

Maybe There's More. Then Again, Maybe Not.

By Norm Weinberg

THE SOUNDS OF JAZZ FILLED THE air around Corpus Christi last summer. The Texas Jazz Festival was going full swing (pun intended) and some great groups were giving their all. A close musician friend and I were visiting between acts, and the conversation went something like this:

Him: "Yeah, you can walk up to a synthesizer with a great trumpet patch, hit the D above high C and 'pop', it's right there. But it's not the same as hearing Maynard go up into the stratosphere. There was always that question of whether he was going to make it or not. Sometimes I wonder if it's just too easy now. The thrill is missing."

Me: " "

Him: "If music becomes so easy to produce that anybody can do it, what will there be to appreciate? What will make the musician different than the ordinary man-on-the-street? The reason we love Magic and Michael so much is that you watch them play basketball, and know that there is no way on the planet that you can do what they do. You appreciate their skill and their talent. But if everyone could play like Michael, nobody would pay money to watch him. He would be no different than you or me."

Me: " "

My friend is no musical pedestrian. He's a well-respected performer on both trumpet and piano. He's at home playing in a symphony orchestra or with a jazz group, so his thoughts and beliefs are not to be taken lightly. In addition, he's got a nice MIDI rig at his home, so he's not one to shy away from musical technology. Well then, what will happen when creating music becomes so easy that anyone can do it?

Maybe it's incorrect to compare a fine basketball player to a fine musician. Maybe it's like apples and oranges. Maybe not. Let's see...A basketball player must make instant decisions concerning the interaction between himself and all the other players. Yeah..., OK. Musicians do that too. He must always consider his

teammates, and know when he should take the ball and charge, or give the ball to someone else—for the good of the team. Hmmm.

The position of the basketball player's body—his physical awareness—often changes several times per second. Physical motions must be calculated far into the future, in order to keep forward progress, momentum, and direction. By some magical intuitive process, players can anticipate the actions of others. Uh-huh. Good ball players adjust to rapidly changing situations with cat-like speed and precision. Yeah...

Basketball is played in "real-time". Players don't have the luxury of stopping to think about their next move, to ponder and reconsider the results of their actions. More often than not, they make a split-second decision and go for it. Hmmm.

The goal (putting the ball through the basket) is often achieved by incredible feats of skill and daring. Beep! Hold it! That's going too far. Here we draw the line.

Is putting instruments through hoops the goal in music? Perhaps the goal of music is the journey itself—the interaction and communication, the adjustment and reaction to rapidly changing situations, how one maneuvers between "Point A" and "Point B" (in sound, of course).

Could it be, that during the last few hundred years, musicians and their audiences have been moving more and more toward "incredible feats of skill and dar-

ing;" and at the same time, moving farther and farther away from creating "music?"

Back when Greek culture was about the only game in town, there were two major schools of thought about music. One was the cult of Apollo and the other the cult of Dionysis. One of those groups held musical contests to see who was the best aulos (an ancient wind instrument) player in the country (these events were similar to another Greek invention, the Olympics). The other group felt that music was a manifestation of beauty which reflected the magnificent order of the cosmos.

Maybe there's more to music than the thrill of hearing a performer survive "dangerous" intersections. Maybe there's a certain beauty in listening to a performer control and shape a musical phrase with such skill that it brings a tear to the eye. Perhaps the high notes shouldn't matter anymore.

When we play percussion, we interact with the other musicians. We sometimes "carry the ball" and at other times we pass it to a teammate. We anticipate the actions of the other musicians, and make split second reactions depending on changing circumstances. We play more than one note at a time, and we string notes together in a certain manner which exhibits both logic and creativity.

Nobody knows what will happen when the process of music becomes so simple that anyone can do it. But perhaps that time will never arrive. We *have* ar-

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rived at a time when anyone can create a beautiful sound, but a singular sound is not music. It is only a sound. It's true that you can walk up to an electronic instrument and—without any skill, logic, or creativity—produce a single sound of immense beauty. But, hey, pianists have been able to do that for a couple of centuries. Throw a cat on a piano keyboard and listen to the beautiful sounds. The secret to creating music is not only producing a beautiful sound but it is also connecting sounds together into a rhythmic, harmonious whole.

It doesn't matter if the instrument used is a violin, clarinet, or trombone. It doesn't matter if the medium is a snare drum, tambourine, guiro, or an old beer can filled with rice. It doesn't matter if the group is a jazz trio, a power trio, a big band, a symphony orchestra, or just a jam session held under a tree. What matters is the creation, the game, the subject matter, the emotion, the idea, the journey. The tool shouldn't matter.

Is a book written with a word processor any less of an artistic expression than one written with a pencil? Obviously, it's not a single letter which creates the literary masterpiece. It must have something to do with the way the author chooses to put certain letters into words and then to place those words in a certain order to express thoughts. Technology has reached a point where *anyone* can buy a computer, software, and printer. People may certainly produce beautiful letters, but there is no certainty that those letters will come together to form a satisfying whole.

Perhaps in the future, when someone produces that high D above high C, listeners will be asking him to do more. "Yeah, so what are you going to do with that note? Where are you taking me? Can you create music with that note?"

Would you go to see Magic or Michael make one single, isolated slam? Would you go to hear Maynard play that single high D all by himself? Maybe there's more to music. Then again, maybe not. I hope there's more.

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