

Technology vs. Musicianship

John Novello

All right, let's get this sorted out! Technology is supposed to be a systematic method, a tool if you will, for attaining a specified and/or practical result; not a substitute, and a poor one I might add, for musicianship or the lack thereof. Did the lack of sophisticated technology (tape recorders, drum machines, samplers, computers and sequencers, MIDI, etc.) dampen the creative output and/or the quality of the great masters from Bach to Charlie Parker? Of course not!

So what's happening here today? Where are the artists? Where are those individuals who have taken the time to research and master and pioneer new areas relative to their musical goals? Where are the new Coltranes, Parkers, Jarretts, Bill Evanses, the Coreas, the Art Tatum, the Stravinskys, the Bachs, the Beethovens, the Mozarts, etc.? Where are the great rock and roll artists—the Beatles, the Creams, the Whos, the Traffics, the Led Zeppelins, the Hendrixes, the Emersons, the Yeses, etc.? What's happening here? Where is artistic integrity, technique, intonation

(singing in tune), playing in tune, melody, harmony, improvisational ability, originality, or even the ability to play a whole song through from beginning to end without having to quantize, cut, copy and paste?

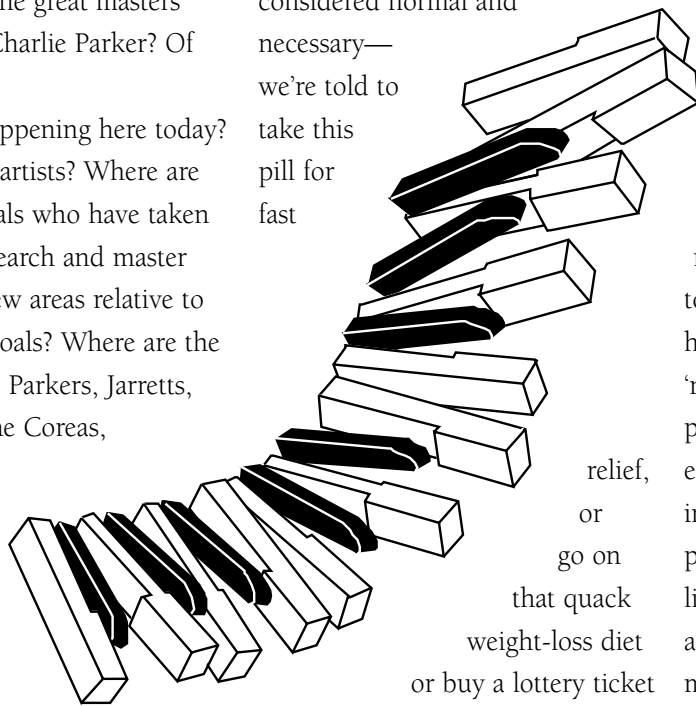
Let's look at this more closely. In today's fastlane quest for instant gratification—a symptom of the West and not of the East where practicing Akido for 20 years is considered normal and necessary—

we're told to take this pill for fast

relief, or go on that quack weight-loss diet or buy a lottery ticket and become a millionaire overnight, sample a groove instead of creating our own, quantize a phrase because we can't play it correctly, punch in every word of a vocal track because we can't sing in tune longer than a nanosecond, use a computer because we're

either too lazy to play and interact with other musicians or couldn't anyway if we had the chance as that would mean that we would really have to be this almost extinct being called a musician! Yet society's addiction to quick-fix thinking is leading us to artistic, social and personal suicide.

Now am I saying there is no place for technology? Heck no, as long as they are tools to carry out musical ideas. But when they become substitutes for inabilities, it shows in the end product. (Ever listen to the difference between a drum track programmed by a real musician/drummer as compared to someone who should be selling hamburgers? Sure, I realize these 'musicia' and their 'devices' have produced hit songs and have enabled a lot of people to dabble in the musical arts and produce a product. But take a good overall listen. What are you hearing? We are on a dwindling spiral. The musical arts are fast becoming third-rate facsimiles of the past because new original artists are far and few between. Why you should ask? Simple—the concept of mastering the fundamentals of music [musicianship] is almost nonexistent. When one is trained, and by trained I mean however



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this occurs (formally in school, privately with a teacher, by reading books which I realize is also on its way out considering there are videos now, listening to and studying other great artists, etc.), one can actually have a Viewpoint—a stability—an ability to create something on his own and with expertise and communicative abilities. In other words, a trained musician (please remember the above examples of what trained can be) knows his fundamentals and cannot only produce what he has already studied but also produce new creations and thus advance the art. I have yet to meet a successful and prolific artist who didn't intensely and consistently practice his art. Is it really talent or is talent a word we give to someone who makes the seemingly difficult look effortless. And how did he really do it? I'll bet my reputation that it took a lot of time, patience, and practice.

So what's the point of all of this? Simple. First realize that technology in the hands of a master, an

expert, works a billion times better than in the hands of an amateur. Second, the goal is for you to master the fundamentals so you can say something as an artist because you know what? Only you can say what you want to say. No one else can say better what

you want to say. So if you master the fundamentals then you can say it exactly like you want to!

The quick fix is actually the long and expensive way as one never attains his goal. Mastery is the short and inexpensive way because one actually becomes whatever he intended be it a keyboardist, singer, poet, artist, actor, composer, arranger, producer, etc.

The good news is that in the last three years I have seen a gradual change both with musicians and

industry people over to an emphasis on real ability. More and more musicians are realizing the sense of fulfillment that comes from actually knowing and mastering the fundamentals.

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John Novello is a keyboardist/composer/arranger, musical director, and producer. He has played and worked with everybody from Chick Corea, Ritchie Cole, Hubert Laws, Al Vizutti, and Ramsey Lewis to Billy Sheehan and Mr. Big, Edgar Winter, Mark Isham, Donna Summer, Manhattan Transfer and A Taste Of Honey. As a player he is equally at home with contemporary jazz, R & B, rock, fusion, and the avant-garde, and both acoustic and electronic instruments. His favorite instrument is still the Hammond B3. Through his love of teaching, he is considered one of the world's most sought after keyboard instructors and has written the instructional books 'The Contemporary Keyboardist' and 'Stylistic Etudes.' Novello's first solo CD "Tool Cool" was released to excellent reviews. He just finished writing, playing and producing "Tightrope"—his wife's posthumous solo CD. Novello also wrote 'The Song That Never Ended' the story of how he and his wife, Gloria Rusch met, created music together, and fought cancer. After writing movie scores, Novello and Alan Howarth formed their own record label called 'Lunatic Music.' His newest project is a collaboration with rock and roll bass legend Billy Sheehan and drummer extraordinaire Dennis Chambers called 'Niacin,' a high-powered rock/funk instrumental trio.