

Portrait of “Speak”

By

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Introduction

Speak, such a simple word representing the very complicated band I have come to know over the past nine weeks of fieldwork. They are not only complex individuals, but together they have particular group dynamics—social and musical—that are equally complex. When I chose to study Speak, I had no idea that I would end up loving them so much. I could not have anticipated discovering what I did about the members' individual histories, their collective history, their music-making, and their philosophies of music. I know that in the pages that follow I have necessarily been selective in my writings about them, but as you read I trust a portrait of this band will begin to take shape. Indeed, having shared such limited time with Speak, I can only hope to make that portrait as thought provoking and personally moving as the fieldwork was.

The beginnings of Speak date back to the summer of 1992 when Cristian Amigo (guitarist, singer, and lyricist) decided to form a band in LA.¹ Cristian met Dave Carpenter, the current bassist for the band, through a fellow musician named Jose Pedro Veleo. At that point, Cristian and Dave set about auditioning musicians to fill the remaining spots in the band. For a while, they played with a percussionist friend of Dave's named Eddie Drayton. Drayton then introduced Cristian and

¹ The name "Speak" was not decided upon until some time after the band had formed. They went through a series of other names such as "Volcano for Hire," "Volcano," and "Speak no Evil" before shortening the latter to "Speak" (Carpenter, interview, 27 February 1999).

Dave to Ed Barguiarena, the current keyboardist for the band. Ed joined the group in November 1992. As it turns out, the drummer was the “Achilles heel” of the band for a long time. Cristian notes, “It was the hardest chair to fill” (group interview, 20 February 1999). Finally, in 1995, Evan Stone began playing with the band and, over time, officially became a member (Carpenter, interview, 27 February 1999).

Though the four core members of Speak, Cristian, Dave, Ed, and Evan, have been playing together now for four to five years, they all come from disparate musical backgrounds. Since those varied experiences have played a large part in the development of their sound as a band, I feel it necessary to provide some information on the individual histories of each member. Then, we can move on to how those histories have affected their music.

Cristian started studying guitar in New Haven, Connecticut, when he was twelve.² At that time, he learned how to read and play basic chords on a Spanish guitar. He says it came “pretty easily” to him, and, because of his sense of rhythm, he was able to play songs after learning only a few chords. When he was thirteen, Cristian moved to Florida and, shortly thereafter, got involved in school ensembles and took private lessons at the local community college. He also started playing the electric guitar. One of the things for which Cristian expressed great gratitude was the theory training he got from his various teachers. He

² All personal information and quotes on Cristian Amigo taken from our interview on 4 March 1999.

also comments, “I always had a lot of respect for music and musicians, you know? So, I was always wanting to learn—even stuff that I didn’t particularly like, like I wanted to learn jazz theory even though I was forcing myself to like jazz at the time.” Now, Cristian acknowledges his affinity for jazz, and, as we will see, jazz is one of the influences that all members of Speak share.

When he was fifteen, Cristian began studying classical guitar and teaching at his high school. He went on to study at the Florida State University before moving to Miami when he was about eighteen years old. Cristian then devoted himself to playing intensely in various top-40 and cover bands for about four years. During that time, he also worked on a few commercial jingles and recording sessions. When he moved out to California, at twenty-three, he somewhat dropped out of the professional circuit for about three years. However, he continued to practice rigorously during that time. After a while, he got some work doing jingles for the Latin American community, and he did some recording sessions with film composer Hans Zimmer. He received a BA in Philosophy and Political Science from Cal-State Northridge in 1995 and began graduate study in Ethnomusicology at UCLA in 1996.

In comparison with Cristian’s extensive formal training, Evan’s musical background presents a sharp contrast. He grew up in Long Island, New York. Long before he considered playing the drums, he was

in love with John Denver and listening fanatically to The Beatles.³

However, he notes that he was “always banging around the house,” and his father used to cut up wood for him to bang on.

Ironically, Evan’s first instrument was the trumpet, which he took up in third grade. During our interview, he shared a rather comical anecdote that says a lot about his early jazz improvisatory inclinations:

I was always into improvising, even back then in third grade. ‘Cause I remember my friend and I, John, were playing trumpet. We were in the first chair, you know . . . We were doing these silly songs for elementary school, and instead of playing the parts that were on the page John and I would come up with, like, our own harmonization. I mean, it was like basic, basic stuff, but it went with the song but it just wasn’t what was written. And I remember our teacher stopping us and telling us that we couldn’t do that I’m a rebel at heart, so I kept doing what I wanted to do anyway.

It was when Evan encountered his first drum set, at twelve, that he decided to put the trumpet aside and devote himself to drumming. He started out playing with cardboard boxes in his basement but soon graduated to his own drum set and private lessons. He considers himself a schooled musician because of those private lessons, but he never received a college education. Instead, he says, “My school was life,” referring to his extensive experience (starting at age thirteen) playing with bands in nightclubs. Since then, Evan has not stopped playing or learning.

³ All personal information and quotes on Evan Stone taken from our interview on 20 February 1999.

Like Evan, Ed, the current keyboardist for Speak, started out on a different instrument than he now plays. In fact, Ed started out on drums.⁴ He attended an arts high school in northern California where he learned about orchestral percussion, how to read music, and started to compose. However, he soon became disillusioned with high school and took an exam to pass out of it. He moved on to community college in San Jose, but never received his BA. Still, it was during college that he switched to piano in order to facilitate his compositional interests. He also studied jazz improvisation in college. In addition, he was involved in the local drum and bugle corps and began teaching at his old high school.

Ed says the drum and bugle corps was his “introduction to classical music,” and he started writing percussion arrangements for classical pieces. All of those experiences provided Ed with a “visceral understanding of composition and form,” and he continues to write today. He has written for theatre, modern dance, short films, and television. Currently, Ed is a resident artist with the Los Angeles County Music Center, and his activities include working with school children on music performance projects (see Fig. 1).

⁴ All personal information and quotes on Ed Barguiarena taken from our interview on 21 February 1999.

Figure 1

Last but not least, Dave began his musical career playing the tuba in junior high and high school bands.⁵ He received most of his music theory training in public school. In high school, he started playing the bass, which he says was an “easy transition . . . because the reading was the same [and] the role in the band.” Shortly thereafter, Dave began playing with high school garage bands, specifically surf and punk bands. With the latter, he got to play in local Orange County clubs and once opened for the Red Hot Chili Peppers.

Another force behind Dave’s musical development was his involvement in playing “casuals,” or formal, one-time gigs for entertainment at parties, weddings, etc. Dave describes casuals as primarily “reading gigs” where musicians would play whatever the audience wanted to hear. As Dave put it, “Sometimes it’s jazz, sometimes it’s show tunes, sometimes it’s country.” Though Dave dislikes those kinds of gigs, he admits they were “a great way to learn and make money.” No doubt, they also exposed Dave to various types of musical styles.

Dave then went on to complete three years of college playing bass in every band he could manage. Music is still his primary livelihood, but he has started teaching private students and producing albums in his home studio.

⁵ All personal information and quotes on Dave Carpenter taken from our interview on 27 February 1999.

Music

Then and Now

Given the variety of musical genres represented by the band members' personal backgrounds—from classical to jazz to country to Spanish guitar—the four members of Speak naturally had an eclectic mix to work with when they started out. Nevertheless, they have spent the last few years working towards a common aesthetic for the band. By taking a look at musical examples from their past and present, we can trace their development and the characteristics that have defined their musical style over time. From their first album, simply titled “Speak,” I will closely examine the song “Buddha” (Ex. 1 on accompanying tape) because it represents much of what the band members have said about their earlier work. I will then examine “Essence,” their latest single, which represents the band’s current inclinations (Ex. 2 on accompanying tape).

“Buddha” opens with a jazzy, introductory interlude. You can hear heavy drums with frequent fills, periodic chords on the piano, and an active bass line. Over that, a saxophone plays melismatic runs. After about fifteen seconds, that interlude comes to a pause and the sound decays slowly. At that point, the drums re-enter with what I call the Main Groove⁶ of the song. The bass and electric guitar come in shortly thereafter, punctuating the groove with repetitive musical ideas. Cristian

then enters and sings through the first verse of lyrics, followed by the piano's re-entry.

After a short time, the drums and piano drop out. A choppy, electronic section of music follows while Cristian sings the lyrics "Holy water, sex, mother, monkey mind, big breasts, etc." This section is characterized by a kind of lingering quality, and it ends when a group of voices comes in screaming, "BUDDHA!" That signals what I call the Distorted Rock section of the piece. Voices periodically yell "BUDDHA" while a dense texture of distorted guitar and cymbal-heavy drums drive the song forward. Meanwhile, Cristian's voice has also been distorted as he sings repetitive phrases underneath the rest of the texture.

The Distorted Rock section then gives way to transitional material reminiscent of the jazzy introductory interlude. Once again, that comes to a pause before the Main Groove begins. This time, however, an ambient hum, or buzz, has been added to the Main Groove, and the texture contains more piano and electric guitar. Cristian sings another verse of lyrics before his voice distorts and he repeats the opening lyrics. The piano and drums drop out again, and we hear a section parallel to the choppy, electronic section mentioned above. This time, however, it sounds less choppy and more ambient. Furthermore, Cristian sings an octave higher. As before, the Distorted Rock section follows and extends through to the end of the song. A little before the fade out, the

⁶ I will be discussing the band's concept of groove and how it works in their music in the following section

melismatic horn of the opening interlude returns, leaving us with a strange but oddly appropriate sense of juxtaposition.

“Essence” has a much different feel and sound than “Buddha.” It opens, rather unassumingly, with a solo acoustic bass line. Drums and keyboards come in next, and together all three instruments make up the Main Groove of the song. After a few bars, Cristian comes in on the chorus lyrics, “Gotta get to your essence, to your essence got to get.” That repeats four times (still over the Main Groove) before the bass takes an eight-count solo with drum accompaniment. In some ways, that solo functions as a fill leading back into the Main Groove. Cristian then sings the verse lyrics, “Break with reality, I roll a fattie etc.” Following the verse, the chorus lyrics come back but with added voices barely audible in the background. Notice how the Main Groove has remained underlying both the verse and chorus lyrics. We still have not heard any shift in musical ideas since the song began.

A keyboard solo follows the second chorus, and Cristian sings “Yeah we rollin’” over it. Shortly thereafter, the eight-count solo bass idea returns and remains throughout the denser mid-section of the song. This mid-section is the only time we hear a break from the Main Groove, and Cristian repeats the verse lyrics. The music then stops, and the Main Groove returns in the bass. Cristian sings the chorus lyrics over that bass accompaniment before the drums and keyboard join in again.

The chorus lyrics and Main Groove then continue repeating until the song fades out. However, the melodic idea from the keyboard solo is added to the texture before the song ends.

Having looked at “Buddha” and “Essence,” we can see how different Speak’s music has become since their early days. “Buddha,” in effect, contains a mish-mash of sounds, textures, and musical genres that allude to the band members’ disparate musical backgrounds. Speak refers to that musical combination as “collage” (group interview, 20 February 1999). “Essence,” on the other hand, sounds much simpler, mellower, and spacious. One predominant musical idea, the Main Groove, makes up the whole song. During our group interview, I asked the band members to tell me what they felt had changed from the first album to “Essence.” Since they articulated the comparison best, I will be quoting them at length (Speak, group interview, 20 February 1999):

Ed: I think we’re more concise in how we present something [now] . . . It’s more about being concise and not being so experimental that you lose your audience. I mean, I feel like the first record, we just kind of did whatever. And we liked it all, but it’s really thick. You listen to it, it’s like there’s a lot of stuff in there. And the music we make now isn’t that way. But I say that with hesitation because there’s other things that I know we’re going to record later that do have that element to it. So, I think we’re just kind of learning how to pick and choose a little more wisely.

Cristian: What I really like about now is that we don’t have to so much prove that we’re smart in a musical way to ourselves. Like, we don’t have to try to be “tricky.” We just let ourselves be smart. That means we can speak much more simply . . . That kind of density that we had in the first record, we can hear it and we like that kind of sound. But, you know, I get it from my family and from my friends- It’s really hard for people to hear it, you know?

It's even hard for some musicians to hear it, so really it's expecting too much. I think you're right (Ed), I think it's been about cleaning up lines. About less sort of—less polyphony, less parts, you know?

Evan: And creating more space too. The first album, every space was taken up. And now, like with “Essence,” you can hear that we're creating holes in the music. And I think that simplifies it a little bit to the listener too. I mean, it *is* night and day. I said that, that was one of my first comments when I heard the mix of “Essence.” I said, “This is a different band.”

Speak definitely gave me the feeling that they are happy with their sound now. They feel they have matured, gotten wiser, and “Essence” represents a positive direction for them. That being the case, I wondered what the first album had come to mean to them. Without my having to ask, Ed let me know that “the process of making the first record was the process of finding out what [the band's sound] is” (group interview, 20 February 1999). In other words, making the CD was a way for the band members to work through their musical differences and arrive at an intuitive understanding of what the band's cohesive style would be. “Essence,” then, is the culmination of that process and—quite literally—the essence of where Speak is going.

The Approach

As I mentioned above, all members of Speak share jazz as a common thread in their musical backgrounds, and we saw how it influenced some of the musical material in “Buddha.” Jazz also influences Speak's *approach* to making music. “Jamming” and

“Groove”—two terms that Speak relates to jazz music—are both important concepts in the band’s compositional process.

Jamming is when the band members collectively improvise with each other. They normally do it at the beginning of every rehearsal. They try to record as many of these jams as possible and use material from them to compose new songs. As Ed notes (group interview, 20 February 1999):

We kinda jam and we try to tape ourselves in rehearsals and find things that we like. Like, I’ve put together some loops of rehearsals and stuff and try to make sense out of the music that we make jamming, and then we take that and try to make something out of it. I think that’s where our sound lies, in a big part, is . . . when we intuitively make music together.

In fact, Dave later informed me that “Essence” emerged from one such jam session. Dave started improvising the bass-line, the structural foundation of “Essence,” and the rest of the group joined in the improvisation, working out musical ideas as they went along. Another new song, “Maya,” was composed in the same way (Carpenter, interview, 27 February 1999). Later, I will discuss how jamming represents communication among the band, but for now let us look at “Groove,” the outgrowth of jamming.

After the band has been jamming for a while, they usually hit on what they call “a groove.” I wanted to be absolutely clear on what that word means to them, so I asked them to define it for me during our group interview (20 February 1999):

Evan: When something sits inside a repetitive motion . . . You understand what's happening each time, you know, it's going over and over and over again . . . It's something that you can predict it's coming again and get inside of it and kind of—get inside that groove.

Cristian: Seems like a sense of flow to me. I like that repetition aspect of it, but it's gotta be like an energy dynamic, right? It's always the same, yet it's always changing, you know? . . . You can do something repetitive and it just has no groove to it at all. Or it can become just completely static.

Ed: I think that's where the improvisation comes in. Where, even though we have certain parts that we're playing, we're always kind of putting little variations on them to make it interesting.

So, groove is the repetitive musical pattern that the band comes together on, and, within that, they create interest by maintaining an openness to improvisation. We saw this exemplified by “Essence,” where the Main Groove was the song. Yet, the textural changes, lyric changes, and instrumental changes kept the groove sounding different each time. As Evan said concisely, all of Speak's music is “groove-oriented music,” and jamming is the way to the groove (group interview, 20 February 1999).

LA and the Music Industry

The more conversations I had with Speak, the more I became aware of their ambivalence towards the music industry. As a band and as individual musicians, they have certainly not given up the hope of making it, but that hope grows increasingly distant. In some ways, I

think that bothers them and in other ways it does not. Over time, they have learned to “let go” and enjoy the process of making good music without being overly concerned about fame and fortune (Barguiarena, group interview, 20 February 1999). The fact remains, however, that they want their music to be heard. Thus, they are constantly negotiating the tension between wanting to just play and having to do the scut-work required to succeed commercially.

The nature of the LA scene has only added to the band’s ambivalence about the music business. Because LA is the “industry place,” local bands abound. In Ed’s words, LA is “saturated.” That makes it hard for bands to get gigs let alone get signed to a record label. I realized this after my first trip to see Speak at the club Luna Park.

When they had finished playing, I went backstage to see if I could help them take down their equipment. There was not much for me to do, but I got into a conversation with Evan about what gigging in LA is like. It turns out that Speak had not been paid to play at Luna Park. As Evan sarcastically put it, the club owners had “privileged” Speak with the opportunity to play in a space that the music industry frequents (personal communication, 29 January 1999). That same night, about five other bands were equally “privileged.” Evan informed me that, in addition to playing for free, bands often have to solicit club owners with tapes of music to be able to play at all. In one case, The Whiskey club

demanded \$75 from each band member for the “privilege” of going on stage (ibid.).

When I spoke to the other band members about gigging, they had feelings similar to Evan’s. Dave rather crudely summed it up by saying, “It basically sucks. I mean, they have musicians by the short curlies” (group interview, 20 February 1999). As a result, Speak has done gigs in places ranging from the corners of coffeehouses and record shops, to dingy clubs with one microphone and an upright piano, to Luna Park and The Galaxy Theater.

Another problem with the LA scene is the audience (Amigo, group interview, 20 February 1999):

It’s almost a cliché to say that the audiences here are jaded, but in a sense they are, you know? You need to have a complete thing happening for people to really, like, dig the music. ‘Cause they have to like more than the music. They have to know that something’s going on. So they have to come out to an event where there are five hundred people there, people trying to get in, and you know what I mean?—The whole thing, all of that has to happen so that their perception changes, so that they feel like there’s something ‘going on.’ . . . So, the audience has to get excited. They’re not only there to hear good music, they want to get high on what’s happening.

Cristian’s comments about the LA audience relate directly to the fact that LA is the “industry place.” With all of the record companies, bands, and multi-media commercialism, “hype” has become a crucial factor to musical success. If there is no hype, why should an audience *want* to go to a show? That kind of thinking has led to increased indifference

regarding smaller, local bands that do not yet have industry hype surrounding them. They cannot attract an audience or consistent following. As Evan asked, “How do you become a fan of one band in LA?” Cristian’s response was both true and telling, “You can’t do it.”

Music industry success becomes even more complicated if you consider the people deciding which bands to sign (to a label). Industry representatives choose bands that fit within the established parameters for commercial success, such as the band’s ability to fill up a room. Often times, their choices have little to do with the music at all because industry representatives are not musicians. As Ed points out, they are businessmen, more concerned with numbers and “potential for record sales or the latest trend that you might be a part of” (group interview, 20 February 1999). Right now, that trend is pop, and LA is “pop central” (ibid.).

For a band like Speak, going “pop” to make it in the industry is no longer an option, mostly because they already tried it once (Carpenter, interview, 27 February 1999; Barguiarena, group interview, 20 February 1999):

Dave: When we were Speak No Evil we had a manager and producer who really—you know, we were constantly hearing that the head of A&M said this about [our music] and we got a little money from A&M to do demos. And so we felt like, “Ok, we want to rock harder, we want to cut the excess,”—This kind of thing. And it *really* didn’t work for us The band was not good under that kind of pressure. We had some showcases, we’d have all these record people there, and our energy would be shit on stage because we were so caught up in the other stuff we couldn’t just

relax and have fun and make music together—which would've been what would have turned them on We were too worried about what would turn them on.

Ed: We did try to do the standard industry thing earlier, you know, and play more accessible music, or what was being termed accessible at the time. And it didn't work for us. And we weren't successful at it either, you know, personally or as an entity. Nobody was buying into our version of what that was.

Speak made the decision not to be a rock band and to pursue the musical avenues that would continually stimulate them emotionally and musically. Naturally, they gravitated towards the more avant-garde and “visionary” type of music making. They maintain hope in their audience's ability to recognize the vision in their work, and they hope that will be the impetus of their success (Speak, group interview, 20 February 1999).

Nevertheless, the fact remains that Speak has had to find alternate means of recording and distributing their music. The first album testifies to their hard work and long hours finding a way to do that. The process involved playing in various rehearsal rooms, including the particularly memorable “Dungeon.” They also recorded bits and pieces over the course of two years at Front Page Studios, House of Blues Studios, and Dave's home studio, Big As Records (Speak, group interview, 20 February 1999). In fact, Dave's purchase of tape machine (see Fig. 2) was crucial in making the first album possible. The band used it for a significant amount of their recording (Carpenter, interview, 27 February 1999).

Figure 2

I have already shown how the LA scene and music industry attitudes have contributed to Speak's feelings of ambivalence about commercial success. However, there are other forces at work within the band contributing to those feelings. On a very basic level, geographical distance and time constraints have made it difficult for the band to work together on promoting themselves. All the band members live in different cities and are involved in various individual activities. Thus, what little time they have together they spend making music. They do not spend it

talking about what direction the band is taking and how they will invest the energy to succeed.

On a more subtle level, the band members' spiritual beliefs have influenced their views on the music industry. I was pleasantly surprised to find that, like me, Cristian, Ed, and Dave share an inclination towards Buddhist philosophy. Briefly, Buddhism teaches that we should put space around worldly possessions and ideals. We should not be attached to the permanence or attainment of anything. It also teaches that we should aspire to always live in the moment. In our interview, Dave touched on how these notions have affected the band's approach to music (27 February 1999):

We [Speak] have spiritually minded people And it affects what we will choose to talk about It's affected our approach too. And maybe not to our benefit in as far as the commercial thing. But our approach, I think, is affected by the way we look at life. We don't get attached like a lot of bands do, where you *set* your arrangement, you *set* your parts, and all you try to do is do that to the best. I mean, we're always trying to change it up I think that's a very detached musical approach, you know? . . . We need to create an experience for ourselves and for those around us that's in the moment.

So, the spiritual beliefs behind Speak have led to their more flexible and transcendental approach to creating music.

Finally, there is the simple fact that Speak's aesthetic of sound differs greatly from that of the record industry. As Ed points out, the LA industry favors a "clean and pristine" sound quality for production (group interview, 20 February 1999). They achieve that by separating

band members into different rooms for the duration of the recording process. When I attended a recording session with Speak, I witnessed this first hand. Figure 3 shows photographs of two out of the three rooms used for recording at Front Page studios, Glendale. The main room contains the drums and keyboards, adjacent to that was the piano room, and behind that was the bass room (not shown).

For obvious reasons, being isolated makes it hard for Speak to maintain the kind of group energy they thrive on to make music. Though they can hear each other in the studio, they cannot physically or visually interact. Recording requires that they concentrate harder on trying to maintain a level of musical union that would otherwise come more easily (Barguiarena, interview, 21 February 1999). In addition, the end result's "clean and pristine" sound does not necessarily fit with what the band is after (Speak, group interview, 20 February 1999):

Ed: That [sound] works for television, but it doesn't necessarily work if you want to use your music as an artistic medium. I mean, you want to be able to change your palette of color.

Cristian: We never really liked that [industry] sound. We always liked more, like, British sounds, more abstract sounds . . . stuff that has a little more grit to it, that's a little bit dirtier, that has more *vibe*.

Ed: Low tech.

Dave: More imagination.

Thus, the band appreciates having had the experience, with the first album, of engineering and producing the sound they wanted.

Figure 3

“Speak”ing Without Words

One of the issues that repeatedly surfaced during my fieldwork with Speak was communication, both musical and verbal. As I alluded to above, jamming, in large part, represents the band’s communicative dynamics. Thus, I have devoted the final section of this paper to a discussion of two rehearsal jams and the various complicated aspects of Speak’s communication.

On February 20, 1999, I arranged a group interview with Speak, after which we would be heading to a rehearsal studio. It was Yo Studios in Burbank, and we arrived there at about 2:30pm. All of the band members busied themselves with unloading their equipment from their cars and setting it up in the rehearsal room (see Fig. 4). I, too, was busy setting up my equipment so that I could record part of the rehearsal.

While they were finishing up their set-up, I was amazed at how the rehearsal began. No words were exchanged, Evan simply started playing a rhythmic pattern on the drums. Slowly, the other band members picked up on what he was doing and came in with their own musical ideas. Naturally, it was choppy and off-kilter to begin with, but they quickly struck a groove and kept it going for well over ten minutes.

During that time, they recycled small melodic ideas and developed them through variation. Ed also experimented with different ambient sounds for accompaniment. After some time, the jam trickled away

Figure 4

much as it had begun. Each band member just dropped out until no one was left playing.

Again, there was silence and space.

The second jam of that rehearsal (Ex. 3 on accompanying tape) begins similarly to the first. No one says anything, but they are all fiddling with their individual instruments. In the midst of that, Cristian starts playing a repetitive melodic riff on the electric guitar. Slowly, Cristian's idea takes the floor, and the other band members start to come in accompanying him. First, Ed and Evan join in with keyboards and drums. Almost immediately following them, Paul Vargas comes in on the trumpet.⁷ Finally, Dave joins with the bass. This groove, like the previous one, continues for several minutes, and the band members introduce musical ideas and variations throughout. Notice how the more time they spend playing it, the more they are able to musically respond to one another's ideas.

What really struck me about Speak's rehearsal and the way they started playing was that *nobody said anything*. I had expected them to discuss which song they would rehearse first or changes they might want to make to a song. Instead, they just started right in, and they seemed to know how to do that and where to go with it. The more I got to know Speak, the more I realized that is just their way. They communicate and

⁷ The members of Speak sometimes invite other musicians to play with them at rehearsals and/or gigs. Paul is one such musician, and he has played with Speak on numerous occasions. He also played on select tracks of Speak's first album.

understand each other musically very well. During our interview, Dave further elaborated on this point (27 February 1999):

Usually, someone comes in and starts saying something musically to us. Often, there'll be three or four things thrown around and everyone'll just be tuning or plugging in. And then something kind of catches us and we start going. It's kind of our way of connecting back up and kind of warming up the communication and understanding.

Though Dave was talking about Speak's jamming in general, he could easily have been referring to the particular rehearsal discussed above. Even though Speak does not necessarily begin by saying something verbally, they say something musically. As Ed also told me, the members of Speak believe in "letting your instrument be your voice" (interview, 21 February 1999).

Though that kind of musical communication creates a cohesive sound, Dave went on to explain that it can get in the way of verbal communication (interview, 27 February 1999):

I have mixed feelings about it [jamming], actually. I think that . . . we need to communicate more [verbally]. We need to come in and we need to sit and talk, we need to meditate—get quiet before we just start talking musically.

In fact, I soon realized that all the members of Speak feel a lack of verbal communication. They are so used to working through things musically, that unspoken barriers have arisen. They are reluctant to say things to one another and long-running currents of silent tension are the result.

Ironically, the band members' strong friendships with each other are part of the problem. As Cristian stated in his interview, close friendships increase the potential for strictly musical critique to be taken personally (4 March 1999). Knowing that, it makes more sense why the band members referred to our group interview as "therapy." I am not sure I understood the full extent of that metaphor at the time, but it has become clear how much the band members appreciated having that space to speak their minds to an impartial observer.

Conclusions

I feel strange using the word "conclusions" as a heading for my final words about Speak. The truth is, I do not think one can reach definitive conclusions about people as dynamic and variable as they are. As I said before, my only hope in writing this was to paint a somewhat accurate portrait of the band I have come to know and love. Perhaps, my readers will come to know and love them in some way as well. Either way, I trust this work provides a richer understanding of Speak's complex personalities, interpersonal dynamics, and approaches to music making. I must admit, however, that I feel like it is only the tip of the iceberg.

References

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