

## 05-29-2009

**5 a.m.** – I've been awake for 22 hours, now. From now on, I think it's a good idea to avoid early flights, as long as I live in Boston—the lack of transit at night really makes it a problem, and forced me to show up here at the airport at approximately 1:30 a.m. I'm going to get some food, so that I pass out faster, when on the plane.

They let me take my guitar, though, so I saved money and peace of mind.

**9:30 a.m.**-ish, not counting Mountain Time – I'm somewhere over Nebraska, having fitfully passed out most of the time. The flight is quite light, and I have an entire row to myself, in case I get sick of the left window. Looking across the way, there's more going on in terms of visual fireworks, but nothing in terms of what I'm concerned about. Nebraska is, unnoticeably flat. I'm glad I'm not a Midwesterner, anymore.

I will never get tired of flying. Whenever I'm in the air, I never need to refer to my bag for anything to do, because I'll probably be fine just gazing outside and watching the world literally slide beneath me.

One is reminded of certain writings about the mind, and evolution. I am looking outside, and I see the world, and am aware that there are people down there—hell, I can see their houses. But, of course, I can't see all the little details that flesh them out. I just see a dot, or a bunch of dots. I wouldn't be able to handle all the details up here, though: there's far too much to concentrate on, and so I just see dots. I'd go mad if I was able to see the minutiae of the world, all at once. That is the way the human brain has evolved, and why we see a rock, instead of billions and billions of molecules, atoms, or smaller. We see it that way, so that we can assimilate it, and use it—in essence, we force shorthand on everything in our world, including our world.

You could also translate that into music. We never hear/listen to music as “C C G G A A G”, or the various actions required to make the sounds; we hear it as Twinkle Twinkle Little Star, and might notice the unusually breathy quality of the singer's voice, but just hear that as timbre. When we are listening to music, we are forcibly abandoning that basest of levels, so that we can focus on the whole. And, unless we are a trained musician, we'll never tap into that level, and thus surrender a lot of the mystery to the unknown. If we are too microscopic, though, or if we refuse to bring ourselves up from that level, instead preferring to focus purely on sound quality or tone of note, then we lose sight of the music and fail in our responsibility to the musician and the music and the art of it all. Intentionally? Dubious, but it is alarming to deal with it.

We'll pick this up in Salt Lake City.

**10:10 a.m.**, Mountain Time, Salt Lake City, UT – Beginnings of a serious headache. I'm assuming that it's a result of the awkward sleeping I was maintaining on the plane. It would not be convenient for this to be a lack-of-caffeine headache, as I still need a little more sleep. It's weird being in this area of the country again, even if it's only an hour or so. Everyone's just so... frumpy. Granted, these are travelers, and one never looks good when traveling, but still—choose some more flattering pants, eh?

I want to travel, more. Only with better coffee.

## 05-30-2009

**11 a.m.**, en route to Tacoma – The plane ride was uneventful, thankfully, and I barely slept. Met up with my sister Lindsey. We went straight to her place, ate, dropped by Guitar Center (apparently, no one has my strings), and went over by the Space Needle. Met up with Sam Turner (old high school friend), had dinner, and then let him drop us off at a gathering of Lindsey’s friends, which I didn’t enjoy.

Lindsey and I left and went back to her place; I showed her a couple of things on YouTube, and then promptly passed out. She got me to the bus this morning, and now I’m en route to Tacoma/Lakewood, where Aunt Gabi and Co. will be picking me up.

**2:45 p.m.** Arrived at Gig Harbor, Raft Island Guitar Craft Course. Here we go....

**11:30 p.m.** – Raft Island – The course was declared to have officially begun at 9:21 p.m. Before, at the evening meal (tofu, broccoli, and carrots), very few people spoke, and then we were “visited by silence”. Being in a room of approximately 65 people that are dead silent is, on the one hand, strange. On the other, it was fascinating and exhilarating. Still, though: strange.

We introduced ourselves at the inaugural meeting, which involved stating who we are, where we’re from, what brought us here, and what our aim is. Following is what I said.

“My name is Brad Hogg. I’m originally from Montana, and now live in Boston. What brought me here was the discovery two months ago that Guitar Craft may hold some new paths, and maybe some answers. My aim for the course is, hopefully, to clear some of the chaff away, to find the answers.”

One of the other people on this course has a shirt from David Byrne’s last album, “Everything That Will Happen Will Happen Today.” I always thought that the cover looked like Legos.

I feel like the first couple of blocks cemented together, tonight.

### **05-31-2009**

Woke up at roughly 5:30 a.m., got up around 6 a.m. Slept fitfully, though I blame that more on the strange location and poor mattress than anything. Sitting is at 7:15, so I have time.

Sitting ended at 7:48 a.m.

Breakfast at 8:00 a.m. Lasted about half an hour.

During the sitting, I mostly noticed that my mind was racing, but that I was completely calm. Someone’s cell phone went off. I don’t expect that to happen again. One curious thing that I noticed, during the sitting, was that I suddenly snapped out of it. It’s important to note that I didn’t realize what I was snapping out of, until I did it. Interestingly enough, this didn’t come until after the cell phone. In fact, it felt like the cell phone going off actually distracted me from concentrating so hard, and allowed something to happen. Then it stopped happening.

When I’ve done this at home (in a much more abbreviated fashion), I’ve been successful maybe 50% of the time. Sometimes, it works really well, and other times, I’d be doing more good by beating two rocks together.

Actually, I probably would be more effective by doing that, but that’s not the point.

Everything is so calm. The beginning of playing, which was at 10 a.m., was begun by playing the first note in a week. Everyone played sparse notes for about 10 minutes, and then circulated a chosen note, in different directions. RF led the first part, and then left us to the “guitar buddies”, the intermediate and experienced Crafties (all League members) that are on the course to help and nourish (my interpretation) the beginners on course.

Lunch at 1 p.m. Helped in the kitchen—interesting, since there was a meeting of the crew before and after the work. The first was informative, and the second meditative.

I’m honestly having fun.

**4 p.m.** – at tea (or was it lunch?) RF mentioned the cellphone from this morning, and that it was a first from 24 years of Guitar Craft. He then suggested, not too subtly, that the beginners attend a meeting on the morning sitting. At 4:45 p.m., we did exactly that—RF led us through a full 30 minute sitting, quite systematically. At 5:20, we were released to our own devices, at which point I chose to go off and practice for about 40 minutes (and remember what it was like to play guitar).

**6:15 p.m.** – Tai Chi. I never thought that I’d be doing that, but am pleased to find that it was wonderful. That, and I figure that I’m trying to remain open to everything that’s put in front of me.

That finished, and was followed by dinner at 7. Dinner was treated with a minor-keyed piece that seemed based on circulation, as well as a song by one of the long-term Crafties (apparently, his singing was quite unexpected). When RF was addressing the course, he asked if the beginners had any comments about their day’s findings. One person, Chris, mentioned that, at the second rehearsal, when we were all rushing, he had the realization that it was him “who was not choosing to move ahead with the music.”

For my part, I am finding that I have never stood outside myself quite like this.

**10:30 p.m.** – Full "House of Guitars." Roughly 65 people in the chapel, sitting in two circles, one large, and one smaller and on the inside. There was a moment when one of the beginners, who had already chosen to be late, also chose to make a scene about being in the inner circle: “I don’t belong there!” “No one said that you did not.” At this point, this was the last available spot, and had been for some time. So, it was meant for him, whether he wanted it or not.

During the double circle, we had three improvisations.

*“When ready, please begin.”*

We improvised for probably 10 minutes. There were some interesting points, but it was mostly tentative, and almost strictly atonal.

*“When ready, please begin, again.”*

This was when I stepped outside myself. This improvisation was a much more interesting piece of music, and I did feel like it was musical. At one point, it became very aggressive, with the outer circle (where I was) circulating power chords. I suddenly looked at it as a group, outside myself, for a very brief moment, and then snapped back.

*“When ready, please begin again, again.”*

On this last one, RF turned out the lights. What happened was best summed up by RF himself, later. There was already a great deal of energy in the room. When it went dark, people gained a new sense of anonymity that lent itself to recklessness, as opposed to freedom. It was interesting for a moment, and then fascinating, and then dull and repetitive for the rest. The lights went on, and it sort of flopped out and died.

I'll need to digest that for a couple of days. Mainly, I just needed to get out of my cabin.

### **06-01-2009**

**10 a.m.** – during the morning sitting, I had a moment when I realized that my leg was falling asleep, and that the pain was beginning to be almost unbearable. So I let it become so, if you will—I just let it go. I got about 5-7 more minutes out of it, in the same position, before I finally had to shift. A little later, I became aware that I was in a fair amount of pain, but that I could deal with it by breathing.

I cleared up, momentarily, and then snapped out of it, again. But then, through breathing, I began to approach it, again. Eventually, I was distracted by my legs, again. I am only getting a tiny glimpse of the persistence I'll have to adopt.

Also, I missed Tai Chi, because I was down by the water, practicing. Oops.

**2:10 p.m.** – During lunch, when RF asked if we had any comments, since dinner the night before, I mentioned, or rather observed, that during the second improvisation I experienced a moment—very brief—in which I stood outside myself and saw the room. Then, it ended.

Alexander Technique meeting at 3 p.m.

Private meeting with Martin, one of the “buddies”. After that, we had the first real down time since Saturday, which I spent learning “Hope” and “Invocation”, two of the pieces of repertoire. The last was a little bit more conceptual, as I couldn't quite get the picking pattern of the theme, which I'll write out after breakfast, probably.

At dinner, the issue of private meeting sign-up sheets being taken down was brought up. Len, an older man who happens to sleep on the bunk below me (also the person who chose to be tardy to the House of Multiple Guitars), tried to confront RF and the buddies about it. Martin relented, but Len doesn't seem thankful. He seems like a frustrated asshole.

At 9:30, some of the beginners chose to work on circulating, and the rest of the course went back to the chapel. One circle, with 5 groups. Each group had a chord, and that was what they played that night. Going around the circle in sequential groups, with different variations on the order, eventually moving to what I saw as a fairly insubstantial whizz. For those who do not know, whizzing is essentially a circulation, which itself is passing a note from one person to the next, in the circle. Circulation is one of the primary forms of music in Guitar Craft. To take it to the next level, a circle would whizz, which is to say that it would circulate really fast.

We did exactly that, eventually, but I kept felt like I was getting in the way—I was still having fun, though. The whizz went around a few times, and then sort of imploded upon itself, at which point RF had us play all five chords at once, which was a glorious sound.

Bed at around 11:30 p.m.

## 06-02-2009

Up early—about 5:30 a.m. Like I had for the two previous days, I went down to the dock and looked out at the bay for about 20 minutes, just relishing in the quiet. Morning sitting at 7:15. It is starting to get easier: I blanked for about 5 seconds, and then snapped out of it. I consider this progress.

Breakfast was wonderful. Very quiet. Some interesting comments from everyone.

Attended Tai Chi, again. Enjoyed that as well. Am considering finding a teacher/class back home.

**10:45** – Had an interesting epiphany, of sorts, during beginner’s work with RF. We were working on counting in 5 and 7, and performing miserably. When counting 5 as *ONEtwothreeFOURfive* failed, and 7 as *ONEtwothreeFOURfiveSIXseven* proved just as ill-fated, we moved to counting just *ONE*, which just didn’t happen.

The method being used was circulation: Person A would play on ONE, Person B would play on FOUR, Person C would follow with ONE or SIX, whichever applied, and so on. We couldn’t do that, so we eventually tried ONE, which also crashed. What I realized was that, as we passed the notes, there wasn’t any cohesive language being used. That is, everyone was simply using a random note. This led to each person deciding what note to use, and not paying attention to the time, or anything, for that matter—this, in turn, meant that almost everyone was inexcusably late when it was their turn around the circle. If we had something to latch on to, I felt, such as just a few different notes (say, a Cmaj7 chord), there wouldn’t be such a needless element of randomness and chaos, and it might allow the circle to play a little more in time.

Eventually, it became apparent that the bigger problem was a little more personal: as the note (eventually just the beat/clap) came around the circle, each person would actually shrink away from the beat, because he or she didn’t want to be the one who screwed up. As a result, the beat was continually off, continually late, because each person was terrified of being the one to blame, as opposed to just taking the responsibility for the note, whether it’s wrong or not.

**6:45 p.m.** – When presenting that last bit to the course at lunch, the “us vs. them” attitude was sort of thrown in my face, again.

“They are offering this to us. They’re equal to us, and they’re making themselves available. Why turn it away?” “Why don’t you go back to Guitar Center, or wherever, and—” It was here that I walked away in disgust.

Later. “A lot of people were very offended by that remark you made at lunch.” “They were? I’m sorry....”

Later, still. “Hey, were you offended by my comments?” “No, but I think that we need to realize that we’re all in this together. I’ll go get my guitar in a second.”

Later, again. “So, you were basically saying that we need to take responsibility for our mistakes.” “Well, not just mistakes, but just take responsibility.” “Right. I wasn’t offended.”

Later, still, again. “I just wanted to say I really appreciated your observation.” “You weren’t offended?” “Offended? No! I thought it was really important.” “Thank you.”

During dinner, it was quite noisy in the hall, but I didn't really notice it. I was stressed out, and it seemed everyone else was, too. I forget how exactly it all started, but at some point, during dinner comments and discussion, one of the intermediates mentioned the act of taking responsibility. She was talking about the mistake-making workshop that Hellboy Tom had held, and how the circulation we were trying to play never made it around the circle, because the mistakes were random, yet people almost seemed to be preparing for it. They weren't taking responsibility for their mistakes, which actually seemed to be making the person before them screw up.

At this, the room went dead quiet. It was the first time that true silence had visited in a couple of days (since Saturday, really). Dennis (an Intermediate) then pointed out, once RF asked him, that we simply hadn't let it visit, and that it was high time that we be open to it.

Then it was decided what the night might hold for us. Long story short, there were three options: take a "Rhythm Walk" with Bill Rieflin, study Craft repertoire with Leo, or "aspire to making music" with RF in the chapel.

I raised my hand for repertoire, realizing as I did so that I was making the wrong choice.

I haven't felt quite that level agitation and stress in a while. Alex (one of my fellow beginners) asked me why I had picked that, and I replied that I knew it was a bad choice. Noting my distress, Alex pointed out "I thought you were here to make music."

So, at 9:30 p.m., I found myself in the chapel. We first started out with an improvisation—I noticed how much more controlled and musical it was, compared to Sunday's cacophony. There was a similar moment on Monday, too, but this had a little more resonance.

RF then split us into groups, still within the circle. I found myself the only beginner in a group of experienced and formidable guitar players, which I took as an inadvertent compliment/opportunity. Each group improvised for roughly 2-3 minutes at a time ("This group, right here, please begin to play for 2 minutes and 38 seconds.... 1234!"), and in retrospect, I thought I held my own pretty well. After this, RF then reorganized some of the groups to be a little more equal in size, and then gave each group a chord, same as the night before.

We began in a similar fashion—group 1, group 2, group 3, etc.—in sequence. Then, instead of different arrangements, we moved straight into whizzing. Two sides of the circle, each made of three of the groups. From the first person on one half to the last person, and back to the first person. Repeat twice more, and then off to the other half of the circle. Three times back and forth, and then around the circle 7 times. Repeat. Repeat. Fall apart, and try again. Again, only 7 times on each side, and 7 times around.

I had started to have a sense of when it was coming around, the night before, but I still wasn't quite getting there. This night, it was better, but I felt like I was in the way, but so close I could taste it. I began to see and feel when it came my way (it was almost like something was physically being passed from player to player). And then we ended with the form, and just started whizzing around the circle.

Bill Rieflin had come in, and was sitting in the room, behind Dev Ray and Hellboy Tom. He later told us that, when the whizz started to just rotate, it started out a little slow, but "took off" around the 50th time around, and completed 97 revolutions. At the very end, he roughly clocked the revolutions at 140



took so easily to her suggestions. She also asked me to tell Victor that she said 'hi', as they've known each other for a very long time.

Tea at 4 pm. While I was talking over something with one of the beginners, Hellboy Tom came over to me and asked me a favor: would I please sweep the steps of the chapel? No rush, but when I got a chance? I happily agreed, and Tom said thank you, and by the way, to pay attention to what I notice about the place.

This is Guitar Craft: there are always a couple of different meanings available. I excused myself, fetched a broom, and then set to the task. The first thing I noticed, of course, was that I wasn't quite noticing what I wanted to. One person, walking by, asked me who put me on broom duty, and I replied that I was asked, at which point the walker continued his walking. The steps were clean, and so was a good portion of the sidewalk. I saw that a pair of shoes had been left behind, but ruled that out, as it was too obvious. I looked around the steps, a little into the chapel: still nothing. Having failed to notice anything immediately apparent, I tried to pay attention to what happened as people walked in. While nothing immediately apparent came up, about the only thing I noticed was that no one was noticing the changed state of the stairs. One or two people had seen me sweeping, but no one said "thanks"—this is not to say that I was digging for appreciation. I really was just trying to see what happened, and what came up. Feeling a little blind, I walked into the chapel, to continue with the day.

Dinner at 7 pm. A very powerful silence came over us, during the meal (which was admittedly quite Spartan). This was one of the longer silences that had visited, and by this time, I was incredibly open to it, and very aware of the tangibility of it. Someone had said, the day before, that you could feel silence trying to come in, but that there was too much noise, too much distraction. Now, it came, and it was almost like being caught under a pillow, but not in a negative way, if you will. It eventually lifted, but you could still feel its presence, in a sense.

RF called for a meeting of all the beginners in the chapel at 9:15. At that time, we found ourselves sitting in the circle, with RF at the proverbial head, but it wasn't really the head, it was sort of off center—almost as if he was intentionally avoiding the top, 12 o'clock position. No guitars, this time: this was strictly a Q&A session. I had a very strong suspicion of what might be sprung upon us, at this point, but I wasn't really willing to lend voice to that suspicion, as I had nothing to back it up.

About three minutes of silence, followed by question time with 'Old Uncle Bobby' (his sense of humor is very crazy-old-Englishman). A few different questions were asked of him, followed by his response. Regrettably, I don't remember any of them, but I do remember mine. I asked him about how the course had been under a tangible amount of stress and discomfort the day before, but that, after the whizz, it instantly seemed to change into something much more pleasant, more real. The confusion seemed to dissipate. Did he think that it was coincidence, or that the whizz was directly related?

His answer was surprisingly straight-forward, almost as if he'd been waiting for this question. No, it was not coincidence. One can divide a process, or an event, into three parts: a beginning, a middle, and an end. Going on from that, each of those parts has three parts, so you have:

The beginning of the beginning, the middle of the beginning, the end of the beginning,

The beginning of the middle, the middle of the middle, the end of the middle,

The beginning of the end, the middle of the end, and the end of the end.

While this all seems quaint enough, it's actually quite true: one has the very outset, followed by the point where one is still testing boundaries, and then the end of the novelty of an experience. Following this, one enters into familiarity, and the awareness of this unfamiliar sense of familiarity. Then one hits the middle of the middle: "You're too far forward to go back, but much too far behind to go ahead." It's awful, and the sense of being stuck in a rut, which is never a fun feeling, prevails. That was exactly what we were caught in the throes of, the day before.

(Later, when talking over the whizz with a fellow beginner, the subject of whether the whizz was a reaction or a catalyst came up. This is still a fair question, and one that I'm still not sure I know how to answer. The timing was unmistakable, of course, and there was an immediate change, afterwards. The truth may well be that, with RF directing, he essentially created a temporary construct, with the whizz as an intended end result, but the degree of success was unexpected. )

RF then pointed out that, in order to get through the middle of the middle, one keeps on doing what one has been doing—you continue on. Challenges come up, and you meet them, as best one can.

This entire time, he'd been holding a hat, upside down. I hadn't seen him wear a hat the entire course, so it was apparent that it wasn't his. He noted the history of the hat (Igor Abuladze's personal skull shelter), and that usually the hat he preferred was that of Hernan Nunez, the director of all things Guitar Craft in South America and Europe (that hat, incidentally, dated from Nunez's tenure as a David Bowie security guard). But that was not the point.

Inside the hat were the names of all the beginners. Placed in the middle, on the floor, they constituted 2 quartets, a quintet, a sextet, a duo, a trio, and one solo. RF then announced that the following night, we'd be performing right there in the chapel: 9:30 sharp. The music would consist of one piece per group, and then an ensemble piece from the whole group. At 10 p.m., the chapel was needed for the intermediates, but after that, was available until 5 a.m. He then smiled, and quietly walked out the front, leaving our surprised selves to our own designs.

My first thought was, *well, I guess I was right.*

As RF walked out of the chapel, there was a tangible rise in the tension of the room—or maybe we were simply more aware of it. Two or three guitar buddies were off to the side, waiting patiently. One of the beginners, Michael (who had a particular quality of being enormously tense at all times; this regularly came out in his playing), went down to the floor and started to look at the groups and call out who was in each group. Shushed momentarily by several of the other beginners (I don't remember if I said anything), he continued on, pointing out that we were going to find out anyway, and why would we try and hide it?

At this moment, unnoticed by us, the guitar buddies took their leave quietly. As they walked out, we went through the lists. When poor Matt (a middle-aged psychology professor who was staying in my cabin) was told he was the soloist, the look of dread that washed over his face was a good barometer for the rest of the room. I found that I was in one of the quartets, with Sasha, Michael, and Jason, and shortly after this, the beginners decided that, as it was currently 9:30 p.m., that we should disperse, talk as individual groups, and then reconvene in the dining hall at 10 p.m. Thus splitting up, my group spoke briefly ("Do you have anything? I've had a couple of ideas bouncing around. . ." "So have I." "Well, why don't we bounce some things around, after the group meeting?"), and at 10, we all found ourselves in

the dining hall.

What followed was my first real taste of trying to manage by committee, and further personal affirmation that pure communistic anarchy is likely a bad idea. What started as an organizational meeting to try and come up with a game plan quickly devolved into an argument over which idea was more likely to result in a game plan. The only two discernible results of the meeting was that we elected a leader in Chris, whose full-time job was directing choirs, and that we knew what we were doing at 11:00 p.m.: meeting in the chapel.

In between was a bit of open time, so my quartet chose to grab guitars and toss ideas back and forth. Jason had a bit of a chord sequence he'd been toying with—a couple of chord shapes that he'd adapted from Old Standard—and asked if we wanted to hear it. It was almost instant music, with a form and tonality that made sense. Workshopping that for a bit, we came up with a rough sketch with bass line, chords, and an intro to a B section. That brought us up to 11, and off we went to the chapel, with a couple of intermediates silently and knowingly nodding at us as we scampered.

Once in the chapel, all beginners arranged themselves into the circle, gradually shifting the parts into place—this took a little longer than usual, in part because we were suddenly much more attuned to the “state of the circle”, a phrase that would be repeated quite a bit more over the course of the next twenty-four hours. We focused for a moment, and then began the meeting with a circulation. This lasted about ten minutes, and then quietly died down. After this, Chris asked if anyone had any suggestions. There was a bit of difference of opinion, but the general consensus was that we should try playing with some ideas, and see where they went.

With no ideas offered, Chris turned to his left, and asked Matt, “Do you have anything?” Later, Matt would say that it was simply a matter of panic that brought about the simple three-note figure that became the genesis for our group piece. Over the course of 2 hours, we wrote—through a great deal of strife and agitation, not to mention a fair amount of squabbling—the bulk of the piece, which would be presented as a fanfare. At the end of the rehearsal, we decided that we should rest for the night, as it was now shortly after 1 a.m., and we would have the bulk of the day to rehearse and work for the performance.

After we adjourned, Michael and myself got together to hash a couple of the ideas we'd been working on for our quartet, but shortly realized that we were exhausted, and chose to wait until the following morning. I still chose to go off and woodshed for a bit (about 45 minutes), trying out different ideas, but eventually made my way back to bed, so that I'd be able to rise for the sitting, tomorrow.

### **06-04-2009**

I woke up the next morning a little later than normal (at least, what was normal for the course—this was compounded by the fact that I was still on Eastern time, so 5:30 a.m. was my body's internal alarm time). As I was getting up and off my bunk (the top one), I was rudely asked to please be quiet, and not be so disruptive, as some people were still trying to sleep. The request was met as I went off to shower, though I chose not to inquire as to whose behalf was being spoken for.

The sitting was followed by breakfast at 8:00, which led to a day that was markedly open, as opposed to the exceptionally busy schedule we'd been expecting (RF had chosen to not assist Murphy's law, it seemed). Small groups met first, with a large group meeting scheduled for roughly 10:30 a.m.

My Taylor had chosen to lose its strap button the night before, so I was dealing with a small technical difficulty that manifested itself in being unable to stand and play, and thus hold the guitar correctly. Outside of this, our quartet was pulling together quite well: we'd chosen to adjust the time signature to fit the less traditional means of the course (5/4). Some work provided a little more clarity to what we were writing, as well as a view of what the middle section might be. At 10:30, we moved on to the large group, meeting in the chapel.

Sitting down and beginning this meeting with a draw of attention to ourselves, we circulated for a bit, to get ourselves thinking together, and then proceeded to continue work on the group piece. Opinions continued to be offered with authority, and it was all that Chris could do to keep some semblance of control over the rehearsal—it was at about this time that he chose to simply not play on this piece, so that he could focus on directing. Some embellishments began to present themselves, and Chris chose to break the meeting for a few minutes, so that such trimmings would be set in stone, on reforming. We did so, and ten minutes later, running the form, it was apparent that we really did have a nice piece on our hands. This brought us up to lunch.

Writing this almost five months after the fact, it is admittedly difficult to remember with any sort of clarity everything that happened. I do remember RF asking us how late we had been in the chapel, and seemed to be slightly surprised that the answer wasn't "4 a.m." I am also told that Patrick Smith played at this lunch, and while I don't remember this, I do remember Jaxie's comment that his command over an audience was stunning, and that one of the first real silences of the course was directly after he played. She asked, to everyone and no one in particular, "How does he do that?"

The last AT meeting was at 2:30—I was late to this, as I was busy having Igor A fix my guitar (with the promise to buy his CD, later). I managed to show up roughly halfway through, though, in time to really get the idea of the Alexander lie-down, which just might be the best excuse to lie on the floor that I have ever seen. After this, Sandra and Brad bid their adieus, and my group took advantage of the free time in between then and tea to rehearse once more. This rehearsal was actually, to me, where the piece really crystallized and became a piece of music.

On to tea, where I talked for a bit with Hank and Elisabeth. Hank, it turned out, had gone to Berklee School of Music (in the mid-1970s), across the street where I work; hearing about some of the old town that doesn't seem to exist anymore was very interesting, along with comparing what it is now to what Boston was then. At 5, the large group met up again, addressing some practicalities, and running the group piece twice more. We now had a name (the *Aarhythmics*), and a game plan for how to run the night. The suggestion was put forth to run the setlist, but that was shot down quickly, with the reason given that we all wanted to hear the pieces for the first time that night. In retrospect, I see that for what it was, but at the time, it seemed perfectly logical and practical. But more on that later.

Dinner followed at 7. This was a decidedly smaller gathering, as the TTA performance team had left earlier for their Thursday night gig. I don't remember any of the conversation or comments, but for the beginners, our dinner finished with RF asking what time the gig was, and then asking why on earth were we still in the dining hall. We adjourned, and went to prepare ourselves and the space.

After cleaning up, I went to help prepare the chapel for the performance. The weather had taken a sudden turn for cloudy, which was the first time the entire week. The wind had also kicked up quite a bit, too—at roughly 8:45 p.m., there was a very unexpected and comparably intense flare-up, though rain had not really entered the picture. It seemed odd, and was a little disconcerting, but we waved it off. Gathering in the “green room” (a strangely unconverted dining hall), at 9:00 we collected our attention for a final preparation, and at 9:15 we walked into the chapel.

A couple of snickers from the audience led into the group piece, the “fanfare”. The character of the piece changed noticeably, then: it gained a sort of life it hadn’t had, before. The possible was presenting itself as possible, so to speak. Moving on from there, the set proved to be quite good, with a very liberal dose of heckling from the audience. Having read the Eric Tamm account, I had already been expecting some form of taunting, though with a good deal less good will. When my quartet played, there was enough to put a grin on my face, but it was never at a level that I would consider inhumane. Rude, yes. Inhumane? No: merely hilarious. I did feel bad for a couple of the small groups, especially the quartet that prompted Hellboy Tom to run screaming out of the room (literally). But, other than that, I saw all of the heckling as a benevolent hazing of sorts—everyone in the room had been put through the same thing at one point or another, so it was a sort of establishment of brotherhood, if you will.

The one unfortunate aspect of the performance was the result of several things. We hadn’t run the set, so we didn’t know what anything sounded like, making it impossible to organize an actual flow of the performance—I had foolishly gone along with this idea, thinking that it would be fun to be surprised by what I heard. Additionally, someone had chosen to take on a solo project, which was not well received. He was dogged in his intent to present this piece, though, no matter how loud the audience grew (RF actually tried to hang himself with his own belt), and for that he gained my respect. He took his seat again, and then we filed back out, heading again to the green room.

My first thought was that something was left undone, and standing in the dining hall, I was convinced of it. Those suspicions were confirmed when we were called back, with the instructions to play the set again.

Quickly reorganizing, we reentered the chapel, and assumed the space, amid a hearty and spirited demand for an encore. What followed was a completely different set and performance: the order of events was technically the same, in regards to the order of groups, but the quality of process was different. The playing wasn’t as focused, and there was little to no heckling from the audience. The one thing that did not change was the quality of applause for Matt’s solo piece; each time was very enthusiastic, and it was easily the best song of the night. The final solo took the stage, and to his credit, he absolutely refused to finish until he was finished. Instead of relentless and loud heckling, though, there was a dead silence, making the piece seem even longer (and it easily could have been, as it was improvised each time). At his finish, we sat in silence for a moment, and then began to rise to leave—this was stopped by Dennis, who asked us to please circulate.

It was a slightly disparate circulation, but as we played, we tried to listen, and I believe that this came through in the actual playing. There were a few bum notes, a couple of them my own, but they were played with intention. This came to an end, and we left the chapel, and returned to the green room. The tension was much thicker, now, as we didn’t know if we’d be called back (I have heard stories of the set being played several times), and at one point, the “realization” that we were going to do the set yet again spread quickly. This dissipated quickly, once someone saw the audience leaving the chapel, and

we realized we were now off the hook. The performance was now at an end, and dessert would be available in a short time.

It still didn't feel like it was over, though.

I went to put my guitar away—I wouldn't need it for the rest of the night. As I returned to the dining hall (which was no longer a green room), I gradually became aware of a very present feeling, though I couldn't put my finger on it. The TTA team had just come back from their gig in Seattle, and dessert was being made available. I sat down with my coffee and cheesecake, and a minute or two later, Tom sat down next to me, amidst all the excited chatter. Taking the opportunity, I began to talk to him about the task he'd asked me to do, the day before. Telling him about sweeping it each time, and looking to see what happened, I concluded by saying that I had noticed that some things simply needed to be done, regardless of who did or did not notice, and that I'd been happy to notice that.

Tom responded to this by saying that these were good things to notice, but that it wasn't quite what he'd intended: the thing that he'd hoped I'd notice was how the energy changed when I swept away all the detritus and debris from the doorway. This was something I hadn't thought about, but was immediately clear to me. Suddenly, when the doorway and steps were clear, the energy of the building was available, and the chapel was much more inviting. Fascinated by my fascination, I found myself getting gradually more excited, until it suddenly hit me.

"Tom, do you remember what I declared my aim to be?"

"No. What was it?"

"My stated aim was to sweep and clear away the chaff."

"Oh! Wow—I guess I did remember, by accident!" replied Tom, with a grin. We both agreed that it was quite unusual and interesting—right then, Jaxie stood up as if on cue and asked the room, "Does anybody need five dollars?"

Immediately, everyone stopped talking. With all eyes turning to her, and the bill in her hand, Jaxie continued, "Seriously, does anyone need this? It's right here. Does anyone need a pack of strings?" More silence. "No? Well, I'll put it at the front of the room, on the floor." Walking over to the end of the dining tables, opposite the head table, she put a five dollar bill on the floor, and walked over to sit down, on the other side of Tom.

The sense of a present feeling surged up in me, and as she sat down, I knew that something was on offer, yet I couldn't see it. Leaning over towards her, I caught her attention and asked, "Jaxie, do you need five dollars?"

"No. Do you?" This was said quietly, yet silence descended immediately. It was terrible. The only way that I can describe this is hearing something of incredible value, and knowing how important it is, but being absolutely incapable of understanding it—as if there was a conversation going on, two floors above me, and being able to hear the voices, but helplessly unable to guess the words. As this went on—and it went on for about 13 minutes—it grew more and more intense, until I absolutely could not bear it, and the emotional became a very physical turbulence.

Eventually, the silence faded, and then simply switched off, quietly, and the room began to talk again. The helpless feeling did not subside, however, and I leaned over again, and asked, "Jaxie, is there something I could give you in return for the five dollars?"

"No, I don't need anything. Do you need it?"

"Well, no. . . ."

"Do you want it?"

Almost unable to hear my own voice, for the sound of my blood rushing, I answered, "I mean, I could use a pack of strings for when I get home, but—"

"Alright. I'll give it to you."

"What?"

"I'll give it to you. Let me go get it for you."

And, as Jaxie got up, I lost it, and broke down. I felt Jaxie slip the bill into my jacket pocket, and give a reassuring touch on the shoulder. Recovering myself quickly—a little too quickly—I apologized, and said something to the effect of "You guys probably see this stuff all the time." Tom said it was fine, and that you learn to have a sense of humor about it after a while. I grinned sheepishly, rubbing my eyes to remove the "dirt" that had suddenly appeared there.

With this, a bit of small talk followed, including an unusual and surprising synchronicity of events at the TTA performance and the weather at Raft Island. I bid good night, thanked Jaxie again, and left for the chapel, grabbing my journal on the way. Greg was playing and either arranging or composing. I asked him if it was alright if I sat by the wall and wrote for a while—he replied by asking if it was okay if he played while I was in the chapel. With mutual agreement on our side, I wrote for a while, and called it a night at roughly 1 in the morning.

In other words, an extremely exhausting day.

### **06-05-2009**

**8:40 p.m.** – The course is winding down to a close. Final meeting in 30 minutes. I don't really know what to expect.

I think this course of life attracts some really strong people and personalities. In this case, when I say *strong*, I mean that there are some really powerful connections being made to something that is greater. I don't think I've ever had such a strong question of "What is it?", ever. I don't think that it's an accident that these courses are necessarily held at monasteries and church retreats.

### **06-06-2009**

**6:29 p.m.** – Minneapolis airport – This day started quite early: I was up at about 5:30 a.m., showered, and went directly to the chapel, for the morning's sitting. This was the most successful morning, fittingly—I was legitimately aware for 32 minutes. In a sense, I could say that I cheated, as it was in a chair, but it was so much better that I'm fine with that. I'll eventually make it to the floor, and it will be successful.

After I was finished (I was alone, for most of it—the makeshift breakfast team was in there, but they left shortly afterward), I went back to the cabin, packed up, tried to fix the sweep-broom (apparently, it was broken in the first place, anyway), and then went down and visited the dock, once more. I didn't go out onto it, this time around, but simply looked at it, this time. After a couple of minutes, I left it and

headed back up to the cabin, but not before taking a picture of the chapel's front doors; by this time, it was roughly 7:30 a.m., and I'd watched RF walk in.

I spent a few minutes restlessly shifting around, and then it was 8:00 a.m. To breakfast. 15 minutes later, to the van. One of our number for the leaving crew was a minute or two late, but we were on the road at roughly 8:35 a.m. 45 minutes later, we were at SeaTac. I spent a little bit catching up with e-mail, and took off at 10 after noon. One of the Intermediates, Dean, was sitting directly behind me to my left. On touchdown (surprisingly rough, but it could have been worse) and exiting the plane, we wished each other well, and went our separate ways. Which leads me to here, waiting for my connection, listening to the first recorded music in a week.