



AL GROMER KHAN

THE 99 AXIOMS ON SPIRITUALITY IN MUSIC

1. Only one in love should sing a love song.
2. A whisper is more beautiful than a shout.
3. *"The Beloved lies hidden behind the veil"*.
4. New music wants a change of attitude rather than circumstance.
5. The Creator makes music sublime.
6. The creative is that which comes from within and addresses *"within"*.
7. One in search of the wonderful will ignore and transcend preconceived styles.
8. Every listener has a right for their *"Inner One"* to be addressed.
9. Would I still be making music if all I had was my voice and a small hand drum?
10. When humility and structure, when honesty and beauty are kept in balance, we find ourselves close to the origin of music.
11. If one begins to look at three or four musical notes in ever new ways spontaneously, this is surely an interesting state of music.
12. Melody represents the *"Inner Female"*.
13. Notes should not be given lightly, but with care, as one does when giving food to a starving person.
14. What notes should I leave out? This brings about the possibility of an element of awe, the miraculous.
15. In a piece of Ambient music there may be durations during which *"nothing is happening"*. These phases represent the out-breath.
16. An element of chance should not be random; rather, it should be uplifting.



17. Literal texts, symbolic and descriptive titles are commonplace. Sound transports energies that are far more subtle than any verbalization.
18. Sentiments spelled out do not create the necessary space, but sentiments that are suggested do. They turn into poetry.
19. Ambient music should linger in the listener for some time afterwards.
20. The central objective in this field of music is creating psychic space. This space, when it occurs, is usually accompanied by a feeling of "nostalgic" recognition.
21. This type of music provides an opportunity to shed light on some areas of the vast subconscious that can only be reached by intuitive means.
22. We are not dealing with entertainment here, but rather with an exercise that proposes a translation to a more subtle plane of thinking.
23. Contemplative music does not imply that it should be used for practicing meditation, but that it should put one into a mood of exquisite thoughtfulness.
24. Even though exponents of "New Age Music" have claimed to address the needs of the spirit, their fanciful descriptions rarely prove true when it comes to actual musical content. New Age musicians, meanwhile, have appropriated most of the concepts and vocabulary that have to do with the spirit.
25. Pretense of higher states in title and lyric is laughable.
26. Eastern titles like "Mantra" for musical works that have never transcended materialistic Western thinking are pretentious nonsense.
27. On the other hand, we are indeed entering a new age, one in which apparently old structures and principles will be ruthlessly discarded unless they correspond with the new standards of intuition.
28. Every historical period has its unique way of expressing itself musically. Let us inquire about the musical states of bygone cultures. Written structures can relatively easily be handed down. The motivation and emotional content behind them cannot.
29. What are rusty old habits? What is the magic of traditional forms that have been handed down over centuries? How do we incorporate them into modern works of music?
30. Let us try to take tradition into abstraction, and keep its essence alive.
31. Let us remind those who call Western music "classical", that China, India, Persia, Arabia and Africa all had classical music systems (music with a spiritual



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base) long before there was any recognizable civilization apparent in Europe.

32. Because of their puerile nature, the cultures of Europe and the US usually work with projections. In the case of America, the African element was necessary in order to bring about musical statements that addressed the entire human soul. In the light of this realization, even acknowledged musical geniuses like Mozart and Beethoven appear like emotional captives. It is time they were reconsidered. (See: Eno, Music without Africa).

33. Who is this person? What is the age of his soul? Does he/she derive the inspiration from the core or the outskirts of their being?

34. Even if the industry tells us otherwise, not everyone is chosen for music. If your demands on originality and emotional refinement are not particularly high, then why not be content with listening?

35. Music is very much like a relationship: superficiality is to be avoided.

36. There are "*arts and crafts*", and then there is art. Art cannot be entertainment. End of discussion.

37. Art should be offered at limited editions at a high price.

38. It is convenient to provide the public with what they expect, that which conforms to and confirms their thinking and listening habits. The public will in return affirm the artist's ego. This trade off rules out a higher vision. I disagree with Eno's opinion that pop music is art.

39. Compromise is a high principle in politics, but in art its effect is disastrous.

40. Alcohol wants everything louder, faster and more complicated. The effect of beer (in terms of shutting of important aspects of consciousness) should be more extensively researched.

41. The extrovert, in life as in art, is usually motivated by a deep rooted insecurity that will leave behind a feeling of unease in the audience (the "*Schwarzenegger syndrome*").

42. High volumes address the physical human aspect, but shuts off crucial sensory perceptions. Conversely, lower volumes open up subconscious channels.

43. Faced with the rational albeit gutless concepts of Stockhausen and Cage on one hand, and brutal and brainless pop, one longs for the original purpose of music, which is to open the heart of the listener.

44. In my experience academics are almost always motivated by ego fulfillment, while hiding out in institutions that are subsidized by taxpayer's money. At least pop musicians spare us the pretense.



45. This does not mean that Cage's principles were wrong. The folly lies in thinking that they could be applied.

46. Rock music, much like the automobile, started out as something exciting and ended up as a brainless monster. What is the role of the music industry in this transformation?

47. The industry is capable of hollowing out music, and then marketing the empty shell.

48. Animal energy lies dormant in all of us. In art it needs to be included, albeit not on a crude and ugly level.

49. "Third World" musical systems have always taken into account the spontaneous release of subconscious energy, thus the need for improvisation.

50. Western society's need for order, and neglect of the individual's mystic quest, have produced the Western "classical" systems of many musicians playing together in harmony. For an orchestral musician, from the viewpoint of the mystic, this is a disaster, since he has to forever interpret other's feelings and inspirations.

51. Had Western classical music catered for our more sensual instincts and included elements of self-expression for the musicians involved, then rock and pop would never have achieved the prominence that they have.

52. As in architecture, structure should not go beyond the basic needs. When the need to provide shelter has been met, an artist can begin with the decorative and emotive aspects of work, rather than establishing more structures.

53. The harsh Northern climate, and the constant struggle for shelter, has led to an over emphasis on rigid structures. This is immediately reflected in the musical traditions of the European cultures, where Venus is prostituted to embroider the endless fixed structures of "symphonies".

54. When structure is excessive, it hinders emotional expression.

55. Only when the formal structure is "endangered" is translation onto another plane of creativity possible (1995-more recently Brian Eno has coined the term "generative music").

56. Decorative elements in art are there in order to make the beauty of "state of mind" manifest, not as something of importance in itself.

57. "Complication breeds contempt" (Chinese saying).

58. Complication also breeds triviality (AGK).



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59. Technical perfection, (as indeed technology can achieve), may produce lightness in movement, but more likely arrogance and boredom.
60. As in Ming porcelain and Persian rugs, any piece of rare and true genius should contain a small mistake in order to honor the perfection of God's creation.
61. Technological over-abundance usually leads to boredom, and not only in art. If kept to a minimum, however, it can be more easily controlled, and it forces one to try harder to be innovative and original.
62. It is wise to look at electronics as colors, rather than musical instruments. Sounds and shades thus become "*the music*".
63. When electronics develop a charm of their own, "*composing*" music can become an interference.
64. Musical culture has not necessarily become more interesting since computers are incorporated. There might be a danger...
65. A time might come when technological perfection in music production will be laughed about.
66. Imagination compensates for the sterility of electronics.
67. Technical devices are there to serve a purpose but not to be loved for their own sake.
68. The downside of automation in music production is loss of mood.
69. Rough sound structures may gain a poetic quality by simply turning the volume low.
70. By turning the volume low and moving to an adjoining room, one can judge the spiritual energy of a piece of music.
71. Greatness comes via experience. Refinement comes via compassion and honesty.
72. Genius or not, discipline clears the mind and allows one to focus on the task at hand.
73. One must find sacrifice of every kind, humiliation, loneliness, and even idleness highly conducive, in order to make art interesting.
74. An opening into the abyss of the mind. But how?
75. Once certain subconscious channels are opened, one may become



incapable of any work other than art. Society as a whole should feel obliged, upon recognizing this caliber of artist, to do everything in its power to support him/her ("*Treasure in the ruins*").

76. To an ordinary person, a trance state is something mysterious, even frightening. However, to a genuine artist it is something normal.

77. Depression is generally regarded as pathological, but an experienced artist bears it with humility and sees an opportunity to explore wider and deeper.

78. Though hostile energies lie dormant in humans, art should always be uplifting, never ugly ("*The Venus Principle*").

79. In order to recognize ignorance in all its disguises, one must immerse in it at least once (Tantra and "*Tantra*").

80. One must trust and rely upon one's feelings, however humble the musical expression.

81. Staying with one musical subject for weeks, even months, can be beneficial in order to penetrate the soul.

82. Beauty will provide temporary relief from suffering separation from the Ideal.

83. One is always on the lookout for the poetic, in order to cut through the mundane and arrive at the amazing.

84. One may have access to a particular, unique train of intuition at a certain period of one's life, one that will never return. Art produced at that time should be preserved, regardless of its low technical quality.

85. Humility towards other quality artists, not necessarily famed ones, is a sign of greatness.

86. Inspiration may last only an instant. It takes courage to follow it and make it manifest.

87. As in blues or raga music, one should find one's own simple "*ritual*". It may not be much, but it is mine.

88. Often the byproduct of a greatly anticipated piece of work becomes the main item.

89. The rational mind wants a never ending range of things, but the heart wants one thing only: union. Thus, one should turn to the place that provided "*union*" previously.

90. After finding this ritual, no one should be allowed to discourage you by



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asking "What will the press say?", or "Is it commercial?", etc.

91. Reconsider fame and money! Artists have written, painted, composed, designed and played their best when they were unknown and lived a simple life.

92. However, success could mean inner independence from fame and success.

93. In this day and age, the transition from personal to universal feelings is taking place. It is an interesting time for an artist to live.

94. Be aware that there are those who voluntarily stay out of the limelight.

95. Cross cultural experiments tend to devalue the respective other culture; a higher common denominator is required.

96. Artificially connected elements of different cultures produce stillborn children.

97. Every one will recognize great art as it occurs; however, most of us have forgotten what it feels, looks, and sounds like.

98. In order to make art wholesome, it can be helpful to move things onto a smaller scale. Use less.

99. Words unspoken or ambiguous. Pauses left.

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