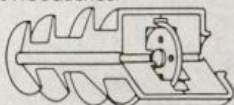


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BARNEY KESSEL GUITAR JOURNAL Instilling Integrity

Today more than ever before musicians are reaching out for new music and new ways to play, and they want to "do their own thing." For many musicians, especially those young in years and musical experience, there is a great interest in new tonal colors achievable by such things as electronics, synthesizers, and an avant-garde approach to music itself. Quite often this interest is so intense that the fundamentals of music are not used as a starting point in which to move forward in an orderly, sequential manner towards more complexity and abstraction. This state of affairs causes these particular musicians to be involved in musical expression without the proper concepts, skills, and evolving experiences necessary for any artist to grow, ripen, and reach an exquisite period of mature fruition. In a sense, these players are in an adult's world, but they are going through experiences as a child; not equipped with the necessary things that only come from good training and experience, they are musically bankrupt and drawing only from their talent alone (which is not enough).

Once musicians are engaged in pursuits that transcend tradition and in which they no longer draw from the rich legacy left by their musical ancestors, it becomes a temptation for many of them to employ charlatanism in their compositions and performances. Some of the ways that musicians practice charlatanism are:

1. Changing their name to a more exotic name—such as changing Joe Smith to Abou Ben Agaza—without having affiliated with, or received consent from, a religious order or brotherhood.

2. Wearing bizarre costumes and pretending to be serious about their clothes and musical performance instead of honestly admitting that the costumes are part of the show. This admission would be the honest thing to do, and then the performers could be viewed and heard from the proper frame of reference—as entertainment, not music.

3. Playing only original compositions which are abundantly scattered with grating dissonances, passages that are illogical and painful to the ears, harsh tone production, and nonsensical improvisation. This indicates that the performer should immediately abandon his instrument and call a physician for a prescription for musical diarrhea.

4. Giving original compositions exotic or bizarre titles to create a sensational effect when the music fails to do so on its own. Examples of such titles are things

like "Cosmic Awareness," "Transcosmic," and "Cimsoc" (which is cosmic spelled backwards).

5. Recording music, playing the tape backwards and rerecording it, then overdubbing to produce an *effect* which is passed off as music.

These charlatanistic practices, and others like them, indicate a lack of musical integrity, as well as a low quality or no quality musical output. Many of these musicians wish to achieve a modern or abstract output that might favorably compare with works by Stravinsky, Bartok, or Schoenberg; what they are really looking for are shortcuts to avoid self-discipline and paying their dues, and they hope to pass off their feeble flutterings of profundity with an extra helping of intimidation. Not only does the public suffer, but the cultural level drops even below its subterranean location. And the musicians themselves fare far worse by missing the chance to honestly find themselves, develop, and express themselves musically.

If a musician is in the embryonic state of his musical development and has the desire to express himself through abstraction and complexity, hoping that it will be regarded as profound and awesome, he should at least have the respect for music to learn its fundamentals and build from a solid foundation. Anyone who knows music will know whether they are listening to a charlatan or a real musician. So the charlatan is only deluding himself if he thinks he can pull the musical wool over the ears of real musicians and fool them into accepting two pieces of bread with nothing between them as if they constituted a sandwich. When charlatans pass off their mediocrity and works without substance to the public as if they were music, it doesn't do the serious musician any good, nor does it serve the creative musical world in any meaningful manner. It only serves to confuse the public as to what is really good music and good entertainment, and whether performers are being sincere and demonstrating integrity or putting everyone on (including themselves).

There is nothing wrong with presenting entertainment; there is nothing wrong with presenting music. But it would serve to lift the cultural level if personal integrity was introduced into more compositions and performances. Then "To thine own self be true" and "Thou canst not then be false to any man." Recommended reading: "The Emperor's New Clothes" by Hans Christian Andersen.