

ON THE COVER

Holding hands (Dresden 2011) by Lev Tsimring

Portions of the following are based on an interview with the artist June 28, 2017

Life for Lev Tsimring began in Russia, on the banks of the Volga River, first, in Saratov, then in Nizhni Novgorod. He inherited his love of science from his father, a physics professor, and his artistic talents from his mother, a producer and director of music television programs. His father, an amateur photographer who enjoyed documenting the life of the family on film, gave the artist his first camera, a Soviet *Zenit*, and taught him the basics.

As a student, Tsimring developed an immense curiosity about the way things work and followed his father's footsteps to physics, focusing on the dynamics of complex systems. While in Russia he studied fluid dynamics but gradually worked his way to physical biology. He explains that one can study biological systems at many different levels, from collective behavior of populations of organisms (for example, flocks of birds or schools of fish) all the way down to sub-cellular processes. He is fascinated by the mechanisms of emergence of regular spatiotemporal patterns so prevalent in the natural world. Tsimring's art also reflects his passion for patterns that he studies as a physicist; unlike his scientific work, his photography is a quest for patterns in human experiences.

Tsimring dabbled in photography in Russia but it was not until he came to the United States that he became truly serious about it. He recalled, "I was invited to spend a year at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) to collaborate with UCSD physicists on problems in nonlinear dynamics. I arrived in San Diego on January 1, 1992 with my wife Irina and my then 5-year-old daughter Masha after an arduous 48-hour journey from Nizhni Novgorod via Moscow, Shannon, Havana, Mexico City, and Houston." Tsimring is still at UCSD 25 years later and reports that he is quite happy in the university's stimulating research environment, with its strong physics and biology departments, his areas of greatest interest.

Around the year 2000, two things changed: Tsimring was introduced to digital photography and the Internet provided him a forum for meeting like-minded people and talking with them about photography. He felt that these factors helped him to grow both technically and artistically. Eventually, he found his true calling as a street photographer. Street photography is about life, not interfering with what is going on but capturing that proverbial "decisive moment" that reveals the intricate patterns of human life. "You look

at other people's lives and you connect," he said, "A good street photograph has to be sincere, not contrived." Street photographers strive to discover hidden compositional order in spontaneous and seemingly chaotic street scenes, but Tsimring likes to balance composition with emotion and find something for the mind and heart.

Looking through the piles of street captures that I'd accumulated over the years, I realized that no matter how far I went and how different the language, culture, or circumstances of these people were from my own, their situations and emotions were really the same as mine. People are so similar wherever and however they live. . . . In most cases, I don't really know these people. Usually I take these photos quietly in passing, or else I only exchange a few words with my subjects before asking for a photo. Sometimes, if a language barrier is in the way, no words at all are exchanged, and looks, smiles, and gestures prove to be enough. (Tsimring, 2015)

Like many scientists, Tsimring regularly travels to international conferences near and far where he speaks on his scientific research. Those are also the times when he likes to take photographs—when he is back home, he is busy working in the lab. On one such occasion he found himself in Dresden, the capitol of the German state of Saxony. He climbed to the cupola of the recently rebuilt famous Frauenkirche (Church of Our Lady) from which people can enjoy magnificent views of the city along the Elbe River. Tsimring however looked straight down onto the large cobblestone square, and saw strolling couples below. The almost vertical view hid the people themselves and revealed only their beautiful long shadows from the setting sun. The juxtaposition of the old cobblestones and the diagonal shadow of a couple holding hands created the warm, inviting composition in the image on the cover. Who are these people? Are they on their way home? Are they on their way to a night out after leaving their children with their grandmother? Are they just starting out in life together? Or this is an old married couple? We will never know, but in them we can see the timeless quality of couples supporting each other, through life's twists and turns.

Reference

Tsimring, L. (2015). *Parallels*. Los Angeles, CA: En Ville.

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