians, or whatever it is, where there's a full spectrum of possibilities between being quiet and observing something and thinking that only one person in all of history could be so great, to thinking that we're all great people. We are human beings alive and making their own music. You know, that spectrum has to exist.

And so I feel very strongly for example that the great music of western Europe, which now dominates education throughout the world, is being debased by its own cult. You know, the people that worship it are destroying it by making it such a singular thing and by making it such a privilege of the few. One of the problems of that kind of elitism is that I often feel when people get off on the great music of our culture, is that the music that made the powerful classes made them feel good about themselves, in that they were self-selected

people. The great musicians "of their time, who made them feel good about being powerful, or being sensitive, or in other ways being detached from daily life in the way that most people experience that.

And rather than talk about a working class music, I'd rather talk about the possibility that some of the greatest experiences are not tied up with the high art itself. The high art itself is a form of power consciousness, that in a way one listens to the high art in the same way that one walks around being a flirt. You know, there's something very flirtatious and arrogant about a person who only regards ah the western high art or whatever high art the Chinese high art that Mao got rid of also.

That's the reason I'm interested in finding out how the very basic tribes integrate their art into a system.

Let me tell you that you have a very big disappointment coming. Also the people that I've met are anxious to develop money and get rich. And every place you go in the world all of the cultures are disappearing. A friend of mine said, "You can't maintain a culture." He's a director and theatrist. And he travels all over the world too. I have many of his tapes here. He says you don't maintain a cultural civilization. So in Bali if the people want to start the Bali Hilton, and want to drive cars and have suits, if they want to have money, you can't stop them. Their radio station is going to have rock and roll.

So the problem of relationship of modern people who are descendants of modern culture, you know to people like us, who are interested in culture as an aspect body, is a very curious one. Because emerging cultures throughout the world are mainly interested in economic development. It will probably go through stages resembling places like America went through, where there will be enormous exploitation before there's a kind of reasonable attitude that prevails.

The Balinese are just getting seduced by the mechanism of commercialism.

Well, the sense of relationship to tradition is often misplaced. For example, I know people who have grown up in very religious homes, who really feel that their time has not been devoured by their obligations to go to church or go to synagogue. And they had to spend so much time with that. You know, even though it's maybe a wonderful spiritual experience. We're living in an age where people are beginning to value again the spiritual experience. But not everybody values the study and having their whole lifetime with it.

I know a pianist for example who is an orthodox Jew, who between the ages of sixteen, when he was regarded widely as one of the finest American pianists, and the time he was twenty-three years old, couldn't move out of his parents' home, because he was part of a little orthodox Jewish group. And it was necessary to make the prayers. It was necessary to make prayers. And they needed a certain number of men to make the prayers. And he was one of them. I mean, it was a small group of people and a tightly knit community, and he was paralyzed in his professional life for many years. He couldn't do it, because he was essential to the religious life of his family. *But there are many examples of people whose*

tribal consciousness gets destroyed by expanding civilization. I mean the Indian tribes are not the only ones.

Well....Well, here people are kind of wrapped up in a wet blanket of commercialism, of popular music. Ah, one of the things about popular culture is that people....your broad masses are suspicious of anything that isn't commercially successful. So that, you know, anything that's strange at all is set aside.

So what are you doing strange?

My work is involved with a kind of story telling relationship of the person to the material. Because I don't believe that music and the performance of music are unrelated to each other in the very highest sense, you know? A person doesn't sing a song except that it's the right ritual. So I like to feel this sense of rightness in the material. And basically you know all music is involved with a kind of sense of burning, of intense music, of intense experiences.

One piece that I do that involves audience participation is called "HO HO", in which there are two musical ideas. One goes (singing on B in the gesture of an Indian song): ho HO HO HO HO HO HO HO HO HO HO HO.

And once an idea begins like that it doesn't have to be in unison with itself. It might be a dialogue too with everybody in the audience. Then I'll take the second part.

It would be (singing as before ho HO HO HO in B. Then, one octave higher b and slides to d#):

hoho hooh oh

hooh hooh ho

So you've got those two going together. Once those get rolling, then I use the pitches in a variety of ways. I take the solo part, and let other people do solo parts within this ostinato. But the ostinato and solo part relationship is something like this.

One piece that I do is I put on my father's shirt. You know, in a sense the relationship to my father is that. I'm working through with all of these people. Another piece that we do is when we have a sick friend, we take a piece of their clothing, say a scarf for example. And I was saying that they had had a bad fall at dancing. So we all went and did a "HO HO". It was a healing piece in that situation. And I've been very interested in healing in this particular sense. Because I think that it's very, very wholesome. Healing means to make whole in English. I feel that when you have contact and intensity that self-expression arises.

So I deal with two broad categories of chanting music, "HANDS ON" and "HANDS OFF". You see an orchestra, and you don't touch them. You hear a minister, and he talks to you, and in other situations puts hands on your head. Or, in all the rituals that I do I do with people's hands touching each other. And that contact automatically changes into «11 the hands on the scarf of the sick person. And it's absolutely amazing what happens when other people feel that contact. Because then, it's no longer showing off. And there's always a tendency to show off, particularly in these kinds of things,

particularly if it's in public, you know? And it sort of changes once people's hands are touched. It becomes a very, very powerful thing that people can do for each other.

So, I don't think that this should replace BEETHOVEN or BACH or traditional or Indian music or anything like that. What I'm trying to do is find ways for people to enter into relationships with each other musically that are meaningful.

There are a lot of realizations of what is meaningful. There are actually people coining from completely different corners who try to reestablish things that are meaningful. If they do self-explorative exercises, like OLIVEROS' meditation or strengthen their understanding of our political situation like RZEWSKI in his songs. I think both is necessary.

I do too. I do too. And that's why I write two kinds of music. One thing is that I feel that there's no ONE way to make music. And as long as you're prepared to deal with the versatile, and even with the possibility that people may make music that you disagree with, that can be valid music.... then you are in good shape. One of the things that's happened is that there's no longer a sense of essential styles. If you're stylistic or say political positions, you describe two broad basis for working. But they don't have to be style basis. They can be attitude basis, you know? And I think that there's a kind of danger in things falling into similar categories. You know, you should better kind of play ball politically.

Some people are I think more consciously aware of that. TOM JOHNSON, a music critic in New York, a very, very beautiful man....One of his strong distinctions is between manipulative and non-manipulative music. He says we're all smart enough to know when we've manipulated an audience. We feel a certain way. Manipulated people do certain things. So if we have an awareness or consciousness level where we know when we're manipulating and when we're not, then there's a real responsibility in order to take that into account, to establish an ethical basis for what you're doing. And part of the manipulation is the political surroundings of the musicians working together, people just wanting to be each others' friends.

And these surroundings alienate people more and more.

Hm. What used to go on was that in each community people used to get together. There was the town square where people in the community saw each other. And there was more of an extensive connection. And nowadays people don't see each other much, with automobiles and modern technology in the world there's a great deal of isolation. The town square doesn't exist, and there's nothing to take its place. They go to movies, and everything is passive.

People have come to a particular position where they think they can get everything from books, from master artists, from this pro, from that pro. And it's all based on a kind of hierarchical structure. It's always the best, the best, the BEST..... And you're always tied up with money.

And you've gotta buy the book. You've gotta

buy the record, and so forth.
that's all very destructive.

I think that
And the way

that I've done it is to turn people onto the
power of themselves.