

Sound Source

Sonic reflections from Gary Diggins

Aural Cravings

It usually happens when I'm driving. Last night, for instance, the urge mysteriously surfaced. I was negotiating snowbanks and an absentee driver (cell phone in one hand and a Starbucks latte in the other) when suddenly my ears got hungry. It typically starts with a craving for an accompanying soundtrack: music that transforms the mood or enhances the scene. I'm usually prepared with my FM radio programmed to alternative stations such as CIUT, classical stations such as CBC, or even an old funk station out of Buffalo.

Just for back up, I have a six disc CD player stacked with esoteric choices ranging from percussionist Trilok Gurtu to oudist Anouar Brahem.

Sometimes I get lucky. My ears are ravenous for a specific, sonic entree (organic-mystic-groove-with-a-dash-of-industrial-noise) and a college station DJ, telepathically picking up my desire, plays a track of Pygmies of the Ituri rainforest mixed with ambient mayhem. In those magical moments, I can calmly smile at the PT Cruiser breathing down my bumper as we thread the DVP.

Swept away by the music, I can picture the pursuing vehicle as a rhino chasing me across the Serengeti plains. More often than not, instead of finding the perfect

music, I end up scrolling through dozens of stations and discs, like some poor soul on the couch with channel changer in hand searching for paradise lost.

Last night was different though. I had a breakthrough in my sonic questing. I was driving someone to a Loblaws store when my realization struck. At the time, my passenger and I were coming from a celebratory drink at the Four Seasons Lounge. We had joined Evelyne Datl to toast the release of her new CD (a wonderful collection of original piano compositions). Since neither of us had heard Evelyne's finished product, the rational thing would have been to flip on the CD and soar along to the night's vibe of friendship, accomplishment, and best wishes for success. However, a Honda SUV simply wasn't the appropriate setting to savor all the nuances of sound that our composer friend had meticulously crafted.

Knowing that my passenger was a vocalist at home with improvisational singing, I suggested we check out an interactive CD I just purchased. The content of this recording was intended to accompany singers by providing various grooves, harmonies, and musical styles. Just press play and make up a part. There was perhaps a nanosecond of silence after

I turned on the CD and then, spontaneously, the two of us jumped in. For the next several miles we jammed and wailed as we cruised toward the supermarket. Even after my rider left, I continued to navigate my way home with song. I felt like an Australian Aboriginal following the songlines across vast desert stretches.

When I woke up this morning I was inspired to pass along this little 'ah ha' to my friends. You see, it occurred to me that what I'm often tracking - over airwaves or through pre-recorded sounds - is something that already exists inside. Too often I'm a typical consumer of song and sound instead of periodically turning off the radio or CD player in order to fashion my own meaningful soundtrack - a chant, a wail, or an ecstatic song to accompany my inner voyage and outer venture.

Perhaps the next time you are out driving in traffic, or even walking along plugged into your personal listening device, try turning off the music and making your own spontaneous music. Hum, sing, chant, rant, or make up rhythmic poetry. As a friend of mine put it, soundmaking is highly personal because "no music passport is required."

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