

*JIM WOLPER*

**Changes and Deltas**

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?