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Larry King Live: Yanni Talks About his Career, his Critics, his Loves, and his Life

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LARRY KING, HOST: Some call his music new age. Some call it contemporary. And some have even called it fusion jazz. Whatever you call it, his fans throughout the world consider the man behind it, a musical messiah. His name is Yanni. He's our guest for the full hour next on LARRY KING LIVE.

Our guest for the full hour tonight might be called a worldwide phenomenon. In fact, he is a worldwide phenomena. He is Yanni. No one knows quite to make of him. His music is beloved -- some people don't understand it. The cartoon in the current "New Yorker" has a dentist leaning over a patient and saying, "Novocain or Yanni?" Is that a compliment to you?

YANNI, MUSICIAN: That's I don't care one way or another. But I think that's funny.

KING: It was funny.

YANNI: You know what's really interesting, that people say that my music relaxes them or I heard people who go through chemotherapy, where they go through extreme pain, that they can avoid taking pills, the painkillers by using the music. And it may sound like to some people as a -- as a blow or as a cut, but in reality, I think that's pretty amazing to think that you can do this with music.

KING: Let's go back. You don't read music, right?

YANNI: That's true.

KING: You don't write music.

YANNI: That's true.

KING: It comes to your head?

YANNI: Yes, I hear it. You know, not reading or writing music is not the same as being illiterate in speech. Airl Goner (ph) couldn't read or write music. Music is something that lies in the auditory domain, primarily. When you translate it and you put it down on a piece of paper you essentially lose maybe half of it. Society has go gotten used to taking something that lies in the auditory domain and make it into something visual because we're visually oriented.

KING: When did Yanni know that music would be it?

YANNI: After I graduated from college.

KING: So up to then --

YANNI: I was studying psychology. I was going to be a clinical psychologist.

KING: Where did you go to school.

YANNI: University of Minnesota in Minneapolis.

KING: But you're born in Greece -- right?

YANNI: Correct.

KING: Take me a little of that travel.

YANNI: Well it was 18 years old, I left Greece -- and I came to the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis.

KING: Speak English?

YANNI: Barely.

KING: Learned it at school?

YANNI: Yes.

KING: Why Minnesota?

YANNI: Minnesota was one of the best psychology schools in the country. I applied, I passed the exams. They accepted me. For a little Greek kid to be accepted by an American university it was a big deal.

KING: Did you do four years there?

YANNI: Yeah, three and a half. I finished.

KING: Does it get that cold in Greece?

YANNI: Like Minnesota -- no chance.

KING: No chance. Therefore, did you have a tough time putting up with that?

YANNI: Yes, it was very difficult, but you know 18, 19 years old you're invincible. You put up with anything.

KING: So, what happened? -- and your name was Yanni Hrisomallis?

YANNI: Hrisomallis.

KING: And that's the name -- you didn't become Yanni singular until music -- right?

YANNI: Yes, absolutely.

KING: What happened in senior year in college you are a psych major -- to turn you to this.

YANNI: Well, I started playing music when I was 6 years old. There was a piano in the house. I refused to take lessons. I just liked to climb up on the bench and sort of re-create whatever I heard at that age. And that's how I developed perfect pitch -- out of necessity -- and that's why I learned how to play the piano -- out of necessity -- because I was hearing music in my mind and I wanted to hear it. It was after I graduated from college -- the passion for music was there. I was always composing but I just had no sense as to why I was doing it.

I remember having thoughts in my mind saying why do you bother recording this music? Nobody's ever going to record it anyway, you're never going to be a musician and after I finished college I decided to take a whole year and just do music -- a hundred percent. And that's all I would do. And I was the happiest I was ever been in my life. And that's how I knew that's what I was doing to be doing.

KING: When you write a piece of music what do you do? Hum it for someone and they write it down?

YANNI: No it's not necessary. You see, in the old days you needed to write music down otherwise it was lost. Now we have tape recorders and CD's.

KING: And they transpose it from that?

YANNI: Yeah what I do is -- when you write an orchestrated piece there's so much information. There's millions of bits of information and so I have developed a very powerful memory for music. I remember, whenever I work on something in my mind -- I don't forget it.

KING: You do all the arrangements too?

YANNI: Yes.

KING: OK. Did somebody about psychology turn you off or did music just turn you on more?

YANNI: A little bit of both. I think the truth is that music just pulled me in. That was it. It was a time bomb. It was waiting to explode. I was also a little bit disappointed in psychology.

KING: What, for want of a better term, Yanni, was your first break?

YANNI: That's hard to say because -- because there's a lot of reasons why I'm still here doing music because --

KING: Where did the public first get note of you?

YANNI: The first major break is when I appeared with Linda on the "Oprah" show.

KING: Up until that time, no one knew you?

YANNI: Well, yes, they knew me. I was doing tours.

KING: A kind of cult figure, right?

YANNI: Yes.

KING: You had fans, limited?

YANNI: Yes. But I had not reached an audience yet -- a big audience. And the Oprah Winfrey show gave me the chance.

KING: And so that changed it? You're now -- concerts got bigger, travel got greater?

YANNI: Right. And the next level came when I did the Acropolis concert. And for the first time, the public got to view and hear the music.

KING: Were you concerned that we, the proverbial we, pay so much attention to that relationship with Linda Evans?

YANNI: Actually, it hasn't been bad. It has been -- the press has been very nice to us, very kind. Yeah, there has been some funny stuff here and there but we haven't been hounded.

KING: But you broke up, right?

YANNI: Yes.

KING: Has that been painful?

YANNI: Yes, very.

KING: Any chance of coming back?

YANNI: I don't think so. I don't think so. But you know, Linda was a great woman when I met her.

KING: She's terrific.

YANNI: She remained a great woman for the whole nine year relationship. And she was great the -- the day we said we were going to separate. We will remain friends. I am certain of that. We are very close and very connected.

KING: You wish her the best?

YANNI: Absolutely.

KING: How did you meet?

YANNI: Well, she was a fan. She was a fan and called me to say she enjoyed the music and that's how it begun.

KING: So you went out to dinner one night and from there --

YANNI: Actually we talked on the phone for about a month. I -- we knew a lot about each other before we first met. And we met at her house in Los Angeles.

KING: All right. How, Yanni, would you describe -- we have heard all of these other descriptions. How do you describe what you do?

YANNI: Well, what I do when I -- when I compose is I write music. I don't write a particular type of music or style of music. I will use any instrument known to man in any combination, any rhythm -- as long as I -- as this combination describes an emotion that I want to put out.

KING: So you cannot label it?

YANNI: I don't think of it as such. I think of it as music. I just write music. The influences come because of where I grew up. People forget sometimes I grew up in Greece. I was exposed to a lot of the middle eastern scales of rhythms and so on, a lot of classical music, a lot of Beethoven, Bach, and Mozart, Chopin -- all of these influences are in me.

KING: And all that's in you?

YANNI: Yes. And it's sort of primordial soup inside. It's a subconscious choice as to what instrument what rhythm and how.

KING: We'll get into this more with Yanni -- who's everywhere. He's on an 18-month tour for his new album, "Tribute." We'll be right back.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

KING: An hour with Yanni on this edition of LARRY KING LIVE. Why the keyboard? Why is that the instrument?

YANNI: The keyboard, first of all, the piano is such a complete instrument. You know, you can have -- you can actually hear a song.

KING: (INAUDIBLE)

YANNI: Yes, you can -- but the synthesizers were something that appealed to me very early on because of the millions of sounds that you can sort of design. Think about it this way: in the old days whenever we needed a new sound, we had to create a new instrument.

You know how many years -- hundreds of years did it take to develop the piano and now they come up with something called the synthesizer and sort of sound design -- you can create millions of sounds just in a few seconds if you're proficient on them. There's one problem with them, they're not very expressive. They tend to be a little cold and that's why I use the symphony orchestra.

KING: For the expression. Most people use synthesizers -- use them in lieu of big orchestras. They can create other sounds. You add a big orchestra.

YANNI: Right. You cannot replace a symphony orchestra. You cannot replace a human being performing. An acoustic instrument is so expressive it has so much emotion in it. Keyboards are not that proficient yet.

KING: Can you tell me how -- since you don't read music -- you can arrange for the flute.

YANNI: Easy. You hear the flute in your mind. You hear it. You hear the sound.

KING: Then you have to meet with the flutist, it's a flutist who plays flute right?

YANNI: And my flutist is extraordinary. His name Peter Usash (ph). I think he's one of the best in the world if not the best in the world. He's got perfect pitch and my communication with this man is so quick because there's no paper needed. He's classically trained -- he can read -- but he prefers not to read.

I go here, play this and boom he does it. There's no extra translation. It's like I speak English. He understands English. Instead of I speak English, gets translated in Chinese on paper and then back to English.

KING: You ever wish you had classical training? Are there moments when you've said I'd like to know more?

YANNI: There's nothing to know other than I like to be self- taught. I like not to be told how things are or should be. In a way at this point in my life I am glad I never went to school for music because I don't really know which way is the right way to do music.

But having learned as much as I have learned over the years and knowing how much more there is to learn -- I am glad there was no direction. There was no person that got me at 7 years old and say here, you put your fingers on the piano this way not that way. And don't play like this. That's wrong. Play like that. I am glad I don't have those rules inside.

KING: The choosing -- how many people work with you?

YANNI: Musicians you mean?

KING: Altogether. How many are on that stage?

YANNI: Around 45.

KING: That includes the singers.

YANNI: Yes.

KING: You pick them all?

YANNI: Yes.

KING: Do they all travel with you or do you use local musicians.

YANNI: No, I cannot use local musicians because this is a highly specialized concert.

KING: Explain.

YANNI: If you take classical musicians who are used to playing in symphony hall and...

KING: Someone from the New York symphony orchestra would take a tough time with you?

YANNI: A tough time. They would take a couple weeks before they have learned and adjusted to the sound and the way things work. Every instrument is miked separately. Every single violin, every oboe, every cello, everything is all separated. Each musician has earpieces. It's the way to monitor each other - I don't want to get technical.

KING: It's fascinating.

YANNI: It's a very complex concert. And the result is that you can take a symphony orchestra and -- take a symphony orchestra outside the traditional symphony hall and be able to present it to 20,000 people and have tremendous power.

What I have done is, I have added drums and percussion and base guitar which gives me more rhythm and keyboards which gives you sounds that the orchestra cannot do. That way what I have done is sort of widen up the sound picture.

KING: But you have enormous expenses that way, right? You have to travel all of these people?

YANNI: Yes, 102 people on the road right now.

KING: How many concerts do you do a year?

YANNI: I don't know. We're doing five cities a week right now and we're going six weeks on, two weeks off.

KING: Why 18 months?

YANNI: I don't know. I'm into playing.

KING: A long time.

YANNI: Yeah, it is a long time. These musicians in this orchestra have taken me about seven years to locate, find them all, put them all together, work them out. It's a very difficult configuration to keep together for long periods of time. They're from all over the world. I have Russians. One is a Chinese, Japanese, Australians, Peru, Venezuela, Cuba, Puerto Rico. There's a token Greek. There's an Italian...

KING: A token Greek.

YANNI: Yeah, there's a lot of different...

KING: Do you guarantee them a certain amount of work so they stay with you?

YANNI: Yes, you have to. But what I was getting at was that the sound that they create and the soul of this band is so special that I want for as many people to see it as possible. We even go into smaller towns, where we know we can't make money and in some instances we lose money because it's too expensive to have a show like this but I want people to see these musicians.

KING: Concerning this album -- explain the title "Tribute" to...

YANNI: Well, the two cultures and the two monuments the Taj Mahal in India and the Forbidden City in China.

KING: That's where your music comes from -- the places you were at on this album?

YANNI: It was in anticipation. Knowing that you would be in India, that affects me. It affected the way I did the music. The same thing with China. These are two dream places for me. I'd never been in India and I had never been to China. And India being the country it is, I mean, it's the birthplace of a great many of the world's religions and philosophies.

KING: How do you title your songs?

YANNI: With great difficulty.

KING: We'll pick that up in a minute. Our guest is Yanni. This is LARRY KING LIVE. Don't go away.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

KING: Extraordinary man in music. Formerly from Greece. Now, are you an American now, you're a citizen?

YANNI: Yes.

KING: How do you title them?

YANNI: Well -- one of the things that...

KING: I mean this ain't "Begin the Beguine" or "Night and Day."

YANNI: That's right. It's instrumental music -- the beauty of it is it's a great language. It bypasses logic. It just produces an emotional reaction inside you. And I describe emotions, not circumstances, in the pieces. And therefore, they tend to be undefined, so it's much easier for a human being to feel the emotion and relate that to their life, and hence...

KING: So you'll call things like...

YANNI: I have to be a little more abstract and point to a direction. I don't want to pinpoint a piece of music. It's one of the reasons why I mostly avoid lyrics, is I don't want to say it's about this. It's about last night and it was 12 o'clock...

KING: That's what all the great composers were doing, right?

YANNI: Absolutely.

KING: You put your own lyrics to whatever you're hearing...

YANNI: Absolutely.

KING: Your own feelings to it.

YANNI: Instrumental music to me is the most powerful and most direct language. It can describe subtle emotions very accurately.

KING: Why do you make people, do you think, angry, that you're so popular, that there's an element in the musical world angry at you?

YANNI: Do you think they're angry?

KING: Well by angry I mean that, you know, they'll say things like "schmaltzy," or "He's John Tesh with long hair." Does that annoy you?

YANNI: Actually I don't let critics motivate me one way or another. And I'm never motivated, even by the fans. I write my music...

KING: For yourself?

YANNI: Yes. I write my music 'cause I need to. It fulfills me. The creative process is a very powerful process for me. And if fans like a direction of music that I've done, it doesn't mean I'm gonna keep doing it. And if they don't like it, it doesn't mean I will never do it again.

You create a baby. And you fix it up the way -- you're the sole judge. You decide how long, how loud, how soft, how sweet, how bitter, how whatever it is. You make all the decisions. And once it's finished and you send it out in the world you have no control over it. How -- what people are going to do with it, how they're going to react, what they're gonna think of it. And I want freedom from being worried about what people will think, and I've been working on it since I was a little kid.

KING: And it's getting -- it works?

YANNI: Yes, absolutely.

KING: Therefore, do you not read criticism?

YANNI: I do sometimes. But I can't read everything that's written about me, you know, and it's -- yeah, I have heard some really good shots.

KING: Do you like the term "new age" or not? It implies a lot of things.

YANNI: Yes. It brings a lot of baggage with it. And it's not a musical term. It's an unfortunate choice, a very unfortunate choice to apply to music.

KING: What would you give -- what would you title -- Yanni's music is?

YANNI: If I had to give it a name, I would call it contemporary instrumental music. Because it's a wide avenue. I mean, it allows me to experiment and move.

KING: How do people hear you? By that I mean, when you sell your CDs, are people in automobiles? Are they like to hear it at home? Are they out on the veranda? Are they on a boat? It's not the kind of music for a bus.

YANNI: All of the above, actually. All of the above. The music is being used -- from reading the mail.

they use it for all occasions. Of course, I have numerous albums out, so there's a lot of different emotions and moods in each album, so different albums are more suited for different occasions I suppose. But the most poignant of all is when they write me and tell me about what it does for them in their life. They use it to give birth to their children. They use it to get married to.

KING: You mean while they're giving birth, they'll listen to a Yanni?

YANNI: Yes. And they also use it during a death in the family, which is the three probably most important occasions in a person's life. They even use it to go to sleep with, and some people think that's an insult. It's not. When -- just before you go to sleep, you're at the most vulnerable. And you just don't take anybody with you to bed, you know? And apparently, my soul is in the music. I don't lie with music.

KING: Yanni is the guest. Extraordinary. We'll be right back with more. Don't go away.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

KING: By the way, his current album, "Tribute", is already platinum. It was released last fall and it dealt with unprecedented concerts at the Taj Mahal and China's Forbidden City. He's also performed in his home country at the Acropolis in Greece. He's almost working all the time. We're taping this on an afternoon in Los Angeles; he'll be doing a concert in Phoenix tonight. I guess everybody's assembled there, right?

YANNI: Yes.

KING: They're ready to go.

YANNI: They're ready to go.

KING: You ever forget what city you're in?

YANNI: Yes. Because now we fly out after the concert, so I never sleep in the city where I just performed at. So sometimes there's a few minutes in the morning when you get up and you go, "Where am I?"

KING: What is the area code, right?

YANNI: Yeah, oh.

KING: And you play and then out. So there're times in the middle of the thing where you could be in Milwaukee or Chicago, you know.

YANNI: That's right.

KING: The Taj Mahal; where did the idea come from to play at the Taj Mahal?

YANNI: It was -- it was -- the Taj Mahal is so -- the symbolism of the Taj Mahal was the thing that got to me, plus the beauty of it. It's a stunning, stunning...

KING: How you set something like that up?

YANNI: Again with great difficulty. It's two and a half years of work. What happened is the Acropolis concert played on Indian television and it was very popular, and so we were invited to play there. And then we expressed desire to perform at the Taj Mahal. But there's no theater there. I had to build a theater to do three concerts for 10,000 people every night, on sand essentially, on the banks of the Yamuna River. It was quite an undertaking.

KING: Had anyone ever performed there before?

YANNI: I think -- no, no Westerner has ever been there. And I don't think there's ever been a concert of that magnitude. I think maybe they had had 300 people or something like that.

KING: Back to the Acropolis, how did that come about?

YANNI: Well, that's a Greek kid's dream. The Herodes Atticus Theater, that theater we performed is the highest place that you can perform in Greece, and it's...

KING: So it would be a personal thrill as well, right?

YANNI: Oh, absolutely.

KING: What was it like to walk on stage at the Acropolis for the young Greek Yanni?

YANNI: Goose bumps. I had a hard time to -- I'm a person that really strives to live in the now. And I knew that was a dream come true -- once-in-a-lifetime event. You're out on stage, and you begin playing, and you want to live your dream, but at the same time I had to sort of pull myself up by the shirt-tails to say, "Don't forget you're an entertainer. You're the guy who's gonna talk to them. You're the guy who's..."

KING: In that case, though, you didn't forget the city you were in?

YANNI: No. No.

KING: We'll be back with Yanni. Don't go away.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

KING: We're back with Yanni. Doing concerts at ancient, religious, incredible places, you must have incredible bureaucracy deals?

YANNI: Bureaucracy and tremendous responsibility. I had to meet with ministers of culture of the respective countries, the archaeological societies, there is a lot of red tape.

KING: And I imagine a lot of negatives along the way -- you can't play this at the Taj Mahal?

YANNI: Yes, all of that, but, you see, if you come with an open heart and you mean well, and if you're as persistent as I am, both of these concerts were deemed impossible. Everyone told me, don't even try.

KING: Metropolis -- or the Forbidden City and Taj Mahal. But I thrive on impossible.

KING: Which is harder?

YANNI: I used to think that the Forbidden City was going to be the one that I wasn't going to make.

KING: Just by its name alone.

YANNI: Right. But the Taj Mahal ended up being the most difficult, logistically and also it's just -- it's a highly reviewed monument in India. And the possibility is great. You go there, it's doesn't just matter of whether you're going to protect the monument or something may go wrong and you may damage something there, which...

KING: (INAUDIBLE)

YANNI: Yeah, you don't want to have that happen under any circumstances, but also, you want to make sure that your presentation is appropriate for that monument and what that monument means to that culture, so there are sensitive issues that are involved.

KING: And Forbidden City, what was that like?

YANNI: Forbidden City was a joy. The Chinese people were incredible. And I made sure that I travelled. I did concerts in Shanghai and Guangzhou and also Beijing. Before we did the concerts in the Forbidden City, they wanted to learn about the Chinese people. I wanted to feel people. They are very emotional. They love their music. And they are extremely expressive, which was contrary to what I was told.

KING: Your music is obviously universal.

YANNI: I would like to think so.

KING: When we listen to Chinese music or Indian music, it's very different from the Western ear.

YANNI: Yes.

KING: Right? It doesn't sound like a tune or that it's going anywhere.

YANNI: Right.

KING: Did you play any music that fit that axiom for them?

YANNI: Something that's been really interesting that I've found out about this music is that when I visited, let's say, Jakarta, or Kuala Lumpur, or Malaysia, or Singapore, or South Korea, or India, the public comes up to me and says, "You know, your music kind of sounds like ours." There is a lot of -- the things that you have in your music that reminds of our music, which is stunning to me. I never expected that. It's a great compliment too.

KING: Who -- can we -- type your fans -- or how old are they? Are they -- there are more women than men, right?

YANNI: Maybe 55 to 45. I know generally the press says that, but it's not true. If they read my mail, it's pretty much divided.

KING: What age group?

YANNI: Oh, 6-year-olds, you'll see in the concerts, and all the way to 70, 80.

KING: Would the largest be somewhere like in the 40s?

YANNI: Twenty-five to 50.

KING: That's...

YANNI: Twenty-five to 50.

KING: ... out of teenagers?

YANNI: Yeah, it's not so much the teenagers in the United States, but if you were to go to Mexico or to India or to China, it's more teenagers than here.

KING: Mood of audience when you're playing? I mean, you go to a rock concert, and we know they jump up and down in aisles, and serious -- if we go to a classical music and opera, we know there is a certain feel the audience has. What happens with you?

YANNI: It's -- I bring them up and down a lot, the dynamic range of this concert varies tremendously, so does the sound. If you go to a rock'n'roll concert, after you hear about four songs, you know what it's going to sound like for the rest of the night. If you come to this concert, you won't know, because sometimes I become completely classical sounding, only orchestra, and sometimes I go straight into rock'n'roll. And in fact, we have a song towards the end called "Niki Nana." The whole audience gets up and starts dancing. So now you are watching 6-year-old kids and guys with leather jackets dancing like right next to grandma.

KING: You know everything you're going to do every night?

YANNI: It's pretty well scripted.

KING: So this 18-month tour, everybody is getting to sing -- there is no ad-libbing?

YANNI: There is some, and there is some improvisation that takes place, but with the ensemble of that size, you can't really drift too far off.

KING: How long a concert do you have?

YANNI: It's almost three hours: two hours and 50 minutes.

KING: Why so long? That's so long.

YANNI: I have a lot to say. And I think the audience enjoys it. I thought I was losing my audience and they didn't enjoy it, I would cut it a back.

KING: Do you talk to the audience?

YANNI: Yes.

KING: A lot?

YANNI: Some. I like relating to them. And so on the second half of the concert, I tend to talk a little more.

KING: Any country you haven't played that you'd love to play?

YANNI: Russia.

KING: That should be around the corner, I guess.

YANNI: Yeah. South Africa, yeah, we're working on it.

KING: Have you ever had an audience not appreciate this, country you didn't like?

YANNI: No, never. It has taken time. I've been in places where they didn't quite know my music. And they came out to sort of take a chance with this guy. And it would take a half hour or an hour until they get used to the sound and relate to the personalities on the stage. Remember, this concert is about music and it's about great musicians. So even if you don't know the music, even if you never heard the music, it's very likely that you will appreciate who is playing the music.

KING: We'll be back with more of Yanni on LARRY KING LIVE. Don't go away.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

KING: Yanni created compositions for the close of the recent winter Olympics in Japan. So you will scale music to order then?

YANNI: Sometimes. It's not something that I do very often.

KING: Why did you do it for the Olympics?

YANNI: Actually, this particular piece was not created for the Olympics. It was used for that. It's on the album. It's the main song on the album that's called "Tribute."

KING: They used it?

YANNI: They used it.

KING: But you didn't write it for.

YANNI: No.

KING: Could you write...

YANNI: Of course.

KING: ... for, you know, I want to dedicate a building and I need a nice -- would you do a movie?

YANNI: Yes, I would like to.

KING: Movies cost.

YANNI: But that would take, I think, a couple of years from now, I will be open to do this sort of thing. Right now, I'm so preoccupied with touring and the albums that. Films and commercials and television scores, it's something that I can be doing when I'm older or a little later on, and get off the road and stay in the studio and do this sort of thing.

KING: Eighteen-month tour, almost three hours, you must be whacked out during the day.

YANNI: Yes, I try to work out like swimming. I try to get into swimming pool and work out. And that helps. But it's tough. It's tough.

KING: Did you dislike having your personal life in tabloids and stuff? Did you like that?

YANNI: I don't think anybody likes that, but I think it's a necessary evil. I suppose I haven't been beaten up enough. I have seen some horrible things for other -- unfortunate circumstances for other people, but it hasn't happened to me. So I don't know how I would react to that. I think it's been OK so far.

KING: Because of Linda and Oprah and beginning of your career -- have a lot of people ever expressed to you that if it was you that broke it up, you owe her more?

YANNI: I've never heard of that one, but...

KING: What do you hear the most from people who care about you?

YANNI: Actually, they have been very quiet. And it works very interesting, as I do question and answer periods, usually at night, at the end of the concerts.

KING: We only had three hours, why not another hour?

YANNI: Right. So people call in and...

KING: And they just come up and play with you, quarter to 2:00 in the morning, and we go home.

YANNI: They ask me questions. And the thing that has really amazed me is that they avoid the Linda question, 20,000 people. They have been very respectful. You know, Linda and I were never a social couple. We never really went...

KING: You didn't hobnob it?

YANNI: Yeah, we didn't make the scene, so we have been out of the public eye essentially for the most part. And I think it's -- I have not been tortured, let's put it that way.

KING: We can put an end to all -- everything to the rumors and everything, why did end? Was it just a case of time running out? Why do -- you're still friends, you're close?

YANNI: I wish I could put my finger on for you. It's still early. It's a difficult time for both of us. We're talking. It's hard. I suspect, also, the fact that I have been so preoccupied with my career and traveling and always been gone.

KING: Career came first?

YANNI: Yes.

KING: A lot of people have that.

YANNI: Yes. It's a major problem, but the thing with Linda is that it's so powerful, she's such a strong human being, and she's been

in show business, so she knows and she understands, however, the times apart, when they get longer and longer and longer, that has an effect for sure.

KING: Absolutely. Does it affect your music? What's happened, for example, are they sadder?

YANNI: Anything that affects me affects the music I create. And everything that you create comes from who you are.

KING: So a bad day affects what you write that day?

YANNI: It could, but I don't give in to those kinds of emotions. I don't write sad music. I don't angry music or frustrated music. I don't think there's a lot of value in there. I wait a few more days until I get through the pain, then there is learning that is taking place, and then there is a reason to write about the learning. And that's what I talk about in the music, a lot of them.

KING: You'd agree, though, that a lot of great music comes from pain?

YANNI: Absolutely. Pain is a motivator, a great motivator.

KING: Sure, like love, it's too strong emotions.

YANNI: Yes, but it's not necessary to write about pain. You can't just -- for me, at least.

KING: How do you want the person leaving your concert to feel?

YANNI: Besides being entertained?

KING: Yeah.

YANNI: Uplifted, feel better about themselves, maybe a little more empowered. I have a lot of faith in the power of the positive side of human nature. I'm a firm believer. And I try to -- I think that comes in the music. And I think that's what people get out of the music when they listen to it.

KING: Yanni's music has helped some people, more than just feeling good walking out of the concert. We'll talk about that after this.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

KING: We're back with Yanni. True that your music helped prevent a suicide?

YANNI: Yeah, more than once, and one of the most poignant things that happened was after the

concert, this 22, 23-year-old guy, who was about twice my size, football player, came in with his mother and father and I met the kid and everybody in the room was crying and he hugged me and...

KING: This was the kid who was gonna kill himself?

YANNI: Yeah, and there has been others.

KING: And what -- he stopped and listened to your CD?

YANNI: The music itself says -- it just put some thoughts in his mind, and by the time he got done listening, he couldn't figure out why he wanted to kill himself. There was no reason. There was also a 16-year-old also that went through that, but they're very vulnerable at that age.

KING: Yeah. Also you deal with people with cancer, right, who feel better.

YANNI: Yes.

KING: it's not a cure...

YANNI: No, it's not a cure.

KING: But the pain goes away sometimes.

YANNI: And I think to call it a Valium -- it's not a Valium, it's a psych -- it brings your soul up. It makes you feel better about who you are. It makes you feel like -- at least, that's what they tell me -- and again, I don't want to say that I write this music to do this.

KING: I write it for you. All good performers perform for themselves...

YANNI: Exactly.

KING: ... and then through them to the audience.

YANNI: And it's cathartic for me; it heals me. Through my music I deal with my own issues.

KING: Do you know, obviously, you must have thought a lot about this, why music is so essential to human kind? What would it be like with no music?

YANNI: To me it would be the most boring planet. I live with it.

KING: How essential is it to all of us? We never think about it. We don't -- you hum a tune, you sing, you watch a concert, you enjoy it, but what if there were no music?

YANNI: It would be, I think -- you can find music in nature -- actually, there is music all the time -- not in the big cities.

KING: Movies would be boring?

YANNI: Absolutely, but I mean, nature plays music for us all the time and that's where I learned from, and I know this sounds a little strange, but I mean, the ocean waves, the birds, the wind, the occasional

sound...

KING: You hear it, right?

YANNI: Absolutely.

KING: It's a soul-uplifter.

YANNI: That's right, that's right.

KING: Do you hear it all the time? Is it kind of mind-boggling to you? Are you always thinking tunes?

YANNI: Most of the time, most of the time. And it's because the brain -- my brain has been developed in that direction. I tell this to kids, nothing that I do is extraordinary. Anyone can do what I do. The skills required to create music, and record it, and produce it, and all that stuff that I have learned, any person in the world could learn. We all have that capacity. The difference would be in our souls, who we are, and how we grew up. So that would make the difference, but what I do can be done by anybody.

KING: Anything you haven't done. You'd really like to do, whether it's play a place, or write something different, or what.

YANNI: I'd like to, and eventually I will, but it's probably a few years away, is I'd probably do classical pieces for acoustic orchestra with no -- not the same configurations I'm doing right now, but just music to be heard acoustic in a small room, you know, in a typical symphony hall. That's something.

KING: You mean, like write an original, classical piece, a symphony.

YANNI: Yes, a symphony.

KING: To be played by...

YANNI: Anyone who cares to play it.

KING: ... Zubin Mehta and that kind of crowd.

YANNI: Yes. Anyone who cares to play it.

KING: But you're so inclined you want to be part of the playing of it, too.

YANNI: It's not necessary.

KING: No.

YANNI: No, I see myself as a composer, primarily. I know I'm a performer also. I get on stage, and I have fun on stage, but I -- what I do is create music and that's how I see myself.

KING: And never play anybody else's, or do you?

YANNI: When I was a kid, I played in rock'n'roll bands, so I played quite a lot of people's music.

KING: Were you good?

YANNI: I thought it was. It was good fun.

KING: What was the name of the band?

YANNI: Chameleon. We had fun. We had a lot of fun with that band.

KING: We'll be right back with our remaining moments with Yanni after this.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

KING: We're back -- our remaining moments with Yanni. Would you have been a good psychologist?

YANNI: I think, probably, but I'm too empathic. I think it would have done a lot of harm to me. I tend to get involved in people's problems, or I feel their pain and I don't -- and for that reason, I probably would have burned out.

KING: One would gather from that, then, that you're a hands-on employer.

YANNI: Absolutely.

KING: You know everything that everybody's doing.

YANNI: I'm involved. I'm the music director. I work with everybody.

KING: Does that bug some of them a little; "Here he comes again, Yanni, what's he got today?"

YANNI: I don't know. Maybe they're lying to me. I think I'm OK to work with.

KING: Are you a -- you're a workaholic, obviously, right?

YANNI: Absolutely.

KING: I mean, you -- you love it.

YANNI: Yes, yes.

KING: When you get away, where do you get -- you can never leave music 'cause it's your head, right, so I put you on a beach somewhere and you'll hear flowers.

YANNI: Yeah, but that sounds great in my mind. It's not work.

KING: So it's not...

YANNI: No, that's a pleasure. Creating music is the best part of it. It's when you try to translate it, and write in on pieces of

paper and train musicians and get out there and do it, that the difficult times begin.

KING: What's the feeling like, just before a concert begins? There -- people have written about that moment -- there's a moment, it happens in theater and it happens -- when the lights go down -- there's that -- right that moment in there -- what's that -- I know what it's like for me sitting in the audience, that moment of expectancy; what about the artist?

YANNI: Well, there's butterflies, and we hope you do have butterflies. And it's not fear, it's maybe heightened excitement. There's a jolt of adrenaline, and no matter if you have a headache, or if you're sick, or if you haven't slept, or if you're tired, or whatever it is, it just goes out the window, and it's miraculous.

KING: And that also that little butterfly -- Frank Sinatra told me, sitting in that seat, that there's never been a time that he hasn't gone on stage with a little bit of, "Am I gonna do it?"

YANNI: Absolutely. You don't take anything for granted. You walk in front of 20,000 people; you cannot take anything for granted. I don't take for granted that they will even like me. Even though I know they've paid to see me, and they're probably fans, and they probably will enjoy everything I do, I walk out there feeling I have to prove myself every night, and it has to be done right, and I want to give them a good time. I don't take anything for granted.

KING: Do you want to settle down?

YANNI: I don't know why -- settle down, what does that mean?

KING: You meet someone and have children.

YANNI: Oh, that's...

KING: Go out less, go out a lot less in concertizing, focus on family, et cetera -- slow down.

YANNI: The way I look at life, is I don't do things because I'm supposed to or because everybody else is doing them. That's the way I was raised by my parents. I'm allowed to live the way I want to live, as long as I'm a productive member of society and I don't hurt people around me, I should be allowed to live the way I want to. I believe that life is very short and I want a lot of experiences. I want to feel things. I do not like repetition. I'm a creative entity. I got to live and try different things, and keep my mind open about everything. About philosophies, religions, foods, the way you play, the way you enjoy life, and so on. And that's why I've been traveling around the world, it so open my mind up. And I think if I keep doing that, then I'll be able to create music and I think I'll live longer.

KING: So life then is a learning process.

YANNI: Absolutely, to the last breath.

KING: Do you ever get cramped -- they call it writer's cramp if you're a writer -- nothing -- "I can't think of a thing today." I panic. There's nothing -- Marvin Hamlisch describes that as he runs down to see "Chorus Line," just to remember that he did it. Does that ever happen to you, to run dry?

YANNI: I think that what happens is that the writer's block is an illusion, I don't believe in it. I think if you know how to access the creative process, it's unending; there's no end to it. What happens to people is, their life stagnates, out of repetition, out of the routine, and once your life and who you are stagnates, then your art, also, will stagnate with you.

KING: An honor. Thank you.

YANNI: It's an honor for me.

KING: Yanni, in the midst of an 18-month tour for "Tribute." We thank him for joining us on this edition of LARRY KING LIVE. We thank you for joining us as well. Good night.

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