

Tunings

June, 2006

Finding Strength in Waiting

Michael Jones

We know fast knowledge with its pressures of busyness and the compression of the clock- but perhaps we have forgotten slow knowledge – the kind that is measured according the silent intervals of inner growth that unfold across the great arcs of time.

A colleague called this morning. We talked for a few moments about the recent heat wave and then she said; “you sound excited.”

“I am,” I replied. “ I’m placing my first print order for Artful Leadership this morning. It took me seven years to write– longer than it took to finish high school!” I added.

“Seven years!” and how long did your first book take?” she asked. “Another seven years!” I said...and the new music CD Almost Home – three years... maybe more!”

There was a long pause – “ That’s *seventeen* years.” My colleague exclaimed. “ Yes” I said – some of those years were concurrent but regardless; there seem to be few short cuts in living a dedicated life.

Her words helped me realize the extent to which we live in a culture of fast knowledge and with it, the pressures of busyness and the compression of time. And I realized how perplexing it can be to fully appreciate the slowness of the creative process and with it, the long and silent intervals of artistic growth. It is a form of growth that acknowledges that all work is half rest and that creative inspiration often comes to us in those moments of meeting between *kairos* and *chronos* where the timeless crosses time.

Writer Annie Dillard in her book *The Writing Life* suggests that any worthwhile book will take two to ten years to write and poet Donald Hall, in his book *Life Work*, describes one poem that took him seventeen years to write–others took ten to twelve or more - and jazz guitarist Pat Metheny once observed that the band really didn’t begin to sound like itself until they had recorded their twelfth CD.

Poet Robert Frost was a master at the art of waiting;

According to his biographer, Jay Parini, when Frost’s ideas would come he would play with them in his head, on the tongue and in endless conversations. By the time the idea found its way to market it was fully formed and richly developed.

This idea of time - and the wasting of it - of letting the land go fallow and taking ideas and turning them over and over, was Frost’s way of not rushing product to market. Instead he devoted all his creative efforts to *building soil* - finding in the earth a

metaphor for depth and generativity that served as a counterpoint to the superficiality of the life above.

So in all creative work – the strength is found not in the doing, but in the waitingthe waiting to begin, the waiting to know, the waiting for meaning, the waiting for completion, and finally waiting for the response to our work that may never come. It may only be in this waiting that we learn to truly slow down, to connect with others and ourselves and really take life in.

Performers understand this in that they often enter the stage and wait with a heightened sense of attention and awareness for what is emerging. And they are being attentive not only to themselves, but to the collective space that is being mutually held between themselves and the audience. They listen, their cells alive, waiting to find and express that one gesture – a musical note, a word, the stroke of the paintbrush, the slow raising of the arm that is not casual or random but instead holds a sense of deep inner truth and conviction in it.

For the leader, to wait is not a passive act but a conscious choice to *lead from behind* – to sense for the aliveness and natural flow of the moment and to follow its leadings with the knowledge and trust that there is an intelligence and authority in it.

My friend had grown more thoughtful as I spoke. When I finished, she said;

“ I am beginning to realize how much we live in a ‘how to’ world. And the drive for answers and how to’s draws the life right out of the experience of waiting and the present moment. Too often how to’s put our attention of empty successes or to some distant future outcome we feel helpless to create on our own.”

“Yes.” I said. There is no ‘how to’ that can come close to surpassing what we already uniquely know and that inner knowledge is specifically suited to ourselves. Perhaps this is the sacred power of waiting. It is one of the ways the muse tests us to see what we are capable of. And so we patiently turn things back to the earth, building soil for the time when we must act. Artists spend ninety percent of their time waiting – it takes the form of practicing, noticing, rehearsing, imitating, inventing, repeating, reflecting...walking, all to discover the strengthening power that waiting instills in us.

In waiting, we become integrated with our own solitude and learn to be at home with ourselves. And this may be the first rule of thumb for anyone who seeks to live a more creative life - to learn to wait, and in the waiting, to discover the slow unfolding perfection of time.

Michael Jones

Pianoscaples

Tunings

Volume 1 Number 1

Copyright C June, 2006

Thanks to colleague Karen Graham at [www, panaceacanada.com](http://www.panaceacanada.com) with whom a recent conversation about time and creativity inspired this essay.

Thanks for reading *Tunings*.