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**RK:** I just don't feel I own it. Yeah my name is on it, I own the copyright. I understand the business aspect of it, but there's also a part of me that just feels like it came through me, I do not own it, and I have to give it out to the rest of the world. You learn this concept. There's also another factor that I think leads to your question, which is what I call the comfort zone. The comfort zone is where most people like to stay and they don't like change. They rely on artists to do the change for them. That's kind of a lofty concept, but artists, improvising musicians are willing to go to the uncomf zone. But what happens is, once you live in the uncomf zone just for a fraction of a moment, it becomes comfortable. Then you live there for a few minutes and then you go to the next place. That's what improvising musicians, in fact, that's what all artists who are pushing the boundaries are doing. They're doing it for people who cannot do it themselves. It's a different way of thinking about this. It also is part of the responsibility of what this is all about. If you're given a gift, regardless of what that gift is, and I believe everyone is give a gift at birth, I think its beat out of a lot people by the time they're three, or even earlier sometimes. The person who is lucky enough to have retained his or her gift, regardless of the form, it can be painting, sculpture, music or dance, it doesn't necessarily have to be Jazz, they then live with a double edged sword. One side of it is the joy of being able to be creative. It's joyful to sit at the piano and improvise. I am the luckiest person in the world to be able to do that. But at the same time, the other edge of this sword is that it is a major responsibility because you have to get up every day and push yourself into the uncomf zone. That's really what's going on here. There are some musicians who push continually, and then there are some who take

it to a certain place and then they stop. They can't go anymore, something happens to them psychologically that doesn't allow them to go any further. It's very complicated. It's very individual.

**JJ:** Kind of retract.

**RK:** Right. And I know people who have had major successes in their 20s and 30s, and after that they never went any further. Whereas I think the people more like myself who, I feel like my big successes are yet to come, I feel like I'm just about to break out, and my music is just about to get discovered, that it's been kind of sitting dormant and mostly my own fault for not being more aggressive about it or not understanding that it was time for it to come out years ago. So I just think I'm feeling like I'm just on the verge of something that's gonna happen. I'm waiting for whatever's next. Meanwhile I get up in the morning, start writing again trying to push myself into the uncomf zone.

**JJ:** Yeah, some of my favorite musicians, as they're getting older, I feel like maybe technically they're getting better, but I almost feel like creatively they're getting worse. And it's the opposite with other players. They get more creative and less technical as they get older.

**RK:** I agree with you. Different peaks or plateaus. There's one very famous pianist that I heard recently, and I love his playing, but I felt like as he's aging he's not really saying anything new. Sometimes musicians just need to stay in their comfort zone, and he found his at a certain point and he's just staying in it. That doesn't mean he won't leave it—he may wake up one day and do something different. But there are many pianists that I feel I looked up to as I was climbing this ladder here, and I feel like they haven't moved

forward. They're just living on their laurels. Again, it doesn't mean they'll stay there—that's the other part. It doesn't mean that. Because you never know what someone's life cycle is going to be like. I'm just saying to you that I feel like for my musical life — Sunday Morning is merely the beginning. Chris DiGirolamo says to me all the time "You're going to have to approach this as if you're 19 years old and you've never been reviewed before, regardless of what your track record is." He says this to me every day on purpose to keep me levelheaded, and it works. When I get a review and I know the reviewer didn't get my music, I just let it go.... at least I'm getting reviewed. I am grateful that they mentioned my name.

**JJ:** Is there anything else you'd like to talk about that I haven't already prompted you for?

**RK:** I guess that I do feel that after all of these years, as I said, I'm starting over again. I was lucky enough to write some songs, pop songs, with a lyricist named Ron Miller. Ron Miller wrote the standard, "For Once In My Life". You know...Stevie Wonder, Tony Bennett....He also wrote "Touch Me in the Morning" for Diana Ross, but "For Once in My Life" is his big claim to fame. He died last year, he was in his 80s. He would always say to me, "Hey, man. I always feel like I'm auditioning." I think of that all the time. I always feel like I'm auditioning. It keeps me straight and I don't have to worry about ego or anything like that. I wake up in the morning and I play the piano and I write, and I do the best that I can. I'm trying to put out really good music of my own stuff as well as on Jazzheads. That's what counts to me. And, if it makes a difference — if a few people learn from the music and the listening audience expands, if just a few more people get it that improvisation/Jazz is a life force, then I've been successful. ■

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**CH:** I started singing at one and 1/2 years; playing piano at 2 and 1/2. No one in my family was really into music that much; but my sister has a nice voice, and my mom played a wicked ukulele! I loved my father's deep voice. The obsession started really with hearing catchy melodies; those old Disney records; my mother's Herb Alpert and Jobim, and George Shearing stuff, and the soundtrack from the movie, Exodus. There was an awful lot of crap in my parents' record cabinets too, but I was able to find the "good stuff"—all four albums! By the time I found Bill Evans (the pianist), it was a "done deal". I was completely hooked for life. I began to learn as much off of Evans' *Intuition* album as I possibly could. I was 17, then. Sorry to go on and on... the main thing that keeps driving me forward is my obsession with harmonic movement. I'm still a lyrics/melody gal, but I am having a continuing love affair with harmony and chordal progressions. After a lifetime of experimenting with and enjoying harmonic development, I still feel like I've only scratched the surface. I mentioned to John Stowell, whom I co-write with and play with frequently, that I'm frustrated sometimes because I'm not "there, yet". He answered, "You'll never be there; that's the beauty of it all, Cheryl. When you're finally

there, you'll be dead!" I got a good laugh out of it; but I can't deny that there's a lot of truth in that.

**JJ:** In order to lose yourself in the moment, and tap into pure creativity, do you have to practice this the same way you would practice scales and arpeggios? Have you done other things in your life outside of music to make you better able to fully express your creative self?

**CH:** In a typical practice I still do finger exercises, scales and arpeggios. Gotta get those fingers goin'. I'll then spend time working on new licks, and perhaps a little transcription. At the end of the practice I press "record" on my keyboard, let my mind wander, visualize colours and emotions, and just let the music fly! I find that this "free time" is where all the good stuff happens. Occasionally, I'll have a "blocked" day where nothing new seems to be coming out. At that point I will do things like: take a walk in a graveyard, journal in the garden of the local coffee house, or even draw or paint with watercolors. When I finally sit down to write the song I put pencil to paper and within 30 to 45 minutes have a completed song. This is the case 90% of the time.

**JJ:** Do you feel it gets easier or harder as you get older? Why so?

**CH:** My biggest fear was that when I got older the creativity would stop. Luckily, it is just the opposite. The ideas keep comin' and flowin' so fast that I sometimes cannot get it down on paper quick enough. And now, I'm going to get all metaphysical on you, so you can either choose to print this part, or not; but I feel very strongly that at times I've had visitations from the spirits of Monk, Miles, and Bill Evans. Crazy, right? This has only happened three times in my life, but each time I feel I've been given some musical insights... Does this make me a music medium?!

**JJ:** What do you think it takes for someone to achieve success as a professional musician? What are the necessary ingredients?

**CH:** There are three necessary ingredients, in my mind: talent, the physical ability to express the talent, and; lastly, a drive to communicate your ideas/ideals in music. That entails never stopping putting one foot in front of the other. Keep the eyes on what you are doing at all times; don't worry about where you are going... that's a red herring. ■