

## **James Goldsworthy: Charge to the Class of 2019**

Thank you, dear friends, for such a great honor; for charging me with charging you with this charge. Don't worry parents, there's no charge for this. Those of you who know me well know that I could keep going with this, but I think it's time to end this. Let's commence.

You all are on the cusp of a degree in music. The greatest musician I know has said that it's not so much that you choose music, but music chooses you. Ok, you chosen ones, now comes the responsibility of what I believe is the most abstract of all human activities, of all disciplines of study in higher education. After your intensive study, I believe that now you are ready to begin to try to understand what music is. And I can give you either warning, but moreso hope, that this will last a lifetime.

Since it is the most abstract of all human activities, of human disciplines, I feel that it is the most abundantly adored of activities, yet probably the most wildly misunderstood. That probably puts us in a very strong position to seek to better understand the power of this. If something can have such a dichotomized viewpoint from people to the degree to which schools will at first say, "Well, maybe we should cut the music program." In essence if we really dedicate ourselves to how music works, I believe that we than are more closely connected to its power.

For years, I used to do lectures on music from the standpoint of pitch and music from the standpoint of time, and it was I'd say maybe 25 years ago or so I said to myself, "Well now, wait a minute. What's in common between the two?" And I thought to myself, "I believe it's motion." I have the feeling that music is the study of motion. Of course, if I move, there's a chance that pitch will be produced. That's much more concrete. But time? That's much more abstract to the degree to which physicists – who are supposed to know something about what time is – will say that they believe that probably time does not exist. Boy, I'm giving you a big assignment now for the rest of your lives. If time doesn't exist, that does not give you liberty to disown proper rhythms or meters – don't get any big idea. But it does cause you to really think about music from the standpoint of motion in a way that helps you to explore why it is so moving and probably so emotional. And I don't mean "electronic motion." Emotion. Life is motion. Our beloved voice faculty will tell you, "Be sure to move the breath." What's the first thing that someone will say to you after an operation? "Get up. Move." Well, if life is motion then what we're engaged in studying, and what we're engaged in teaching and what we're engaged in becoming more deeply connected to is life itself.

In terms of this abstraction of time, there is one physicist that I admire that has talked about time, and he says that time involves heat – not that I understand that, but I certainly am loving trying to understand things that physicists say because it gives me further perspectives on lo and behold my early beginnings of acoustics of music class back when I was a freshman in undergraduate school. Of course, if music time involves heat, no wonder music is such a hot item – sorry.

There is a great composer friend of mine – maybe I should a great friend composer of mine – that has said, "my endings are my beginnings." One of the great examples of my endings are my beginnings was sitting across the kitchen table from my mother-in-law. She was 97 at the time, and she looked across to me and she said, "You know, I'm trying some new things in my teaching." I looked at her, and I said, "That sounds – good." I mean, what do you say to a 97-year-old that's saying they're just beginning. John Cage says "Begin anywhere." Well, if you can begin anywhere, I'll bet you can begin anything, I'll bet you can begin any time and you can begin anyhow. What about beginning anyway or any way? I've

begun over the last few years to really try to explore physics because I feel like if I look into physics and the science of how the universe works, maybe it will teach me more about music. And so that's what I'm beginning.

What's interesting is – a little Princeton story – Einstein was always engaged in playing string quartets. My mother-in-law remembers people that played with Einstein in those string quartets, and she used to tell me that the people in the quartets would sometimes have to say, "Albert, es ist einz, zwei, drei, vier!" I hope that makes you feel better that music is so abstract that even Albert Einstein had trouble with meter or rhythm.

I'm going to go back to Carlo Rovelli. Carlo Rovelli has said that most people tend to think of the universe as a collection of things, but really the universe is a collection of interactions. It really makes sense. You don't understand one thing without something else. You know, music is a lot about interactions and especially choral singing. Well, in the first place, if you're going to sing, your breath has to interact with the vocal cords; vocal cords have to move; the movement then creates sound in the air; the sound is interacting with the air; it's then interacting with someone's eardrums which then registers as a sound that we trust is moving. He speaks of these interactions in such a way where he compels us to not think about things in isolation. From that standpoint, you have been blessed to have been interacting with some of the most beautiful singers that you will come in contact with in your lifetime. In fact, you've already been interacting today. Keep that interaction going. Keep your interactions going with others. Keep studying music to understand all of the interactions of music; how a G sharp can interact with an E at the same time. While that same G sharp can interact with something after it, probably an A. If you do this, I have the feeling you might B sharp. I'm sorry, I could not resist! And if you B sharp, you'll end up and C sharp. Well, so much for this and the blessings of Westminster Interaction College. After this continuum of word interactions that have bounced across this charge. I think it's time to end the charge. But I think there's maybe one other thing to say. Let's begin. Thanks.