

Sound Source

Sonic reflections from Gary Diggins

The Sounds of Authenticity and Beauty

"What would you say is the distinction between a singer and an artist?" asked the radio host. I turned up my attention as well as the volume. CBC FM had just showcased several promising opera singers from across Canada and one of the judges, while praising the musicianship of each singer, stated that an artist radiates something more than technique. His comment prompted the question.

"I listen for three things," said the judge. "Truth, beauty, and love."

I have thought about the judge's answer for months now – during a trumpet practice, before a performance, after attending a concert, even while making an omelette. In my opinion, the palpable expression of truth, beauty, and love are no more determined by talent or training than artistry is determined by glamour.

Truth in music usually comes through as heartfelt authenticity that transcends the amateur or professional category. I've been moved to tears by an untrained eight year old singing a movie theme. I've been bored to tears by a superstar belting out his hits. In the first instance, I could tangibly feel the little girl's yearning as she sang the lyrics "somewhere out there, beneath the pale moonlight." Her conviction in the song landed as truth upon my ears. In the second case, I felt entertained but not

moved by a famous singer who put on a great 'show'. You can't fake truth.

Beauty in music doesn't mean pretty or exemplary. I recall Miles Davis' last performance at Massey Hall. Suffering from a frail body, Miles' trumpet playing frequently cracked and rasped that night. Still, there was a dark beauty and enchantment in his timeworn sound. It was like listening to an elder sharing his life stories and not editing out the pain of affliction.

Sometimes, when musicians practice or perform, we strain to perfect a sound or give a flawless concert. While such rigor has its place, we ought not forget about a soulful brilliance that comes through breakdowns and slip-ups. You can't rehearse that impromptu beauty.

Love in music happens when soundmakers are intentional about imbuing their notes, rests, melodies and harmonies with a unheard, creative power. To channel that force, and thereby lift listeners or players into rhapsody and reverie, an individual must approach music in the same way a yogi approaches meditation. In his guidebook for musicians, *Effortless Mastery*, pianist Kenny Werner underscores this music and mystic connection by saying: *"If we would just stand still and quiet ourselves long enough to sense that power, we would come to know an ecstasy that lasts. We*



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must decide that it's more important to surrender to the space and to love what it gives than to play well."

One of the most liberating things about collaborative musicmaking, such as improvising with others in sound circles, is that co-operation replaces competition. Love thrives in these environments where little egotistical goals – trying to impress people with one's musical skills – are supplanted by a collective process of inspiration. In a supportive context, everyone can play and be played by an experience that invites listening, openheartedness, inventiveness, simplicity or complexity. You can't control that encounter with Love but you sure can savor what happens when you surrender. ssionately welcomed.

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