



Keeping an Open Mind

by Sheryl Bailey

This year marks my 10th year anniversary of living in NYC. It's hard to believe. Where did it go? In some ways it zipped by, but in so many ways, it has seemed like lifetimes have passed by. The pace of the city puts you through a lot of changes in fast motion. Sometimes a week in NYC feels like a month anywhere else in the world. I have made leaps and bounds spiritually, intellectually, and without a doubt, musically. The player I was when I came here compared to what I am now is so different, in ways I couldn't even have imagined before I started. That is why musicians flock here - to be challenged and to reach higher levels of musicianship and opportunities. I would say that my growth as a musician has not just been development as a jazz player, but as a total musician, which is the theme of my writing today-

keeping an open mind.

When I moved to NYC from Baltimore in 1995 my dream was to be a "jazz guitar master". When I came to the city, it was one of the most joyous times in my life. I could go out and hear all of my heroes, including people that I'd followed on recordings for years, and others I'd never heard of who were monsters- every night of the week! Not only that, but I could sit-in with these great players, gigging with the masters and becoming a part of the scene myself. It was a dream come true. I was also deeply aware of how much I had to learn to be able to hang with these great musicians; digging deeper into the music, the history, the feeling of the music. I could see I had a long way to go to reach my goals. It was also one of the darkest times of my life - to face my weaknesses, to compare my playing with that of the best in the world - ouch!

I was rediscovering the beauty of humility - that wonderful feeling of being just a speck in the universe, when you realize that there is infinitely more that you don't know compared to what you do know. I learned how to embrace the inspiration of this chronic condition, and this is what drives me forward to this day.

Keeping this open-minded attitude has made my career extremely interesting. In my ten years in New York City, I have played bass in hard-edged rock bands like Earthworm, The Electric Mermaid, and Sarah Greenwood (adding some Angus-like guitar solos on their discs), recorded and written tracks with pop diva Irene Cara, learned a set of Brian May's guitar solos for a Queen tribute (really fun!), fused together influences of blues, jazz, r & b, and rock to compliment singer/songwriters Justin Tracy and KJ Denhert, toured and recorded with Cameroon bassist Richard Bona, and added screaming guitar sounds to David Krakuer's new vision of Klezmer music with Klezmer Madness. All of that and more, in addition to the opportunities to work with so many great straight-ahead jazz musicians like Dwayne Burno, George Garzone, Rob Bargad, Dena Derose, and Jack Wilkins.

You might look at this list and not see a connection, but to me I know the underlying connections to all of these types of music; all music is a vehicle towards communication,

learning style is like learning a language, learning the nuances, the accents, articulations - the underlying principals are always the same- melody, harmony, rhythm. Having these experiences has made me give up the notion of neurotically pursuing the unattainable "jazz guitar master" and made me more focused on simply being a good musician, whatever style I'm playing.

Keeping an open mind has sent me on a never-ending adventure around the world performing for new audiences, making new friends, and ultimately inspiring me to become a better musician every day. Performing in so many varied situations and with so many different types of musicians has actually deepened my concept as a jazz musician by inspiring me to develop my own voice - which is what drew me to jazz in the first place.

A jazz musician's ultimate goal is to find his or her own voice, to be a filter or conduit for the music. By not becoming fixated on one particular style, I've actually come full circle and into my own style as a jazz guitarist. That was the vision that drew me to NYC, but I couldn't see it or attain it until I let go, and opened my mind.

Peace -
Sheryl Bailey

To learn more about Sheryl Bailey, please visit her website at: www.sherylbailey.com/