

The Well-Tuned Drum

By Jim Pugliese

As drummers and or percussionists we are among a group of musicians in an ever-expanding world of rhythm, melody and harmony. Most of the time we are responsible for keeping the rhythm section together while still trying to be creative, hearing and playing the melody, listening to the pitches and overtones of our drums and cymbals, playing a song within a song. We learn how to orchestrate and compose with the many instruments and sounds available to us, skin, metal, wood; sustained and non-sustained sounds; pitch, tones and overtones. This is a blessing. It is why some of us break away from our role as keeper of the beat. It instills in us a desire to allow the audience to hear what we hear while we are sitting above and behind the drums, ears wide open, limbs independently free, allowing our instruments to speak with each other as well as with the other instruments in the band.

We know that drums are the root of ritual and ceremony in many cultures and indigenous music and because of this we share a passion and yearning for this music. Many of us love to improvise and experiment because we have so many sounds and rhythms available to us. As we grow and learn we try to blaze a trail or find a path, hone our style, become more creative, more original. We find our voice. We look back at the music that we loved and try to connect that with the music that we are presently passionate about.

Knowing all of this and as someone that has worked in many genres throughout my career, I have often wondered what it is that remains consistent in our playing regardless of the genre. What is it that allows us to continue developing our own voice? Part of it is learning and practicing technique, paying our dues by going out and playing with lot's of musicians, discovering our own pulse or rhythm in life, building a foundation. This creates consistency but once we have a foundation it is very important to seek out mentors and other musicians that have a connection with the past so that we can build on that foundation and advance the art form further.

Throughout my life I have spent time with some great musicians, mentors, who had the ability to pass their wisdom, style and passion on to me and to others. This becomes a part of me. I internalize it. It allows me to continue developing my voice, building on my foundation and helps me find new ways to communicate my ideas. It creates a form of performing that goes beyond virtuosity, allowing freedom of expression, spontaneous composition. At a certain point we are able to abandon technique and trust the body and soul to remember what has been passed on.

I believe that it is important to always pursue the persons and music that will lead us on a path; help us to blaze new trails and build on our foundations. It is important to surround ourselves with friends and musicians that allow us to feel like we are part of a community, sharing ideas, growing together, staying politically, physically and spiritually aware and conscious. In this ever-expanding world of rhythm, melody and harmony the drums have been and always will be a guiding force while on this path. There is nothing like following the sound of a well-tuned drum.