

## Timo Andres

Last year, having barely dipped his toes into his 30s, musician Timo Andres was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize for *The Blind Banister*—a three-movement composition for the piano inspired by Beethoven. Shortly after, *The New Yorker* called Andres “nothing if not a millennial”—a vague description that offered little insight into the composer’s fiercely intelligent character or critically acclaimed career. Here, from his kitchen in Brooklyn, Timo muses on some of the parallels between his creative process and cooking—his favorite pastime.

**Would you describe yourself as both a composer and a pianist?**

I prefer to think of myself simply as a musician. My dad brought an electric keyboard home when I was 6 years old, and I began to play and furiously write down pieces that I created myself. I’m not sure what drove me to write, but the urge to do so has yet to stop. Studying to be a pianist was a big part of my childhood and young adult years. Writing gradually took on equal, and then greater, importance. I was partially attracted to the life of a composer, rather than being strictly a pianist, because there’s a lot of competition and conservative politics in the piano world.

**How do you name your work?**

Titles are something that I feel strongly about. I keep a list of words

and phrases that I hear and like. It’s been going for about 10 years. Sometimes, a phrase on my list will just work for a new piece. Other times, nothing works and I’m forced to come up with something new. I tend to be attracted to the idea of plainspoken titles. Some composers whose work I admire have titles that border on pretentious. I enjoy little phrases that sound almost pedestrian or cliché at first but can hold multiple meanings, especially after listening to the piece.

**Do you ever have writer’s block?**

Writer’s block is something that I luckily have yet to encounter. It’s always hard to start something, and it’s inevitable to stumble along the way. Writing is advantageous for my emotional well-being. There were a few months after the [US presidential] election when I wasn’t writing anything. The combination of everything that was happening in the world with my lack of creative work caused my self-worth to plummet. When I began to write again, it felt like everything in my life fell back into place. They say it’s unhealthy to have your sense of self-worth tied directly to your work, but it’s difficult not to in a creative profession.

**How do you spend time away from work?** It can be hard to shut off, especially if I’m on a deadline or there’s a show coming up. It’s about constantly finding a balance

On classical music and cooking.

between being conscientious of what I need to do to maintain that rhythm of work while also remaining sane. That’s a difficulty for all freelance artists. I used to spend a lot of time in thrift stores. My coats are all about 40 years old—I don’t think I’ve ever bought one new. It’s nice to wonder how many people my coats have kept warm over the years. There’s one in particular, a leather jacket that I purchased 10 years ago in Paris. It still reeks of cigarette smoke—the smell will never disappear, but I love it. There’s a certain feeling about something that has had a previous life, a history.

**I hear that you love to cook.**

I’ve been cooking since I was a kid. Cooking for other people, and the process of it, all the chopping, is deeply restorative for me. The lifestyle of a musician is very compatible with cooking projects. These culinary endeavors make for nice breaks in the day.

**Do you follow recipes?** I buy cookbooks for inspiration, but I find it hard to thoroughly read and stick to a recipe. I’m much more improvisatory. It’s like composing—I choose a process, not a recipe. I’ll think, “Today is a good braising day,” and then I’ll go to the store and see what ingredients are best for braising. Starting with a process, rather than having the finished product in mind, is the best approach for any creative endeavor.

“Performance is a part of my musical life that I would never give up,” says Timo. The portrait opposite was taken prior to a performance of his concerto *The Blind Banister* with the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra.

