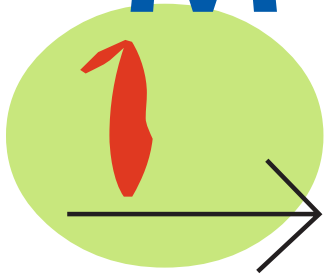


**THE WILD HEART JOURNAL** is an ongoing inquiry into a single subject: to what extent can the artist's creative process serve as a spiritual practice? Clearly, there are enough famous and accomplished artists whose personal lives serve as a miserable example of how art can fail to enlighten; we're interested here in discovering the conditions under which it can provide illumination, both for the creator as well as the audience. In this issue we speak to several musicians who are in some way bridging the distinction in their own work and lives between art and spirituality.

# MdU iS a | l CoAgL u e



**BROOKS WHITEHOUSE AND JANET ORENSTEIN, CELLIST AND VIOLINIST, HAVE TOURED THE WORLD BOTH AS SOLOISTS AND AS MEMBERS OF THE GUILD TRIO, AND ARE CURRENTLY ARTISTS-IN-RESIDENCE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA, CHARLOTTESVILLE.**

**WHJ:** You've been professional musicians all your lives--how did it come about that you started meditating?

**Brooks:** My manager asked me to do some research on Attention Deficit Disorder, the inability of audiences to focus for long periods of time on classical music, and along with that I also had a clarinetist friend who's really into meditation, and I was talking with him about how my mind wanders during performance and he said "Meditation is about just that--being constantly bombarded with thoughts that you can't control." So I initially started doing it with the hopes that it would help my ability to focus, overcome some of my nervousness in performance, that sort of thing. As I looked into it more, I quickly saw that whatever by-product or benefit I would get out of doing this for performance purposes, the actual heart of the thing meant something much more.

**WHJ:** It became more of a personal spiritual practice...but did it also in fact have an impact on your performing?

**Brooks:** Yes, it revealed the reasons behind why I was doing what I was doing, seeing my nervousness for what it is, my self-involvement, and the image that I have as a player, and what I want to project to the audience, and the fear of either projecting it or not projecting it well on a given day. But ultimately I realized that meditation is not goal-oriented in that way. It also allows me to become aware of physical tensions that I wasn't even aware of being there. There's something about sitting for long periods in meditation--you become acquainted with your body in a new way, and then when you go back to play the cello, you think, "My God, I'm in a knot!"

**WHJ:** Meditation practice is a focus and a concentration, and as a musician I know that when I'm totally focussed on playing a piece of music it requires a very similar one-pointed engagement, so I'm wondering if playing itself has ever functioned for you as a meditation in the sense that you can't be too busy being self-conscious about how you are presenting yourself if you have to stay with the music.

**Janet:** When you do something a lot, like performing, your body has a certain memory about what it's doing, and it is possible for your mind to wander and for you to still perform at a very high level.

**WHJ:** So you're on automatic?

**Janet:** Almost--you're not there. You're actually not really there with every note. It's a little bit



like driving a car--you're going home, and suddenly you realize you're home, and your mind has been wandering, but you didn't go through any red lights. There was some level of awareness, certainly, of what was going on, but it was a very partial awareness, not total. And that can happen to anybody, doing anything--life can become mechanical.

**WHJ:** That's true whether you're chopping vegetables, playing violin or driving a car--there can be the automatic performance of it, and then there can be those moments when you are fully present with what you're doing. Have you had performances like that?

**Janet:** Yes, absolutely! I've had performances where I was so present that I couldn't tell you anything about the performance afterwards, there was no time to even judge it.

**WHJ:** And are those different qualitatively?

**Janet:** Very different, in that it doesn't even feel like I was there--the "me" wasn't there. There was no thought as I was playing of "Did this go well? Was that good? Was that bad? What is anybody thinking of me? Will the presenter be happy? Will we get a good review? Does my dress look okay?" Any number of thoughts that can come into your head, are not there, and it's an incredibly wonderful thing to be that free of those thoughts, but meditation is about what is, and life is about what is, and if those thoughts are in your head, then it's interesting to notice them dispassionately, as "Oh, this thought is arising," and to not buy into it, to be a little more gentle towards yourself, and not, in a resistive, coercive way, force a concentration, or force a thought out of your mind. But just to see that it's part of conditioning, part of the self trying to assert itself, it's your consciousness trying to take the place of reality, really, of awareness, trying to say "this is real." And this is what happens, and it's not to be condemned.

For a long time, when I would play or rehearse, if a so-called negative feeling would come up--one of self-consciousness, concern, nervousness, fear, discomfort, agitation, defensiveness, attack, anger --anything like that, I would fight it. What meditation has done for me is that it helps me to

understand that there's no me, first of all, that is doing any of this--it is simply happening. Anger is felt, fear is coming, anxiety is coming--it's almost kind of wonderful, that these things happen to us. What is that feeling? What's going on? My hands are sweaty, my heart is beating fast--isn't this an incredible organism, that this happens? How remarkable! There can't be any "I," because I couldn't think to do something like that--I couldn't make my hand sweaty, there's no I to do that. It's an amazing thing.

**WHJ:** Do you think your music is different with this awareness?



Janet: I do, because I think that the listening is different. If there can be more presence, there's an openness to something without a conclusion already drawn. When I go into a performance thinking that things should be a certain way, that's resistance, that's when I feel nervous, because I think this should go a certain way and I'm scared that it won't. I want to know the future, and I haven't gotten there yet. I haven't even started to play and I want to know, "How's this going to be?" And we all want that, it's very common.

And so I'm nervous, I'm scared--there's fear, there's anxiety, there

might even be blame involved. If something isn't going right, it's somebody else's fault, because this is not the way it should be, this is not the future that I had fantasized in my mind. If I can see all that for what it is, then I'm back there, and I can hear what's happening. If I can be with a note, hearing what's happening, there's no conclusion to that note--it's like Hamlet doesn't know he's going to die. If the actor knows that Hamlet is going to die, then it's like a dead play. Or a dead piece of music. Brooks had a friend who used to call it "viewing the body," like wheeling out a corpse onto the stage--it's supposed to go like this, it's going to go like

this, and you feel like you're in control. But it's an illusion. There's no creativity in a performance like that. But if you can really not know, if you can say, "I don't know how this piece is going to end," then things can happen--a tempo can change, or somebody is doing a cadence and you just know that you have never heard this before. It's like an adventure. And where is there any time to judge that? It's not good it's not bad, it's actually happening at that moment! And at the end of performances like that I can almost get a little scared, and think "Did that go well? I wasn't in control." On the other hand, I really don't care about the answer to that question. I don't know, and I don't care, so it's very liberating.

**WHJ:** So now that you have some experience with a meditative practice, can you imagine your violin playing being a meditative practice?

**Janet:** It is--but I could see going to the bathroom as a meditative practice.

**WHJ:** But you don't spend the hours of practice...

**Janet:** That's true! But even more important than that is the relationship with colleagues, and with the audience, that is even a bigger part of the practice. Because let's face it, it's in the relationship with other people, or the fear of it, that causes us to bolster or create an image of ourselves so that we know we are good enough or better or deserving or whatever we need to convince ourselves that we can be loved--that's really what it is, isn't it?

**WHJ:** Although I've always thought that art and performance might start out as my own desire to be recognized and acknowledged and loved, but if I really get to the heart of it, it's my inclination to offer love out, giving the audience a gift.

**Janet:** Right, it totally changes. But I'm saying that if meditation can get you to see that, it sort of humbles you. Realizing that there is no "me" is just a deflating thing--not like a crestfallen deflation, just a lack of inflation, a lack of trying to create this image, trying to assert it and make sure it protects you. If that barrier comes down, then I think you're absolutely right, you realize that you are just love--you're not even giving, it's more like an un-self-conscious sharing of that, because there's nobody that's giving. It's a place of endless possibility. Imagine if performances had endless possibility--then you could really make a case for going to a concert rather than buying

a CD. Because the CD is dead, but a live performance hasn't happened, it's a present thing, there's a "who knows?" quality which is very exciting. If you can convey that as an artist, maybe even like a great teacher, that openness affects other people. So that's the sharing with the audience, so it can be a very spiritual thing in that sense.

**Brooks:** I think for me it's just been a release of concern, of feeling that if it doesn't go well, that's fine too. If it's too goal-oriented, that's the whole problem. Developing your skill at being goal-oriented can produce incredible things, and performances, but not peace of mind. I want to enjoy what I'm doing, and if I'm just practicing the art of making sure I never fall off the bike, ever, it's not that appealing or interesting to me, it's not freedom for me.

**WHJ:** Are you finding parallels of this dynamic in your life as well?

**Brooks:** Yes--in terms of my profile--my success as a performer has receded in importance to me. I used to think that if I couldn't at least prove myself on the instrument to certain people that were important to me, my sense of well-being would plummet. That has eased quite a bit. In order to be free with an instrument you have to easily picture your life without it. If you have a fierce attachment to "my life as a musician as it's going now" and an attachment to where you think you should be in x number of years, or whatever, then you're not free with the instrument. If it isn't the final verdict everytime you play as to whether you're where you should be, or if you don't feel like "it's this or nothing" then your playing and your musical life are a lot looser.

