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St. SomeTimes

MUSIC FOCUS EDITION





A Musical Re-Awakening

February has been rich with teaching at school. The classes come and go. I call the kids “you” and “you” and “you”. They roll in for 30 minutes and roll out. Like a factory. Days start to bleed into each other like white walls changing colors.

So it goes for teaching in February, usually. Add to my mood, the fact I have mentally “had it” with this country. I’m not in a good mood on the inside, but I try not to show it. As a teacher, I’m always on stage, affecting the lives of my students.

How do I survive in the desert without diving? Music. Music is my outlet. I’ve even cracked open some books on music theory. If you had seen me during my Middle school years, you would never believe the amount of practicing and theory study I have

been doing. And yet, I still feel like I’m not practicing enough.

Perhaps it is the simple fact I am dabbling in so many instruments. It has taken a while, but I finally feel OK on my Electric Wind Instrument. [I have to catch myself before I tell someone “I was playing with my EWI last night and...”]. Hah.

I’ve added quite a few instruments to my collection after sending my saxes and guitar back to the US with David & Roseanna’s container two years ago. I’ve gotten back into basic clarinet skills with both my Buffet and the Silver King. I dusted off my ukulele. I unpacked my banjo and started plucking again.

My most recent addition is a new 66key Roland E-x10 electric keyboard.

The Keys to Boredom and Self Growth



Way too many Instrumental sounds!



Backbeats are totally awesome.



Finally, I can work on cord fingerings at home.

I first learned how to pluck at the piano when I lived in Germany as an exchange student. My host father was a professor of music, who woke up every morning and jammed on Beethoven, Bach, Mozart and all the greats in the attic. He had an organ, yes a pipe organ, installed in the attic. I had a piano in my room.

Nope. Never had any official lessons. It just happened, I had one of those lonely days in Germany. I was totally outside of my comfort zone. I was questioning what I was even doing there in someone else's house, family, bedroom. Someone had made a mixed tape for me. If you are old enough, you'll remember mixed tapes. This particular tape had a random piano solo on it. I didn't even know who had composed it, much less recorded it. My friend said it was some friend of his. Some girl from another *Gynasium* (high school) than ours. [I'm rambling with too much background info. Sorry.] Anyway, that day, I sat down at that dormant piano in my Berlin bedroom. I played that song over and over on my walkman. Note by note. Play. Pause. Play. Play. Rewind. And taught myself how to play the solo with both hands. Remember, I am a woodwind player. One tune at a time. One line of notes. Two hands to form a line of notes.

That was 1987. I still play that solo on the piano whenever I sit down to the keys (and no one is around). Now I have my first, very own, electric piano. I'm 54 years old and I gave in. Boredom and self reflection drove me to it. I also have **headphones** and **TomPlay**.

The Internet Quest Continues

Stories from overseas never end. The fuhdriculous stories from the island? especially delightful to write about them later on. I labor through the memories again as a cathartic remedy.

My last issue of SST spelled out the internet debacle. Suffice it to say, the last time I tried to get internet (fiber optic) installed at my island hacienda, the instructions from the internet guy was:

“All we need is a picture of the address on your door so we know where to install the internet.”

So I actually took a picture of my address when I got back home. That was last month. It takes a lot of meditation, patience, and support from friends for me to actually go back, in person, and talk to the monopoly internet provider for this island I call home.

This would be number three...ever. Since I arrived in 2016. Uggh. Someone should sew my head to the carpet instead. Pour lemon juice on open wounds. A catheter insertion might come after this situation in my list of “no way” scenarios. But in the end, I scheduled it just after lunch.

I entered with the picture of my door and address. Just to make sure, I took a picture of the internet boxes. Mine and my neighbor’s. The neighbor has a fiber optic cable going from the box to his apartment. Mine doesn’t. I wanted this to be crystal clear. No translation necessary. Look at the picture!! No cable.

After my half hour wait...did I mention the electronic ticket dispenser never works and no one cares, even though everyone... everyone tries to punch buttons to get a service ticket since there is always a huge line waiting... !!! [breathe] I got a discussion going in line and we all acknowledged who was where in the lineup.

When I sat down, the lady smiled because I stated that I needed internet and had brought a picture of my address. She looked at it and frowned.

There is a sticker somewhere near the box outside. The ISP code. Mine was painted over by the wall painters before I moved in.

She pounced out of her chair and went to the back room. A minute later, she danced back to her desk carrying a wireless modem. “Unlimited 5G.!”

I left the room fuming. Went back to school. I just might never go back.

The Magic of Technology for Instrument Practice

I now have two electrical instruments. Each one can plug into an amp for playing with a band or ensemble (or just pissing off my neighbors). Better yet, I can practice the EWI or Keyboards at any time of the day with headphones plugged in. That was never possible in my earlier years. Why didn't I do this years ago? There is a time for everything. It just wasn't time.

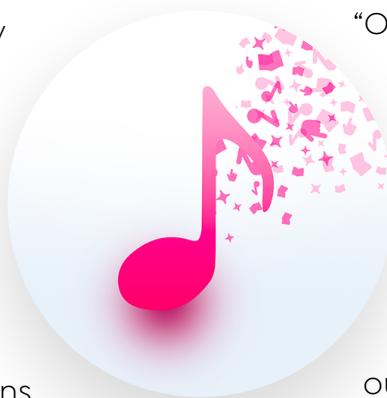
The most important piece of the daily practice puzzle? The devotion to routine and daily practice. I think... natural musicians do this out of love and intrinsic need to practice. I've never felt it.

It takes a little more for me to practice daily now. But I found the answer: accompaniment. I can find the backtracks of so many songs on youtube. Bam! I'm hooked. I can play a background track YouTube video right through my EWI and into a speaker. I don't have a speaker yet. But I can go through my headphones, playing a sax part with a backup band. All alone. Like those artists that get hired to play on stage at a holiday inn or play on the streets. Pretty cool. But it's all me. I love it. And it gets even better...

Introducing... Tomplay. Where were you when I was learning instruments? I had a 20 year old college student teach me clarinet in a practice room on KU campus.

And Judith Lindbaum the middle school band teacher in DePere.

Now, I'm 54 and relearning my wind instruments with a backup band, thousands of song scores on an Ipad, and an app showing me how to do the fingerings. How cool is this?



Make no mistake. I'm not belting out "Owner of a Lonely Heart" as a soloist sax with a muzak background. I hate that shit form of music.

No. I am learning how to play piano backup music for songs for vocalists. I'm belting out One Step Beyond, a sax solo featured song from Madness. Get it?

Choose the music for the specific instrument. If I come across a song that features a sax solo, I only hit the solo part and skip all the body of the song. Baker Street is one of those songs. Tomplay features the entire song, the sax playing the melody instead of the vocalist. Nope. Just the solo sax part for me. But that solo part with backup is ... Fuhdicularly awesome.

Buy it. Try it. Practice with it. The app is astounding. Magical. Yeah, sorry, I DO have to admit that I have belted out "Careless Whisper" and a few tunes from Kenny G. Sorry. I really apologize. But I always use the headphones.

Miscellaneous February Notes



Waiting, and waiting, and more waiting....

Sometimes, shipping to the “island” can be tricky. Customs exerts it’s power just because. Conspiracy? Maybe. I think music, overall, confuses this country. I ordered my first very own amplifier a month ago. Next day Amazon delivery. Hah. Tracking listed it daily as held up in customs. Yesterday, it said “delivered to carrier”. Please DHL, can I have it? My wifi pickups are anxious.



“No mam, we’re musicians. We’re on a mission from God.”

Who needs cords? I’ve had these wifi pickups for my EWI for months now. Just in case the Bacon Lover Combo ever got together for the first time. Dan has amps. I figured better have them just in case. Soon, I’ll have my amp and I can finally try out these babies on my EWI to amp setup!



“Hey Greg, let’s play some duets!”

Why not? So Kent sent me some pdf copies of some flute duets. He’s learning flute. Takes lessons from a lady in Canada. Miracles of video conferencing. Yeah, I practice my EWI on flute key of C settings. Pretty cool. I’ve practiced. Now we just have to follow through with getting it all together at some point.



That's me. Testing out my newest instrument. This was actually delivered to the school two days after I ordered it on the local Amazon. Very strange. The keys take a bit of getting used to. They are weighted like analogue piano keys feel. Just wait until I get my amp. Then it's *G Major Toccata* from *Fresh Air IV*.

-Yeah, right. Impossible.

But wouldn't that sound so awesome. However, guess what I played first on this new keyboard to test it out. Not "chopsticks". I don't even know how to play that any more. Guess. Just guess. Think Germany.



SHOUT OUT FOR THE SAX GUY!

Check out the one sax player
on the right.

iPhone with Tomplay.
Sax with mic & amp.

Belting out muzak sax solos
with backtracks.

(He sounded terrible and out of place)

I applaud his bravery. That
isn't easy. Especially with ten
other dudes sitting up there on
display as VIP guests.



International Week at School

Empanadas de Carne Moilida o queso!!! (pequeñas)

International week ended with a food festival. Guess what the Venezuelan families had? Yummy. They even had mini containers of guasacaca. It is always a pleasure to see the VZ crowd come out in force. Too bad they weren't booming some Reggaeton music! Empanadas de queso ,por favor!, Y dos cajas de auzules, tres paquetes de Mani Japanese, y tres bolsas de hielo!



Kent Represents Japan!

He fits the bill. No one else from the Japanese families wanted to help out at their booth. Kent was up for it. I stopped by to snap some fotos while he ran the table of chopstick races, some kind of paper dice, and kept scaring the nice Japanese mother helping him at the booth. You can always count on Kent to help out.



Mexico! Where Speedy Gonzalez is from.

Inside joke on that title. Ask JP Mint or Kent. Yet, the Mexico table was amazing. They had some scary dress up clown/whicker man leading some form of picture BINGO with the kids in Spanish. Totally awesome.

This was a really well done year for our annual international week celebrations. I stopped by the ever present Little Caesars table and got a mini-pizza to go. Yeah, some parent must own the local franchise here.





My first
experience with a
mini empanadas.
Yummy with
guasacaca.

Empanada
"Carné Mantequilla"
Carné mantequilla, queso fresco
y papas, con salsa guasacaca
y cebolla picada.