

## Chapter Twenty-nine

### MUSIC: LISTENING/RECEPTIVITY

*“Seek the music within you,” I still tell myself. “Find it and follow it. Let it be your guide. It will always lead you right.”*

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#### **JB                      Listeners: Can They Grow?**

While music magazines focus strongly on musicians and their music, they almost never explore complex issues involving *the listener* — things like conditioned perceptions, emotional needs, fear of the new, courageous curiosity or lack of it, willingness or unwillingness to explore adventurous styles, concepts and depths, ability or inability to move into areas that offer emotional expansion, psychological growth and spiritual evolution.

Why do some listeners grow and develop and deepen (as Tim did)? Why do some forever remain adolescents? The audience can be sweet as sugar when the performer mirrors its ego; it can be a vicious, narcissistic beast when the performer attempts to take them higher than the known.

Can listeners learn how to become receptive, how to open their ears, hearts and minds? Can they learn how to grow? Can they learn how to utilize music as a tool for self-exploration and personal growth? Tim's life and work open up these questions, and raise issues that, again, are perhaps better discussed in a book length form that allows for greater depth, scope, detail and length.

## **O Portals**

How kind of you to ask, about the relationship of music to our inner sense of self. It's a great question, one of the most fundamental.

Music and I finally learned how to frolic together – but it didn't happen overnight. It took years, in fact, because I ignored and resisted nearly every type of music available, and listened only to those musics that emotionally amplified and psychologically reinforced the person I already was. But eventually I discovered something enormously valuable about listening — something which opened my ears, expanded my mind, and played a major role in changing my life.

Perhaps my greatest joy, both as a guitarist and a music journalist, came when I ventured beyond the perspectives and values of conventional musical entertainment and art. It came when I discovered for myself, not just music, but the rather profound *relationship* that can exist between music and our inner lives. This relationship would seem to be obvious, but indeed it is not, at least not to all of us.

Contrary to popular opinion, as I have said elsewhere, all types of music, from the most angry and confused to the most intelligent and ethereal, have their beauty and power and purpose in the scheme of things. As well, each type of music emerges from a particular emotional, psychological and/or spiritual wavelength within the musician, and addresses and awakens the same wavelength within the receptive

listener. Different kinds and qualities of music awaken different levels of psycho-spiritual reality within ourselves.

Receptive listening involves the ability to resonate selflessly with what we hear from without — and from within. It is perhaps the most fundamental creative technique there is. It is through receptive listening — which precedes and qualitatively determines our actions — that we can develop our innate abilities to create the highest work of art conceivable: *ourselves*.

For the truly receptive listener, music-as-a-whole becomes far more than trivial escapism or lofty aesthetic diversion. It can be a powerful source of revelation. In fact, if we let it in, music can be a mighty guide and potent catalyst for self-transformation. From wherever we are in our present psycho-spiritual development, we can venture — through music — into new and previously uncharted inner regions. Sometimes that feels scary, to be sure, but it is invaluable in the process of self-discovery, because through our deep connections with types of music new to us, we can resonate and become acquainted with new selves. We expand our dreams. We increase our choices. We increase our possibilities. In this way, we give ourselves the opportunity to expand and grow and evolve.

Most of us don't do that, of course. Just as I did for so many years, we remain musical box-thinkers. That is, we listen to familiar musics that recycle familiar emotions and reinforce psycho-emotional wavelengths with which we already feel comfortable. Simultaneously, we reject other types of music — not because they are “bad” (they're not) — but because we are afraid to feel the emotions of those particular musics and afraid to explore unfamiliar mind-states within ourselves. We never admit it, of course, but the fact is most of us stay with what we know, and invent rationalizations to justify denigrating what we refuse to experience. We treasure our ignorance, seeking mirrors instead of portals.

But, ah, when we open our hearts and liberate our ears! When we welcome all of the musics — from Western rock, jazz, country and classical, to the host of other musics around the world! Then comes the joy of exploration, the thrill of

experiencing new emotions and new states of mind, the delight of discovering, through the enlivening powers of music, the depths and heights of who and what we are as total human beings. Indeed, through music, we can open virtually all of the inner doors, from the lowest and darkest dungeons of our being to the most sublime spiritual realms of clear-light serenity.

Beauty lies not only in the eyes of the beholder. It already exists, waiting for us to evolve to the point where we can perceive and embrace it as our own. Perhaps the most important focus becomes, not the music, but how we listen.

By temporarily suspending judgment, by becoming inwardly receptive and transparent, and by allowing the music to flow through us unimpeded, we can begin courageously advancing ever further upon our evolutionary psychological and spiritual journey. Eventually, in the light of musical revelation, we can begin to distinguish our many inner selves from the shadows, and learn to affirm them as one Self. Thus we begin to both discover and create our own voice, our own unique and unified vision, our own personal and universal song. I have written at length on this very subject in an essay entitled “Liberate Your Ears.”

“Seek the music within you,” I still tell myself. “Find it and follow it. Let it be your guide. It will always lead you right.”

And indeed it has. I feel good today, full of wonder and delight; and I hope you do too. Let the music guide you. It will always lead you right. Happy trails, my friend. Happy trails.

**DR            Music, Musicians and Listeners Work Hand-in-hand**

Over the years I have learned something that I consider to be profoundly important: For musicians and listeners alike, each level and generic style of music offers a certain kind of artistic expression, emotional release, and socio-cultural identity. Each level serves important purposes. That is why, for me, all of the hierarchical domains of music are worthwhile, even if I do not personally care for this or that particular level, or generic style, or this or that particular artist within any given generic context. . . .

While playing guitar with Tim Buckley and moving into the Seventies, I loved the funk and rock musics of the day, and steeped myself in them. What incredible intoxications! Then, in the mid-Seventies, I became a music journalist.

After I had explored the funk and rock genres thoroughly as a listener and writer, I moved into jazz as a writer — astonishing virtuosity in that genre, extraordinary intelligence, and brilliant performances (not only by the established classic jazz greats of old, but by emergent new talents such as John McLaughlin, Keith Jarrett, Chic Corea, Weather Report, Terje Rypdal, Ralph Towner, John Klemmer, and many others).

By 1979, I had interviewed dozens of older and younger jazz musicians, listening intently for hours to their music, talking at length and in-depth with them about their work and the broader jazz contexts. I then wrote about them and their musical perspectives, thoroughly absorbing virtually the entire century's wonderful jazz permutations along the way.

When I left pop, rock, and jazz behind, I entered a new level of music. As a listener, writer and also as a guitarist, I started exploring musics that delved into transrational and transpersonal levels of being. They had little or nothing to do with the conventions of mainstream commercial entertainment and art. Unlike pop and jazz, they were not devoted to celebratory egoic vanity, cathartic release, emotional

intoxication, flashy sensationalism, technical virtuosity, and/or escape into pre-conscious oblivion. To the contrary, they took me, not out and away from myself, but *into* myself, into the depths and up into the heights of my own interiority. *And that is the key to utilizing all types of music to explore one's own psycho-spiritual reality.*

My personal favorites became globally inclusive composers such as Peter Michael Hamel, Henry Wolff (Tibetan bells), David Parsons, Kevin Braheny, Steve Roach, Michael Stearns, Brian Eno, Harold Budd, and a treasure house of musics from around the world — particularly India, Japan, China, Tibet, and Morocco. I still listen avidly to all of Keith Jarrett's solo piano concerts, which are immortal. I also plunged into Western classical music, and still hang out with Chopin, especially his Nocturnes, and with Bach, particularly Glenn Gould's performances of Bach's keyboard pieces. Those who condemn Gould as "ego, ego, ego," might want to read his biographies, liner notes and essays (as I have), and listen more carefully to his brilliant interpretations of Bach's keyboard works.

There is another important dimension relevant to this question. Other than Keith Jarrett, Chopin and Glenn Gould's Bach, I spend relatively little time listening to music these days. Music has lead to nature. Sound has led to quietude. There's a stream that runs all year in front of my modern cabin's workroom window. The forest surrounds the house, and I hear the wind in the trees and the music of the tumbling waters. Nature's music plays a significant role in my life. I honor every level of music's spectrum, which is the spectrum of consciousness, and at the same time find myself listening more and more to the stream and birds and wind — and to my own inner silence (which is radiant).

I believe in music. I believe in the strength and dedication of musicians. I believe in the capacity of listeners to seek and find higher and higher levels of music as they themselves evolve from one psychological domain to another. Not every listener (or

musician) does that, of course, but some do, and those who do will seek and find and listen to the musics and musicians who speak to them from those higher levels. In this way, music grows. Music helps receptive listeners transform themselves from one state of being to the next. Music, musicians, and listeners work hand-in-hand. Those who serve psycho-spiritual evolution serve life itself.

## **AP                      The Ah-Ha! Experience**

For myself, during years of listening (while assuming the responsibility of publicly commenting on various peoples' music), I found that comparisons among art and artists are self-defeating. Nobody of stature has qualities that others have.

There is only one Mozart, for example, and we love him for his strengths and accomplishments, and for the feelings he expresses that mirror and amplify our own perspectives. We do not dismiss him for whatever weaknesses or limitations of style or depth he may demonstrate in any given work, but appreciate and celebrate him for attaining the glorious heights he does in fact attain in those major and minor works that stir us to the core of our being.

If, however, we shut others out because they do not possess Mozart's qualities, it seems to me we cheat ourselves. If we reject others because they are themselves and not somebody else, we refuse to experience the accomplishments of other greats throughout history. Maybe it's like the apples and oranges syndrome. Each luminary in the arts has his or her own genius, and the power of that genius in art has the capacity to awaken us in radically different ways.

But first, we must be receptive. We must be willing to open ourselves to the music (or painting, whatever) and let it touch us on its *own* terms, within its own framework; be willing to be fully present, to explore the span of the works, to get

into their details, to allow ourselves to be borne away by their music and in terms of that music alone, not standing outside of it, passing judgment on it in terms appropriate to other musicians writing other works from other perspectives out of perhaps very different historical/cultural contexts.

Nutshell: that's why certain kinds of qualitative comparisons constitute self-abnegating barriers. Nobody has what anybody else has. Everybody has their own light, power, joy. Each one can awaken us within ourselves in new ways, *but only if we have courage enough to let them.*

Our willingness to explore multiple dimensions of music/art is a correlative of our willingness to explore ourselves. When we venture beyond the familiar in music/art, and journey into the unknown, led by the great creators of all ages, we venture beyond the comfort zones of our own psyche. Exploring music as listeners, we explore our own interiority.

Some musicians are safe. We know them. We trust them. Others take us into greater or lesser depths and heights that are not so safe; they enable us to confront our own resistance to self-experience, and to break through those limitations imposed by familiarity. The great ones enable us to suddenly fly free in previously undreamed of psycho-spiritual spaciousness. We grow. We expand. We evolve.

Music can do everything, can't it? It can entertain, soothe, excite, relax, dazzle, comfort. It can give us what we want and already like. *It can also transform us, leading us from one level of consciousness to another, expanding our depths of feeling and heights of awareness and perception virtually without end.*

That's why, personally, I never exclude the greats (of every level), but look into them, spend time with them, venture into unfamiliar zones, fly up and beyond what I already know and appreciate, and enter into those new zones where I don't know what they are doing.

Only when I seek and find and deeply experience what it is THEY think is beautiful do I consider myself familiar with that composer's aesthetic perspective and spiritual orientation. It's the Ah-hah! experience.

I never evaluate musicians or composers in terms of what they don't have that others do have, especially without having experienced them and their works deeply. Instead, I jump into the music, give it a go, allow it to touch and affect me to the point of self-dissolution, disappear into their worlds, feel their power, grace, beauty, wit, charm, or enormous spiritual span from the depths to the heights.

Only after coming to know them "from the inside," as it were, do I bring in questions of like/dislike, preferences, value judgments, etc.

It took me many years to learn these things, and so I pass them along to you, fellow traveler, with my love. Best, L

## **MH                      Change Our Way of Listening**

You wonder what you or anybody else can do to change today's dire musical situation, and you raise a number of intelligent questions. Thank you, M. It gives me an opportunity to explore the subject a little bit more than I have in the past.

Personally, I don't see it as anybody's job to change things, and even if I did, I regard such a project as futile. Record companies are always going to sign musicians who fit proven commercial paradigms. Amateurs are always going to flood the on-line market with less-than-sterling works. And most listeners are going to gravitate to commercial radio-musics that are familiar to them. It seems to me, the only thing we *can* change is our *own* listening orientation.

I once wrote an essay entitled "Liberate Your Ears." Nutshell: we can expand ourselves by expanding our willingness to explore the full spectrum of music. And we can expand our listening capacity through our musical experiences. It works circularly. We can liberate our ears from the imprisonment of conditioned "tastes," and explore music openly, with passion, leaving the question of "like or dislike" *for the last, after* we have absorbed the music on its own terms. Each different type of music takes us to a different level within ourselves. And thus we grow by exploring ourselves through music. The ideal, I suppose, is the willingness to explore. Then comes the developed ability, to listen, hear, and understand different types, styles and psycho-spiritual levels of music, respecting the values of each level. *After* that come matters of "like and dislike" and personal tastes. There is a considerable difference between "I like (or don't like) it," and "It's good (or bad) music."

For example, I said in my last e-mail, "Nor do I sit around and whine about rap music, while yearning for the good ol' '60s. . ." You interpreted that to mean that I like rap music. Actually, I don't care for it personally, but I do understand its cultural and emotional origins, the strong feelings it addresses and expresses, the particular psycho-spiritual level of consciousness it springs from (lower chakra, to use an ancient term; survival, fear, rage, etc.), and what its appeal is, especially to urban blacks. I also honor its place at the base level of the spectrum of consciousness, and respect the aesthetic/emotional elements the musicians and their appreciative listeners are tapping into. Primarily, and most importantly, I honor the health of music's *entire* spectrum, not just those levels of it that I personally enjoy (such as the Higher Consciousness, classical and jazz musics I have often mentioned).

It's a subtle, sometimes complex issue, and a very interesting one. I know you're a busy guy, but when you get a chance to read "Liberate Your Ears" and absorb it, drop me a note, won't you?

In the case of people like Bill Evans, Erroll Garner, Miles Davis and dozens of others I could name, the music does not date itself, because individuality is original. Even when that originality is set in a style that remains associated with a particular period (like Louis Armstrong or Charlie Parker), the individual's originality inevitably transcends the stylistically shared context.

Jazz is one of those great areas of music that is not tied to fads or linked exclusively with social periods. Fads come and go. Social periods and their surface styles change. But the greatest jazz musicians remain with us as unique individuals and brilliant luminaries.

Obviously, some people listen to this or that period of jazz nostalgically, just as some pop and rock listeners listen nostalgically (having feelings about things they already felt, reliving what they already lived, remembering days and times and passions of their youth, using music to recycle their lives.) Nostalgia is one of the pleasures of listening, but by no means the only one. There is more to music and listening than nostalgia, much more.

A good listener from today can check in, and, without having a past rooted in social and musical time zones long gone, can feel new feelings in the immediate present, can be touched and moved by a piano solo or a flight on the trumpet or a waterfall of saxophone notes as if sitting at the feet of the improvising musician in a night club exactly in *this* moment, experiencing the passion in the flow of the music as if it were taking place right now, instantly: and it is! The music is here, you are here,

and your feelings take place spontaneously here and now. It is a direct connection in the living present.

The jazz genre is a great place to find musics of this kind. So is European classical music (Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, et. al.) and contemporary Spacemusic (from the '70s to the present).

## **LI                      Music Has a Life of its Own**

It is wonderful that you listen to Tim and Jeff Buckley. It has been many years since they died, and you are right — their beauty and passion remain with us. There is a timeless quality about both of them and their works. The intensity that they gave us remains, forever touching our hearts and uplifting our souls.

Alas, I agree with you that so much of today's music does not go as deeply into our mind and hearts as Tim and Jeff did. However, their music was written by and for a different generation. Every generation expresses the same sentiments about love and anger, but does so in its own style. Each generation rejects the styles of previous generations and comes up with its own ways of composing and performing.        As well, the music industry — the business people who select, buy and sell music — caters almost exclusively to teens and young adults, leaving out hundreds of thousands of older, more sophisticated listeners.

Not only that, but most older listeners remain locked in their own past — listening almost exclusively to the songs they loved while growing up — and they refuse to explore new musics in different areas. Rock lovers stay with familiar rock; jazz



of touch with the here and the now. We develop perceptual tunnel vision. We desperately seek relief, and Roloids doesn't help.

As a result, there is a *need* for serene music in our violent, stressed-out culture, precisely *because* there exists such an enormous need for psychological de-intensification. As a general generic category, New Age or Spacemusic is a response to this need. And it differs from Muzak in several respects.

Muzak is an impersonal, corporately formulated music designed to mask environmental noise and increase worker productivity. Its primary emotional appeal is to our sense of nostalgia — comfortable feelings about feelings we have already had.

New Age Spacemusic, perhaps particularly in its ambient form (which is only one aspect of the genre as a whole) is the non-formulated musical extension of an individual composer's tranquil state of mind. It can be used to mask noise, yes. But it also *enhances* the emotional and psychological quality of our environment.

Whether listened to or ignored, relaxing New Age ambient music at its best provides a safe and serene context that de-intensifies our mind-states and offers us the opportunity to expand our higher capacities for compassion, love and spiritual evolution.

The best of this music is both relaxing *and* nourishing, a welcome addition to the spectrum of familiar excitement-musics we already enjoy.