

## DAVID ADICKES

DA: **06:03** Well, for God, all kinds of reasons. If it's good, it livens up the landscape. It's something – it's the same thing as paintings in a private collection except it's for the public – or sculpture. I mean it's something thousands, millions of people can see and interpret their own way. It's not as important as trees, and lakes and sunsets but close, in my opinion.

I: What role do you think the public play in public art in terms of you create something, what is their role in the whole process?

DA: **06:39** Well the role the public art, uh the public in public art is they are effectively the audience. And the artist will either do something to please them or not; it depends on the artist himself. **06:56** The scale between one and ten, I would say most are about nine or ten – in pleasing. Some are one and two that have no intention of pleasing, but they're pleasing themselves or the dealers or something like that. But, of course, it's for the public. They are the audience. **07:10** It's like – would you make a television broadcast if nobody on the set – you know, it's the same thing. They are the recipients of it.

I: Uh, let's talk about the piece. Tell me about the name of the piece and – that you have downtown – and tell me the back story of it.

DA: **07:26** The piece downtown at the Lyric Center is called the Virtuoso, and it was commissioned by Joe Russo. And he named it "Virtuoso" because it's kind of close to "Russo". But, I just going to call it "The Cellist", and he said, "Let's call it Virtuoso." I said, "It's fine." You know? It was commissioned in '83 for that building – site-specific to that building. **07:48** It was even completed before the building was, and it was – it was interesting the idea – the motif that he was looking for. He said, "I just want something that expresses the arts downtown, either theater, dance, music, writing, drama, or all of the above." So I designed something, it was sort of like – almost like a wedding cake of some shelves. And on one of them was three musicians. **08:17** On the other were three dancers. On another one was a conductor and music, and the other one was drama and what-not. And so, to show him – it was kind of a complicated piece – to show him how it was going to look, I had one of the musicians, namely a cello, done about this high. And so he came to my studio upstairs and says, "That's it. You don't need any more than that. Why crowd it up?" **08:39** It doesn't express all of the arts, but it expresses one of them: music. And its – it's a – I think it's a great symbol – a great icon for Lyric Center. I said, "Okay." So, that's what I did – and made it big – made it 36 feet. It was originally going to go – be about 6 feet.

I: Why did you make it so big?

DA: **08:57** Well, it needs to be big to have any importance and be – in relationship to the building. It's the same height as those columns in front – those polished steel columns? And, so I found out they were 36, and I just picked that number to make the top of the cello equal to that if you're looking at it from another angle. **09:19** But, 36 feet felt about right for that spot, so I think it was the right size. It is the right size.

I: Describe the piece for me.

DA: **09:29** Well, it's – it's steel and concrete. Mostly – concrete is what you see – with a big steel armature inside – of an abstract cellist. The cello is – you know – is slightly concave in front, and I wanted depth – I mean, it's convex – and I wanted real depth, so I made it a “V” shape where the cello goes in – you feel that feeling of the space of the inside of a cello.

I: Could you start that over just so we get the – the whole ... thing about it being –

DA: **09:56** Okay. Of course, a real cello is convex slightly in shape in front, but I didn't – I wanted something that had a lot of depth to it so I reversed it and made it a “V” shape – a deep concave shape inside with the strings in front and the bow and the hand and so forth, just to give it depth. And I tilted it to give it some angularity – just – everything you do is just to make it more interested, basically. **10:24** It could have been a real cello and a real person, and I don't think it would have been that interested, so – also, it works with modern architecture, and it's also whimsical, which is what he liked. It's what we both wanted. We wanted – we didn't want something really serious and – boring.

[Phone ringing]

DA: Uh-oh – just let it go. It'll – it'll answer it – a machine will get it.

[Phone ringing]

Crew: We [inaudible]

I: Okay. Can you relate particulars about how long it take to create? What were any challenges that you faced putting it together?

DA: **11:00** It took about – almost a year to create it. The actual – actual fabrication was closer to 9 months. I spent a couple of months going through all sorts of sketches and ideas to see what I wanted to do. -- That's usually about one-third of any project – to figure out what it's going to be – and then the doing of it is usually the other two-thirds. **11:22** There were no challenges that I didn't meet.

The challenge was just simply what's it going to be like? What is the concept that you want to portray?

I: And what was the concept that you wanted to portray for him?

DA: **11:38** Be over the arts – the fine arts – the Lyrics arts, and music in particular in this case, and – but – as a sculptor, I just wanted something big and interesting to look at. As – as you know, it's wired for sound, which was my idea. It plays chamber music 24 hours a day. It has interior lights. It lights itself so it doesn't need any outside flood lights, which was another idea of mine that took a while to figure out how that was going to work. **12:11** And, there was – at one point there was thought of doing it maybe in some combination of colors, but I thought, no, white is the right – white is right for this one. And – no great challenges. If there were, I've forgotten, because that was a long time ago. The challenges have a way of disappearing from my memory.

I: How about the back side of the piece?

DA: **12:36** Well, originally, it was designed in this reverse “V”, so coming out of the building, all you see is the – is this – the apex of the “V”, and it didn't seem interesting at all. So then I decided to do three life-size abstract figures – a trio – behind it – behind it. And there's – a violinist, a flute, and a bass – a string base, and that was just to give interest to the back side of it. **13:01** I just thought it was sort of boring on the back side.

I: What kind of reactions did you get from people with – for the piece?

DA: **13:08** The people loved it; the critics hated it. -- Yeah. Strange enough, the three – the four major downtown pieces were all done within a few months of each other, and then there was nothing since for 15 years. So there was a lot of excitement about new downtown sculptures, and it seemed that there was going to be one coming along every year. But for some reason it didn't. **13:31** That was just one of those curves – peak of the curve. Everybody seemed to like it, but the – the criticism was bad and – from the – Rice Department of Architecture that publishes a little deal called Cite – Le Cite or U. Cite Magazine. They didn't like it, but it was – they were – I think what they want is something more architectonic like the steel pieces that – that were blossoming all over the country – the ... and that sort of thing, but – **14:01** so Joe Russo was a little bit disturbed about this criticism, so he had a company – like a Gallup Poll thing – a local company take a poll of 500 people down – who work downtown over the lunch hours – it took several days – and he had pictures of the other three statues – the Miro, which was new; the De Bufet; and the Louise Nevelson – and mine. **14:26** And the deal was if you – first of all, you know, you can't vote unless you've seen them all, and

secondly, which one do you like the most, which one do you like the least, and some other comment on it. Well, mine came out 67% liking it the most and 4% liking it the least, and – the expensive one, the Miro, which cost about \$1 million dollars all together, was the least liked. So, he – then he felt better about that, and he had it published and sent to people and what-not. **14:54** So, that was – but ever since then, there's been very little criticism of it, and I think most people love it because it's whimsical. People – all the time tell me that when they have visitors in town they take 'em down there. **15:07** I know there's a lot of photographing in front of it, and it was used on two rock 'n' roll albums – 'cause I was down there one day when there was a group that looked like the Kiss – they had black lipstick and all that stuff – posing for it. I went up and talked to one of the guy and he says, "It's a hell of a way to make a living, isn't it?" – It was black lipstick – 'cause he was sort of a macho kind of guy otherwise. It was used in Fortune magazine, I believe, as a symbol of Houston – when they did various cities, they just used that as the little icon for Houston. **15:37** But it's certainly not an icon for Houston, I mean, it's far from it. The astrodome used to be. Now that it's defunct, I don't know what the icon for Houston is. But anyhow –

I: Go ahead, you were going to say?

DA: **15:48** -- It's been well received after the initial shock of it, which is fairly typical of almost anything – the Eiffel Tower – the great – greatest case in history – the Parisians were about ready to string up Eiffel by his toes, you know, and now it's the symbol of France, so – it takes a while to get used to something that's a shock.

I: Uh-unh [Affirmative]. What do you hope ... -- when people look at the Virtuoso, what do you hope they experience?

DA: **16:17** When people look at the Virtuoso what do they experience? I think –

I: No, actually, what do you want – what would you like them – as the artist –

DA: Oh, what would I like them to experience?

I: What would you like them to take away from –

DA: **16:30** Oh. When they see it, what would I like – what would I want their reaction to be? What – would I like them to take away from it? Just enjoy it. I – nothing deeper than that, much. **16:40** Just a whimsical, fun thing to look at, and – a lot of people picnic there during the lunch hour and listen to music, so it serves that function, which I think is unique in public sculpture that I know of – it plays music. I – I don't know. I really never asked myself that question, to tell you the truth.

I: Okay. What sort of – we could talk about the negative reactions. What kind of positive reactions have – have people said to you about – about the piece?

DA: **17:08** Oh, the positive reaction has been strong. All the time – every day almost, somebody tells me – that’s who even has been such in uproar about the mustache being painted black because people are aware of it, and – I went to a party Sunday night, and half the people talked about that – to me in any case. **17:27** There were other subjects going on that night, you know, obviously – but it’s been very positive, I think. I think it’s an asset to the town.

I: Okay. Anything that I didn’t ask you about – about the piece? Anything that – any funny stories? Anything that you want to say about the –

DA: **17:48** When the first bad publicity came out, my daughter was 12, or something like that – and she had christened it, by the way. She christens all my big pieces, including the Sam Houston, and – she was so upset by the – the bad reports that she wanted to do her own poll. So she made her own little thing – she was 12 years old – about which one do you like, you know? Or – Do you like it, and Yes or NO or something – and would stop people on the sidewalk. **18:14** And one guy didn’t like it, and she was incensed. And she came back and says, “Poppy, he didn’t like it. DO something,” you know? I – that’s his right, you know what I mean? That was kind of funny. She was – has always been a kid that has this intuitive thing – to want to do something – to want to add – to want to complete some – something like that, and – otherwise I can’t – well, yeah. **18:43** One time, there was a – a formal dinner party with a table and – white cloth – champagne, and the whole thing. I – was just two people right there under it. And I don’t know if it was like a – a – and engagement thing or something – but they just decided that’s where they wanted to have a very formal – I didn’t see it myself, somebody else saw it. I wish I’d seen it to photograph it. **19:09** Otherwise, not – there’s nothing particular that I recall about it.

I: How about the actual installation of it? Was that a challenge?

DA: **19:18** Yeah, it was. It was a challenge – the installation of it – because it’s cantilevered so much that the welding on the bottom of it to a huge steel plate – a inch thick – I think 40 in inched square – really had to be right, because that’s all that’s holding it up, you know? There’s a lot of pressure on the back side. **19:36** In fact, when I designed it, I had a – a thing coming off the back at an angle that would help support it like this, and a –an engineer that I had said, “You won’t need that. If you got a good enough weld, you won’t need that. Just cantilever it and weld it.” And he was right. Getting the bow up in place where it was supposed to be – and it’s connected to another plate and it’s bolted on and then

welded – was a challenge to the crane people, not to me. **20:05** ‘Cause they had to put it on the ground and re-hitch it again and try it again – and then re-rig it, it’s called – and then move rope a half an inch so that when it gets up there it’s just right, because you can’t move it by hand. And so, that took – well, a couple of hours just to get that up there – and the hand itself was a similar challenge. **20:24** But by and large it was – to anybody that doesn’t know that business it would be a challenge. To them, it was just a day’s work.

I: Is that how long it took to install? Just a day?

DA: **20:34** It took all day, yeah – yeah – a Saturday. Yep.

I: Talk to me a little bit about the creative process. How – how do you make something that big? What’s the – what are the steps that you go through to create something like that?

DA: **20:47** Well, first you start with a pencil on paper to figure out what subject you’re looking for. Then, when that’s fairly clear, you make a model of some type. In this case, I made a Styrofoam model because it’s flat and white and easy to cut out and all the rest. And then from the model, you do all the changes on the model, ‘cause it’s easy. **21:09** I mean – it’s – you don’t want to do it to it after the thing is already built, so – then when you get the model as best as you can get, you sign off on the model. Then, it’s basically an engineering process to measure everything, get all the angles, and then build the thing out of steel – get everything to work together – and then cover it in concrete. **21:31** You know – that’s – the presidents’ head are done that way, and the Beatles will be done that way, and that’s the normal process.

I: You make it sound so easy.

DA: **21:40** Well it’s – it’s – it’s not complicated. It’s long to do. I mean, it – it’s – it’s a lot more physical work than – than you think when you start it, but it – there’s nothing really to it that complicated about it.

I: Okay. Anything else that you can think you want to add – I think we hit all the points that I wanted to talk about. Anything else you want to talk about?

DA: Well –

I: Pertaining to the Virtuoso.

DA: **22:01** Yeah – I – you asked me who commissioned it, I guess – didn't you already? And – yeah – people ask things like how long will it last and all that kind of stuff and – no, I don't have any – any suggestions about other questions.

I: How long will it last. I mean, of the different –

DA: Funny you should ask. [Laughing]

I: [Laughing]

DA: **22:18** How long will it last? It – it will last hundreds of years if it's maintained. You know 500 years – it's- concrete is about the hardest substance there is – outside of granite, of course. And if it's – if it's maintained, there's no reason why it shouldn't last for – for a very, very long time. Probably, economically, it won't – I mean, somebody will want to build a skyscraper there that's 50 stories tall or something, and then they'll move it somewhere else and – but, as far as physically, it should last hundreds of years – 2- or 300 years. **22:49** The Sam Houston in Huntsville, we figure 500 years before anything really seriously started degrading on it.

I: Well, I think I probably asked you – could you just introduce yourself? Say your name and what you do?

DA: Spell my name and –

I: Just say your name and what you do.

DA: **23:03** David Adickes, sculptor, artist, painter.

I: Good. Thank you. We're all set.

DA: Lover. Did you get that part?

[Both laughing]