

Sometimes It's OK To Play What's Written

Contributed by Larry Lawless
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Today saw the first day of rehearsals, when we see just what we've got here. I am overwhelmed with my audacity and foolishness at the concept of putting together a group for a recording who have never all been in the same state together, much less a performing ensemble. My fears are quickly put aside as the task of covering all 10 tunes in 2 days hits us smack in the face.

What a great bunch of guys!! I am amazed at the knowledge and talent that Doug, Rich, Bart, and David have to contribute. The best thing about the rehearsal process is the interaction, the "arrangements while you wait", the give and take to achieve the artistry we all want for this project. At one point, Doug gives us one of his truisms of jazz performance, "sometimes it's OK to play what's written". Dan is right to the point and keeps us honest. He constantly demonstrates why I am so glad he is here for this, with uncompromising standards of excellence.

We quickly discover the balance problems inherent in mixing percussion instruments, the drums have to be played full to get the full sound, while marimbas are really solo instruments. We solve the problem by creating a "drum fort" around the set, a house of cards made from acoustical baffles taken from the walls of a nearby ensemble room. After more experimentation and practice, we end up with baffles between the mallet instruments, as we are close micing everything, to eliminate as much bleed as possible.

The day is fun, but very long, and after 9 1/2 hours of rehearsal, we are all exhausted and ready for some down time. And tomorrow we get to do it all over again!