

> hi claudia,
> some time ago i heard the radio playing perhaps ten seconds of an
> album of yours, tierra dentro, and that was all. i was very enticed by
> those ten seconds and wanted to hear more because what i heard seemed
> to be hinting at a style i've been trying to develop--very open, lots
> of space, extreme focus on the quality of each note, very high level
> of presence and intimacy with the listener, etc. that may be the only
> ten seconds that were like that, i don't know. but i can't seem to
> find the records locally, in reno, nevada. do you happen to know who's
> carrying them in the u.s.? thanks,
> tom harrington, Ph.D.
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hi claudia,
thanks for the information. i'll keep looking for tierradentro, and if it's convenient for you i would like to know when the next album comes out.

yes, i am part musician, formally i was a scientist, university prof for 20 years teaching perception. Perception of course is how we hear and appreciate music.

In the field of perception, in music and in art (which I also do--portraiture) I keep noticing something that entices me. Everything, notes, brush strokes, whatever, that we perceive seems to have a kind of thin nearly invisible fascinating fringe around it. as you shade the side of a face in portraiture to make it look three-dimensional there is a very subtle nearly imperceptible region that lies between 'not enough shading' and 'too much shading.' almost always you cross over it without noticing as you blend the paint with repeated strokes. one stroke isn't enough and the second stroke is too much and you never really know you've crossed the magical region. but once in a while you land in 'just right,' and it's kind of exciting. the face jumps out in three dimensions. this is very hard to duplicate.

in music, time is like this. there are certain points in time in relation to the beat where notes or taps on the drum or whatever make the music jump to life, like oscar peterson's triplet runs, and other points where a note can't go because it stops the beat, sounds rushed, or drags, or causes a train wreck and shatters the whole temporal landscape. it's not clear to anybody i've ever talked to what the territory surrounding the beat looks like in terms of the various places that swing etc. a friend of mine who works with computer music from a scientific point of view told me that this fine line between

what swings and what doesn't is on the order of 1/1000 of a second wide, which is pretty delicate too.

there seems to be a hidden language of phrasing. if you play three notes in sequence, over and over for maybe 30 minutes, with different phrasings you start to notice very subtle phrasings that jump out with special meaning--jewels hidden in there someplace that are in a different plane than the rest. but they're really delicate also, very hard to find and produce, like the shading of the portrait or like whatever it is that makes oscar swing incredibly hard in a way that other people have so much trouble duplicating--i've never heard anybody who really can, you always know if it's oscar.

tone of voice is the same way. on one side of producing a sincere intimate sound and feel for instance is a forced feel--comes on a little too strong for the listener to relate to personally--sounds deliberately produced, feels not like a singer or speaker singing or speaking personally to the listener. you hear the voice, not the feelings. and on the other 'not enough' side is a hesitant kind of self conscious impression--the listener hears the hesitance instead of resonating to the sounds with the notes themselves being kind of transparent.

and it seems that there is magic hidden at the ends of perceptual dimensions too. for instance in hearing, if you play the sound of a click to one of a person's ears and then play a click to the other ear the person can tell you which ear you played a click to first. but then as the clicks get closer and closer together, almost simultaneous at the two ears the person starts to get confused. even closer together and they can't tell which came first at all. but the magic happens when you play the clicks even closer together--the person starts knowing which came first again. a whole sensory world is hidden here where time differences are so small they are beyond human perception. it's the world of auditory localization--knowing where sounds are coming from. the person hearing the clicks, when they are really close together, doesn't hear two clicks anymore, but rather a single click that seems to move back and forth in space depending on how close together the two clicks are in time. stereoptic vision works more or less like this too. our mechanisms for seeing things in depth are hidden at the very end of a continuum.

musical dynamics and a bunch of other things in music seem to have these same golden fringes. for instance if a sound gets louder the mind interprets it as getting closer, getting softer means receding into the distance, and as the notes and timbres and such change the mind assigns them to locations in space and creates the musical 'picture space' that the listener, some at least, kind of watches rather than hears as the musical entities fly around in space or hover

there, or change shape or texture, or speak out with emotion. but these things have to follow certain rules it seems or they don't work right, the same rules that hold the real world together. if a sound changes intensity slowly it is heard as a musical object getting closer or receding, but if the change gets faster and faster then a point will be reached where the brain says, 'hold it, no physical object could move that fast, so instead of a musical object in motion this must be a musical object that's stationary that has a warbling (rapid change in intensity) quality. producing a coherent musical picture space requires following certain rules otherwise things begin to break apart and change chaotically.

All of this is very puzzling to me and i'm trying to understand it, not formally, just for myself, maybe so that i can create music beyond what we've ever heard in terms of the human language of feelings and sensations--gentleness, excitement and the rest. i haven't begun to even try yet, still just thinking it all over, listening, thinking some more.

best regards, keep up the good work. i think your music is out on these frontiers and i'll be interested in watching it progress.
tom harrington