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All the world's a stage

Don't expect this column to be profound.
I don't want to disappoint you.

Sometimes thoughts just percolate for years, and I need to let this one out. Let's face it; I don't want to be racist. I want to be as open-minded as humanly possible, but I fear most people have a certain amount of racism built within them, despite the fact that it is extremely painful to admit. Not just whites, not at all. It's all of us.

Eight years ago, I went to see Dave Matthews Band at what is now known as CMAC. I watched the violinist play, and he was absolutely amazing. The crowd adored him. As he did solos, they literally worshiped him. He happened to be black and had very long hair, and I wondered how the community would have interacted with him, merely being himself offstage, passing through one of the streets.

I don't think they would have worshiped him.

While I'm writing this column, I'm in the middle of the Rochester International Jazz Festival, watching people of all colors, all types and varieties and different nationalities, all come together in what may truly be the only universal language.

On an afternoon earlier this week I spoke at length with a musician from St. Petersburg, Russia. We talked about Rochester, the decline of Kodak, Xerox and Bausch & Lomb, the rise of Paychex and the resurgence of the rapidly growing high-tech incubators that sprouted up when major talent was laid off, but chose to stay in Rochester. I've been speaking to musicians and fans from all over the world, of every race, creed and color you can imagine.

I watched as we all rose in unison, giving standing ovations for blues maestro Keb Mo, a wonderful guitarist and singer. Some of you might remember him from the days when he played with another black musician, Papa John Creech from

Jefferson Airplane. I couldn't help but wonder how the adoring audience would have dealt with him the day before, if they didn't know who he was.

Don't get me wrong, I think most of us interact with dignity and respect, but I still can't help but wonder what it's like for some people offstage, when they're used to being treated by an adoring crowd while they're on stage.

Perhaps I'm just waxing philosophical here. I don't claim to have the answers, and I don't even claim to necessarily comprehend the right questions.

Somewhere in my heart, I know that music does wonderful things to people. I've seen musicians jam with people they don't know, and their differences seem to evaporate into the night, into a colorless vapor.

People who might not otherwise give each other more than a second glance allow their differences to melt away on stage.

People who might not ordinarily be allies become protective of each other, and dear to each other, and music transforms them into one cohesive unit.

Then while I was writing this, my buddy Peter Parts called me. I read him that last paragraph and he helped me to come up with a closing: Imagine what the world be like if all the world were a stage, and we were merely players, but treated each other as if he or she were the star.

What if we all lived with music?

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