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## Composer channels cancer experiences in new work

Posted by Sandra Thacker, SCENE Producer | Saturday February 2, 2013

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Composer Vincent Ho (WSO), Gwenda Nemerofsky (Ken Lee)

This piece is my response to the preciousness of life, the importance of the little things that make life worth living and how important some people are in our lives. —Vincent Ho, composer  
Cancer is a disease that touches everyone. And when a friend's struggle with cancer touched composer Vincent Ho, he responded - by drawing on that experience and channeling it into a new composition.

That new work is called *From Darkness to Light: A Spiritual Journey*. It's part of a continuing collaboration with Dame Evelyn Glennie that began last year when Vince wrote *The Shaman Percussion Concerto* for her.

This new work is dedicated to the memory of his friend, Dutch-American painter Luc Leestemaker, who was diagnosed with cancer and painted throughout his illness. Both his paintings and Ho's composition express the horrors of the disease and the fight people face. It's essentially Ho's personal response to cancer.

But Ho didn't just rely on his own emotions for inspiration. He opened up a dialogue with a number of people going through cancer treatment and heard their stories.

One of the people he spoke to was Winnipegger Gwenda Nemerofsky. She was diagnosed with a very aggressive recurrent form of gynecological cancer in August 2011. Since then Nemerofsky has endured surgery, radiation and she is on her fourth type of chemotherapy.

According to Nemerofsky, having cancer has changed everything in her life. "I'm one of those people who likes to know what's happening and plan a lot" she says. "And now there are so many unknowns. There's so much I can't plan for. It's affected my feeling of well-being. I don't have energy. I can't work as much as I used to and I can't play with my granddaughter in the same way."

Nemerofsky admired Ho's work and agreed to share her experiences with him. "The idea of being a part of this was very touching to me and very meaningful. Vince is easy to talk to. I cried a lot. I kind of unloaded on him, poor guy."

Ho feels that through the process, he learned a lot about himself. "I approach composing like a method actor. I really need to get into the emotional headspace. So I tried to imagine what it was like to be in the shoes of someone who's going through that."

While he was writing last May, Leestemaker died. "That really hit home for me. And a month later I experienced the birth of my first child. So during the creation process I was experiencing the extremities of loss and gain."

"This piece is my response to the preciousness of life, the importance of the little things that make life worth living and how important some people are in our lives," he says.

Nemerofsky can't wait for the premiere. "It's very meaningful for me. I'm going to be listening hard to hear myself in that piece. It feels like it's a bit of a legacy as well. It's something that will be there always, even when I'm not."

*Hear From Darkness to Light: A Spiritual Journey featuring the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra with Dame Evelyn Glennie on Saturday February 2, 8:00 p.m. at the Centennial Concert Hall.*

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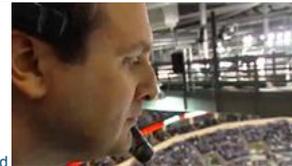
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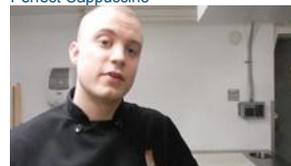
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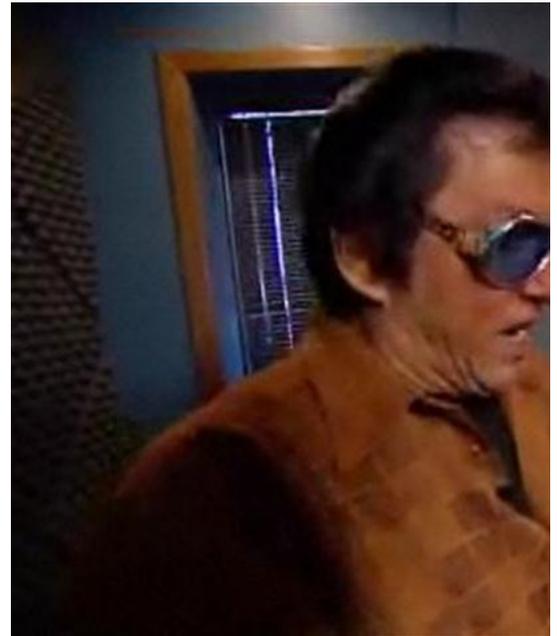


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