

Wingdale Community Singers
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2:30 PM
The Philoctetes Center

Levy: Francis Levy
Nersessian: Edward Nersessian
Grubbs: David Grubbs
Katchadourian: Nina Katchadourian
Marcus: Hannah Marcus
Moody: Rick Moody
A: Speaker from Audience

Levy: I'm Francis Levy, co-director of the Philoctetes Center. Dr. Edward Nersessian is the other co-director, and welcome to the Wingdale Community Singers, an event I personally have been tremendously anticipating here at Philoctetes. We have had a number of musical events recently. We have a jazz improv series with Jane Ira Bloom and Louis Porter and we have a classical music series run by Stephanie Chase of the Music of the Spheres Society. This is the first time we've gone into a totally other area of music, which I am very loathe to try to describe. You'll just have to figure out exactly what kind of music this is when you listen to it, and then you can put a name on it.

I'm now pleased to introduce Rick Moody. Rick Moody is the author of four novels including *The Ice Storm* and *The Diviners*, three collections of stories, and a memoir, *The Black Veil*. His work has appeared in *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *Esquire*, *The Atlantic*, *Harper's* and many other publications. As a musician his releases include *Rick Moody and One Ring Zero*, *The Wingdale Community Singers* and the upcoming second album from the band, *Spirit Duplicator*. He is at work on a new novel. We were proud to have Rick on our inaugural panel on imagination, *What is Imagination*, and I felt since Rick is kind of an alumnus at Philoctetes and a supporter of Philoctetes, since you've been so helpful, that you would introduce the other members of the band.

Moody: I can't bear to read the bios, so you can just—they're out there. David Grubbs plays the electric guitar. I know my nieces and nephews specifically requested electric guitar, so he's the electric guitar player. David's made many records as members of the bands Squirrel Bait, Red Crayola, Gastra del Sol, and many, many solo albums. He now teaches in the department of music and radio—is that correct?

Grubbs: Television and radio.

Moody: At Brooklyn College. He got his PhD from University of Chicago and is that enough?

Grubbs: Yeah, that suffices.

Moody: Nina Katchadourian is next, rhythm guitar and accordion and vocals and tomato and potato—show those, tomato and potato. You guys see that? And she's a very accomplished visual artist and has a show up right now, a retrospective. Is that right? In San Diego?

Katchadourian: This one isn't really a retrospective. A show, it's a show.

Moody: It's in San Diego, yes, and she's also curator at The Drawing Center downtown and a musician as you can see, who's working on her first solo album. Hannah Marcus is the rhythm guitarist and violinist and singer and also has recorded five solo albums. The recent ones are on Bar None. They're really great. And that's me you've already heard about. Any questions so far?

The way this is going to work is we're going to play a little and talk a little and you guys should feel free to ask questions between songs at any time. I'll try and get these people to talk about the songs some and they will refuse. So you'd better ask a few questions and that's how it going to go.

Would you like to introduce the first song since it's yours?

Grubbs: Oh, and perhaps we should talk about the organizing.

Moody: Good point.

Grubbs: Conceit of the set. We're playing the songs in the order in which they were written, roughly. It was the conceit.

Marcus: This is a song called "Blue Daisy" from our first record. I shall say nothing more about it.

[PLAYS SONG]

Moody: Everything's analyzable in this gig, so we can—

Katchadourian: Just go for it.

Moody: Talk about Hannah chickening out on the violin solo.

A: How do you decide how to end a song?

Moody: Potato.

Katchadourian: Tomato. The tomato is higher pitched than the potato.

Moody: This song is called "Pawn Shop Fire" and that's what it's about. Dave came up with the subject and I wrote the lyrics. Hannah wrote the music. Any questions so far?

Levy: It seems like right away—

Moody: I bet he always asks the first question.

Levy: —considered photographic realism. You could see everything. And this next one sounds like it's almost like a news story.

Moody: Yeah I guess.

Marcus: Photographic realism.

Moody: Hannah wrote the lyrics on “Blue Daisy.”

Marcus: I'll tell my mother you said that. She's a photorealist. She'll be delighted.

Moody: All right, chord please, chord please.

[PLAYS SONG]

Grubbs: Can I say one thing about that song?

Moody: Yeah, sure.

Grubbs: I always think it's bad form to talk about how long it takes to write a song. On the one hand, you have people bragging that they can write a country song in ten minutes, or you have a more pop-baroque lyricist saying that they spent three years working—Leonard Cohen saying he spent three years writing a verse.

Katchadourian: Ten.

Grubbs: Ten years. Anyway, “Pawn Shop Fire” was a kind of experiment in the former, in accelerated song writing. And Rick does excel in this idea of accelerated song writing. He was casting about for topics and I agree with you that it sounds like a news story in the way that—in Harry Smith's booklet accompanying *The American Anthology of Folk Music*, each song was given a headline as if in a newspaper. So that's where the idea for “Pawn Shop Fire” came from.

Katchadourian: Isn't there a misunderstanding with the title too?

Moody: You mean there's an alternate title? In our family friendly environment—

Katchadourian: Oh, sorry.

Moody: —we're going to leave that one out.

A: So how fast was it written?

Moody: Less than ten minutes, maybe.

A: You wrote the lyrics in less than ten minutes?

Moody: Yeah, there were extra verses too. It got cut down.

A: That was cut down.

Grubbs: Because it takes me ten years to write a lyric.

Moody: The bulk of the lyric writing in the Wingdales goes this way: I write a lot of lyrics and then everyone cuts them down.

A: So you're editors?

Moody: Yeah. All right, so shall we play this next song?

Grubbs: Oh yeah, this is a good one.

Moody: This is sort of the hit on the first record to the extent that there is one.

Grubbs: It was the single.

Moody: It was the single. It's called "Give it a Kiss."

[PLAYS SONG]

Moody: Dave has to retune, so we could take a question if anyone has a question.

A: Are the tomato and the potato actually real?

Moody: Are they real tomatoes and potatoes? No, they're plastic. Would you like to come test it out?

A: That's okay.

A: Speaking of potato and tomato, I noticed that you play potato. Is that a conscious decision on your part, to use the potato, and is there ever a—

Katchadourian: A strike!

A: —about who gets to play with what?

Katchadourian: You know, I think it's a momentous day because it's the first time I've let you play a vegetable. They're actually mine, the potato and tomato, so I have some sort of role as the absent presence.

Moody: Presence in absence. Actually the potato—it's a potato that's more trebly, right?

Katchadourian: Yeah.

Moody: We've determined that in the kind of upper frequency range, the potato excels. So actually there is a little bit of a difference between the potato and the tomato.

A: I see that some of you are trained in classical western forms. Have you ever thought of using them as po-tah-to and tom-ah-to?

Katchadourian: That's a very good point. From now on. When we play in the U.K. we do refer to them in that manner.

Moody: Any other questions?

A: I was thinking when I was listening to this song—do you ever think consciously about where a song might fit in time potentially? Like it could only go back this far in history, and it could go up to the present or not? For instance, this song could have been any time, except for exhaust from a car sort of put it closer to the present. Do you think in those terms?

Moody: I think initially we thought of ourselves as departing from old time music in the real sense of the thing, at least when we first convened. Hannah and I started together, and it really was meant to be super old time kind of idiom. But the fact is that you can't write in that idiom anymore. That idiom really is sort of historically based. You can play those songs, and we actually really like to play those songs, but you can't write an old time song anymore because I think of post-modernity or whatever. It just can't be done. So we effectively realized that the only result is that you can take old chord structures and old musical forms, but that the lyrics would probably have to reflect something more contemporary. Unless you're like slavishly trying to imitate something that's from this prior year. That's my response to that.

A: You ask someone to give you a kiss in the Ozarks in the '20s, they come after you with a switch.

Moody: Yeah, exactly. It's different trying to say those things with a song now. It can't be done.

Marcus: Also, the thing that I think actually we've succeeded in, in a couple of songs—I mean, we veered from that sort of project a lot. But it's that old time music was about the present, was very much about what was going on immediately in the present. If we were going to write, it was sort of like news. That was always the concept. It was actually about what's happening now, so why be afraid of writing about your experience now. It's easy to romanticize, you know, writing about West Virginia in the '20s, but I'm not there. I'm at the Philoctetes. We've been pronouncing it wrong.

Katchadourian: Yeah, I think we have.

A: It's okay. Everybody pronounces it different.

Katchadourian: Oh really, it's a free-for-all?

Marcus: It would be good for a rhyme in a song, but Philoc-TE-tes I think is better than PHILOC-te-tes.

Moody: The other answer to the question is that as a result of sort of tilting at the old time thing, I do think it's true that we've ended up making music that doesn't sound like it's specifically now in a way. I mean, you could take our first record: it could have been made at any time since 1966 basically. And look at us. It's not like we have a lot of digital stuff up here. So even though I don't think it can really be done—you can't duplicate the old form—it is possible to simplify, and song writing right now seems so technologically based. It's nice—for me, anyway, I assume

for the rest of the band—and refreshing to kind of clear away all the technology of modern music making and just get together and sing.

A: I think that explains—what was striking me was how modern and how old it sounded at the same time. And how un-self-consciously so. How was it so un-self-conscious and yet so aware. Writing about now makes it modern, but it also makes it old because that’s what the old songs were about.

Grubbs: The next song is about a photograph, entitled “Family Plot: Mayfield, Kentucky.” And it’s a photograph by Walker Evans of a group of cemetery statues in western Kentucky. William Faulkner wrote about it and he described the photo saying, “The statues defend the dead from our kind. They shield the dust, the harmless dust from anguish, grief, inhumanity.” I thought it was an interesting song about a graveyard in which the dead need to be protected from humanity. So this is called “Family Plot: Mayfield, Kentucky.”

[PLAYS SONG]

Katchadourian: Does this next song pass the family wholesomeness test? Your call.

Moody: I was out in San Francisco a couple of years ago. Hannah and I were doing a show at a great bookstore out there, City Lights Bookstore. I was sort of walking around downtown, and if any of you have been in San Francisco, you know that there’s a lot of burlesque type shows there. I walked by this marquee that boasted—it said “Naked Goth Girls.” I thought, this is the craziest thing I had ever heard, and I called Hannah and said, we should try to write a song about this. And so we did.

A: As long as it’s not worse than Snoop Dogg I think we’ll be all right.

Moody: Were you listening to Snoop Dogg on the way up? All right, ready?

Marcus: Actually, this is a good example of the Moody songwriting sort of explosion that’s a proliferation of ideas. It has nothing to do with naked goth girls at all.

Moody: Yeah. Actually—

Grubbs: Cuban revolution.

Moody: Yeah, it’s about illegal immigrants and trying to express compassion for their struggle.

Marcus: When I started writing it, it had more to do about naked goth girls. Okay. One, two three.

[PLAYS SONG]

Levy: The accordion really was an interesting surprise for me because when I first met my wife, Hallie Cohen, who is taking the photographs, she told me she played the spoons, but she also played the accordion and that was the most un-cool thing to play. I would jazz her about this. I loved it, and it kind of reminded me—what I was free-associating to was kind of Brecht and like

Mahagonny a little bit. I don't know if that was used in that or if that's one of the instruments, but it's fantastic. It's an underused instrument.

Katchadourian: It's a great instrument. It's a dorky instrument. I love it, and probably for that reason. I love dorky instruments. I play this, the dorkiest instrument ever, the recorder. I mean, could it get worse? Maybe potato and tomato is worse. But I think it's a wonderful instrument too. In some ways this kind of instantly old world feeling for me that comes into things when you hear an accordion too.

Moody: Salt in the air.

Katchadourian: We've not really talked about this, but to me it fits the song in part because it is about people from elsewhere, and immigrants and things that are kind of worlds clashing in a way.

Moody: I think it adds really nice tonal color. I remember as a kid one time after my parents got divorced my father had his fortieth birthday party and he was looking around for the worst music he could have strolling through the party and he said, "We hired a guy with an agony box!" That turned out to be the accordion. He wanted this sort of horrible guy strolling through with the agony box. For a while I think I had childhood trauma associated with the agony box. Do you remember this? That's my brother.

A: It also provided me a little bit of the Lawrence Welk lederhosen bit. It's just wonderful.

Moody: But that's the thing. You can cast against type a little bit and get some mileage out of it.

A: I will say the accordion's not as unusual as it used to be, because now we have the annual accordion festival at Riverside Park South, created by my friend Robin Schatell.

Moody: Yeah, I love them now. I think they're great. Would you like to speak to the next song since it's yours?

Marcus: I don't think there's really anything to say about it.

Moody: This is a real country song I guess.

[PLAYS SONG]

Moody: Any questions?

Marcus: Your nephew has a question.

A: What's tequila?

Moody: Tequila? It's a kind of drink that comes from South of the Border, basically. I think it's fermented agave, is that right? It comes with a little worm in the bottom of the bottle, and the big thing is when you finish the bottle you're supposed to eat the worm.

Grubbs: He's not making it up, it's really true.

Moody: Other questions?

A: You sing together so beautifully and you're all so accomplished and do so many other wonderful things. Do you practice together regularly throughout the year? Is it part of your regular week or do you get together before performances?

Moody: Ah, the brutal truth.

Katchadourian: We do all have a lot of other lives going, but we often play when there's an opportunity to play too. A show becomes a reason to get together and play and write more. It's good to have deadlines sometimes, speaking for myself anyway. We certainly don't play every week. I think this is our first live show since last summer because we've been working hard on our record, and that's where we've been putting our time and energy.

Moody: It's good to sing together if we want to sing the harmony though. I've been drilling harmonies. It's how it happens. A big influence for the band is this old group, The Carter Family. In fact we're going to sing a Carter Family song later. I remember asking Hannah one time how the old country singers got their entrances and their exits down so well, and they did it just by drilling, just sing together as much as you can. I think we're getting better at the trying to get the uncanny harmony thing down a little bit. That's the goal. Because it's a lost art. There's not a lot of harmony singing anymore.

A: People have been whispering about these records that you've worked on. What's the best way to get your recordings? Online, or how do you buy them?

Moody: Our stuff? I have albums that people can buy after the show. We've got a psychoanalyst discount, which is they normally cost \$15, but you guys pay \$45, because if you pay you'll take it more seriously. Actually it's an hour's worth of entertainment so it should be about \$150, right?

Grubbs: I was about to say, I think as a group we've spent much more on therapy than on recording costs.

Moody: Sad but true. Okay, the next song I wrote the lyrics, and I wrote them after I spent a while in the art tours and destination of Marfa, Texas, so that's kind of what it's about. Hannah wrote the music.

A: What is Marfa, Texas?

Moody: It's south of El Paso in the middle of nowhere. The entire county is the size of Rhode Island and it has 7,000 people in the whole county. I think 4,000 of them live in Marfa.

Katchadourian: 2,200.

Moody: West Texas, south of El Paso.

Katchadourian: It's become a famous place because there was a minimalist sculptor named Donald Judd, one of our big American minimalist sculptors, and he moved there and lived there

and made a lot of work there. I've actually gone there for the first time myself recently because I'm working on a project there and it's an amazing place. There's something about the landscape and also the way his sculpture is situated in that landscape that is really fascinating. It's well worth a trip. It's a great field trip. Has anyone ever been there?

A: Army barracks.

Katchadourian: Yeah, army barracks. He redesigned a bunch of army barracks and then built sculptures in them, and so you've got kind of his sculptures and then the sculpture of the building and then the outside around it. It's an amazing place. But there's also an edge of creepiness to it, which I think is what Rick was responding to.

Moody: The creepy part is kind of the way the town itself is very Hispanic, and then it's completely ringed by rancher culture.

A: Is there an Armani Exchange there?

Katchadourian: There's a Prada store, but it's been built as a project by artists. It's a wonderful project actually. It's a side of the road, freestanding building. It says "Prada Marfa" and you see through the glass these Prada shoes and bags and all these things. I think the pieces are from 2005 and the idea on the part of the artists was that they would not do anything to it. It was built and left alone and it is really falling apart now. There are bullet holes in the glass. When I was there you could see someone had taken a couple shots at them and lots of dead bugs inside and it's slowly just, like so many things there do, kind of falling apart naturally. That's part of the concept of the piece too. So yeah, Prada Marfa.

Moody: The song is called "Rancho de la Muerta."

[PLAYS SONG]

Marcus: Oh yeah, you can just hear everything I'm saying.

Moody: Any other questions?

A: What do they think about you in Wingdale Community?

Moody: Oh, the name of the band is the Wingdale Community Singers, after the famous de-institutionalized psychiatric hospital called Harlan Valley Psychiatric, aka, Wingdale, which is a place I used to drive by as a kid and always found very terrifying. We were looking for sort of a folksy band name that had a numinous subtext, so we came up with that. I don't think that there really is or are too many people in Wingdale now. They're just the hulking remains, so I'm not sure they have an opinion.

A: One thing I really enjoyed about the songs is the way that you'll zoom into a phrase like "a new barbed wire" or the "Castro regime" or "naked goth girls" and it feels bizarre. The selection of the phrase is a little bit odd and then it becomes the whole picture in a way. Is that something that you do consciously? The emphasized phrase? Or is that—

Moody: Maybe you should answer that, because at least for me what's interesting is that when I hand stuff over to Hannah, she comes at it how she comes at it, and there's a way that group composition supervenes on my individual intention as a lyricist and that's a good example of that back there.

A: What's so interesting is that all the instruments that you use in that song, that last part in which the potato and tomato took a space—soft—I think it's very informative.

Moody: Well it's interesting that you say that because on the recording the accordion is still on that part, is it not?

Katchadourian: Not sure. There's drums that come in.

Marcus: That's true, the drums.

A: The agony box, you know, this is—

Moody: Wait, did you say you're Portuguese?

A: No, I am Venezuelan. What I say is this. That the accordion, that space, that timing of the song at the end would be saying more.

Moody: You're pro-accordion, I like that. It's good, thank you.

Katchadourian: We would have to hand over the vegetables to somebody else to play at that point.

Moody: Stunned by her silence. Go ahead.

Marcus: You mean in the face of the—

Moody: You're just saying nothing. Normally we can't keep her quiet.

Marcus: I'm afraid. No I'm just—

Moody: Is your therapist here?

Marcus: No, I don't think so. I don't want to take too long to look around.

Moody: That means yes.

Marcus: No, I don't think so.

Grubbs: Her therapist is on vacation in Romania.

Marcus: In Argentina. It was like an obscure Lacanian joke—we were trying to see how many times we could reference Lacan in subtext.

Grubbs: Wait, I have a news bulletin.

Moody: It's 6-3? Oh, I had 6-2 Mets over the Yankees, top of the seventh I believe?

A: Bottom.

Katchadourian: Wow, someone is really checking this out.

Marcus: Good news. Okay, here's a song called "I'm in the Mood to Drive." I really have not much to say about this. Do you think that I should say something more about it?

Moody: Sing something about it.

Marcus: Yeah.

[PLAYS SONG]

Katchadourian: Please, we're not letting you off the hook for this one. It's a gorgeous song. She's trying to weasel out.

Moody: I hate singing lead vocals.

Grubbs: We'll talk about that.

Moody: Any questions?

Katchadourian: There might be someone here who could help you.

A: Can you say a little bit about how about when you're making a song, like you're doing more lyrics, or when you're doing one part and someone else is doing another, how—

Moody: That was actually sort of interesting in this song, because Hannah had about half of the song done for a really long time and I was very passionate about the song but it sort of wasn't getting finished. One day I sat down and I said—this is my recollection—I'm going to finish the song for you. And I just banged out a whole bunch of lyrics that I think maybe you didn't like? So what happened was she—Hannah's an awesome arranger of vocal lines. I think she thinks in harmonies sort of the way Brian Wilson thinks in harmonies, just very panoramic. She had this idea for two parts running against each other and basically took this set of lyrics that I had written and said, I'm just going to run this over the top of what I'm doing at the same time. Essentially she wrote a kind of second song that's the descant part. Eventually Nina and I just arranged and worked on this, getting this harmony right on this separate line, and kind of overlaid it over the Hannah part. Is that your recollection?

Marcus: Yes, it is.

A: So how does one come to think in harmonies?

Moody: Wow, yeah.

Marcus: That's an interesting question. Think in harmony.

Moody: Can you answer that?

Marcus: Well, I don't know. It's a good question.

Katchadourian: I think you do a lot of singing along to yourself, or with things in the car. I grew up doing that with my family, belting out things in the car.

Marcus: I'm particularly interested in two completely different things going on at the same time, especially different lyrics going on at the same time.

Moody: Anything else?

A: What's it like to write music for someone else's lyrics?

Marcus: I love writing music to someone else's lyrics, and I particularly like writing music to things that aren't meant to be lyrics. One of the first things I think, even before we started writing songs together, I wrote a song based on a passage in *Purple America*. I really like to manipulate the timing of words so that either rhyme comes out that you might not have, or an alliteration comes out that you might not have heard before, or sentences split. Like what Francis said, the Wingdale Community Sinners—I mean Singers. Sinners. God did I say that?

Moody: Is there a psychoanalyst in the room?

Marcus: Ever since you suggested that my psychotherapist is in the audience somewhere—. Anyway, so if you divide a sentence like what Diana was saying, if you suddenly bring out a clause of a sentence that's unexpected, you can sort of change the whole mood. That's what song writing is to me, is making something vitalizing.

Moody: Okay, here we go.

Marcus: Whew. Finally Rick is in the mood to sing.

Moody: No, I just want to get it over with. This is called "I Was Once a Young Man," and it's the rare song that I wrote the music on, actually.

[PLAYS SONG]

Grubbs: I can't believe that you were going to deprive people of that song, that's all I'm going to say. That's one thing about playing in a group with a lot of talented songwriters is that it's a little—like, it's difficult to appreciate your own music, and it's very easy to appreciate other people's music, and that's one of the great virtues of this group is listening to other people's songs and hearing other people's creative process, witnessing other people's creative process.

A: What was the inspiration for that song?

Moody: I don't know. The truth is it rarely happens, at least for me. There's so much anguish associated with the music writing. I can write words without much difficulty, or that's how it seems to me, but the music part I really get stuck on, and it can be months and months and

months before I find a way to bring out music. That's why it's great to write with someone who's such a gifted musician. Most of the time I don't have to worry about it. But every now and then I'll actually get a musical idea as opposed to a lyrical idea, and in this case I literally woke up one morning, ran downstairs, got the guitar, brought it back up to bed, and suddenly I had the beginning, the first verse of the song. I don't know how that happens. I guess that's what imagination and creativity are really about. That part of the process is ineffable and you can't quantify it or qualify it. I wish that sort of thing happened with me more often because when I actually write music I feel so excited and so kind of overwhelmed with joy, because it's so different from what I normally do.

A: It really has an enchanting beginning.

Moody: Does that mean the end is bad?

A: When you do that, were you humming something to yourself?

Moody: Yeah, with me when I get it, it's all melody. It's never chords. For me the chords are the last thing to put in place. It's all about the melody. My best music writing time is walking around. Like I just try to think of melodies and sing them to myself, walking around.

Grubbs: Talking about the different experiences between writing literature and writing music—there's an interview with John Cage that's in the Smithsonian archive, where he says something like, I desire immediate gratification, that's why I had to be a composer. That's why I had to write on paper knowing that it would be six months before hearing this. He said, I don't understand how writers do it. I write a line of prose and I'm so satisfied with that I think I have to have a drink after that. But the delayed gratification of writing pieces of music, although that's a very different process from picking up an acoustic guitar and playing—the paper composer. I thought that was interesting.

A: It might also interfere with the development of further prose.

Grubbs: Yeah.

A: I noticed in a few songs that there are discordant elements, and then you end songs on chords that don't sort of resolve the melody, and that is a very strong kind of lingering effect with the music that I really like. A kind of haunted quality.

Moody: Me too. Hannah is really incredibly gifted at interesting—like the tritone for example. There's one song that has a tritone in it, where that's an unresolved theoretically bad musical gesture, but I feel like, awesome. If the melody sort of goes there for a period there's a real emotional response to that that I find incredibly satisfying now also. For me, the I-IV-V, without the old chord progression, the old rock and roll progressions get really hackneyed. I like irresolution. It seems more human somehow to me. The next song—

A: It pulls. The end pulls the emotion of the sound.

Moody: I think it's more like human emotional life if it's irresolute in some way. Speaking of which, Nina's song is next, and you really have to address this.

Katchadourian: I have to address this? Before or after I play it?

Moody: As you wish.

Katchadourian: Just a little before and maybe a little after. I had a pillow when I was a kid that I named. I guess because I loved it so much I named it. And I named it Poufelia, which sounds sort of Latinish to me. I don't know. It doesn't mean anything.

A: Ophelia.

Katchadourian: Ophelia, yeah, I don't know. But her name was Poufelia, and it also seemed to be a she. In one of those moments of—I still feel sort of scarred by the misunderstanding. My mother didn't realize how important this pillow was to me and one day threw it out. It's kind of been this lost object for a long time, where did the pillow go? This is sort of an ode to the lost pillow Poufelia. We can discuss the implications of this later I guess.

[PLAYS SONG]

Moody: End of the eighth, 6-4, Mets still leading. That damn bullpen.

Marcus: I'm obviously not a violinist, so pardon me, but I'm learning, and I really love to play. This was a piano solo on an incredibly beautiful recording of this song that will be out on the next Wingdale CD. Since there's no piano at the Philoctetes Center I did it on the violin. It's coming along.

A: I've heard you guys play a number of times, but I think only once has been in a normal music venue. I mean, there are probably other times I haven't been there, but—

Moody: Are you calling this a normal music venue?

A: No, but I'm thinking we always should see a concert where people ask questions, so I was wondering how that—if you think it affects your performing and how.

Katchadourian: To be talking? Not just playing?

A: Not just to be talking but I remember seeing you perform at a—

Moody: Yes, the water tower show.

Katchadourian: How does the space affect—what do you guys think?

Moody: I'm really enjoying the relaxed peace, because normally I feel like we have thirty-eight minutes, we have to like hurdle through the songs, and it's very rare actually that we talk about this stuff, so it's sort of satisfying in a way to just relax and do it. This is actually the way we play most of the time, in Hannah's apartment. We don't run a rehearsal studio or anything. We just sit around and play. So it's sort of more our kind of idiom, I think.

Katchadourian: I think the great luxury of a situation like this one or sometimes others is that we really do deal a lot with lyrics, and when people can actually hear them as opposed to in a club or

somewhere where there's a bar and it's noisy—I always feel like we're sort of half the band when we're in that kind of a venue, because half of it's really not perceptible. I can't tell you how nice it is to have the sense that people are listening.

Moody: We stopped doing literary events because they never listen. It was writers. It's like they stand there and they gab, gab, gab.

Grubbs: This is the greatest crowd I've ever seen in my life. The experience that I've had of talking most on stage was a number of years ago. I was supposed to play a solo show in Nashville and it got cancelled at the last minute and the person who organized it said something like, well, you have a free night. Maybe you want to see what the real experience is of the working musician in Nashville, so you can play from 10:00 to 12:00—I don't know if I've ever told you all this—on Music Row. You know, there's no sound check, you just plug in at 10:00, you finish at 12:00, you're playing for tips. Nobody will have heard any of your music before—there'll be no context, so maybe if you could explain a little bit between songs. I'm used to playing for about forty minutes rather than two hours, and so I would play a couple songs, then talk for about five minutes, and essentially if you can imagine this event transposed to kind of a honky-tonk bar on Music Row in Nashville, that's a little bit what it was like.

I wound up having the best time. Some guy who looked like Garth Brooks gave me a \$20 tip to share the stage and let him sing a song to his fiancé, and all this stuff. It was really, really nice. I had such a great time and at 11:45—it was like the longest set I'd ever played—I said thanks very much, this was a terrific experience. The woman who ran the place nearly vaulted over the bar to block me from leaving and she said, “Honey, you got fifteen more minutes to play.” I said, “Oh, come on, people couldn't want to hear ten more seconds of this.” And she was like, “You are playing until 12:00.” But being put in that situation where you really have to contextualize the songs was a fantastic experience. In fact I found myself reflecting about that night at the Music Inn in Nashville today. The same thing.

Moody: You're not known for your country western songs, so I guess I wonder what it's like to play more traditional melodies.

Grubbs: It's a great relief. I play all different kinds of music. I grew up playing in punk bands, trained as a classical pianist. I do a lot of electric and acoustic music for film and sound installations. So yeah, I wouldn't have it any other way.

A: Does it feel different?

Grubbs: You know, it's weird. What can I say? In some ways I listen to the open string of an electric guitar playing a three-chord song, and it's like listening to the open string of Tony Conrad playing a minimalist violin piece for two hours. There's something about the very materials out of which these songs are constructed that is actually remarkably similar even in very different types of music. It's always just, I mean for me, a guitar.

Moody: Shall we play another song?

Grubbs: We should have.

Moody: I think we're driving people out, so we're not going to go on too much longer.

Grubbs: Also, Rick, a very good technique in playing in front of an audience is to say things like, we've got a couple of songs left.

Moody: Okay, we've got a couple of songs left.

Grubbs: Like in a baseball game there are nine innings. There's an end in sight.

Moody: Then we have 3.5 more innings.

Grubbs: Well, we've got three songs and an encore left.

Moody: Yes, okay. Should we cut one? All right, let's go to "My Les Paul" then. We have two songs left.

Grubbs: Maybe they'll cut the encore. People aren't supposed to laugh when I said we have three songs and an encore left.

Grubbs: All right. Honey, you got to play until midnight.

Marcus: One, two, three.

[PLAYS SONG]

Moody: Okay, next to last song is by Hannah.

Marcus: This song is about a guitar that I sold and no longer have. I enjoyed it while it lasted.

[PLAYS SONG]

Moody: Any questions? Well, thank you so much. The aforementioned Carter family.

[PLAYS SONG]

Moody: We do have one last thing that we did especially for this event, in fact. But are there any questions before we play the last one?

A: When's the next show?

Moody: June 28th, Barbès in Brooklyn, Park Slope, 9th Street and 5th Avenue. 8:00 p.m.

A: What's it called?

Moody: Barbès.

Katchadourian: So rather than that contrived thing of leaving and then playing an encore, this is the last song. Thank you for having us and this is really the last song we're going to play.

Moody: This is sort of worth mentioning in the kind of folk idiom. There's a very famous song by Woody Guthrie everybody knows called "This Land is Your Land," and it turns out that Woody stole the melody from the Carter family, correct?

Marcus: Yeah, basically.

Moody: He stole the melody. He was actually really a lyricist and he kind of filched the melodies as many folk players did in those days.

Marcus: But then they grabbed it from—

Moody: They had stolen it from a blues singer.

Marcus: Blind Willie Davis, I think.

Moody: Blind somebody or other, the blues singer. And he in fact had gotten this idea—his song was called "Rock of Ages" from this old spiritual. So this is about four times removed from this song which we—

Marcus: And actually they made up a slightly different melody to his lyrics and then Woody Guthrie took the melody and made his lyrics fit the melody.

Grubbs: We changed the title to "Rick of Ages."

Moody: "Rock of Ages," new lyrics, old melody.

Marcus: One, two, three.

[PLAYS SONG]