

ARTitorial

MUSIC AS ...

WILD HEART JOURNAL:
A CELEBRATION OF THE ARTS AND
SPIRITUALITY

VOLUME 2 / SUMMER 1999

Editor: Eliezer Sobel

Art Director: Lesley Maclean

Poetry Editor: Elaine Sutton

Front cover painting: *Jazz*
by Karen Shea:

Painting on page 3: Eliezer Sobel:

Drawing on page 3: Asha Greer:

Orchid photographs on page 7
and piano photograph on page 9:
Dorian D'Ausilio:

Woodcut on page 10, and
Buddha photograph on back
cover: Lesley Maclean:

Drawing on back cover:
Kate Robson:

Send Letters to the Editor to
Letters, Wild Heart Journal,
P.O. Box 146, Batesville, VA,
22924, or e-mail
Wildjourn@AOL.com

Wild Heart Journal gratefully
accepts donations towards the
publication of future issues.

Guidelines for submitting
articles and pictures are on the
back cover.

"If music be the food of love, play on." —William Shakespeare

Ram Dass used to tell the story of an elderly, well-dressed woman that he noticed sitting in the front row at one of his lectures. As he waxed eloquent about rather esoteric subjects and cutting edge psychedelic cosmologies, he observed, to his increasing perplexity, that the woman kept nodding in understanding and agreement. When the lecture was over, she approached him and said "That was the most wonderful talk—and I am with you one hundred percent," to which he replied, "Tell me, how is it that you know? What have you done to bring you to these understandings?" She leaned over and whispered conspiratorially, "I crochet."

The point being that any activity that is done with one-pointed focus and concentration is potentially a spiritual practice, which, for our purposes here, is any activity that increases conscious awareness and opens the heart toward an increased capacity for giving and receiving love. And, if we define enlightenment as a "lightening up"—from burdens, from fear, from chronic seriousness, from despair—then in that sense, spiritual practices are those activities which enlighten.

So there is nothing inherently more spiritual about sitting on a cushion and following one's breath than in crocheting, or more to our purposes, in writing, playing music, painting, sculpting, or dancing. It is as difficult to be fully present for five notes—or five brushstrokes—as it is to count five breaths without the mind wandering.



PAT METHENY ▶ PHOTO © LONDON NORDEMAN

But while any activity of engaged focus is potentially a spiritual path, it is equally possible and perhaps even probable that the most devoted practitioner of needlepoint will at best produce great needlepoints, rather than tremendous breakthroughs in awareness. This subject arose for me through an exchange I had recently with guitar great Pat Metheny. I

asked him if, like some artists and musicians, he considers his creative process to be a spiritual path. This was his response:

"I've been so devoted to playing music since I was a small boy that I suppose

"WHEN YOU'RE IMPROVISING, IT'S LIKE INVITING SOMEONE INTO YOUR HOUSE AND SHOWING THEM

Orson Welles makes a speech toward the end of his film, *F For Fake*, in which he reflects that all art...will eventually get lost in chaos and perish in "the universal ash."

But, Orson intones the eternal rebuttal in that marvelous baritone he used for his more oratorical moments: 'What of it?', cry the dead artists from their tombs, 'Go on singing!'"

..... A spiritual path



you could call it spiritual, but I think a more accurate term might be mental illness! (Laughter) Or the word obsession comes to mind...or being a zealot, so there are some parallels. But actually, playing is less important to me all the time—at this point, it doesn't even matter if I'm playing because I see that what's important is how you do whatever you're doing, how willing you are to truly be with what is happening, whatever that is."

Whether or not that insight had anything to do with Pat's years of "guitar concentration practice" is anyone's guess, but he certainly speaks in the manner of one for whom music is also metaphor: "I've played with people who are great players but I didn't really enjoy it, while there might be someone who's not as good, but they're really in the process of discovering as they're playing, people who find out

something about who they are as they play...that sounds esoteric, but it's very important to me."

That's a simple and useful way to approach our subject: if someone "finds out something about who they are as they play," I would venture to say that their music serves as a spiritual practice. And when music that originates from this place of discovery and revelation is performed, the fruits of one's practice are expressed in the relationship with other players and the audience. "When you're improvising," Pat commented, "it's like inviting someone into your house and showing them around. You have certain information to communicate about who you are, so when another musician (or person) is really listening, they're not just hearing the music, they're entering into a space with you."

The breadth and nature of this "space" into which a musician invites listeners will reflect the depth of the performer's music-as-spiritual path, regardless of their technical prowess. In the case, for example, of an awakened yogi chanting devotional songs to the Source of all Being, the listener is invited into a space that is utterly vast. May we all enter that sacred sanctuary of music where mystical melodies and hallowed harmonies soothe all souls.

→ELIEZER SOBEL