

Rick's Place

Notes, Thoughts, and Random Musings on the Online Experience

by Rick Hein, AMIS web master

Once in every show
There comes a song like this
It starts off soft and low
And ends up with a kiss
Oh where is the song
That goes like this?
Where is it? Where? Where?

A sentimental song
That casts a magic spell
They all will hum along
We'll overact like hell
For this is the song that goes like this
Yes it is! Yes it is!

The Song That Goes Like This
Spamalot
Lyrics Eric Idle, Music John du Prez

Not all of our musical experiences will scale this peak of self-reference, but Eric Idle is not one for letting anything go without wringing every drop of humour out of it that is possible. You will remember some of his other hits, *Always Look On The Bright Side of Life*, *The Universe Song*, and most other songs from *Monty Python*. Certainly the composer's name looks a bit familiar, doesn't it?

"Pastiche!", I hear you cry. Well, even Stephen Sondheim has had a go at that. Remember *Follies*? Maybe you've had the experience of performing Mozart's edition of *The Messiah*? Pastiche is such an ugly word, yet as a composer and arranger I know from many hours looking at blank pages that the audience is most comfortable hearing what they are used to hearing. Look at the wild success that the major/minor diatonic system has been having since its introduction. Tell your modal jazz guys and gals that they are using a system of tonality even older than that and they won't believe you.

As a composer, you always looking for your voice. You spend hours in lessons and in writing practice pieces and studies. Sometimes, your voice eludes you. You sit waiting for that magic spark to get you started. I'm sure that my fellow contributors to this august journal will agree that putting the first words on paper is the difficult part. Well, maybe they wouldn't, because just as in musical composition, drafting and redrafting is the order of the day and I would say that keeping the words (or notes) on the paper is the hardest part of composition.

But where does the magic spark come from? Ask any professional and they will tell you the spark is the first excuse of every writer or composer. Just like any other skill, composition takes practice and effort. Diligence. Devotion. One of the best ways to work is to keep a book of score paper and a pencil near your favourite chair or in your school bag and jot down that little tune that comes in your head, or that catchy phrase, or that rhythm that popped in to your head. If you hear a song you like, make a note. Combination of instruments? A news story? Children speaking in the lunch line? An observation about a picture? A picture? Anything that snaps you into that different state that makes you notice. Once you've got a collection, the more difficult part will start as you now have a collection of sparks.

That's right, the excuses are gone now. You've noticed something in the world around you that caught your creative interest. Find fifteen minutes to stretch your creative muscles. If you are not a good lyricist, find a poem you like, a Bible verse (or any other inspirational imagic text) or try an instrumental piece or a piece with obscure Latin-sounding words and syllables. Not a confident pianist? Write a solo line. Can't write melodies? Write a rhythm piece using body sounds. Don't know what the body sounds are? - define your own set.

Some of you must be shocked by now and wondering what has happened to me. We're quite a ways

into the piece and I haven't told you to use technology to solve a problem or buy a new piece of software to get inspiration or go to a cool web site that is full of ideas. Ah, grasshopper, we must look within to see more clearly what lies without.

As your year draws to a close, you'll be starting to think of ways to pass your summer holiday. Courses, gardening, family and travel are some of the ways that we find to re-create. You know the way that you like to recharge your spiritual batteries and to get ready for another frantic year of school life, festival life and life in an ever-changing world. Be bold and take a step on a new path this summer. The journey of a composer is a journey of creation where the experiences of your life are distilled through you into an object - a creation. It is a product that arises from you and reflects you and your world at that moment of its creation. As a performer, you've learned how to re-create that moment when you perform a piece. Now as a composer, you have to take the leap into the world of vibrations and order them to your will, so others can feel what you feel as you create your music.

Unleash your creative powers. Set the water rippling in the still pool this summer and watch the waves of your universe grow to new peaks and catch the glint of a previously unseen light.

Keep rippling.

Rick Hein
rahein@mac.com