

Jazz Inside's Education Workshop

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spent many years in the trenches playing every jazz-related gig I could. One thing I've learned in the 40-some years I've been doing that is that it matters what shape my internal world is in. I don't mean what mood I am in, but rather to what extent I have some internal presence, some internal mechanism that reminds me to be in the moment, to appreciate whatever life has brought me at this point in time. I have been fortunate to have been studying the teachings of G.I. Gurdjieff for several years now and it has really helped me see how things actually work in my world. I find it immensely useful to have some way to gain a broader perspective on things.

JJ: Why is it important for artists and musicians to understand business? And, what are a handful of the more essential aspects that will help ensure success?

CS: Artist or not, we all have to figure out how to keep body and soul together. Even though it may seem to be a distraction from being a musician, I try to live by the old saying, "Nobody can waste your time but you." From that perspective, all life is

art, all of it is music, in the broadest sense. So I try to have fun improvising my way through whatever tasks my daily scene needs, just like I would playing music.

JJ: What have you learned about human nature from being a musician and a business professional - and how have those discoveries impacted you?

CS: To me, human nature is immensely variable - from the greatest geniuses to the most decrepit, ruined lives. What an amazing range 'human nature' contains! For myself I know I have all those possibilities latent within myself, so as Santa says, "Be good for goodness sake!" The business world is not all that different from the music world - again a great variety of behaviors, from great to terrible. To me, the crucial thing is which side of myself I am putting out at any point in time - hopefully, more of the good than the terrible. One thing that I find to be very helpful in that regard is that, as time goes on I find myself being less judgmental of others, which I find to be a great relief. We're all brothers and sisters under the skin and we all deserve to be given the benefit of the doubt, whenever possible. And on a related question,

I've been finding that radical self-acceptance and radical acceptance of reality in general, exactly as it is, is the key to a positive outlook on things, at least for me. Which doesn't mean that you can't work for change, but rather that those efforts are more effective when you are digging being alive in the middle of it all, regardless of how things turn out.

JJ: Out of all the books you've published over the years, which would you put in your top 5...which will stand the test of time the most, and stand out from the crowd?

CS: That's tough, since each one is the most useful book ever published on its own topic, in my humble opinion. Mark Levine's books will certainly be classics long after our generation is all gone from this world, as will *The New Real Books*, *The Standards Real Book* and *The Latin Real Book*, I'm sure. I'm also very proud of my latest book, "Foundation Exercises For Bass," which I hope will inspire bass players to really dig in and learn their craft from the bottom up, long after I'm gone. ■

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group. It's sort of a rock band, I guess... I don't know. I think it's jazz. It doesn't have too many songs with a swing feel - I think there is one - and the guitar doesn't "comp" they way you might hear my old teacher, Peter Bernstein, "comp" on "Epistrophy." But I don't write like a rock musician. I don't solo like a rock guitarist. The band doesn't think, hear, or play like rock musicians... Are there are undeniable rock elements in my music? Certainly! I mean, check out "Re: Creation" from my record, *Atroefy*, and you'll know what I mean. But it's jazz. I don't think it's even "fusion" but I try not to concern myself with what it is or isn't. I just feel it, hear it, write it, play it, and (try to) book it. It just so happened that I've been fortunate enough to book it at a variety of venues from Cornelia St Café, to the Knitting Factory, to the Bitter End.

JJ: What do you think about/visualize when you are playing?

RM: That's a tough question for me to interpret. I don't see pictures or visions or anything like that. I think my answer is actually something I'm not proud of. I'm usually thinking about how to play something impressive, which is awful! I'm often a confident person, but when it comes to improvising jazz music, I'm *very-very* self-conscious. I play my best when I don't give a flying F&*; about what anyone thinks! I play my absolute worst when I am trying to impress someone by playing something "cool" or trying to do something that everyone else does just to show that I can do it too, which strangely enough is most times I play. That's the

single biggest thing I need to work on. After all, I didn't begin playing music for anyone else but myself.

JJ: What motivates you and drives you forward?

RM: Luckily, it's just *in* me. I don't know if that it is a result of my parents impressing upon me the value of excellence or if it's genetic, but being good at stuff has always been something I strove to do. My family would love me no matter what so I don't do anything as a matter of making them proud. I just like being good at stuff. I guess to answer your question: In general it is *excellence* that motivates me.

JJ: When you first embarked on the sophisticated journey of becoming an improvising musician, or a jazz musician who plays over changes, what were some methods that you found extremely useful to achieving your goals?

RM: I've never been a fan of "methods", which is probably a bad thing. "Creative Process" is a term that infuriates me. In my opinion, having a rigid and strict approach to anything breeds complacency. What helped me out when I was starting out in jazz was improvising... A lot. Trying to do new things all of the time. Like I said, that's probably a bad thing. I thought transcribing/learning solos was counter-productive because I didn't want to sound like anyone else. I've since learned that there is a lot more to transcribing/learning solos than imitating someone and I wish I learned more solos of my heroes when I was younger. But I'm also proud that I made an important distinction early on: The distinction that

individuality is very important.

JJ: As an artist, your state of mind and ability to dig deep is important. Outside of playing, what do you do to re-center and find peace of mind?

RM: I grew up obsessing about baseball. To this day I still watch about 100+ San Francisco Giants games - thank you Internet! - and play 40 games a year in a wood-bat/hardball league in New York City. I hit .449 last season. I'm also an avid fly-fisherman.

JJ: What do you do to break through all of the surface stress in our contemporary world? Or perhaps, you feel that angst is good for music?

RM: I'm not yet bored and old but I do believe teenage angst has paid-off well - all apologies to Kurt Cobain. My original compositions have quite a bit of angsty anti-establishmentarianism to them. "Can't Complane" from *Atroefy* is full of rage - Air Rage, specifically. In the liner notes I talk about how that song was written for those people who drove me insane when I was a flight attendant for JetBlue Airways. I write often with a chip on my shoulder, for sure.

JJ: What is the greatest compliment that you can receive as a musician?

RM: The greatest compliment I have received is when people are obviously listening. I love it when people are attentive to what's going on, on the bandstand. ■