

## Transcript of Dana Podcast—Pat Metheny’s Brain on Music

Guest: **Pat Metheny** was born in Kansas City on August 12, 1954 into a musical family. Starting on trumpet at the age of 8, Metheny switched to guitar at age 12. By the age of 15, he was working regularly with the best jazz musicians in Kansas City, receiving valuable on-the-bandstand experience at an unusually young age. Mr. Metheny first burst onto the international jazz scene in 1974. With the release of his first album, [Bright Size Life \(1975\)](#), he reinvented the traditional "jazz guitar" sound for a new generation of players. Throughout his career, Mr. Metheny has continued to re-define the genre by utilizing new technology and constantly working to evolve the improvisational and sonic potential of his instrument. As well as being an accomplished musician, Mr. Metheny has also participated in the academic arena as a music educator. At 18, he was the youngest teacher ever at the University of Miami. At 19, he became the youngest teacher ever at the Berklee College of Music, where he also received an honorary doctorate more than twenty years later (1996). Over the years, Mr. Metheny has won countless polls as "Best Jazz Guitarist" and awards, including three gold records for [Still Life \(Talking\)](#), [Letter from Home](#), and [Secret Story](#). He has also won 20 Grammy Awards in 12 different categories.

Host: [Bill Glovin](#) serves as executive editor of The Dana Foundation. Prior to joining Dana Mr. Glovin was senior editor of *Rutgers Magazine* and editor of *Rutgers Focus*. He has served as managing editor of *New Jersey Success*, editor of *New Jersey Business* magazine, and as a staff writer at *The Record* newspaper in Hackensack, NJ. Mr. Glovin has won 20 writing awards from the Society of Professional Journalists of New Jersey and the Council for Advancement and Support of Education. He has a B.A. in Journalism from George Washington University.

Bill Glovin:

Imagine you're a musician and you're not only able to stroke confidently to a podium and speak to an audience of 5,000 people without using a teleprompter or a single note or index card. On top of that, you're able to dazzle them with your insight and perspective. Now, imagine you're introducing this podcast and you're nervous about how you sound and you need lots of notes just to get through it. I think the fact that I need notes is a more typical approach, one most of us would use, but how is the musician able to communicate so effectively in a way that it appears so effortless and spontaneous?

Here to help us answer that question and much more is our guest, Pat Metheny, guitarist, composer, and band leader extraordinaire who has won 30 Grammy Awards, released more than 40 albums and written at least 10 film scores. At the Society for Neuroscience Conference in San Diego a few weeks ago, Pat demonstrated that he doesn't need notes. He will tell us why his brain allows him to do such a thing. He will also tell us how he composes exclusively on piano. Who would have thought that? He will also delve into how his creative process works, why his grandfather could remember songs from his childhood

into his very golden years and how he continues to challenge himself after 50 years as a musician.

Hi, I'm Bill Glovin and welcome to what is the first of what we hope would become regular Dana Foundation Podcasts. For about two years, I've been conducting monthly podcasts with neuroscientists who author our articles about the latest developments in such areas as the potential of genetics to treat neurodisorders, new drugs to fight opioid addiction and the frontier of getting mental health services by smart phone. You could find those podcasts by simply googling Cerebrum Podcast or going to [dana.org](http://dana.org).

This new Dana Podcast is a bit of departure for me and a most welcome one at that because it isn't every day that you get to meet one of your musical heroes, much less probe into what makes them so good at what they do. Pat Metheny is someone whose compositions and playing just brought countless hours of pleasure through concerts, albums and videos to me and millions of others. It's an honor to have him as our guest and I'm truly grateful to all the people who helped make this happen, but you might be wondering why Pat has agreed to take time out of his busy schedule to talk about brain research on this modest podcast.

For starters, he has a keen interest in learning about how the brain and music interact, how the creative process works, and music's potential to treat neurodisorders. As I pointed out, Pat did an amazing job articulating his thoughts at the massive Society for Neuroscience Conference in San Diego. The only way he could have been better would have been if he would have brought out his 42-string guitar and played for a few hours. You can see it on YouTube or by going to the [sfn.com](http://sfn.com) website, after you're done here, of course. By the way, what you're hearing in the background is Pat's composition Across the Heartland from his early days, 1979 to be exact.

Pat released his first album in 1976 and has played concerts in large venues in virtually every corner of the world, both with his own group and with some of the best-known musicians in jazz history. During this podcast, Pat will drop the names of his peers, some of whom happen to be the greatest jazz musicians of all time. For those of you who are less familiar with Pat, calling him a jazz legend doesn't feel accurate. For me, Pat transcends jazz. Sure, he might be known for his work in progressive and contemporary jazz, but elements of all styles of music are evident throughout his 40+ albums and numerous film scores, bebop, Latin, fusion, straight-ahead rock, original acoustic ballads and covers, orchestral scores, avant garde, you name it.

One more thing, an added thrill was that the podcast took place at the Power Station, the legendary New York City sound studio on West 53rd Street. As we were packing our gear, Pat told us that he recorded his album Secret Story in the room we were using in 1992. It might be my favorite Metheny album, although picking my favorite album of his is like trying to pick your favorite son or daughter. Among the notables who have recorded on what is considered

musical hallowed ground, Lennon and McCartney, The Stones, Dylan, Springsteen, Bowie, Madonna, Simon as in Paul Simon, Clash, Lady Gaga, Tony Bennett.

In fact, I thought I might have spotted Carol King as we walked by one of the sitting rooms, but I could have been hallucinating. Anyway, I rambled long enough. Here's my discussion with the great Pat Metheny. Let's start with that huge dialogues lecture at the Society for Neuroscience Meeting. What attracted you to do it and how did you find the experience?

Pat Metheny:

You know, it's an interesting thing kind of in our world of musicians. We spend a lot of time together, we're hanging out backstage and dressing rooms around the world and then we're on bus for months at a time together. I have found that the kinds of things that we wind up talking about often are not related to music at all. Music does seem to provoke a kind of thinking, at least improvised music, where part of the job skill is sort of being aware of things. I mean the level of awareness that somebody can bring to the activity of being an improviser is closely related to how good they play in a lot of ways.

So, the musicians that I've been lucky to hang with for now, 50 years basically, who are kind of coming in from whatever this general zone is that I have inhabited stylistically tend to be curious about things and that's naturally been my thing too. I mean after a while you do want to understand these connections between language and music, between storytelling and the sort of narrative expositional way that we play. That's something that has actually not only been a kind of interesting subject for me. That's something I talk about a lot with guys that come in to the band or when I have to do master classes talking to younger musicians.

The amount of parallel stuff going on I think has probably captured the notice of people within your community. I am certainly not the only guy in our zone to have been tapped to discuss aspects of what being an improviser entails, but specifically, a few years ago, Charles Lim contacted me to be on a panel where I learned about his work specifically having to do with how he's kind of tracking the actual brain activity that's going on by getting musicians and even rappers into MRI machines and sort of measuring things.

And in addition to everything else, he's a really good musician, so he has a window into it all that's unique and it's mostly through him that I've had these opportunities to as I say go way out of my jurisdiction by participating in events like that, but I've really enjoyed it.

Bill Glovin:

You did a wonderful job moderating the lecture and by the way, anyone interested in seeing the lecture, SFN just posted it on their website, so you can go to [sfn.com](http://sfn.com) and type in Pat's name and you can get to it that way. So, I've been to many of your gigs through the years and you really talk to the audience, yet at the SFN lecture, you got up there and spent 20 minutes talking to us and

you didn't have a note. You didn't look down at notes. You just talked freely of what seemed like off the top of your head.

Many neuroscientists who study music compare music to language and that made me wonder whether you approached talking to that large SFN audience in much the same way as you might approach playing music for them.

Pat Metheny:

The short answer is it's exactly the same for me. It's been really interesting for me to have been able to stick around as long as I have, and kind of my nature is to measure things for some reason. As I mentioned in the talk, I keep very elaborate notes of every day. I'm really curious about why I played good this day and maybe I didn't quite get to it the next day. That's always kind of been on my mind and also as much as we discuss improvisation in a sort of cinematic way that it's this sort of magical thing.

The truth is, play every night basically the same range of tunes like maybe there's one from column A that one night is this tune and one night is that tune, but it's like you're going to start out with a tune that's roughly in this zone and then you're going to play a little slower one that's roughly in that. I mean there is a set of parameters that are there and we're going to do it night after night after night after night after night. Also, another part of my gig overall these years has been doing interviews like this where I can't make up a new story each time. Doing those interviews, I can't make up entirely different facts.

The facts are what they are and just the same way the facts that make Tune #3 are what makes Tune #3, and speaking for me and not just that, being a dad, being a guy who's going to go order lunch and music and improvising and everything else has all blurred into one big thing for me. And I try to be consistent across I guess you could say platforms. They all, to me, work together. They're not mutually exclusive. The specifics of how one describes musical improvisation to language are very difficult to do. That's a very abstract A to B correlation. However, where the connection is, is that the clarity, the ways of being able to describe what it is you hope to communicate kind of revolve around fine tuning aspects of your skills that are kind of parallel.

I found for me as I've improved over the years as an improvising musician, I've been able to hopefully learn from what is happening in that process and apply it to other things. In my case, I got out of ... I could say from sixth grade on I didn't ever learn anything in school. I was practicing 10-12 hours a day and listening to 'Trane and Bird, West Montgomery, all my heroes trying to figure out what was going on, while very fortunately in my case being able to play a lot of gigs at a very young age and hopefully getting it together so I wouldn't get fired on those gigs.

That was my entire focus, but somewhere along the way, I did wind up learning about some of the things we're discussing here as well as History and Math and English and lots of other things that I really just did not participate in in school,

and to me, music has been an incredibly robust environment to not only become a musician but to just be a person.

I think if you dedicate yourself in the right way to music, it's this unbelievable bank that pays 10,000% interest on every minute you devote to it and that has served me really well in a lot of different ways.

Bill Glovin: Human beings seem to have innate musicality. There's no real particular reason when you think about it. Music doesn't offer any basic survival strategy such as eating or sex. I've read a lot of material about how you grew up in a musical family and your brother and grandfather were pretty good trumpet players. Why do think some people gravitate to music while others don't?

Pat Metheny: It's a really interesting question and there are so many mysteries surrounding music anyway. I mean just what it is even is just kind of like so off the grid in a lot of ways from any of our other human experiences. The issue of interest, talent, being exposed to certain things, the whole idea of nurture versus nature as applied to who becomes a musician is gigantic. I mean I was just unbelievably lucky to have been born where I was born into the family I was born into.

Not only that, I mean even in my small community of Lee's Summit, Missouri, there's two other unbelievable pieces of luck which is two doors down from us was a very interesting guy. In fact, my brother wrote a book with this guy, just of their conversations over the years.

Bill Glovin: Saw that on your website, yeah.

Pat Metheny: This guy was brilliant. His name was John McKee. He was probably the only person within 30 miles of where I grew up that was hip to Monk and Bill Evans and Miles and everything else and he kind of singlehandedly introduced me, also my brother and a bunch of other people to that music and that was a guy who just happened to live two doors down from me. Then, to add to that, it took me years to even appreciate this across the street from us was a guy named Carl Frangkiser, who is the Director of the Unity Band out of the Unity School of Christianity which is also kind of an odd thing that was very close where I grew up and that had to do with my grandfather.

It's a very interesting, they probably wouldn't mind me saying slightly wacky thing that began in the early 20th Century and Dr. Frangkiser was a composer. He wrote music. It was like, "What was that guy across the street from you do?" "Well, that guy over there runs the hardware store and this guy over here is a school teacher and that guy is a composer and the next guy down is a preacher." It was just like, "Oh, well, that's a thing that can somebody write music." I had a couple of fairly unique pillars in my immediate environment that were what they were to allow me to even think about stuff.

Bill Glovin: At SFN, you said that melody for some people can be a garbage can rolling down the stairs but not for most people, and as you point out, many people relate to the major course and that's why they are hits. I was at one of your shows that you did with Ornette Coleman in the mid '80s when you're doing the Song X thing. Do you think there are just some people who process audio or music at a much different level than others?

Pat Metheny: Well, I think that I have always overestimated in a hopefully good way what that XY thing is in terms of what people can't and won't accept. I think so much of it is context that I'm always reluctant to undersell the potential of offering whatever it is that's on my mind because, "Oh, well, maybe blah, blah, blah, blah, blah," because I don't know actually. As soon as you go there too, you're making a presumption of stuff that actually you don't know and I get this regularly from my day in, day out experience standing on stage and trying to guess who or what is digging what and I'm completely wrong most of the time by what people come back afterwards and say or maybe don't say.

In the case of the Ornette tour for instance, we just did a couple of things. You may remember if you're at the concert that made the whole thing really fun. I've always taken the idea of presentation as at least equal to what you play. To me, that's maybe just my age or whatever, but to me, it's like, "Okay, if you're going to ask this guy to go park in the parking lot and take a shower and go pick up his friend to come to our gig 20 miles away, the least you can do is have a thing." Sometimes I see especially, I'm sorry to say, musicians from our community, it's like they walk out on stage and they take their instrument out of their cases and tune up in front of the audience.

It's like, "Come on, you guys. Somebody just shelled out some bread to hear you, get it together." For me, I've always tried to have something to make it a thing, and with Ornette, it was pretty easy actually because he was also like that. He was old school too in a way. We just came up with a really interesting way of starting the concert. You may remember we had DiNardo come out first and he would kind of introduce each guy in the band with his drum pad sampling. It was brand new then, so we did this funny thing and then we just kind of had a set that had a few different changes in it. Like this guy would play a duet.

There was just a very limited structure to it, not in the music itself as much as in just the way the night unfolded that made that tour considering what we were playing relative to maybe the insight that a certain part of that audience might not have brought to it. It was fine and also one other thing I mentioned is that in the context of film scores, I mean you can do anything. It can be the most atonal abstract possible music and it's fine. My close associate, Antonio Sanchez, this project that he did with Alejandro, The Birdman score, it's a drum solo. It's basically the same drum solo that he's been playing 20 years, but in the context of that, it had a completely different meaning, but the music is the same.

For me, coming up with context which is actually an area that I feel like our community has not been good at all for about 30 years. I mean if I see one more trumpet, tenor, piano, bass and drums quintet playing sort of blue notey kind of stuff, it's like, I mean that's fine but it's like part of the mandate I feel of our form is to also invent context and we had not been doing great at that, but I think with just kind of some basic human consideration, you can do almost anything.

Bill Glovin: At the SFN Meeting, you pointed out that too many improvisers put out too many ideas. How do you know how many are too many and how to limit yourself?

Pat Metheny: Well, again, I think there is a parallel here with conversation or storytelling which is I am speaking to you right now, whether I am doing it consciously or not, I'm measuring your reaction, and if in the middle of my response to you I see that you are drifting off or checking your phone for messages, I'm probably, whether I want to or not, going to make some kind of an adjustment to that. I will say that there is a danger in that from my standpoint as the person who's on stage, and for that reason you mentioned that I rarely speak, I also rarely look anymore.

To a large degree, I feel like my obligation is to sort of the ideal listener which I actually have to admit that this has changed for me over the years. That ideal listener I find more consistently in myself than I do outside myself and I would say, and this is a little parenthesis, before the internet existed, I truly honestly could walk out on stage believing in my heart that everyone person there was completely hip, that they knew everything about Miles and they knew everything Art Farmer and Chad Baker and Clifford Brown and any other references that I could ever offer.

Then you think the only real direct feedback you get are critics and some fan mail and then you take both of those with whatever measure of whatever you want to take them with. Of course, we all hate critics, so that was easy, and if somebody writes a nice letter, you assume that that's like, oh yeah, that's really what it is. In the era of comment sections, it could be Jesus and Buddha come back and form a band with the Beatles and Coltrane and three comments in somebody's going to say, "This sucks. That was boring. They were better before they were dead," or whatever.

It's like now you kind of realize, "Wow!" There is this cross section of how people receive anything, not just my thing, anything where there's going to be a good chunk of people who are just not going to dig it. I guess my response to that has been to trust more my own. I mean not that I didn't trust it before. Let's say rely more on what my ideal is of what music should be.

Bill Glovin: Along those lines, once you have some commercial success, is that something you have to consider when you go on to the next thing or is that something that

you worry about? I mean after all you have to support yourself and make a living, especially in your younger days, was that a part of the equation?

Pat Metheny:

Well, I mean when I had my first kind of success commercially, it was so completely and utterly unexpected, not just to me but to everyone. It made no sense at all to me, like why suddenly instead of just being like one of the guys on ECM that was selling whatever, I was selling hundreds and hundreds of thousands of records and playing for tens of thousands of people nightly without doing literally anything different to try to achieve that nor have done anything different since. I mean it was just kind of an organic reaction to what music was at that time and it's even a little difficult now I think to describe the cultural conditions that existed at that moment, we're talking about specifically from 1977 to about 1995, that allowed whatever it was that I was doing to have that kind of resonance. But where it was not a problem for me at all is that I was just doing what I wanted to do. There was never an effort to do anything except that and there was an adjustment, and in fact, even again within my particular community, once you get successful at all, you're viewed with suspicion and not to mention maybe that suspicion fueled by a certain amount of envy which I understand because I mean mostly our community is functioning way under the radar.

There was some adjustment there. However, I'm extremely stubborn about music. I have always had a very strong idea about what I wanted to do and how I wanted to do it, and in fact, having that degree of let's call it success or whatever actually allowed me a lot more freedom because I didn't have to sort of function under the mandate of this label or that label. I was able to then kind of do my own thing including I mean the first record I did once I got free so to speak was Song X with Ornette and I've certainly did everything that I did with my regular bands, but I also did records like Zero Tolerance for Silence at the same time.

I mean all of it is the same for me. That's the hard part to describe when my thing comes up is that you will find partisans to the trio stuff who love Song X and this and that, "Oh, the group." I mean to me if there is something about my thing that's of note is in fact it all goes together as one thing. It is not separate for me. That's kind of the way it has worked. Then now, we're in an era where records don't matter. I mean the record industry is essentially over and has been for quite a while now.

Bill Glovin:

Right.

Pat Metheny:

It's different now. It's gigs and t-shirts as the saying goes.

Bill Glovin:

Right, right, right.



Bill Glovin: But as you alluded to earlier about keeping a journal of your concerts for years, do you look back at the journals and what's the overall purpose of the journal keeping?

Pat Metheny: Well, honestly a lot of the purpose that I utilize it for is to say, "Okay, last time we played in Sacramento, we played in this hall. We played these tunes. The hall was X. The promoter was 'fill in the blank' and it all went da, da, da, da, da in that department and we stayed in such and such hotel and it was great or it was too far." I mean a lot of it is just practical pragmatic stuff which is very useful and I have it all so I can cross reference everything. I can see the last 17 times I played in Sacramento and sort of see what it is, not that there's going to be even one person who has been to all 17 gigs, and of course, I figure that in too, but it's very useful on that front.

Then there's the more I guess you could say editorial side which is sort of what's the band doing at this particular moment and also not just band, the tunes, how was this tune fairing at getting pounded on every night. That is an issue. There are some tunes that can survive getting played a lot and there are other tunes that are just way too fragile for them. That's an interesting thing because you never quite know which ones are going to be which. There's that and then there's kind of the personal stuff for me which includes a wide variety of things about eating, about just kind of the day-to-day maintenance of what it takes to get through the day.

I mean that's mostly what I'm referring to in the areas that we're talking about. I have found a whole bunch of things that work for me through testing I guess we could say over many, many years about what allows me to get to what I need to get to and that's kind of all embedded in there too.

Bill Glovin: As you said again at SFN, once you release an album unless it's cover tunes, you rarely listen to it again. How does that factor into what you decide to play? You said things are fragile. Other things have more staying more. I'm sure if you play a lot of gigs over a lot of nights, you want to keep things fresh. You don't want to keep playing the same things. I mean does that all factor into the equation?

Pat Metheny: It's so complex what you just asked and it's like really a Rubik's Cube of things because it's not just me, it's the band, it's the crew, it's the place, it's the history of me in that place. Maybe I'll go right to the thing of keeping it fresh. There is a way to keep things fresh for I would say between 10 and 18 gigs. You can trick people into various things. I can trick myself into various things, but somewhere around in there, that thing of like wherever you go, there you are becomes a thing. You have a limit to your vocabulary. You have a limit to what the tunes will allow you to do.

You have a limit to how fast that drummer can play and how good this bass player at playing swing versus playing eighth notes. There's a million things that eventually you might be able to skate around those things for a while but eventually they are things. My main gig actually is band leader which is to keep

the thing going and so that night after night we deliver a presentation that is at the level that I hope to deliver and that I actually measuring constantly against the standards that I have been exposed to through standing next to Gary Bird and then seeing Keith Gerard play a million times and Miles and everybody else.

To me, I do have this very strong place on the kind of spectrum of what's good that I will do anything and everything to try to get to and then to maintain. So, there is a point in there where freshness will not be there the way it is for the first gig. I mean when I haven't played for six months, physically it's not that great in a way because there is a certain amount of athletic muscle stuff or whatever involved in playing an instrument, but in terms of ideas, it's unbelievable. It's like I mean just all this stuff is pouring and it seems so easy. It's like, "Man, I got infinity of ideas. It's like I guess I got way better or something. This is awesome."

It's maybe the first couple of gigs it's like that balance with the physical limits of not having to play, but even I know having done this for a long time, there will be a point, eight gigs, four gigs in, 12, where it's like, "Oh, I have to think of that first note," as opposed to it just being. That's kind of an interesting thing. There are really many moving parts in what it takes to then get to the really good stuff which is that's the point where what separate somebody at the highest level from a very talented person starts to come in.

Bill Glovin:

Along those same lines about keeping it fresh, you mentioned at SFN during a question about Gary Burton retiring, the example of how Roy Haynes is still going strong at 93 and now he might be a little spacier off stage. Behind the drum kit, he's just as talented as ever. Along the same lines, I heard a podcast with the chef, David Chang, and he was saying that he thought that the prime age for a chef was between 28 and 35 because that's when a chef has the window to feel he or she can be most adventurous from a creative standpoint. There's a few questions here.

First, I guess in terms of age, you said you'd feel like you're an infinitely better player than you once were because of experience, but there are ways where you may not be as good in terms of energy or even spontaneity and in terms of the creative window. Do you think that that applies to musicians like it does to chefs in any way, shape or form?

Pat Metheny:

Really interesting question. What I know for sure is that there's a wide, wide range of examples across a wide range of ages to answer that. I don't think there's a general answer to that. I think it's very much about the individuals. Making the correlation to what it takes to be a chef is an interesting one because I do think ... I don't know I'm sure somebody did a poster on this at the convention about how your taste buds may be more accurate or active between the ages of 25 and 35 than they might be at age 70. I don't know for sure if that's true, but I'm guessing there probably is something like that.

Same way with musicians, there's no question that as you get older, your hearing changes and that's particularly true with somebody who's been standing 2 feet away from somebody hitting a piece of metal with a piece of wood as hard as they can for 40 years. I mean I've got that on my left side. I've been standing next to drummers. That figures in to it. However, for me, I mostly think of examples of players, I'm going to say a few names here, Jimmy Heath, Clark Terry, Keith Jarrett, Herbie Hancock is the ultimate example of this, who as they've gotten older, they've just gotten deeper and there's just more happening.

In those cases, almost zero sense of any kind of diminishing in their physical skills. Now, I do think there are some instruments that are just harder than others. I'm going to add one more very important one, Ron Carter who has been playing with a lot over the last couple of years. Man, I mean it's Ron and he's 80 now or more than 80. It's Ron, and man, you cannot beat that. It's the greatest in every possible way with zero anything in terms of like, "Oh, well maybe blah, blah." No, it's Ron. I'm optimistic myself as I look around and I see plenty of examples of how it can work.

I think Gary who has been an incredible role model for me in many ways over the years is once again kind of a trailblazer. Maybe I might notice a couple of things a little bit sort of under certain circumstances, but I promise you no one else does in Gary's case. He remains, without having played for a few years now, if you were to pick up four mallets right now, he would blow your mind. I'm 100% certain of that and not to mention the just unbelievable originality of what he not only did but always has done as an improviser and as a vibes player.

Then I also feel that like I need to put the inverse on this which is it's really hard for me to find 20- and 30-year-olds who can hang with me I mean in any way, shape or form, let alone going out and doing 150 gigs. It's at least as hard to find somebody like that as to find somebody who's my age. I would say it's harder.

Bill Glovin: Interesting.

Pat Metheny: If I have a choice between a super talented young brand-new guy or the guy who has been around and has done gigs for 25 years, I'll pick the 25-year guy every time, probably. And I mean it's certainly case by case, music by music. It's I think maybe a little different than the chef thing.

Bill Glovin: Right. You said at the SFN gig that you were turned off as a teenager playing with older dudes in Kansas because they indulged in certain substances and that the playing seemed to suffer as the night wore on, but for people who might be a little uptight, do you feel a certain amount of alcohol or drugs can be useful in terms of helping someone relax given that they don't overindulge and along those same lines as my friend Bruce, our soundman and an excellent musician in his own right, pointed out to me last week when we were kicking around questions to ask you, songs like Penny Lane and Strawberry Fields would have never been made without let's say hallucinogens?

Look at Dylan and The Stones who seemed to be at their highest levels for periods around their late 20s and early 30s and indulged. Any thoughts about that?

Pat Metheny: Well, I would say I was never turned off by or down on any musicians that did whatever they were doing. It was more that I noticed. It's more that. I noticed that it didn't get better and file that into my file. I'm not really judgmental about it. My wife is French, so she drinks wine all the time as part of the family there. Myself, I've never tried it. I've never had a drink of any kind at all ever.

Bill Glovin: That's amazing.

Pat Metheny: Same with drugs. It's hard to try to present this in a nonjudgmental way. I just am not interested. I feel fine.

Bill Glovin: Right, good for you.

Pat Metheny: I've never had the inclination to not be just the way that I already am able to be.

Bill Glovin: Right.

Pat Metheny: With that said, I'm, I mean, kind of maybe already spacey to start with. I'm willing to go there. It's not like I'm really uptight about this. It's kind of like I should probably be more uptight about a bunch of stuff, but it's not that. It's like apathetic.

Bill Glovin: Right.

Pat Metheny: Regarding how anybody else gets to however they get to whatever they're going to get to, I've been around a lot of different people doing a lot of different things and this includes for instance, there are musicians who eat a gigantic huge meal and then walk out on stage. I couldn't do that in a million years unless we're going to play all ballads. I just would not be able to do that, but Jack DeJohnette, one of the greatest drummers of all time, "Yeah, I need some fuel, man." He'll eat a steak and then go out and be Jack, the most burning intense drummer of the last 40 years. There's that.

I will say that as time has gone on, because I have just kind of let be people whoever they were, I am now at the point where we're going to play three hours. It's going to be an intense gig. It's not like we're playing little 45-minute sets. This is an unusual gig for anyone. So, I am now at the point where I ask people like, "I don't care what you do, but do it after the gig. Don't do it before the gig," because on the band stand, that's sacred ground for me. I just want everybody to be at their best and I can say personally I have never been around anybody, not one time where they did sound better after than they did before.

Bill Glovin: How did you get a French woman to marry you?

Pat Metheny: Well, I was extremely lucky.

Bill Glovin: I mean does she complain that you don't drink any wine, Pat?

Pat Metheny: No, she knew that she was getting a weirdo, the point she signed up.

Bill Glovin: Music has been tied to mood, learning, memory, attention span and you made I thought a great point at SFN that we can analyze music until the cows come home by breaking things down to auditory perception and reward systems. Most of us are partial to patterns of what you might say is a great melody, but soul as you pointed out at SFN is something we really can't analyze. What does soul mean to you?

Pat Metheny: Well, it's interesting because it was great to do the talk, it was great to gather my thoughts here for the talk and it's fun for me to go to a college campus somewhere and talk about how to think about harmony that you can do this and you can substitute this for that and then I can get a metronome where we can argue about time and playing ahead and playing behind and I can do my best to talk about melody in the way that I think about melody. That's all great, but actually it's completely meaningless really in terms of what makes somebody have a response to music. The same that I am into being, like, very articulate about harmony and much in the way that I hope to convey the details of my ideas while speaking, I'm that way about chords and all these various elements of what makes music do what it does.

But I also completely respond to a really soulful musician who doesn't know anything in a way that I will not respond to the jazz major at University XYZ who just got his master's degree in Coltrane harmony who after 30 seconds I've not even listening anymore. Then there's another thing that has come up since my little talk there which is, somebody asked a question about my response emotionally to music that I made or that I am in the process of making and somebody came up to me afterwards and just could not understand how I could be so unemotional about it.

I realized I didn't say it right. It's actually that it's only emotion, it's only that. It's sort of like I can't remove myself from what it is to see what it is because I'm in what it is and I need to get a better answer for that one, but there is a point not just in music, but I think in literature, in art, in anything where you're going to get to the point where you've talked and talked and talked and described and taught and written books and this and that, you're going to get to the point where you're going to hit something that you can no longer describe.

And I mean from the little I know of your guy's world, I think this came up in a discussion, there's kind of still a remaining question about consciousness itself.

Bill Glovin: Sure.

Pat Metheny: I mean in a lot of ways, soul and consciousness must be, because I think they both remain undefined, they must be connected somehow. Like let's substitute those two words for each other. Like, "Man, that guy is a really soulful player." "That guy is really a conscious being." I mean it's hard to find where they're going to fail each other and so there you go.

Bill Glovin: Yeah, speaking of consciousness, there's a neuroscientist at NYU, his name is Joe LeDoux and he's also a musician and he started a band called The Amygdaloids and they do songs all about consciousness and brain research. It's quite a hoot. In terms of your process, do you lock yourself in a room for two weeks or have any structure to your writing and practicing?

Pat Metheny: I need a lot of time. I'm slow and getting slower as time goes on, not in a way that I would connect to any issue of like having less this or less that because of age or whatever. It's just that what I once would have readily accepted I don't anymore. It's like, "Okay, this is fine, but you know what, I've already written 16 other things kind of like this over the years. What else? What else? What's the next one down?" I actually kind of have to work through all 16 of the ideas that I've already had over the years because I'm happy to say they all remain viable to me. There's very little. There's a couple, but not much as I look back on the whole thing where I go, "What was that?"

Mostly it's like all in line with what was sort of set up on Bright Size Life. I mean that kind of set the basic argument of what it is and I've kind of been just trying to go out from there. So, it takes me a long time and yes, I do. I put a lot of hours aside for, I kind of call it grazing time where I'm just going to be there with the tools that I use to try to get to something and sometimes I do and sometimes I don't and there's a point where when I don't, after a while I'm going to say, "Well, okay. I'm just going to start something and I'll just hit a chord or whatever and I'll start."

Very often, that's enough and it may not be anything that's on the first page, but maybe it's going to show up on the second or third page, but I often make the analogy, and I'm not the only that does that this, about fishing which is if you stay at home and say, "Well, maybe I'll go fishing," you're definitely not going to catch the fish. But if you go to the pond, you get your instrument out to catch the fish, you might catch a fish but you also might not, but if you don't go, you definitely will not. It's like that for me. I have to set aside the time and put in the hours.

Bill Glovin: I would think that mastering another instrument is akin to learning another language and I know that you played trumpet through high school and do you think that made you a better guitarist knowing that other instrument?

Pat Metheny: Well and also, I write everything on piano. I very rarely write on the guitar. Piano is just like a hundred times easier than the guitar. That way I can think of ideas and I don't have to worry about all the weird stuff you have to worry about on the guitar. I will write more in the guitar if it's a very guitar-specific

project like a guitar, bass and drums trio. I'll take advantage of the guitar-type stuff a little bit more, but even then, I don't like to write on the guitar. And my trumpet playing is and always was like excruciating. I mean I always joked, it's like when I would play the trumpet birds would drop from the sky, like that.

However, there is one interesting thing which is I still play enough trumpet, and of course, I'm not a piano player-piano player, but I live kind of within that world, and of course the guitar. I realized that if I start thinking in my mind My Funny Valentine, I'm going to play a solo on My Funny Valentine, I'm not thinking trumpet, piano or guitar, I'm thinking of ideas, and if I pick up a trumpet, I would play that idea excruciatingly bad. If I sat at the keyboard, I would play that idea, and if I did it on the guitar, I would play that idea.

The idea is before the instrument. In some ways, the instrument is only a translation device and my main skill is the guitar as kind of the way English is my language because I've spent the most time with that, but if I'm thirsty, I'm thirsty and I speak enough Portuguese that I could go to the guy at the corner and say give me a Coke. If I was living in Albania for a month, I would learn how to say I'm thirsty in Albanian and then go order a Coke, but I wouldn't be able to stand up in front of a bunch of neuroscientists in Albanian for two hours and talk. I don't have that skill, so the guitar for me, I can go stand on a band stand with Mike Brecker who is the equivalent of Albert Einstein or whoever and I can kind of hang with him in that language.

On piano, I couldn't. Even though I might have the ideas while I'm sitting there, I don't have the skill.

Bill Glovin: At SFN, you also talked about the importance of rhythm and drums and how it's maybe the most important in an ensemble?

Pat Metheny: Not maybe. It is.

Bill Glovin: Okay. If you're constructing something or an idea on piano, I mean how do you incorporate the rhythm side of things?

Pat Metheny: It's really interesting. After the conference, I met so many interesting people in your guy's world there, and at dinner, one thing I said I was challenged on which is in my talk I said that the process from the time I think of something until the time I can play it must happen in less than under a millisecond. That's what I said and I was challenged like, "You're off. Way off. It's way longer than that. You're not even close," to which I was like, "Wow! Oh, my god! I messed up in front of these heavy dudes saying this stuff," but since then of course, I've been thinking about that. A couple of years ago and this came up at the conference, I did this robotic thing with all these robotic mechanical instruments.

Before I could do anything, before I could write one note or come up with anything, I had to figure out in software how to get it so that everyone of those

devices would hit exactly at the same time within a millisecond because at that time I measured what groove is to me. A lot of people would say groove, it happens somewhere around five to 10 milliseconds. That's kind of the window that you see in various software programs. Maybe for somebody, but for me, I got it down to a millisecond. It's like I could feel whether I was in that millisecond to two-millisecond range or if I was in the three to five-millisecond range.

And I know for sure because I've looked at it in software and I forgot all these when the guy challenged me on it, that when I'm playing I can think, I'm going to play a little head of the beat, I'm going to play right on the beat, I'm going to play a little behind the beat because that's a huge thing for me. I'm measuring this constantly with the drums, the drummer, whatever is going on because I don't have dynamics the way a tenor player does. Guitar is an instrument that has actually a lot of limitations, so time is one of my main things. I'm always a little bit, I'm like placing it here and there to the beat. So, he's wrong. I can definitely hit that millisecond because I did it. I measured it. That actually confirmed to me that yeah, I think that maybe the best, best players are probably dealing in sub milliseconds.

Bill Glovin: Interesting.

Pat Metheny: I can tell from sitting on a band stand with Antonio Sanchez for 20 years who in that 20 years I have one time once heard one part of a bar where he kind of messed up. This guy, you could definitely get him to hit right on, not a millisecond before or not a millisecond after. That's my little parenthesis to that.

Bill Glovin: Music has been talked about in terms of being utilized to treat neurodisorders such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, or depression. Do you think about that in terms of it can be more useful?

Pat Metheny: That's such an interesting topic and such an interesting area of research and study. I'm 100% enthusiastic about that idea. I just personally have not experienced it myself and this is also because I've not had a life that has allowed me those opportunities, because I'm out playing all the time where I have been able to see for sure the correlation between playing X and a result in behavior. Particularly sort of something in the form that those particular conditions present themselves as, where there's how it works other than the thing of knowing that older people, because all of my grandparents lived to be fairly old, that they have memory for music that transcends almost anything else.

I mean, my grandfather on my dad's side who lived to be 96 and he was actually pretty together in a lot of ways, but he could sing songs like four choruses of some songs from the 1920s, all the words all the way to the end right up to when he left town and there's many examples of that. Roy is probably an example. Roy, according to his kids, suffers from dementia and the kind of things that starts happening when you become 93 and yet at the same time, I can say, "Hey, Roy, what about that record date you did in 1957 with Booker



Little," or whatever and he'll tell you what clothes they were wearing, and then two seconds later, not quite know where he is and then go out on the band stand and that is Roy Haynes, I mean like to the max. He almost sounds better now than he sounded 10 years ago. So, I think it's an area that I'm really happy a lot of people are working on because I don't know. I don't know.

Bill Glovin: One last thing, so when you're not making music, what other things are you most likely ... what can we find you doing if you have any spare time?

Pat Metheny: Well, I have three kids. I started kind of late with all this stuff. My kids range and age from 20 down to 9 and we kind of have the three of them across that spectrum. Definitely the best thing that ever happened to me in terms of kind of every level of what it means to be on Earth. That's my main focus is those guys. That's my main focus no matter what, playing or not playing.

Bill Glovin: What do you have, girls, boys?

Pat Metheny: I have two boys and a little girl at the end which that has been really something. Girls were always my worst subject and so I'm getting the crash course from the ground up, and man, she's really given me a lot of insight into many, many things.

Bill Glovin: Has that inspired your music at all, having children?

Pat Metheny: Well, what is really interesting, and this seems to be different from family to family, musician to musician, they couldn't care less about my thing. I mean they sort of, they come to the gigs and I think they enjoy it and one of my kids, my middle son is a good bass player. I mean I could almost hire him if he would practice for more than like a minute. He sounds like Sam Jones. He's got this natural walking group because he grew up around Charlie Haden and Christian McBride and all these guys. They're just the guys that dad would hang around with, so he heard them all the time, but in a way, I'm a little bit relieved that none of them show that thing that there will always be this 0.01% of the population that are musicians.

Like me, I'm going to be a musician whether anybody wants to hear it or not and Jeff, my middle kid, has a friend who I knew right away when he was 9. "Oh, that guy, he's a musician," and he is. He's going to be a musician. He can't help it. None of my kids have that specifically, but that's fine and the inspiration that I've gotten from them being on the planet is something that is transcendent of music. It's just into that zone of the soul, consciousness place where we don't exactly know what that is and we're going to have put love in that category too. I mean there's that. It's been fantastic and that's my main occupation other than playing.

Bill Glovin: What happens when your little girl says, "Daddy, play Wheels on the Bus." Do you sing it?

Pat Metheny: We're way past that. No, they do not allow me to sing and for good reason. It's actually even worse than my trumpet playing.

Bill Glovin: Your grandfather would belt out choruses. You didn't get -

Pat Metheny: Oh, yeah. Both grandparents.

Bill Glovin: And you didn't get that.

Pat Metheny: I have really truly one of the worse singing voices you've ever heard. It's unbelievable and the thing is I sing a lot when I'm writing music. Like all that music that I wrote for Pedro around the First Circle era, I wrote all that singing. I would make demos for those guides like the bridge of Last Train Home and all that. I would do these demos and they would be like, "Yeah, we know what you mean." Then on the other hand, it was very instructive to them about what exactly it was that I was looking for. It's strikingly bad actually even I have to say when I hear it back, it's like, "Wow! That's really awful." It's not even that it's out of tune, it just sounds bad.

Bill Glovin: All right. Well, I just wanted to tell listeners that they should check out your websites for all kinds of goodies that goes beyond the typical content. There's a section called Pat Recommends where there are links to some of Pat's favorite musicians, albums, books, movies, even theater. Pat also offers a podcast section where he talks about the experience of creating many of his albums which such luminaries as Jim Hall, Gary Burton, Lyle Mays, and others plus articles and speeches Pat has given at various events. It's quite an ambitious endeavor and I see that there is going to be Pat Metheny Radio. I don't think that's up and working yet.

Pat Metheny: I don't really follow any of that stuff.

Bill Glovin: You don't handle that?

Pat Metheny: I don't have. Same with like Facebook and all of that stuff. I'm really like ... People talk about they have followers. For me, it's like I wish there was a button that was like "Leave Me Alone."

Bill Glovin: When we go to Pat Recommends section, is that you?

Pat Metheny: That actually is me, but I have to say I don't think I've updated that for about 10 years and they would like me to, the people that run all that stuff, but I have to admit as the years go by I'm less and less interested in stuff that is not directly right in front of me.

Bill Glovin: Right. We can't thank you enough for this. It has been incredibly insightful. Personally, it's a great honor to meet you. I'm a fan forever.

Pat Metheny: That's so nice.

Bill Glovin: I hope you keep going forever and maybe I'll even take a trip up to The Egg in Albany where I see you're playing. I guess that's maybe the closest to New York on your next little tour.

Pat Metheny: You know more than I do actually at this point.

Bill Glovin: Yeah, well, I checked the website. All right, thanks again.

Pat Metheny: All right, thank you.

Bill Glovin: And that's our Dana Foundation Podcast with the great Pat Metheny. This podcast and all of our podcasts can be found at [dana.org](http://dana.org). Thanks again to Bruce Hanson for his audio and engineering and editing work and the folks at Power Station for being so accommodating. Thanks again to Pat who couldn't have been more patient and insightful and generous with his time. See you next time at [dana.org](http://dana.org).