

“Just Play One”

Artist Statement

Background

Several months before Easter, I mentioned to Dave that I wanted to contribute some music to our Easter celebration. I wanted to play something that was fitting for the day that tied into the theme of the resurrection of Christ. Worship music wouldn't do, since my singing would dampen the spirit of the party, so I committed to playing instrumental jazz guitar music. This is a form of playing that feels “dead” to me. And, continuing with the metaphor, I could “resurrect” that style of playing for our Easter celebration. Most of what I play these days is ensemble music, but there was a time when solo instrumental music was the norm. Not so much these days because that necessary dedicated woodshed time* is hard to come by. This commitment would be a stretch for me.

Epiphany

Despite my most sincere advanced planning the woodshed time eluded me. So, with only a few weeks before our celebration I was in a panic to get my set of music together. I wanted a challenging set of music that wouldn't sound lame, but that was also up to my perfectionist's standards, all packed into to little preparation time. A non-possible goal given the mutually exclusive conditions. Somewhere in the chaos of the conflicting internal dialog that ensued I must have prayed - I honestly don't remember - and God answered. “Just play one.” What?! That's ridiculous. No one plays a one-song gig. Let me rephrase that; *I don't play one-song gigs. Then again...*”Just play one.” Impossible! Stupid! I'm making this up! Can't be God. I don't get it.

Then, after attenuating the internal dialog and relaxing, clarity arrives. Brilliant! I get it...just play one. Here's the idea. Throughout the day today, at different times, I'll be learning one piece of music. Just one. The same one. It's a piece of music I've wanted to learn but haven't prior to today. Its jazz guitarist Vince Lewis' arrangement of the classic hymn *Amazing Grace*. The peace will be “raised from the dead” in your presence as I learn it live, in front of you all.

Pictures and Sounds

Isaiah 53 describes the messiah (Jesus Christ) as one who “had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him.” What you hear today can be thought of this way. Not typical background music, not attractive. You'll hear the process I go through to learn a piece with all its mistakes, repetitions, and frustrations. I see that process as a picture of Phil 2:12-13 where Paul admonishes the early church to “continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling”. And like Christ gives us forgiveness and grace for sin through His resurrection, you too are given opportunity to pass that along to me, as I work through the music. That's a picture of the outward expression of what Christians mean when they say Christ is “living in them” in Galatians 2:20. This piece may not be done today. I may play it for you all, I may not. We'll see.

If the concepts of prayer, scripture, and hearing from God are unfamiliar to you, or you'd like to discuss this further, please come find me today and lets talk. I welcome conversations around this subject.

* A phrase adapted by the jazz community, “woodshedding” describes the monotonous academic repetition of the basic elements of music - scales, chords, rhythm, melody, technique exercises - done alone in the woodshed to limit the collateral damage to innocent bystanders.