

Go for It!

by Sheryl Bailey

I travel from NYC to Boston each week to teach at Berklee College of Music, and I also travel around the world teaching workshops with young up-and-coming musicians. I often learn as much or more than my students from the experience, and that's key to the enjoyment of my work.

Throughout all of my travels, one common question comes up, no matter what the language or continent. It's always the same universal concern -

"How do I get started in the music scene?"

My answer- "Don't wait for it. GO FOR IT!"

We have all had the frustrating experience of working hard to master a piece of music in the practice room, only to get up on the bandstand or in front of a respected peer to sound like someone who just bought their instrument yesterday. How can this be? They're the same fingers on the same hands that played flawlessly in the safety zone of your living room, but at the moment to shine in performance, they defied you and stumbled. There is a famous quote from the cartoon character Pogo that explains this phenomenon -

"I have seen the enemy, and it is us."

Fear is our worst enemy, particularly as most of the time, our fears are only our negative imagination deceiving us and putting obstacles in our path; our fears may not be real, but they can control you and distract you from having a great performance and creating the success and beautiful music that you are striving for. This is the time when a serious musician must look those obstacles in the face and defy them, let go of the baggage, and go for it!

I encourage inexperienced players to get out there and perform as much as possible to develop the fearless confidence that is essential to a great artist, and most definitely to great improvising musicians. Practice may not make perfect, but at least it can make you more confident.

Here's a personal story about facing one's fears and going for it:

I was visiting NYC from Baltimore. Still on the fence about moving to the big bad city, I had come up for the day to check it out. I was in Manny's on 48th street trying out guitars when a guy came up to me and told me about a clinic that the jazz guitar legend, Larry Coryell was giving that night. I was completely psyched to check it out. Larry was one of my biggest influences when I was getting into jazz guitar from rock. Larry's Twin House and Spaces were two favorite recordings that had really inspired me.

Ovation Guitars was sponsoring the clinic, held in a room with guitars hung all over the place along with a soundstage. I had arrived early and was hanging out playing the guitars and talking to the Ovation reps. Larry arrived and started his show. He was playing solo, and doing a lot of pieces that I knew from his recordings. He started to play John Coltrane's "Naima", surely one of the most

gorgeous songs ever written, and one that I knew really well. I can't say what came over me, whether it was the excitement of being in NYC listening to one of my heroes or the feeling inspired by the music, but I grabbed a guitar from one of the stands and began playing along with Larry from the back of the room.

Larry stopped playing, and I was sure in that moment that he was going to be angry, but he called out, "Do you want to come up here and finish it with me?" Well, that was it! I was up there in the next second. I think he was a bit shocked that someone would take such a bold move on his gig, but he invited me up and we played the rest of the night. Larry's son Julian came by and sat in and we finished off the show playing trio.

As soon as I walked off of the stage, the Ovation reps were on me to hook me up with an endorsement deal. That's where my beautiful 1995 Anniversary Model Ovation guitar came from; it's a wonderful guitar that I'll never part with, for the memory of that night alone.

To make a long story short, that experience ended my fears of moving to NYC. The moral of the story is to go for what you feel and believe in, and you will find that the path clears itself for you. Staying away and shutting yourself off from the experience of playing music, or not getting out making new connections with other musicians won't ever bring you success; you've got to go and make it happen. Even if you don't reside in a major city, you can create a local scene for yourself. Go out and make the gigs happen. It is a challenge for sure, but without challenges we can never grow or reach our full potential. In perspective, it's much easier to avoid the challenges of putting yourself out there and sit around wishing for something to happen than it is for you to face your fears; if it was easy, it really wouldn't be that much fun or even worth the effort. I know I wouldn't continue to be out here if it weren't for the joy of jumping the hurdles and making some noise.

Peace,
Sheryl Bailey
Spring 2005