

Greetings from Sunny California!

The Guild Conference is in full pendular motion.

I arrived on Friday and hooked up with Ric Chitwood and Karen Follet. We immediately launched into “catch-up” mode and ended up with a lively discussion of technology and teaching. Ric is teaching an interesting dance & technology class at BYU where students learn to take photoes, transfer them to the computer and manipulate them using photo shop. They then create posters and publicity materials. They also learn to shoot digital images and create imovies of dance and lay down a musical accompaniment to the film. They wrap up the class by authoring a DVD of their work. Wish I had time to be in Ric’s class!

Friday nite we all met at a nearby Mexican restaurant for fabulous food and friendly conversation. IN attendance were Alan Terriciano, his wife Lisa, Andre Gribou (who was in fine convivial form), John Toenjes, Ric Chitwood, Karen Follet, Larry Attaway, Greg Presley, Natalie Gilbert, Norm Beede and his girlfriend Marsha.

We had a stimulating conversation about music fordance classes. JT is using NPR guidelines and a book about listening to Rock and Roll (can’t remember the title-perhaps John can post it). He also spoke at length about his syllabus for the class and using current popular music as a jumping off point. I have used the Musical Ascent of Herman Being by Danziger in my classes and recently stumbled upon a book called “Beethoven or Bust” that explains the development of classical music in easy to understand terms. Karen mentioned a book called “First Nights” which documents opening nights of such works as Rite of Spring and Beethoven’s Ninth.

This missive has rambled on long enough. More later. Or possibly someone else will pick up the thread.

Ok--where was I?

Oh, yeah...

Friday morning, after a sumptuous repast of oatmeal and the worst canteloupe and honey dew melon I’ve ever had the displeasure of attempting to consume.. (okay,

I'll cut out the verbosity-even if Andre really is convivial), we all headed to UCI for the morning's festivities.

Alan introduced our esteemed guest, Kei Akagi, pianist and composer on the international jazz scene for over two decades. Alan interviewed Kei (pronounced kay) and asked questions that revealed his background as a youngster in Cleveland, Ohio and Japan and his life-long passion for listening to, creating and performing jazz music. Kei was an articulate and humble storyteller and his imitations of Miles Davis (speaking, not playing) were vivid. This remarkable jazz pianist spoke of his development as a player of jazz piano (self-taught, by the way) and of his many associations with such jazz greats as Al DiMeola, Stanley Turrentine, Freddie Hubbard, Airto Moreira, and Miles Davis.

If I can mention some of his comments regarding teaching: (I hope the context is correct)

On teaching students jazz techniques: "For a don't there's always a do--For a do there's always a don't"

He also spoke about students learning to rebel against the teacher in a way that strengthens their artistic sensibilities and hoped that his teaching allowed students to act in an "artistically responsible" way.

Of course the highlight of the session was the honor of hearing this incredible musician play. He favored us with his rendition of "Sweet Love" by Anita Baker. When I was in college, I had the opportunity to hear Charles Rosen perform the "Diabelli Variations." It was a life transforming experience and changed the way I perceived and played piano music. I had never heard so many colors emerge from the instrument before. I felt a sense of déjà vu as I listened to Akagi. I was transported as I heard him wind his way through numerous stylistic configurations that ranged from many jazz styles through what I call contemporary classical sounds. (I'm not adept at recognizing various jazz styles and couldn't possibly identify them.) Watching his body language was as fascinating as listening to the array of sounds coming from the piano. He tapped his feet, passed rhythmic patterns from one shoulder to the other and through his torso. He would hover over the instrument in an intimate passage and practically stand ala Keith Jarrett in other phrases. The joy of the

music

was evident in the sound and in the choreography of his approach to the instrument. Who knows how long he played? Who cared? It was an extraordinary event.

His performance was followed by a question and answer session from the audience.

I was fascinated by many of the questions : “What type of music do you listen

to now?” “What is your opinion of musicians such as Wynton Marsalis?” etc.

This stimulating conversation was brought to an end with another remarkable performance by Akagi. Who knew human fingers could fly across the keys with the

speed of hummingbird wings?!?!? I honestly don't know if it was a jazz standard or purely improvisational (my jazz ignorance is peeking out again!)

It was just astonishing music making.

How lucky for UCI to have such a prestigious and exceptional artist in their midst. How lucky for us to have experienced his artistry.

WHEW! 'nough for now. More later.

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