



5 QUESTIONS

CONCERT PIANIST, SOUND SCULPTRESS

ROSE PFAFF

Corning glass, Brazilian rosewood and thick wall brass — for Rose Pfaff, a composer and musician, these are the components for making music. Pfaff is a pioneer of sound sculpture, a type of performance art in which she explores music and sound via an 11-foot-tall construct of her own design. And she is an accomplished vocalist and pianist. Last fall, Pfaff collaborated with local author Pamela King Cable to create “Piano Music for ‘Southern Fried Women,’” a program that combined a live reading of King Cable’s book with gospel music and piano.



MOLLY BARTELS/NEWS & RECORD

Rose Pfaff plays on a mock-up of one of her sound sculptures in her Greensboro studio.

1 How did you get involved with the “Southern Fried Women” project?

I got a call from Pamela King Cable’s publicist, who had heard about me from the Women’s Professional Forum. She asked me, if they were to send me a publicity packet and an autographed copy of the book, would I look at it and consider working on the project? I said I would.

Well, I read the book on a Saturday afternoon and literally put it down afterward, went over to my grand piano in my studio and composed the music in an hour and a half.

2 Could you describe the process of composing music for a literary work?

Well, it all depends on what the literary work is. For instance, if it’s for poetry, the image of what instruments would be played comes from the actual literary work itself.

3 How did you begin your work in the field of sound sculpture?

A near-death experience in the summer of ’71 at the Albany medical hospital in Albany, N.Y.

I was taken out of my body and into the cosmos, and I looked down and I could see the Earth. ... I was baptized in the cosmos.

The Lord brought me down after I had seen what he wanted me to see, and he brought me back down to Earth. There was a tiny white light there, and the Lord said, “That’s you,” calling me Rose.

It came to me then that if I was going to join the white light, I was going to have to join in the singing, so I started singing what the angels were singing.

That’s when I came out of my coma — singing. I was looking up at my husband, and he said, “Are you singing?” And I said, “Yes, and I have been reborn, and I am well.”

When I got back home, I started taking walks, and I found myself walking into a hardware store where I bought some hardwood and some sheet metal.

4 What’s the most bizarre material or item that you have used to make music?

Sailboat pulleys.

5 What is the best compliment that you have received for your work?

In 1990, when the Works of Art Committee of the National Museum of Women in the Arts created a file for me based on my work in sound sculpture.

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