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Changes and Deltas

Jim Wolper
Idaho State University

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Changes and Deltas

Jim Wolper

wolpjame@isu.edu

He circles the lecture like a jazz musician,
An old jazzman with forty years of scales and licks and arpeggios
In his hands and his lips and his brain, his brain.
He'll have to cover the material, the song, the tune,
The textbook as much a well-known standard as Stardust or All The
Things You Are.
Except, except, this audience has not heard the tune, a fact that
seems harder
To accept after all those years of bandstands and jam sessions
And lecture rooms with three-layer sliding blackboards
On rails as smooth as Miles. Sometimes he fills all 6 or even 9
Boards, gesturing to the melody, the main idea, at the upper left,
The upper left a rhythm section that keeps the beat and the chords
and
The changes, going, going, while the rest of the time he is improvising
On the theme of Integration By Parts, a melody he knows
Backwards and inside-out, quoting the greats, some nameless,
Who have tried this tune before but now it is his alone.

A hundred guys in a hundred little bars, good players,
Gals, too, are playing the same standards,
A hundred guys and gals in a hundred classrooms derive
The same theorems, theorems torn from their context
Like a show tune torn from from the show, a tune that's now a
standard, a classic.
They all know What Is This Thing Called Love but who knows
Wake Up And Dream, the show it came from? Every torch singer
does One For My Baby,

But who among them's seen The Sky's the Limit? How many learn
the rondo about

Integrating the product of a trig function and an exponential decay,
A tune played in every class and every bar, without knowing the
Laplace Transform?

Is this guy even playing in tune?

Sometimes the set list says Partial Fractions, so they play Partial
Fractions,

But the audience can sense who knows why,
Or who does not know why, but this audience can sense
That he knows why, for why is part of his soul and it
It comes out new and fresh and hot and his voice, his voice
Vibrates like a saxophone, his chalk pushing the rhythm along.
He knows he has to stop before the Riemann-Roch Theorem,
Or the tourists will get restless and pay their tabs, not tipping enough,
and leave.

Or the set list says Second Fundamental Theorem of Calculus
And his eyes shine and he starts cool, but weird,
Some freakish mode more akin to John Cage or John Adams
Than Toshiko Akiyoshi, a Schönbergian mix of symbols
That can't make sense except they do! They do!
In control, the tune's changes firm in his mind
But has anyone else noticed the Mean Value Theorem
Lurking two choruses down but him?
He starts throwing in a quote here, a snatch of melody there,
And he works the melodies together, crossing blackboards and bar
lines
Until just as the drummer counts 5 then 6 then 7 then at 8
The final integral falls into place with its $n = 1$ estimate
And a girl in the audience lets out a spontaneous, almost orgasmic,
gasp.

Sometimes.

But a hundred guys at a hundred boards play the same set list,
Their Real Books and their Stewarts all dirtied on the same pages in
the same keys,

The same keys, the same bars at every bar.

Where's Monk or Bird to show us something new in these old tunes,

To play these changes in a new mode,

Something so simple a child can get it but still

Jarring to the old guard?