

Audience Participation

OK everyone, gather around – Aunt Edna is going to play some of her favorite songs on the accordion ...

NOT!

Jazz is much more hip than that, when it comes to audience participation. But sometimes we unknowingly create a gulf between ourselves and the audience. Granted, there are a few listeners who will be clueless about jazz no matter how well we perform. And there are some who pretend to be crazy about whatever you do. But there's a wide range in the middle where we can do damage -- or do miracles.

Lost and Found

Attention span and concentration vary with listeners, but when your music taxes the listener, he or she will stop listening or lose interest. So do we lose listeners by being too complex, or by being too simple? Both are certainly possible. Complexity can hide relationships between musical elements, and a simplistic approach can reduce or eliminate relationships. And that's what the listener needs: 1) to recognize interesting or beautiful elements, and 2) to recognize the *relationships* you are creating between those elements. With those two key ideas in mind, you can create music that draws you and the listener in.

Fellowship Factors

Regardless of whether you're playing complex or simple jazz, there are some definite things you can do to draw the audience into your music. Remember: it's a backwards process – you draw yourself into the music and the audience will follow. Don't try to communicate with the audience before you communicate with the music.

Here are some factors for creating beautiful elements:

- Breathe SHAPE into the music. Don't settle for meandering phrases – use cut, splice, and massage the music into visual forms that really say something to you.
- Be precise (but *not* stiff). Listeners hear all your articulations, all your pitches. You can still be very creative and be precise – the two are not exclusive at all (just listen to a Wynton Marsalis ballad, for example).
- Use rhythmic and melodic color wisely.

And here are some factors for creating relationships between those elements:

- Develop, develop, and develop –from subtle to obvious and everywhere in between. You'd be amazed at how strong a bond you'll develop with the music and your listeners if you develop well.
- Leave space in the music to breathe (physically and musically). Give your listeners time to process what they've heard.
- Dig in and work with the ideas you hear from the rhythm section – create a meaningful dialogue with them.